

LETTER TO HIGH PRIEST NIKKEN ABE 'I WILL TAKE ACTION FOR JUSTICE'

As part of the World Tribune's ongoing commitment to provide its readers with the latest news concerning the state of Nichiren Shoshu, we provide the following letter to High Priest Nikken Abe from the priest Endo Ishida that explains his decision to secede from Nichiren Shoshu (see Aug. 4 World Tribune). Serving as an administrator in the Nichiren Shoshu Overseas Bureau for the past three years, Ishida worked closely with Overseas Bureau Chief Kotoku Obayashi on the development of Nichiren Shoshu's international movement. He is the first priest to secede this year and the first since the Tokyo District Court ruling in the Seattle Incident trial in March. Ishida asks High Priest Nikken to take full responsibility for the decline of the head temple, Taiseki-ji, and expresses his determination to take "action for justice" together with SGI members.

*To Nikken Abe
Chief Administrator of
Nichiren Shoshu*

Quoting the "Encouraging Devotion" (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra in "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin states: "There will be forest-dwelling monks wearing clothing of patched rags and living in retirement, who will claim they are practicing the true way, despising and looking down on all humankind. Greedy for profit and support, they will preach the Law to white-robed laymen and will be respected and revered by the world as though they were arhats who possess the six transcendental powers. These men with evil in their hearts, constantly thinking of worldly affairs, will borrow the name of forest-dwelling monks and take delight in proclaiming our faults ... Because in the midst of the great assembly they constantly try to defame us, they will address the rulers, high ministers, Brahmans, and house-holders, as well as the other monks, slandering and speaking evil of us, saying, 'These are men of perverted views who preach non-Buddhist doctrines!' ... In a muddied kalpa, in an evil age there will be many things to fear. Evil demons will take possession of others and through them curse, revile, and heap shame on us.... The evil monks of that muddied age, failing to understand the Buddha's expedient means, how he preaches the Law in accordance with what is appropriate, will confront us with foul language and angry frowns; again and again we will be banished" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 270).

The head temple, Taiseki-ji, is an unbearably tragic sight today, in contrast to the auspicious events scheduled in 2002 to celebrate the 750th anniversary of the establishment of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Defeat in the Seattle Incident trial has increased others' distrust of you, which permeates the head temple. The number of believers who go on pilgrimage to the head temple is on a steady decline. Those living at the head temple are well aware of the stagnation in faith that prevails on its grounds.

The Fuji School's "pure current of faith" over the past centuries that Taiseki-ji has been boasting about has dried up. We cannot help but feel that the spirit of the Daishonin, the founder of true Buddhism, and Nikko Shonin, the founder of Taiseki-ji, has been completely lost at the head temple. As we observe the pathetic reality of Nichiren Shoshu, it is obvious that you, High Priest Nikken Abe, are only interested in believers' offerings

and have caused all this by allowing your jealousy to destroy the harmonious unity of priesthood and laity.

Indeed, you, High Priest Nikken, embody the third powerful enemy who appears to obstruct the progress of kosen-rufu as described in the “Encouraging Devotion” chapter of the Lotus Sutra.

In 1964, I became a Nichiren Shoshu priest as a member of the fifth class. I have been part of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood since then. But I have come to be convinced that there is no other way than leaving Nichiren Shoshu for me to help revitalize this sect and contribute to the spread of the True Law. Let me share part of my sentiments as I secede from Nichiren Shoshu today.

The decline of Nichiren Shoshu that became so visible at the end of last year makes it evident to me that the Buddhist gods have deserted Taiseki-ji, where I have lived over the past decades. The current dismal financial condition of the head temple and the extremely irrational actions you took to cope with this crisis prove my point.

On April 5, 1998, the last day of the 100,000-member pilgrimage that year, the Dai-Gohonzon was suddenly transferred (from the Grand Main Temple [Sho-Hondo] to the Hoan-den temple), and the demolition of the Grand Main Temple was abruptly announced. We priests residing at the head temple were notified of the transfer of the Dai-Gohonzon only a few minutes before it was executed. We wondered why the Dai-Gohonzon, the foundation of our school’s faith, had to be transferred in such a secretive manner.

In November 1998, you issued an admonition, in which you announced that offerings would be collected for the construction of the Hoan-do temple [where the Dai-Gohonzon will be enshrined from 2002]. At the end of 1999, the first collection of offerings took place, but the number of participants and the total amount of money collected were shockingly below your goal. Only 60 percent of Nichiren Shoshu’s goal was achieved.

I vividly remember what High Priest Nittatsu, my mentor, once said: “We have come to the decision that we will, from now until forever, allow believers to worship the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of True Buddhism at this Grand Main Temple for their attainment of enlightenment and the fulfillment of all their desires in the present and future. We thus designate this structure as a great edifice at which to pray for world peace.” I have been struggling to suppress my distrust of you, my suspicion that your self-righteousness lay behind the abrupt transfer of the Dai-Gohonzon and the demolition of the Grand Main Temple. The disappointing results of the collection campaign in 1999 eloquently prove that Nichiren Shoshu believers are not convinced that demolishing the Grand Main Temple and constructing the Hoan-do temple was the right thing to do. It also shows me that their hearts have begun to close to Taiseki-ji.

In the meantime, you chose to avoid the essence of the matter and ordered all priests’ salaries at the head temple to be reduced by one-third. You justified this by saying that you had discovered a number of unnecessary expenditures at the head temple. As a result of your decision, I know that it became financially impossible for some priests at the head temple to send their children to kindergarten.

High Priest Nikken, I cannot agree with what you have done. Is it not a fact that the true cause for the current financial strains of Nichiren Shoshu lies in your foolish behavior? Is this not reflected in your destruction of various buildings at the head temple out of your jealousy toward the former high priest, Nittatsu, and the Soka Gakkai? And if Nichiren Shoshu is truly having financial problems now, should you not first dispose of the two

residences that you privately use—those located at Nakamachi, Setagaya Ward, Tokyo, and at Shoto, Shibuya Ward, Tokyo? Your self-centeredness is manifested in your limitless greed for offerings from believers. You are exploiting Nichiren Shoshu for your personal purposes. This, by all means, should not be tolerated.

Next, I want to address the Seattle Incident trial. Since most of us did not have any chance to observe the trial, all we knew about it was based on information from the Public Relations Bureau of Nichiren Shoshu. The great majority of the priests of our school were led to believe that Nichiren Shoshu would score a stunning victory in this trial. In March, just before the ruling was announced, those Nichiren Shoshu council members and other priests who gathered at the head temple were full of optimism, some even saying: “We will no doubt win a huge victory.” “We will publish a large run of a special edition.”

However, the trial outcome was exactly the opposite of what we expected. The judge denied the credibility of your court testimony and acknowledged that it was true that you were with prostitutes in Seattle. With such a clear-cut defeat, I now see how ignorant we have been of the truth of the matter. And I know that having made a big deal out of publishing a special edition was just a joke. Nothing brought us, the Nichiren Shoshu priests, greater shame than the official ruling. At the same time, I realize that the Public Relations Bureau intended to hide the truth from us.

You once clearly said that you would resign from the position of high priest if the Seattle Incident were proven true. Nothing is more base than your behavior now as you try to justify your position, thus further deceiving the priests and believers of Nichiren Shoshu by telling them another round of lies and excuses. The statement that you had published is evidence of this: “The verdict was not adequate, and it was a misjudgment by the judge.”

Looking back, the atmosphere at the head temple during the celebration of your 77th birthday last December was still composed and light-hearted. However, failure in the collection drive last December and defeat in the Seattle Incident trial dramatically changed the atmosphere at the head temple. These two major setbacks resulted in a decrease in the number of pilgrimage participants to the head temple; there is growing distrust in you and the current priesthood.

I have been attending every *gokaihi* (ceremony to worship the Dai-Gohonzon) under your leadership. Especially this year, participants have continuously decreased in number. The faces of the participants have continued to darken, and it has become obvious that they are participating in the ceremony merely out of obligation.

The summer training pilgrimage had a remarkably low attendance compared to last year. There were days when we only achieved half of our attendance goal. As a result, the *gokaihi* ceremony that was supposed to be held twice a day had to be reduced to once a day. Not only that, less than 2,600 people—which used to be the regular attendance for each *gokaihi* ceremony when it took place twice a day—showed up when the *gokaihi* ceremony became a once-a-day event. This serious decrease in attendance dumfounded us. Is it not true that the many chief priests of local temples predict that Nichiren Shoshu will accomplish only 20 or 30 percent of the goal of 300,000 participants in the pilgrimage slated for a year and a half from now? Deep in their hearts, they all know that achieving 300,000 participants is totally impossible.

Strangely enough, it often rains on the Saturdays and Sundays when the summer training pilgrimage is held at the head temple. I often witnessed it begin to rain harder just before the *gokaihi* ceremony and could not help but take it as the sorrowful tears of the Dai-Gohonzon. Believers were often drenched when they entered the Hoan-den temple.

The tatami mats thus absorbed a lot of moisture, and a musty smell permeates inside.

Furthermore, the violence and discrimination that abound at the head temple have negatively influenced many acolytes who have received training there. Life has disappeared from their faces. Defiled, their eyes shine no more. I do not see any sign of vitality in these young priests who are supposed to shoulder Nichiren Shoshu's future.

Remembering the days when I became a Nichiren Shoshu priest, our mentor, High Priest Nittatsu, watched our growth with his gentle smile, and I was so proud to receive training as a young priest at the head temple. As I walk around the head temple grounds these days, I reminisce about the good old days at the head temple and the many warm words I often received from High Priest Nittatsu. Today, however, all the structures that High Priest Nittatsu built have been destroyed.

In those days, we were fresh from the completion of the Six-Compartment Lodging and the Grand Reception Hall. All of Nichiren Shoshu was vibrantly advancing toward the great objective of kosen-rufu. Taiseki-ji was full of daimoku, and the Soka Gakkai members who visited the head temple were in high spirits, determined to promote kosen-rufu.

Nowadays, no trace of such a positive spirit is seen at Taiseki-ji. Pilgrims are scarce, and those who traverse its grounds are lifeless, their faces looking down.

In "The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin states, "When one comes to the end of one's good fortune, no strategy whatsoever avails" (WND, 1000).

The dramatic decline of Taiseki-ji over the past six months or so exemplifies the truth of this statement. Though it is summer now, I feel emptiness in the wind that blows over the head temple grounds. Where did the spirit of Taiseki-ji go? I am in deep agony, with an inescapable sadness in my heart.

Taiseki-ji, the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu, where the Dai-Gohonzon is located, is supposed to be a sacred haven of faith. It should be an enlightened place. Why did it have to become deserted? The answer is obvious in the Daishonin's writings: "The Great Teacher Miao-lo says: 'You should understand that one's life and its environment at a single moment encompass the three thousand realms. Therefore, when one attains the Buddha way, one puts oneself in accord with this fundamental principle, and one's body and mind at a single moment pervade the entire realm of phenomena'" (WND, 366).

Our environment is the reflection of our mind, and our mind permeates the entire universe.

The current emptiness at Taiseki-ji, which has strayed far from the great cause of kosen-rufu, clearly manifests the emptiness in your mind. In other words, Taiseki-ji today reflects your excessive attachment to your own welfare and that of your family. It is a reflection of your burning jealousy toward Honorary President Ikeda, a reflection of your evil, wicked mind as the third powerful enemy of Buddhism. You, High Priest Nikken, must know that you are the one fundamental cause for the current decadence of Taiseki-ji.

Also, I have been assigned to the Overseas Bureau since April 1997. What I saw in this assignment is that even though you advocate world kosen-rufu, you lack the heart to bring happiness to each believer and to realize global kosen-rufu.

In reality, Nichiren Shoshu temples or offices in various parts of the world do not have many priests. They are facing severe financial circumstances. Out of your personal emotions toward having a central stronghold in Europe — which I believe is only to satisfy your ego — you give special treatment to particular countries. And you do not show any interest in how Nichiren Shoshu temples are being managed in Asia or South America. You

do not even care how believers in those countries practice the Daishonin's Buddhism.

By rights, the Overseas Bureau budget, which is supposed to be discussed by the top management of Nichiren Shoshu and then distributed most effectively to respond to the reality of overseas Nichiren Shoshu temples, is administrated at your whim. The budget has been distributed unevenly, and Overseas Bureau Chief Kotoku Obayashi has followed your direction blindly. As one who knows the condition of Nichiren Shoshu in each country and who functioned as a liaison with each country, I was deeply concerned about the irrationality of your leadership. I really have been suffering from this. Indeed, you are self-righteous and have no mercy.

World kosen-rufu means that the Law, the Daishonin's Buddhism, spreads throughout the world, and the people of each country enjoy accumulating the benefit of Buddhist practice. However, I have no choice but to say that your behavior shows that your view of kosen-rufu is very shortsighted. Yours is not based on the spread of the Law. In your mind, kosen-rufu just means building temples. It is now clear that the great goal of global kosen-rufu will not be accomplished under your leadership.

As we herald the anniversary of the former high priest Nittatsu's death tomorrow, I declare that I will leave Taiseki-ji for now. Convinced that taking action for justice together with 10 million believers with correct faith is the way to regain the purity of the Fuji School and the way to repay our debt of gratitude to the former high priest, Nittatsu, I hereby declare that I secede from the current Nichiren Shoshu. I proclaim that you, High Priest Nikken, the fundamental obstacle to kosen-rufu, should take responsibility. I strongly request your resignation from the position of the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu.

July 21, 2000

Endo Ishida