

**THE ISSUE IS: COMPASSION**  
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SGI President Ikeda's addresses, essays and other works — so many of which have appeared here in the *World Tribune* — display his awesome capacity for compassion. In them, he clarifies from many angles and in myriad ways just how vital and effective the correct practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is in helping each of us weed out our suffering at the root and chart a direct course toward happiness and limitless growth. When we develop this confidence ourselves, and share our conviction in this Buddhism with many others, we are cementing the foundation of a true, enduring peace.

Therefore, when the correct teachings of the Dai-shonin's Buddhism are threatened, especially to the degree they have been by the priests of Nichiren Shoshu in the ongoing temple issue, we can understand why President Ikeda's strictness toward the priesthood is equally awesome. This stern rebuke of the priesthood's arrogance and negativity, however, is a further display of his limitless compassion for the people and reverence toward the Law.

When the temple issue surfaced in December 1990, the SGI pursued every possible way to resolve the issue through dialogue, intent on furthering the harmonious unity of priesthood and laity for the progress of kosen-rufu. But the priesthood, maintaining it has a special, sacred and inherently superior position in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and is in no way answerable to the laity, refused to talk to the SGI.

Before being excommunicated by Nikken on Nov. 28, 1991, President Ikeda is known to have encouraged those priests who later decided to sever their ties with the head temple to continue to stay within Nichiren Shoshu and reform it through dialogue with their high priest and others. In other words, until his ties with Nichiren Shoshu were forcefully severed by the priesthood, President Ikeda tried to protect Nikken and the priesthood fully by trying to restore Nichiren Daishonin's correct teachings and spirit within Nichiren Shoshu. By choosing to excommunicate the Soka Gakkai, however, Nikken actually severed his connection with the kosen-rufu movement. By proclaiming that Nikken's status as high priest is more important than anything else in Nichiren Shoshu, Nichiren Shoshu thus became the Nikken sect.

In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, identifying devilish functions for what they are is the first step toward enlightenment, and toward protecting the movement of kosen-rufu. Despite his long devotion to supporting the priesthood's dignity and prosperity, President Ikeda now had to become the fiercest critic of priests who, while disparaging sincere practitioners, cloaked themselves in their presumed sacredness. This he had to do to protect the Law. The past nine years of struggle with the temple bears witness to his relentless resistance to the assault of the priesthood, which is epitomized by the recent destruction of the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo).

The temple issue challenges us to realize the importance of the spirit apparent in the following passage by Nichiren Daishonin: "In the Nirvana Sutra Shakyamuni stated, 'If even a good priest sees someone slandering the Law and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him or to punish him for his offense, then that priest is betraying Buddhism. But if he takes the slanderer severely to task, drives him off or punishes him, then he is my disciple and one who truly understands my teachings.' Never forget this admonition against ignoring another's slander of Buddhism" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren*

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*Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 165). In the above quote, the phrase “even a good priest” means any Buddhist practitioner.

President Ikeda’s deepest feelings in regard to the temple issue are well summarized in his recent essay “A Revolution Dawns”: “For the sake of kosen-rufu, we of the Soka Gakkai simply could not allow the Dai-shonin’s teachings to be trampled.... The Daishonin’s Buddhism exists for all the world’s people. We rallied to defend the Daishonin’s spirit, and we rose as one. It marked the dawn of a new religious revolution.... For the Gakkai, the excommunication released us from the chains by which the envious, scheming Nikken sect had sought to control the Daishonin’s followers and allowed us to claim our true spiritual independence....

“The new humanism of the Soka Gakkai, derived from the Daishonin’s Buddhism, is linking people around the globe, transcending national and ethnic boundaries, and earning praise from all as the light of hope for the new century. Leaders of diverse fields who seek a philosophy of humanism and peace come to the Gakkai in a constant stream from all over the world. Isn’t this brilliant proof of our truth and rightness?” (Feb. 5, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Strictness in the Daishonin’s Buddhism has at its essence compassion. This awareness is vital in carrying out the kind of practice through which we will fully bring forth our inherent Buddhahood — and protect those trying to do the same.

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