

IN MY LIFE: IT'S THE SPIRIT THAT COUNTS
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When I observe what people are doing, I realize that although they profess faith in the Lotus Sutra and clasp its scrolls, they act against the spirit of the sutra and thereby readily fall into the evil paths.... Even if one embraces, reads and praises the Lotus Sutra, if he betrays its intent, he will be destroying not only Shakyamuni but all other Buddhas in the universe. ("Letter to Niike," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 253)

During the several years of the temple issue, it has not always been clear to me exactly why the temple members aren't practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism correctly. But in light of the above passage, it is crystal clear to me. Although all of us have a Gohonzon, do gongyo and chant daimoku, the SGI and the temple members are on two completely separate paths. Setting aside any doctrinal differences and looking at the issue from a purely secular standpoint, it is clear that the SGI is practicing in accord with the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, whereas the temple is not.

Going back to the earliest days of the Soka Gakkai, it was former SGI presidents Makiguchi and Toda who were persecuted because of their faith. They were the ones who stood up to the authorities and subsequently imprisoned because of their stance.

No priests joined them in their fight to stand up for this Buddhism; in fact, the priesthood acquiesced to pressures from the government.

When Toda emerged from prison, most of the members in Japan began practicing because of the efforts of the Soka Gakkai members, not because of the priests. Since then, the Daishonin's Buddhism has spread around the world because of the efforts of SGI President Ikeda and the SGI members.

It is alarming to me when I hear temple members criticize the SGI. If it weren't for the SGI, most of them would never have encountered this Buddhism.

Additionally, the SGI is receiving praise and commendation from all realms of society for its efforts to spread peace and humanism around the world. President Ikeda has published many dialogues with leading thinkers who are also committed to building a peaceful, prosperous future. And the SGI president has received tremendous recognition for those efforts.

The priesthood doesn't appear to be making any efforts to live up to the Daishonin's spirit.

On the contrary, they appear to be going against that spirit through actions such as defaming Mother Teresa (as happened recently in Argentina, which led to the government deporting the priest), or ignoring the millions of voices both within and outside of the SGI protesting the demolition of the Grand Main Temple.

Nikken himself seems most renowned for the Seattle Incident. I don't recall him receiving any honorary degrees from esteemed colleges or publishing any dialogues with leading world thinkers. Has anyone read a peace proposal from him?

The intention of the temple is ultimately to destroy the SGI, as was evidenced by Operation C. And by saying that people can only attain Buddhahood through obedience and worship of the high priest, they have undermined all of the Daishonin's efforts to teach people that no intermediary is needed to attain enlightenment.

They have betrayed the intent of the Lotus Sutra.

President Ikeda always reminds us that the organization exists for no other purpose than

to help people become happy. We have to be vigilant in our efforts to ensure that our activities are based on this spirit—and that we don't take the road the priesthood has taken.

The spirit of the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin's Buddhism is to relieve the suffering of the people and enable them to awaken to the joy, wisdom and good fortune that lies dormant in their lives. When we ask ourselves who is acting in accord with this spirit, who is fighting day and night to make this spirit a reality, the answer is very clear.

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