

GET REAL!
WHAT'S SOKA SPIRIT? WHY DOES IT MATTER?
BY JOMO THORNE, SGI-USA HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION LEADER

“The Daishonin also strongly urges Tokimitsu to fight bravely, with all the spirit of youth, against the attacks of evil authorities. ...‘Fight back fiercely against evil. That is what it means to be young!’” (SGI President Ikeda, April 6 *World Tribune*, p. 6)

Most teens in the SGI-USA haven't had a lot of experience with Nichiren Shoshu priests or temple members. We hear a lot of talk about “the Nikken sect,” “the temple issue” and “Soka Spirit,” but for many of us these phrases don't mean a whole lot.

I think that the best way for teens to understand why SGI President Ikeda focuses so much on fighting against the priesthood is by asking three questions: What is good? What is evil? Why does it matter?

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is based on the belief that all people have the potential to achieve enlightenment. We chant and do activities to bring out and experience the wisdom, compassion, joy and vitality we call Buddhahood. Because we all have a Buddha nature, we are all inherently equal. Since Buddhism is about helping every single individual become happy, from a Buddhist point of view, good is anything that improves human life and evil is anything that leads people to misery.

All of us have probably heard the term *sansho shima*. In English it means three obstacles and four devils. The devils here are not little red guys with horns. Devils are the forces in our lives that prevent us from realizing our Buddhahood, interfering with our advancement. Devils can take many forms. They can come from within — as illness, laziness, depression — or from our outside — as arguments, mishaps and so on. In the Goshu, the Daishonin refers to the strongest type of devil as “the devil king” or “fundamental darkness.” This fundamental darkness is our ignorance of the fact that inside, we all possess the means to achieve absolute happiness.

This fundamental darkness makes people look outside themselves for happiness and security. In a sense, it makes people insecure about the possibility of living a happy life. Some exploit these insecurities to relieve their own. Fighting against this negative human tendency is what lies at the heart of what we in the SGI-USA call Soka Spirit.

Nikken Abe, the man who holds the position of high priest and chief administrator of Nichiren Shoshu, claims that all people aren't equal. He claims that people can only experience the benefits of Buddhist practice by blindly following him. Playing on the temple members' tendency to look outside themselves for salvation, Nikken is leading them down a path of great suffering. Based on the previous definition, the behavior of Nichiren Shoshu under his leadership is clearly evil.

If we don't fight against the priesthood now, millions of people could fall victim to this evil. From a broader point of view, if we as teens don't learn to oppose evil abuse of power wherever we see it, in the future we will let ourselves be manipulated by corrupt authority figures. This is why we need to learn to make Soka Spirit our own.