

SOKA SPIRIT STUDY
WHAT IT REALLY MEANS TO INHERIT THE LIFEBLOOD
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Below, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood tries to use Nichiren Daishonin's writings to instill us with fear and foreboding:

"If the person worshipping it [the Gohonzon] slanders the High Priest of the conferral of the lifeblood of the Law...there will be no benefits... What is more, all the benefits derived from faith up to that point will be extinguished. This is something to be feared. This is what is meant by, 'Unless one possesses the lifeblood of faith, even if one were to embrace the Lotus Sutra, it would be of no use'" (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, p. 15).

The Goshō passage quoted in the above is from the Daishonin's famous letter "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life and Death." In *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* it reads: "Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith" (WND, 218).

Nichiren Shoshu seems to suggest here that belief in its high priest is equivalent to the heritage of faith. The Daishonin, however, never equates the heritage with a formal lineage, and even less to belief in the primacy of a religious hierarchy. In this writing he discloses what it really means to inherit the lifeblood of faith.

Addressed to Sairen-bo, a priest of the Tendai school who became the Daishonin's disciple, it's a response to Sairen-bo's question about *shoji ichidaiji kechimyaku*—the "heritage of the ultimate law of life and death." The Japanese term *kechimyaku*, literally lifeblood or bloodline, originally meant the transmission of authority, spiritual and legal, from master to disciple in Japanese Buddhist schools.

In the Tendai school, such formal rites of transmission were veiled in secretive esoteric ritual. They involved the transfer of doctrine, proprietary knowledge, real property, and even political power in much the same way as estates and titles were transferred from father to son among the nobility. The Daishonin roundly criticized the Tendai school, originally founded upon the Lotus Sutra-based teachings of T'ien-t'ai of China, for mixing esoteric beliefs into its doctrines.

In response to Sairen-bo's question about the heritage of the ultimate Law, the Daishonin casts an entirely new light on the idea, defining it as the essence of the Lotus Sutra and as faith itself.

For example, in this letter he writes: "Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another. To chant Myōhō-rensō-kyō with this realization is to inherit the ultimate Law of life and death. This is a matter of the utmost importance for Nichiren's disciples and lay supporters, and this is what it means to embrace the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 216).

The heritage lies in praying with the conviction that we are no different from the eternal Buddha and the Law that leads to Buddhahood—*Nam-myōhō-rensō-kyō*.

Overturning the idea that the heritage of faith is passed down exclusively or secretly, the Daishonin also writes, "Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood" (WND, 217).

In its literature, Nichiren Shoshu often divides the heritage into two: the heritage of the entity of the Law, which they say is possessed and passed on by only one person, the high priest; and the heritage of faith, which they hold to be inferior. Here, though, they associate the heritage of faith, as well, to belief in the high priest. Either way, their arguments contradict the Daishonin's words, which place primary importance on the faith of the practitioner.