

**TEMPLE ISSUE: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS
SHOULDN'T WE JUST SELF-REFLECT?
BY JEFF FARR, ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches the oneness of life and its environment — that our lives are intrinsically linked with the universe around us. When we change ourselves for the better, the environment surrounding us has to improve, too. When we quash negative attitudes, everything responds in the positive.

Given this principle, if the SGI keeps criticizing the teachings of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, aren't we forgetting something important about Buddhist practice? Can't the whole temple issue be seen as a reflection of our negativity? If we stopped being so critical of Nichiren Shoshu and just looked at ourselves more, wouldn't the temple issue naturally disappear? These are some of the questions I've heard from members.

The concept of the oneness of life and its environment, however, doesn't teach that we can change our environment *only* through self-reflection. In fact, this Buddhism emphasizes inner change *plus* self-motivated action. As SGI President Ikeda says in a recent speech: "It all comes down to whether you are taking action. Without personal effort, Buddhism does not exist, kosen-rufu cannot be realized, and there is no true glory" (June 18 *World Tribune*, p. 8).

In the case of the temple issue, what kind of action is appropriate to take? Since 1991, the U.S. temples have been trying to persuade SGI-USA members — especially inactive members — into the temple organization to confuse them with erroneous views of the Daishonin's Buddhism. The temples have been teaching, for instance, that ordinary people are lesser beings than priests — especially the high priest, whom the temple now says is some kind of a supreme being. This goes against the Daishonin's teaching that all people are equal, that all people are potentially Buddhas. So, what can each of us do about this situation? This was discussed at the June session of the Central Executive Committee, and the following three guidelines were agreed upon:

1) Prayer: Each of us can offer strong prayers about the temple issue as part of our daily practice. We can set our own chanting goals about the temple issue. And those of us who know temple members can keep praying specifically for the happiness of those friends.

2) Study: Each of us can continue to educate ourselves and our fellow members about the differences between the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu. We can study the various materials available on the temple issue, like the pamphlet *Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue*, President Ikeda's speeches in the *World Tribune*, and the *Living Buddhism* series "Untold History of the Fuji School."

3) Outreach: Each of us can visit inactive members whom we know, create friendships with them, and encourage them to participate with us in SGI-USA activities. We can pursue dialogue with temple members, and through deepening our relationships with them, lead them to the true practice. We can also teach our guests to meetings the difference between the temple and the SGI as part of the introduction process.

All of these ways of reaching out are compassionate actions. The Daishonin says, "I am fully aware that if I do not speak out, I will be lacking in compassion" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 95). He was troubled by all the religious confusion and injustice going on around him, and to alleviate this, he took action: He distinguished all the incorrect practices from the correct practice of chanting Nam-

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myoho-rence-kyo. He spoke, wrote and proved the truth.

Seeing all the suffering being caused by the confused religious world of his day, what if the Daishonin had said: “This is all just a reflection of my negativity. I better just chant about myself and not say anything to anyone?” None of us would be practicing now.

Sometimes the change in attitude that we need to make in our Buddhist practice involves mustering the courage to take action — to do something concrete about our situation. When we do this kind of human revolution, there are no circumstances that we cannot change.

This is not to say that we don’t need to self-reflect — we do, always. We continually need to self-reflect about our practice. Again, we need both: inner change *plus* self-motivated action.

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