

Eight Years of the Temple Issue
A Universal Religion
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On Dec. 27, 1990, Nikken Abe, the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, convened a meeting of the Nichiren Shoshu council at Taiseki-Ji temple in Japan to change the by-laws of the organization. The action resulted in the immediate dismissal of SGI President Ikeda and other Soka Gakkai leaders as Nichiren Shoshu lay representatives. It also added the provision that “disciplinary measures may be taken against lay believers who criticize, defame or slander the chief administrator [the high priest] through speech, in writing, or by other means.”

The events leading up to this decision were part of a larger scheme. On Dec. 13, the Nichiren Shoshu General Administrator, the Rev. Nichijun Fujimoto, after a regular communication conference between Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai, presented a tape of President Ikeda’s speech at the 35th Headquarters Leaders Meeting (Nov. 16, 1990). The Rev. Fujimoto requested that the Soka Gakkai respond in writing to questions prepared by the Nichiren Shoshu Administrative Office regarding statements by President Ikeda on that tape. It was later proven that this tape was an inaccurate, and in fact doctored recording.

Nevertheless, the Soka Gakkai leaders requested a dialogue to discuss the priesthood’s concerns and they agreed to talk. Four days later, however, the Soka Gakkai received the questions via certified mail with instructions to respond within the week. Yet when the Soka Gakkai then sent nine questions to the priesthood regarding issues of concern, the Rev. Fujimoto responded that it was shameful to “interrogate” the head temple. Specifically, the Soka Gakkai wanted to examine statements made by individual priests accusing the Soka Gakkai of delaying the construction of 200 temples.

The dismissal of President Ikeda, as well as the temple’s refusal to hold dialogue on the issues, led to confusion within the SGI-USA (then NSA) especially since Nikken had praised President Ikeda in the January 1991 issue of *Daibyakurenge* and in SGI publications worldwide for his contributions to kosen-rufu: “The many offerings to the head temple and the donation of local temples begun by the Soka Gakkai around the time of President Toda, have been greatly built on by President Ikeda, whose contributions have earned numerous words of praise from my predecessor, Nittatsu Shonin, the 66th high priest.”

Nikken mistakenly believed that practitioners would defer to him as high priest in any conflict with the SGI. When that didn’t happen, he began to “reconstruct” the teachings of the Daishonin by claiming: the infallibility of the high priest; how the Nichikan Gohonzon issued by the SGI were false because they had not been sanctioned by the high priest, and; how members had to go on pilgrimage to the head temple in order to strengthen their faith.

When that didn’t work, he began tearing down buildings — first the Grand Reception Hall and now the Grand Main Temple. These actions of destruction do NOT reveal the heart of someone whose mentor is Nichiren Daishonin. It is also in stark contrast to the efforts of the SGI to build bridges of friendship within local communities and to build places to hold discussions, whether community centers like the Los Angeles Friendship Center or research centers like the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century.

Whatever Nikken’s motives were, we should appreciate that in excommunicating the SGI on Nov. 28, 1991, he liberated us from the growing authoritarianism of the priesthood and provided the first step in the globalization of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The Main Temple’s design was of a crane preparing for flight. With the Main Temple destroyed, the Buddhism of the sun, practiced as the Daishonin intended by the SGI, can now spread its wings and take flight. We can look back on Nov. 28, 1991, the moment that the Daishonin’s Buddhism became a truly universal religion.

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