

WHAT'S THE REAL VICTORY WE'RE SEEKING IN THE TEMPLE ISSUE? NEW TEMPLE ISSUE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

*We've been talking about achieving victory in the temple issue for a long time,
but it helps to be clear on exactly what that victory is.*

BY JEFF FARR, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

For the last eight years of the temple issue, SGI members have been talking about fighting the malicious and destructive forces of the Nikken sect — achieving victory in the temple issue.

But what *exactly* is this victory?

From talking to many SGI-USA leaders about this, I've learned that the real victory we're seeking is assuring that everyone in our organization and everyone in the temple organization — plus anyone else who is interested — is thoroughly educated about the difference between the fundamental spirit of the SGI and the distorted views of Nichiren Shoshu.

In other words, we want everyone to learn the difference between the correct and incorrect practice of Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism.

It's important to understand that we are not seeking, in any sense, the unhappiness of temple members. We are instead seeking their happiness — their victory in their lives — through teaching them the correct understanding and practice of this Buddhism.

Although both the SGI and the temple teach the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the two organizations' philosophies are completely at odds. For example, the SGI believes, as the Daishonin teaches, that all people are equal, that all people are essentially Buddhas. All people have the Law within. This Buddhism is thus centered on the ordinary person, and the SGI is spreading it with this clear understanding.

The current Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, though, doesn't see things this way. The temple believes that we are lesser beings than priests — especially the high priest, who has been set up as a supreme being. It's a priest-centered religion.

The priests teach in their study publication, *Dai-Nichiren*, that correct practice entails "absolute faith in and strict obedience to the High Priest." They ignore the Daishonin's strict assertion that we should follow not the person but the Law — that we should put the Law, not any high priest, in the center.

When the priesthood first excommunicated the SGI in November 1991, many SGI members felt that it was their responsibility as disciples of the Daishonin to educate people about the growing philosophical difference. This, we felt, was the same as educating people about what the Daishonin's Buddhism really is and is not, what it really teaches and does not teach.

In other words, this education was *shakubuku*, the spread of Buddhism.

The true victory we seek in the temple issue is indeed found in this educational process — one that doesn't necessarily have a clear endpoint, similar to the kosen-rufu movement not having a clear endpoint; kosen-rufu just keeps going on eternally; so does this education.

The temple issue raises this question: What does Buddhism posit as the greatest victory we can seek in our practice? Ultimate victory to the Daishonin was to make continual

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effort for kosen-rufu, to never give up. Our ultimate victory is when we've done our best, throughout our lives, to educate ourselves and others about this Buddhism. To help every person attain Buddhahood.

In "Repaying Debts of Gratitude," the Daishonin writes that "if Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin*, vol. 4, p. 272). This is his heart, his goal, stated simply: to educate everyone about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, to thus give everyone, "every living being," happiness. And to block off, once and for all, "the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering," the road of incorrect teachings.

If we make this goal our own and do all that we can toward it, we win in life, we truly win.

Then, we cannot help but show actual proof to people. When people see us taking action for them based on our compassion, they're seeing a form of actual proof — they're seeing that we do practice what we preach. When they hear what we say and see that what we do matches it, they're naturally impressed. They'll want to join us.

As SGI President Ikeda explains: "Dialogue is the lifeline of Buddhism. The Buddha's fundamental objective is to develop in the lives of all people a wisdom equal to his own.

"As this implies," he goes on, "we tell others about this Buddhism because, fundamentally, we venerate their lives. If, on the other hand, we had the attitude 'Even if I tell this person about Buddhism, it couldn't possibly do any good,' then we simply would not bother talking to them.

"We tell people about Buddhism because we respect them as human beings," he concludes (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 85).

Now must be the time for us to prove that we do respect all people, that we do care about everyone. Having opened people's eyes to what we're really about, it's certain that those who have left the SGI will return to the organization, that the priesthood's negative influence in the United States will fade out and that Nikken's distortions of the Daishonin's Buddhism will be seen with skepticism by all.

This is the education process in which we are now engaged.

One in a series