

FROM SGI GENERAL DIRECTOR EIICHI WADA THE TEMPLE ISSUE STARTS WITH FAITH, PRACTICE AND STUDY

Nichiren Shoshu is recruiting SGI-USA members to join its temples, where a distorted view of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is being taught. The following are points on the temple issue made by SGI General Director Eiichi Wada during his recent visit to the United States. He explains that it's our responsibility to protect our fellow members from this—based on the basics of faith, practice and study.

- What can each of us do about the temple issue? The “how” of challenging this issue is nothing more than the basics—faith, practice and study. The entire temple issue should be viewed in this context.

- Faith means prayer. Overall, we should pray for kosen-rufu, propagation and for each person to become happy. Pursuing our own happiness and the happiness of others is the basic purpose of Buddhism. First, let's pray for a great victory in the temple issue. Second, we should pray that our members are never deceived by the priesthood—that they understand the essence of the temple issue. Through heartfelt prayer and meaningful dialogue, we can help them practice correctly. Third, let's pray for the happiness of the temple members. They have been misguided by the priests and are being encouraged to make offerings to these slanderers of Buddhism. Thus they are inadvertently making bad causes for their lives. It is our mission to disconnect them from the temple through our prayer.

- In 1991, SGI-Brazil, which had donated Ichijo-ji temple to Nichiren Shoshu, began taking legal steps to reclaim the facility. A group of priests and temple members had illegally taken control of the center, ousting the temple's original Board of Directors, who were SGI-Brazil members. Facing what appeared to be an impossible challenge, the members based their efforts on one thing: chanting daimoku.

Over an eight-year period, sometimes winning, sometimes losing, the Brazilian members continued to chant to get back their building. Finally, in May of last year, the situation was resolved with a court ruling that the temple property should be returned to the SGI-Brazil. At that time, the members celebrated their great victory by renaming the temple the Brazil Ever-Victorious Community Center.

But the battle was not over yet. The priest occupying the residential portion of the temple refused to move out. So the SGI-Brazil members chanted again, went back to court and on July 30 won again: The court ruled that the priest was guilty of illegal occupancy and ordered him to vacate. Hearing of this great victory, SGI President Ikeda said: “It is actually daimoku that determines whether we win or lose. Only through daimoku does kosen-rufu advance.” We have a lot to learn from this example set by the members of Brazil.

- The word practice means action and dialogue. The word kyo of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo also means action, by the way. Our actions are the source of our benefits. To the degree that we move—taking action for kosen-rufu—we accumulate fortune.

Everything we do for kosen-rufu is a source of benefit. For example, participating in culture festivals, holding an exhibition, visiting members—whatever we do by moving our bodies for the sake of the Law is a source of benefit. Benefit is not something that just

comes to us. When we take action for kosen-rufu, the Buddhist gods begin to function on our behalf.

Nichiren Daishonin speaks of “gathering fortune from ten thousand miles afar” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1 p. 272). The Gohonzon is like a magnet that can gather fortune from 10,000 miles afar. The Gohonzon in each of us will shine to the degree that we practice. The Gohonzon within is the force that gathers fortune from all over the world.

- Ours is a practice built on propagation, or *shakubuku*. This is the basic practice. The temple issue should be seen in this context; our compassionate shakubuku spirit should be the basis of dealing with the temple issue. Propagating the Daishonin’s Buddhism mercifully among those seeking happiness is our goal. Winning over the temple issue is a vital part of this goal.

- It is especially important to support SGI members who are in contact with temple members, as they are the lifeline for temple members; friendships between SGI and temple members should be cherished. Their relationship is the temple members’ avenue to rediscovering the correct practice.

- One of the reformist priests in Japan has succeeded in bringing more than 60 temple members back to the Soka Gakkai. What we can learn from his example is the power of cherishing human relationships with temple members; the power of sincere, compassionate, tenacious efforts to care about others whether they are in the temple, on the frontlines of the SGI or behind the scenes. One of the temple members in San Francisco who has returned to the SGI recounts that it was a friend of hers—an SGI-USA member who continued to chant for her happiness, who led her back to the SGI. While no one in the temple seriously chanted for her recovery when she became very ill, she learned how much SGI-USA members had been caring about her and chanting for her, even though she had once turned her back on the SGI.

- It is through front-line activities that we can advance kosen-rufu. When all SGI-USA leaders place themselves in the forefront of their district activities, we start learning what kind of influence the temple members are having on our membership. It’s there that we can diminish the negative influence of the priesthood and increase the Buddha’s forces by having courageous dialogue with the people who are being swayed by the temple issue, as well as the people who are still having difficulties understanding the import of this issue.

- The third of the three basics is, of course, study. Our study centers around the Daishonin’s writings and President Ikeda’s speeches, which are based on those writings. We can see, through study, the clear distinction between the Daishonin’s teachings and the new teachings of the Nikken sect. Through study, we can learn that the SGI is exactly in accord with the heart of the Daishonin’s teachings. And by studying what President Ikeda has to say to encourage our faith, we will get a clearer picture of the temple issue.

- Since the inception of the SGI in 1930, this organization has remained unchanged in its direct connection with the Daishonin and his writings, which we have made our foundation; the Gohonzon has always been the basis of our faith. In the Nikken sect, however,

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Nikken is seen as everything—he is the center and has gone so far as to assert that his word is even more important than the Daishonin's. In fact, Nikken allows one of the temple publications to state that he is the “Daishonin of modern times” (June 1991 *Dai-Nichiren*, Nichiren Shoshu's monthly journal).

- We should try not to use buzz words or emotional language such as “destroy the Nikken sect” or “close the temples” in talking about this issue. Rather, we should be aware that our steady efforts in daimoku and dialogue—cheerfully, joyfully—will enable us to win. The important thing is for SGI members to show actual proof of our practice. President Ikeda always wants SGI-USA members to be joyful and to enjoy our correct practice fully.

- We have observed the past destructiveness of Nikken, and it is vital to know what Nikken will try to do in the next few years to stem the flow of kosen-rufu. After destroying all the precious buildings donated over the years by Soka Gakkai members in their sincere faith, including the Grand Reception Hall and the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo), the Nikken sect is now focusing on the year 2002, which will commemorate the 750th anniversary of the establishment of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Nikken's goal is to have 300,000 people make a pilgrimage to the head temple to celebrate the occasion. At that time, he wants to glorify himself with the completion of a new temple called the Treasure House (Hoando). Toward this end, Nikken has instructed temple members to raise \$120 million over the next three years.

- Because of the increasing pressure the temple members will face as they are forced to comply with Nikken's pilgrimage and financial goals for the year 2002, some of the temple members are going to become disheartened. They will begin to see the priesthood's true nature. It is at that time that the SGI contact members will be able to offer friendship and protection for the temple members.

- Nikken reportedly has promised to retire once this new temple is completed in 2002 and the 300,000-member pilgrimage has been held. But even if Nikken should retire, the temple issue is going to last a long time. Future high priests will be as “muddy” as Nikken in their faith.

- Beginning around 1995, the Nikken sect, which did not have much success in recruiting Soka Gakkai members in Japan—where the members are well aware of the reality of the priesthood's faith and lifestyle—shifted its focus to other countries. SGI members outside Japan are usually innocent in terms of their experience with Nichiren Shoshu and can be susceptible to the superficial dignity implied by the priesthood's religious robes.

- The temple issue won't end suddenly. It is important that each SGI-USA member understand the issue's essential nature and take it as an opportunity to deepen his or her faith in, and understanding of, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Just using emotional statements against the priesthood will not help solve this issue. What counts is our steady efforts to further awaken ourselves and others to the profound significance of this issue.

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