

Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue

A Pamphlet Published by the Soka Gakkai International-USA, 1997.

INTRODUCTION

1. [WHAT IS THE TEMPLE ISSUE?](#)
2. [WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE TEMPLE ISSUE?](#)
3. [WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT NIKKEN?](#)
4. [WHAT IS THE REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TEMPLE AND THE SGI?](#)
5. [IF THE PRIESTHOOD HAS BEEN MISGUIDED ALL ALONG, WHY DID THE SGI SUPPORT IT IN THE PAST?](#)
6. [WHY DID THE SGI START TO ISSUE THE GOHONZON?](#)
7. [WHY DOES NICHIREN SHOSHU CLAIM THAT THE GOHONZON ISSUED BY THE SGI IS "COUNTERFEIT"?](#)
8. [WHY ARE MEMBERS EXCHANGING THEIR NIKKEN-TRANSCRIBED GOHONZON FOR ONE TRANSCRIBED BY NICHIKAN? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE GOHONZON?](#)
9. [I HAVE BEEN INVITED TO VISIT A NICHIREN SHOSHU TEMPLE? IS IT ALL RIGHT TO GO?](#)
10. [WHAT IS BEHIND THE TEMPLE'S PROMOTION OF MEDIA REPORTS THAT PAINT THE GAKKAI IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT?](#)
11. [WHY DON'T THE SGI AND NICHIREN SHOSHU TALK TO EACH OTHER?](#)
12. [WHAT EFFECT WILL THE PRIESTS' ERRORS HAVE ON THOSE WHO FOLLOW THEM, AND WHAT CAN I DO FOR THOSE PEOPLE?](#)
13. [HOW WILL THE TEMPLE ISSUE AFFECT THE SGI IN THE FUTURE?](#)
14. [HOW CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT THE TEMPLE ISSUE?](#)
15. [SUGGESTED READING](#)

[Download the PDF](#)

Copies of this pamphlet are now available free of charge through the SGI-USA organization. Electronic or printed copies of this pamphlet may be distributed only in its complete and unmodified form with all copyright information intact.

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet attempts to outline some key elements of what has become known in the Soka Gakkai International (SGI) as the "temple issue" events and information related to Nichiren Shoshu's attacks on the SGI, and its continued efforts to undermine SGI's movement.

When the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu began a series of measures against the SGI at the beginning of this decade intended to disband and destroy the organization, it may have been shocking and disturbing, but it was not surprising from the standpoint of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings and of history. Many incidents and events going back to the Soka Gakkai's inception before World War II indicated that within the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood there existed the potential for hatred and jealousy toward lay believers. It was evident in the attitude and behavior of more than a few priests. As the Gakkai's growth and influence increased, so did the number of priests who harbored such an attitude until, eventually, it reached the office of high priest.

Buddhism means growth, progress, improvement - of the individual and of society; it spurs development through a deep inner reformation. This reformation, as it progresses in the life of the individual, sends waves of vitality, humanity and harmony into the family, the workplace, the community and society. This is the process of human revolution as it unfolds into the

broader process we call kosen-rufu. The ultimate aim is to secure a world of peace, harmony, fulfillment and happiness.

This most elemental purpose of Buddhism has never been well received by those with a strong stake in the status quo, in the established order - particularly when that order is stagnant and calls for passivity or unquestioning obedience on the part of ordinary people.

The Soka Gakkai since its inception has been based on the purest intent of Buddhism, aiming at a fundamental reordering of the lives of the people who embrace its practice and philosophy. Because of this, the movement and its leaders have been maligned, hated and looked upon with contempt by those who feel threatened by its energy and the changes it promises to bring. There is no question that the passage in the Lotus Sutra, "And since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" (LS10, 164), applies precisely to the Soka Gakkai's situation, as it did to Nichiren Daishonin.

The human revolution and social renaissance of the SGI are particularly distasteful to those whose authority and power are rooted in a weak and dependent people. The practice of Buddhism produces a happier and more aware populace; a socially responsible and politically involved citizenry; a people who know what true leadership means, whether religious or secular, and who are perceptive and courageous enough to unmask self-serving authority.

History abounds with examples of oppression by religious or secular authority over those who advocated a new way of thinking or tried to empower ordinary people. Many new traditions sprang from the courage of these ordinary individuals who overcame such oppression. The world's major religions have all experienced such opposition during their early history.

Examples of opposition to those who spread Buddhism in its true spirit are many in Buddhist scripture, particularly in the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Daishonin chronicles in detail the persecutions, by cunning and self-serving priests and political leaders, that he and his supporters underwent in thirteenth-century Japan.

Buddhism characterizes opposition by authority as devilish functions, as obstacles, as influence by "bad friends" or ultimately, as opposition by the third of the "three powerful enemies," and also addresses the internal ramifications of these in the life and faith of the believer. But in its harshest form, the formula of oppression in the history of Buddhism is always the same: A religious authority perceives the teachings or movement promoted by a genuine Buddhist leader as a threat, and then, colluding with secular authorities, attempts to use whatever means are at his disposal to suppress, disband or do away with that leader or movement. Because that leader is innocent of any secular wrongdoing or religious error, crimes and misdeeds are invented and rumored, with the ultimate aim to quash the influence and respect afforded to those committed to Buddhism.

Another vital point to keep in mind is this: Meeting opposition to our efforts to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism does not mean that the SGI has done something wrong and is therefore experiencing retribution. On the contrary, as we know from the Daishonin's own history, he himself experienced many persecutions from the government and harassment from the religious authorities of his day. Such obstacles, the Daishonin explains, are not only a natural consequence of one's efforts to spread Buddhism but also an indication of the correctness of the teaching that he or she practices:

If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. Were it not for these, there would be no way of knowing that this is the true teaching. One passage from the same volume reads, "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... You should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If you fall under their influence, you will be led into the paths of evil. If you are frightened by them, you will be prevented from practicing true Buddhism." This quotation not only applies to Nichiren but also is the guide for his disciples. Reverently make this a teaching of your own and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations. (MW-1, 145) And: When I examine these passages, I know that if I do not call forth these three enemies of the Lotus Sutra, then I will not be a true votary of the Lotus Sutra. Only by making them appear can I be a true votary. (MW-4,20)

When the Lotus Sutra states, "hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound," it puts no limits on who might become susceptible to such base impulses. Any of us is prone to selfish or spiteful emotions. It is only through a life devoted to developing the "greater self," to ceaseless efforts to improve ourselves and take responsibility for the happiness of others, that we can guard against succumbing to such tendencies. Position, status or role in the realm of Buddhism or society do not guarantee the nobility of one's deeds.

The Daishonin admonishes: "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken even a bit, demons will take advantage" (MW-1, 241-2), so that we may win over our weaknesses and never fall victim to our own "demons" of greed, anger and foolishness.

To criticize anti-Buddhist attitude and behavior or to refuse to follow those who maintain such an attitude and behavior in no way contradicts Buddhism. It is in fact the only correct action to take if one regards the Daishonin's teachings on such matters seriously. This has been the stance of the Gakkai toward the "Nikken sect," the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in its corrupt state under the leadership of Nikken Abe.

Ultimately, all the difficulties that the Soka Gakkai and SGI have undergone in regards to the temple issue herald the arrival of a glorious time - a time when Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism will be spread widely by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to serve as the philosophical basis of world peace and humanity's happiness in the centuries to come. This is called the Soka Renaissance.

Therefore, we can confidently say that by being excommunicated by Nikken, the Soka Gakkai has actually liberated itself from the shackles of the priesthood and its authoritarianism. This also means that the Daishonin's Buddhism has been given the grand opportunity in this time period to be taught exactly as it was by Nichiren Daishonin.

1. WHAT IS THE TEMPLE ISSUE?

While the problem actually has roots that extend far back before the inception of the Soka Gakkai, tracing them meaningfully would require studying the history of Nichiren Shoshu, the "Fuji School" of Nichiren Buddhism. This would also involve an examination of the conditions of feudal Japanese society over the centuries that led to attitudes and orientations among Buddhist priests toward the laity that could best be described as a "lord-vassal" mentality.

More immediately, however, in late 1990, it became clear that the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu - which the Soka Gakkai always had supported had been conspiring to either take control over or disband the SGI organization. This course of action, dubbed by its authors "Operation C" ("C" meaning to "cut"), was inspired and led by the current high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, Nikken Abe.

It began with a presentation of nine written questions to Soka Gakkai leaders, accusing SGI President Ikeda of, among other things, criticizing the high priest.

The temple based its questions on an inaccurate transcription of a surreptitiously obtained tape- recording of a speech by the SGI president. Admitting later to the inaccuracy of their transcription, and the dubious origin of the tape, the temple later withdrew four of its questions. Others were taken completely out of context and grossly misinterpreted.

Among them, for example, was a criticism of President Ikeda's suggestion that the choral part of Beethoven's "Ode to joy" be sung at a leaders

meeting. The temple claimed that, because the lyrics by Friedrich Schiller had some Christian references, the Gakkai would therefore be promoting non- Buddhist teachings. This criticism was put forward despite it being widely acknowledged that Schiller's poem is in honor of the highest potential of the human spirit; a celebration of reason, inner joy and human freedom. This prompted the Soka Gakkai to call for a face-to-face dialogue to resolve any misunderstandings or misconceptions. The priesthood, however, adamantly refused any discussion and demanded a written response to its accusations within one week.

The priesthood's stance, the triviality of the accusations, along with other information that came to light, made it very clear that the tape was no more than a pretext to justify actions

that the priesthood had already planned. The Gakkai, since its request for dialogue had been denied, submitted its own questions to the priesthood, inquiring into its motives and actions.

The priesthood followed with a series of onesided measures, including revising Nichiren Shoshu's bylaws to effectively dismiss President Ikeda from the position of chief lay representative to the head temple. It also added provisions in those bylaws for punitive action to be taken against any practitioner who criticized the high priest, verbally or in writing, although it didn't specify what was meant by "criticism."

Just prior to this announcement, Nikken Abe had met in secret with the reporter Isao Dan, a Japanese tabloid-style journalist known to have written groundless and inflammatory articles about the Soka Gakkai. It was clear from this that Nikken was orchestrating an attack on the Gakkai that included attacks by outside media.

The priesthood's course of action against the Soka Gakkai and SGI culminated in an "order to disband," and, finally, notification of excommunication in November 1991.

The Soka Gakkai, having revealed the true nature and character of Nikken Abe, has since demanded that he resign. In response to the lies propagated by the priesthood, the Gakkai has been trying continually to shed light on the truth of the matter. Since the outbreak of the present issue, many events have transpired and much information has come to light, all of which have underscored the SGI's fundamental conviction that these attacks occurred because it is practicing Buddhism in accord with Nichiren Daishonin's spirit, dedicated to accomplishing kosen-rufu.

2. WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO KNOW ABOUT THE TEMPLE ISSUE?

The temple issue speaks to the essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. To understand the issue challenges each of us to realize that taking full responsibility for our own happiness is the path of correct faith and practice.

Simply put, the temple issue provides a real-world, modern-day opportunity to witness the principles that Nichiren Daishonin spoke about 700 years ago. For this reason, we should avoid viewing the problem as something of the past or of another place, something that is not our personal concern. To do so would mean missing an irreplaceable learning opportunity. We would also do a disservice to those who join the SGI in the future: If we do not understand and transmit the profound implications of these events to future generations, then those to follow may face similar obstacles without the benefit of the example and understanding we could pass on.

In many of his writings, Nichiren Daishonin cautions how futile it is to practice Buddhism without correctly grasping the meaning of faith. If we fail to understand the fundamental principles of our faith, he says, no matter how much time we may put into it, our practice will "become an endless, painful austerity" (MW- 1, 4), and our Buddhist knowledge will "not relieve [us] of mortal sufferings in the least" (MW- 1, 4). He goes so far as to say that without a correct understanding of faith, "it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra [i.e., the Gohonzon]" (MW- 1, 25).

"Correct faith" in the Daishonin's Buddhism means to view things as Nichiren Daishonin taught, share his convictions, and practice and develop our lives in accord with that understanding. [Question 4](#) of this pamphlet lists a few examples of how the temple's view on certain matters of faith diverges significantly from that of the Daishonin. In another Gosho, he writes:

It is a time when ... truth and error stand shoulder to shoulder, and when Mahayana and Hinayana dispute which is superior. At such a time, one must set aside all other affairs and devote one's attention to rebuking slander of the Law. This is the practice of shakubuku. (MW-5, 103)

Erroneous views in Buddhism are often propounded by those well versed in theory yet who fail to grasp the heart or spirit of Buddhism, those who lack a compassionate practice. It is up to those who do understand the heart of Buddhism to shed light on what is true and what is erroneous.

As SGI members, we might ask ourselves whether we could clearly explain this issue to someone else, even to someone outside our organization or someone interested in practicing for the first time. If we are asked: "What is the temple issue about?" or "How can you say that the SGI is correct and Nichiren Shoshu is wrong?" can we give a convincing answer?

When we can answer these questions through our own understanding and conviction, then we have grasped something important for our own faith and lives. We will also gain insight into fundamental issues affecting humanity: the nature of justice, the qualities of a true leader, equality, tolerance, and the purpose of religion. The temple issue gives us an excellent opportunity to learn about the Daishonin's Buddhism, which is, after all, about our own lives and humanity.

It is no secret that the intention of Nichiren Shoshu is to disband the SGI and destroy our movement, denying millions of believers the source of nourishment for their faith and practice and stopping the progress of kosen-rufu.

In a recent speech at the head temple, Nichiren Shoshu General Administrator Nichijun Fujimoto is reported to have said, "Now is the time to crush the Soka Gakkai." Efforts by priests and temple members in the United States to convince members to leave the SGI by creating doubts regarding the Gohonzon or spreading misinformation about the SGI are clearly increasing.

The Daishonin writes, "Simply to chant one - four-phrase verse or the daimoku, and to protect those who do so, is called the essential practice" (MW- 3, 9). The best way to protect ourselves and our fellow members from being misled is to arm ourselves with correct information and understanding. Our study of the temple issue will help us do this.

3. WHAT SHOULD I KNOW ABOUT NIKKEN?

The pamphlet *Issues Between the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood and the Soka Gakkai, Vol. 5*, describes many ways in which Nikken Abe, as head of Nichiren Shoshu, has acted counter to the teachings and spirit of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Among them:

1) He plotted to destroy the harmonious unity of believers.

This refers to the scheme that Nikken himself dubbed "Operation C11 (the plot to discredit SGI President Ikeda and dissolve the Soka Gakkai. Details of this operation are reported in *SGI-USA Newsletter, vol. i, no. 6, November 18, 1991, issue.*)

2) He is the cause for the decadence and corruption of the priesthood.

Nikken's personal grudge against the SGI seems to stem in part from SGI's decision to speak out against the widespread extravagance and corruption within the priesthood, as typified by Nikken's own opulent lifestyle.

3) He conspired with disgruntled former members and sensationalist journalists to defame the SGI.

It is well known that long-time anti-Gakkai plotter Masatomo Yamazaki, and anti-Gakkai journalist Isao Dan, have conspired with Nikken in his campaign against the Soka Gakkai. Yamazaki, who was imprisoned three years for extortion, wrote a letter to Nikken advising him which publications would be willing to print scandalous articles about the Gakkai without verifying facts.

4) He rejects dialogue and treats members with disdain.

Nikken never responded to the Soka Gakkai's repeated requests for dialogue after the temple unjustly accused it, although the Gakkai leadership - including President Ikeda - had visited Taiseki-Ji

on a monthly basis for many years. Nikken has instructed priests explicitly to be more concerned about getting members to leave the Gakkai than about those members' faith and happiness.

5) He betrayed the laity's sincere faith in the priesthood.

Hundreds of Nichiren Shoshu temples, from which the priesthood operates to attack the SGI's kosen-rufu movement, were donated by the Soka Gakkai. In addition, much of the priesthood's finances and assets derive from the donations of Soka Gakkai members made over the decades. Nevertheless, he has been using these venues to denounce these very people.

6) He promotes the *danto* (direct temple membership) movement, which he formerly regarded as an incorrect way of propagating the Law.

Nikken is behind efforts by temples to mislead SGI members about their organization in order to entice them to join the temple. He also plays a key role in the global dissemination of false and defamatory articles and rumors about the SGI.

7) He stopped issuing the Gohonzon to SGI members.

Nikken used the Gohonzon and the members' faith in it in an attempt to bait Gakkai members to join the temple. He eventually refused to issue the Gohonzon to SGI members. His aim was to gain adherents by being the only source of Gohonzon for new believers.

8) He excommunicated the SGI.

It is now a historical fact that Nichiren Shoshu, a clerical body headed up by Nikken and consisting of no more than 1,000 priests, excommunicated the global organization of the Daishonin's Buddhism that comprises some 10 million practitioners in 128 nations. This is an act unprecedented in the history of world religion.

9) He altered the doctrines of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

In the Daishonin's teaching, any ordinary person who sincerely embraces the Gohonzon and chants the Mystic Law is viewed as a true Buddha. Nikken preaches the view that he is the sole possessor of true enlightenment; that others can only hope to attain this state in the future through their connection to him.

10) He exerts the power of an absolute dictator within the priesthood.

Nikken has changed Nichiren Shoshu's bylaws arbitrarily, time and again, to stifle any criticism of his leadership from the laity and any opposition from within the priesthood.

Priests who have left Nichiren Shoshu in protest of Nikken's actions unanimously agree that the priesthood had no justifiable reason for attacking the Soka Gakkai from the outset. From their view as insiders, the entire situation was triggered by Nikken's ego and emotionalism.

While the Soka Gakkai's original purpose remains unchanged, Nikken's perverse nature has placed him in direct opposition to the noble cause of kosen-rufu. While he may insist that as high priest he is the sole possessor of the Law, the Law is not something one can possess. It belongs to everyone, and is inherent in everything.

These are among the many reasons why Nikken is unfit to serve as high priest, and why the SGI has called for his immediate resignation.

4. WHAT IS THE REAL DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TEMPLE AND THE SGI?

The difference between the Soka Gakkai International and Nichiren Shoshu clearly can be seen in at least four key areas:

1) View of Equality

The Lotus Sutra is a teaching of absolute equality - it affirms that all people, regardless of station, gender or background, are potentially Buddhas.

Nichiren Daishonin reaffirms this in many places throughout his writings. [To a lay believer named Abutsubo](#), he writes:

You, yourself, are a true Buddha who possesses the three enlightened properties. You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction. (MW-I, 30)

In another letter he writes:

There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. (MW-1, 93)

While the SGI bases itself on absolute respect for the individual, and its activities focus on thorough dialogue with people on all levels of society, Nichiren Shoshu staunchly asserts that it is a "sin" to speak of the equality of priests and lay practitioners, as we can see in a letter to the SGI from the temple's chief administrator, Nichijun Fujimoto: To talk about the priesthood and laity with a sense of equality are expressions of great conceit. In fact, they correspond to the five cardinal sins.... (January 12, 1991)

Representative of such beliefs is the following comment from a priest's sermon at a temple in Japan:

A priest who wears this robe is special and different from lay believers. He is always seated with the Gohonzon behind him, but whatever the priest may do on other occasions and no matter how luxuriant his lifestyle, it is totally all right. You lay believers are confused about this point. These matters are of no account. (Seido Oyabu, at Horin-ji, January 1991)

Around this doctrine of absolute clerical superiority, it created an atmosphere in which the actions and intentions of priests can never be questioned; in which lay believers are obliged to serve priests, but priests have no obligation to serve the believers. Even funeral and memorial services are conducted with the expectation of receiving donations, and with undisguised dissatisfaction if those donations fall below par. This is in stark contrast to the attitude of Nichiren Daishonin, which was one of appreciation, respect, service and support of the believers.

2) View of the Gohonzon

Nichiren Daishonin clearly indicates in the Gosho that the Gohonzon is a manifestation of his life as an enlightened human being, and that it is no different from the enlightened potential within all ordinary people.

He writes:

Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. (MW-1, 213)

In another letter, he writes: "Abutsu-bo is the Treasure Tower itself, and the Treasure Tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful" (NW-1, 30). Later in the same letter, the Daishonin equates the "[Treasure Tower](#)" to the Gohonzon.

Nichiren Shoshu's position is that these teachings by the Daishonin are to be interpreted by priests only, not by lay believers. Their teaching on the Gohonzon is as follows: The Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is not inherent in all phenomena or in the lives of ordinary people. It exists only in the physical object of the Dai-Gohonzon and in the life of the current high priest, who has received it through a secret ceremony conducted with his predecessor. Only the high priest can empower a Gohonzon by personally conducting a special ceremony. Any benefit comes to the believer directly through the auspices and sanction of the office of the high priest. Temple publications state, "The sanctioning of the object of worship by the High Priest, who is the only person to be bequeathed the Daishonin's Buddhism, is what makes the attainment of Buddhahood possible" (From an NST publication, *Refuting the Soka Gakkai's Counterfeit Object of Worship* 100 Questions and Answers, P. 36).

The temple's stance is that believing the Law or the Gohonzon to exist within one's own life will send that person to hell.

Nichiren Shoshu's position on the Gohonzon stands in stark contrast with that of the Daishonin himself. The Soka Gakkai embraces the Daishonin's view that the Gohonzon is the embodiment of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion. The Daishonin inscribed it so that we can awaken the same wisdom and compassion within us. One's power of faith and practice to the Gohonzon enables him or her to tap the power of the Gohonzon within to which the Daishonin so adamantly refers. For the high priest or anyone to claim sole possession of the Law and control over the power of the Gohonzon is the basest form of exploitation of the Daishonin's teachings.

3) View of the "Heritage" of the Law

In his letter "[Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life](#)," Nichiren Daishonin clearly describes and defines what it means to receive the "heritage" or "lifeblood" of faith in his Buddhism:

Shakyamuni, who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other. Therefore, to chant Myoho-renge-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate law of life and death. (MW-1, 22)

In addition, the Daishonin writes:

All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with one mind, transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate law of life and death. (MW- 1, 23)

And:

Be resolved to summon forth the great power of your faith, and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of your death. Never seek any other way to inherit the ultimate law and manifest it in your life. (MW-1, 25)

Before 1991, Nikken himself supported the view of the heritage as expressed by the Daishonin in these passages, saying: "This lifeblood of faith is inherited not only by a high priest. It is also inherited by all priests and lay believers who inherit the true teaching. When these priests and

lay believers carry out pure faith in the true teaching and practice accordingly, they unlock the pure water of the law within their lives and equally attain enlightenment through believing in and understanding the Law." (*Dai-Nichiren*, April 1987) The priesthood today repeatedly refers to the exclusive transmission of the heritage of the Law to the high priest through what it calls the "Face to Face Bestowal of the Living Essence of the Law," insisting that the nature of this bestowal is beyond the capacity of ordinary people to comprehend. In a section called "Absolute Faith in and Strict Obedience to the High Priest," we see the following passage:

*When the priests and lay believers of the faith of Nichiren Shoshu have the occasion to be in the presence of the High Priest, with palms pressed earnestly together in sincere gratitude, we pay prayer- like reverence to him as the Master who embodies the Living Essence of the Body of the entirety of the Law of all existence.... In short, with perfectly sincere faith and self-imposed, strict obedience, we should hold the High Priest's instruction in deepest reverence and we must realize that it is right there (sic) that the great, direct path of the true relationship of unfiltered, unrestricted faith between Master and disciple, which leads to ultimate enlightenment in this lifetime, is to be found. (*Dai-Nichiren*, Special Edition: On the Soka Gakkai Problem (11) pp. 13-14)*

The SGI firmly rejects this idea of the exclusive possession and bestowal of an intangible "essence" of all Buddhism to a single individual by virtue of his religious position. Not only does Nichiren Daishonin never mention such a rite, he clearly refutes it.

4) Attitude and Behavior

The most essential difference lies in the realm of commitment and action taken toward the accomplishment of kosen-rufu and the people's happiness, toward securing a peaceful world based on the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

SGI members have continuously exerted themselves for decades to spread Buddhism, devoting their evenings and weekends to chant and work for the happiness of their friends. SGI President Ikeda, in particular, has met with one person after another, Buddhists and non-Buddhists of all nations and fields of society, to share his commitment to peace and engender an understanding of Buddhist humanism.

It is evident, however, that priests have played a far more passive role, spending most of their time at the temple attending primarily to ceremonies and services. While many Gakkai members were at activities in the evenings, visiting and encouraging friends or studying

Buddhism together, most priests remained at home. It also became clear that many were indulging themselves by joining expensive country clubs or frequenting night-clubs, lavishly and frivolously spending money earned from the members' donations.

Nevertheless, Nichiren Shoshu priests continued to maintain an air of superiority and even condescension toward hard-working Gakkai members. Their aloofness toward the laity is still evident in their relationship with Hokkeko or temple members. For example, at a May 1997 ceremony at a temple in Los Angeles after which the lay temple members held a pot-luck lunch in the parking lot, the dozen or so priests in attendance quickly exited to a separate room to enjoy their own catered feast. There was no exchange or interaction with the laity, other than with a few appointed representatives.

5. IF THE PRIESTHOOD HAS BEEN MISGUIDED ALL ALONG, WHY DID THE SGI SUPPORT IT IN THE PAST?

Historically, the SGI supported the priesthood on the premise that both parties shared a mutual commitment to the realization of kosen-rufu. Nichiren Shoshu, the Fuji School, was the order of Nichiren Buddhism that doctrinally recognized the Daishonin as the True Buddha of the Latter Day and appeared to revere the Gohonzon as the embodiment of the oneness of the Person (Nichiren Daishonin) and the Law (Nam-myoho-enge-kyo). It was the Buddhist school to which the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, was introduced, and through which he and the second president, Josei Toda, became aware of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings as revealed in the Goshu.

It was through the spread of his teaching that Nichiren Daishonin sought the spiritual empowerment of ordinary people for the purpose of building a peaceful society; this is the concept of his religious ideal called kosen-rufu, literally, "widely declare and spread." Kosen-rufu is indeed the ultimate goal of the Daishonin's life and of his teaching as seen in his statement:

"If Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity." (MW-4,272) And: "Only I, Nichiren, at first chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, but then two, three and a hundred followed, chanting and teaching others. Likewise, propagation will unfold this way in the future." (MW-1, 93)

In truth, however, the propagation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and the Daishonin's philosophy had become quite stagnant by the time Makiguchi and Toda encountered it. Nichiren Shoshu itself was an impoverished and tiny Buddhist denomination by that time. Nevertheless, Makiguchi and Toda devoted themselves to its development and to making the Daishonin's prediction in the above passage a reality.

This does not mean, however, that they unquestioningly followed the instructions of the priesthood or the high priest. This was clear at the outset, when both Makiguchi and Toda refused the high priest's instructions to follow a governmental order during World War II that would have them incorporate worship of an amulet dedicated to the Shinto Sun Goddess into their daily practice. Both refused because they were deeply aware that this violated the Daishonin's teachings and spirit, that the Daishonin himself would never have compromised Buddhism in this way. Based on the "Twenty-Six Admonitions of Nikko Shonin" -Article 17 of which reads: "Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views." - they were convinced that as the Daishonin's disciples, they must take the same stance. Both were arrested for their stance and Makiguchi died in prison, a martyr to his convictions.

Both men had grown deeply aware of the Daishonin's real spirit and intent, and lived that spirit even at risk to their own lives. As a result, they were also acutely aware of which priests within Nichiren Shoshu shared that spirit and commitment and which did not.

Even after the war, Toda frequently and forcefully chastised those priests who had forgotten the Daishonin's spirit, were lax in faith or practice, or looked down on the members and complained about donations. Nevertheless, he was committed to protecting and nurturing Nichiren Shoshu, which he viewed as the most orthodox school of the Daishonin's Buddhism,

and he dedicated himself to encouraging the development of priests who could devote their lives to kosen-rufu and the members.

This, too, has been SGI President Ikeda's conviction. Despite the awareness that there were many priests within Nichiren Shoshu who hated and resented the Soka Gakkai, so long as the priesthood as a whole supported the movement for kosen-rufu, the Gakkai devoted itself to the temple's protection and development.

The Soka Gakkai had over the years been aware of abuses or problems with specific priests. At times, the Gakkai pointed out such abuses, thereby meeting resistance and pressure from Nichiren Shoshu.

In the late '70s in particular, a group of younger priests became dissatisfied at the rate at which new temples were being donated by the Gakkai. They were growing impatient, because there were more of them than new temples to which they could be assigned as chief priests. They also railed against what they perceived as the Gakkai's view of priests and laity being equal. Some even held that the Gakkai had no right to receive contributions or build its own facilities for its members, that all donated monies should be handed over to the temple, and advocated a hard line of sanctions to put the Soka Gakkai in its place.

Pressured by the demands of these priests, however unjust they may have been, the Soka Gakkai cooperated with Nittatsu, the high priest of the time, and took a humble stance, publishing an "apology" that had to be pre-approved by the priesthood and endeavoring over the ensuing years to build hundreds of new temples. Nittatsu had always supported and shown understanding toward the Gakkai in the past, though he was often pressured by priests within the temple and others who felt enmity toward the organization. The Gakkai's concern was to maintain its harmony with the priesthood and avoid any undue harm or trouble to the members that might result from further sanctions or denunciation by disgruntled priests.

It was not until Nikken, the high priest himself, together with the executive leadership of the head temple, hatched and began to implement their plan in late 1990 to attack the SGI that the Gakkai began to admonish the priesthood as a whole for its actions. In addition, since the head temple had begun to twist interpretations of the Daishonin's teachings to justify those actions, the Gakkai began to refute their erroneous interpretations in the spirit of admonishing slander.

Even then, it was the priesthood and not the Soka Gakkai that perpetrated the ultimate act of separation: In November 1991, having rejected repeated requests for dialogue, they indulged in the final self-destructive act of excommunication, in effect removing themselves from the body of believers who had contributed most to their development, and who were working hard to make the Daishonin's teachings known to the world.

It had finally become clear that the priesthood and its leadership were oblivious to kosen-rufu and the believers' needs, and were instead relentlessly denouncing, attacking, defaming and conspiring to do damage to those dedicated to that goal. The Soka Gakkai thus found itself with no choice but to strongly admonish Nichiren Shoshu and call for Nikken's resignation.

6. WHY DID THE SGI DECIDE TO ISSUE THE GOHONZON?

In 1991, Nichiren Shoshu announced its refusal to confer the Gohonzon to any person belonging to the SGI. From this point on, all new SGI members throughout the world were forced to practice without it.

Clearly, the temple's intention was to entice SGI members to leave the organization and become direct followers of the temple. While most SGI members waiting to receive the Gohonzon saw through this ploy, their seeking spirit to receive the Gohonzon remained. Soka Gakkai leaders grappled with how to respond to the members.

Then, in 1993, the SGI agreed to a proposal from Sendo Narita, the chief priest of Joen-ji, a temple in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan, which had severed its ties to Nikken and Taiseki-ji. The SGI, in conjunction with Mr. Narita, announced it would start issuing Gohonzon to its membership worldwide. These would be reproduced from a Gohonzon at Joen-ji transcribed in

1720 by Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji. Those who had practiced without the Gohonzon were overjoyed at the news.

The significance of the SGI's decision can be seen from two perspectives: First, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for the enlightenment of all people. His fundamental desire was to make the Gohonzon available to all who seek to practice his teachings, thus enabling them to establish indestructible happiness.

Second, with the development of the priesthood issue, Nikken Abe abused his position as high priest by arbitrarily stopping the granting of Gohonzon to SGI members with the express purpose of undermining the SGI. Nikken's use of the Gohonzon in this way runs completely counter to the Daishonin's fundamental intent and spirit behind inscribing the Gohonzon.

In light of these circumstances - and based on its responsibility as the body of believers harmoniously practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism in modern times - the SGI took responsibility to make the Gohonzon available to its membership. This decision was made solely to protect Buddhism, to reply to the sincerity of those seeking the Gohonzon, and to further promote kosen-rufu.

7. WHY DOES NICHIREN SHOSHU CLAIM THAT THE GOHONZON ISSUED BY THE SGI IS "COUNTERFEIT"?

This charge is an attempt by the priesthood to instill doubt and fear in members' hearts, and to exploit their faith in the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon issued by the SGI are not the SGI's own invention, nor are they counterfeit.

As mentioned before, in response to a proposal from Sendo Narita, the chief priest of Joen-ji, the SGI reproduced a Gohonzon transcribed in 1720 by Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest, and made it available to its membership. They are valid and authentic Gohonzon of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

The priesthood asserts that the Gohonzon issued by the SGI are "counterfeit" because: i) they have not "been authorized by the high priest"; 2) they have not "received the legitimate 'eye-opening' ceremony"; and 3) they are "not issued by the head temple" (*NST News, Special Issue, p. 9*).

Nichiren Daishonin, in a letter known as "[The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon](#)," writes:

Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself . The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The Gohonzon is found in faith alone. As the sutra states, "Only with faith can one enter Buddhahood." (MW-1, 2 13)

Here, the Daishonin teaches us that it is our faith that taps the Gohonzon's power, power that is located within us. Nowhere in his writings does Nichiren Daishonin state that we need sanction from a high priest to benefit from our practice. Not even the Daishonin himself advocated that his sanction was necessary to achieve benefit or attain Buddhahood, as he wrote in "Reply to Nichigon-ama:

Whether or not your prayer is answered depends upon your faith; if it is not, the fault in no way lies with me, Nichiren. (MW-5, 305)

The significance of "eye-opening" lies in opening the eye of the Buddha within us - in other words, in recognizing and revealing the Buddha nature within us. To this end, Nichiren Daishonin stresses faith in the Lotus Sutra, that is, the Gohonzon. The priesthood insists that the high priest must perform an eye-opening ceremony over the Gohonzon to empower it. However, the ritual known as the eye-opening ceremony is nothing more than a formality passed down from provisional, esoteric Buddhism. It has no relation to the essential spirit or Practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

In some writings, the Daishonin refers to the eye-opening ceremony as applied to wooden and painted images, meaning Buddhist statues and the like. He is not talking about the Gohonzon in these passages and nowhere in his writings does he mention an eye-opening ceremony being necessary to empower the Gohonzon.

Most people in the Daishonin's day believed that such ceremonies gave power to statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and other Buddhist objects. In actuality, it had already become a popular source of income for priests, who collected offerings for performing such ceremonies.

For example, in "[Consecrating an Image of Shakyamuni Buddha Made by Shijo Kingo](#)," the Daishonin encourages Shijo Kingo, who has just offered him a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha:

In performing the eye-opening ceremony for painted or wooden Buddha images, the only authority to rely on is the Lotus Sutra and the Tendai sect. (mw-6, 161)

By the "Tendai sect" the Daishonin is referring to the principle of ichinen sanzen (a single life moment possesses three thousand realms), which explains that Buddhahood is inherent in all phenomena. By saying that the eye-opening ceremony must be based on the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin debunks the idea that formal eye-opening ceremonies by priests are necessary and stresses faith in the Lotus Sutra, in other words, faith in the Gohonzon, as the key to summoning forth the state of Buddhahood.

He resolutely declares that our chanting daimoku with faith enables us to call forth the Buddha nature not only from within ourselves but from all phenomena. He further indicates that when it comes to the power of prayer, all people are equal, so long as they do not act against the intent of the sutra.

The priesthood's claim that the Gohonzon issued by the SGI are counterfeit because they are not issued by the head temple is unfounded. In the past, many Nichiren Shoshu branch temples reproduced Gohonzon transcribed by different high priests and issued them to their parishioners of their own accord, without the high priest's permission or an eye-opening ceremony performed by him. The priesthood's assertions are not only against Nichiren Daishonin's teaching but also inconsistent with its own history. And yet, recently it published a document that reads:

One should never worship anything as a Gohonzon that has not been authorized as such by the High Priest, who has inherited the Heritage of the Law, even if it was inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin himself... This has been a basic tenet of Nichiren Shoshu for seven hundred years. (From an NST-published translation of an article from a special issue of their Japanese-language publication *Daibyakuho*, c. autumn 1993)

It is important to note that benefit from the Gohonzon derives neither from the high priest's permission nor an "eye-opening" ceremony, but from our faith and practice in accord with the Daishonin's spirit.

8. WHY ARE MEMBERS EXCHANGING THEIR NIKKEN-TRANSCRIBED GOHONZON FOR ONE TRANSCRIBED BY NICHIKAN?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THESE GOHONZON?

We should first examine Nichiren Daishonin's intent in inscribing the Gohonzon. Regarding one he inscribed for the family of the believer Shijo Kingo, he states in "[Reply to Kyo'o](#)":

The lion, king of beasts, is said to advance three steps, then gather himself to spring, unleashing the same power whether he traps a tiny ant or attacks a fierce animal. In inscribing this Gohonzon for her protection, Nichiren is equal to the lion king. This is what the sutra means by "the power of an attacking lion." (mw-I, 119)

Through this passage, we can sense the intensity and depth with which Nichiren Daishonin poured his heart and soul into inscribing a Gohonzon for the family. Such profound compassion for his believers is vibrantly apparent in each of his letters.

In contrast, however, as is clarified in the answer to [question 3](#) in this pamphlet, Nikken's behavior runs completely counter to the intent and compassion of Nichiren Daishonin. Instead, Nikken has been a driving force behind attempts to destroy the SGI's kosen-rufu movement for people's happiness. In terms of his state of life, Nikken has become the least qualified person to act on behalf of Nichiren Daishonin in transcribing the Gohonzon.

It is quite natural, then, that many members, in reaction to Nikken's conduct, have chosen to exchange the Gohonzon he transcribed for one transcribed by the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan, who struggled to restore the Daishonin's spirit and intent within the priesthood during the eighteenth century after it had been compromised by previous high priests.

On one level, we can state that any properly transcribed Gohonzon embodies the life of Nichiren Daishonin, and Nikken's transcription of the Gohonzon is technically correct. Yet knowing now that Nikken's intent and behavior are at complete odds with the profound compassion of the Daishonin himself, many have opted to receive the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan. This way they can chant to the Gohonzon without being reminded of Nikken's misdeeds.

An additional motivation for some exists in the fact, detailed in a previous answer, that the teaching Nikken is trying to disseminate about the Gohonzon - that he personally empowers the Gohonzon, and that only through his sanction can one derive benefit from chanting to it - is a clear perversion and slander of the Daishonin's teachings.

By chanting to the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan and showing benefit and actual proof as a result, many feel they are refuting both this erroneous claim as well as Nikken's false contention that the Gohonzon of Nichikan is counterfeit. Buddhism teaches that refuting what is erroneous and unjust in terms of the Buddhist Law is a profoundly good cause. Since the Gohonzon is the essential crystallization of that Law, this may in part explain the tremendous joy and progress reported by many who have exchanged Gohonzon.

9. I HAVE BEEN INVITED TO VISIT A NICHIREN SHOSHU TEMPLE. IS IT ALL RIGHT TO GO?

To visit or not visit a Nichiren Shoshu temple is each individual's choice, but the SGI encourages its members not to because the temple has diverged from the Daishonin's Buddhism and is actually trying to destroy it.

On the surface, there may seem to be little difference between attending activities at a Nichiren Shoshu temple or an SGI-USA community center. The temple might even seem aesthetically more attractive to some - the large wooden Gohonzon with gold lettering, golden decorations and ornaments around the altar, etc. At both places, people gather to chant Nammyoho-renge-kyo and recite the sutra before the Gohonzon. But chanting to the Gohonzon alone is not all there is to the Daishonin's Buddhism - the philosophy that he espoused, which informs our prayer, is integral to correct practice. It is in this area that the priests and the temple have completely strayed.

The Daishonin writes in "[The True Entity of Life](#)," "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (MW-I, 93). To be "of the same mind as Nichiren" means chanting with the same spirit and understanding as the Daishonin's. It means summoning the courage to practice for oneself and for others - to strive for kosen-rufu.

There is no better place to gain this understanding of the Daishonin's passionate resolve to help all people than in the SGI. All SGI activities are based on the Daishonin's own words, as preserved in the letters he wrote to his disciples. In addition, our activities are based on his spirit of "practice for others."

The direct connection we in the SGI have with the Daishonin's teachings and spirit helps us to Practice correctly and most effectively. Without this philosophical and spiritual backbone, it becomes difficult to pray powerfully and summon the wisdom and energy to win in our lives.

It is therefore also essential that we avoid supporting the temple's efforts dedicated to destroying our movement. In "[On the Buddha's Behavior](#)," Nichiren Daishonin warns:

Those who endeavor to practice the Buddhist Law and who care about what happens to them in future lives should know what a fearful thing it is to slander the Lotus Sutra (mw-I, 198)

Since many temple activities are occasions where temple members and guests make financial donations, the SGI encourages its members not to attend. If we make contributions to the temple - whether through physical, spiritual or financial support - it follows that we are

supporting those who are slandering Buddhism, which means we ourselves are party to the negative cause they are creating.

In the past, SGI members made financial donations to the priesthood, trusting its faith and humanity. This act was definitely registered in their lives as a good cause. But the priesthood has now betrayed that trust and is using those funds to attack those who contributed them. The gravity of the negative cause committed by the priesthood is unfathomable. In any case, the sincerity shown all along by the SGI members will continue to shine in their lives as good fortune.

Temple members sometimes invite SGI members to participate in pilgrimages to the head temple in Japan, stating that they need not renounce their SGI affiliation to do so. Then, they say, they can see the Dai-Gohonzon, the Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin for all humanity. Those who have gone, however, have been approached by priests and others who vehemently denounced the SGI and President Ikeda. In addition, they were required to offer a donation to attend.

There is no value to be created in seeing the Dai-Gohonzon if members must also financially support the temple's efforts to, in effect, destroy Buddhism. In fact, the members of the priesthood have attempted to exploit its possession of this Gohonzon inscribed for all humanity, and the members' desire to see it, as a means to entice people to follow and support them.

The state of life Nichiren Daishonin manifested has been described as that of "The Buddha of Absolute Freedom." The Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon so that all people could awaken to this absolutely free and unfettered state of life. It is therefore impossible to imagine that Nichiren Daishonin would expect us to be so constrained in our faith that we should feel we must blindly obey and kowtow to whomever might possess the Dai-Gohonzon, no matter how malicious or ill-intentioned they might be.

10. WHAT IS BEHIND THE TEMPLE'S PROMOTION OF MEDIA REPORTS THAT PAINT THE GAKKAI IN A NEGATIVE LIGHT?

English-speaking temple members have translated many libelous anti-SGI articles from Japanese publications - both from temple publications and weekly tabloid-type gossip magazines. They have posted these to the Internet or distributed them to SGI-USA members to try to create distrust and antipathy toward the SGI.

Through its ongoing efforts to protect civil rights, the Gakkai has frequently opposed the authoritarian behavior of Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party or LDP (the name may be misleading as the LDP is actually a politically conservative party). The LDP is now working closely with the Japanese media to defame and discredit the organization and SGI President Ikeda. The flurry of libelous articles about the SGI - more than 500 in 1995 alone - is the work of this alliance.

Almost all of these articles or stories have appeared in publications known as "weeklies" widely read magazines that focus on scandal and innuendo. In the area of culpability for what they report, they fall far below such publications many Americans call "tabloids."

In addition, Japan's lax libel laws make it quite easy for them to get away with this. In the May 27, 1997, edition of the *San Francisco Examiner*, Takesato Watanabe, a professor of journalism at Doshisha University in Kyoto Japan, commented on the low level of reporting found in magazines by two publishers in particular, the *Bungei Shunju* and the *Shinchosha*. These two companies have been most active in running articles that defame the SGI. Among other things, he writes that they have recently carried articles that have:

- Denied that there were gas chambers at Auschwitz.
- Systematically downplayed the brutal Rape of Nanking at the hands of the Japanese Military during WorldWar II.
- Falsely accused an innocent man of the 1994 Matsumoto sarin gas attacks....

- Heaped racy slanders on Okinawa Gov. Ota, who opposes the government's stance on American military bases on the islands.

Nichiren Daishonin would have considered this abuse the SGI today faces from such quarters as a natural result of the organization's faith and growth, something completely in line with Buddhist teachings. False accusations by self-interested individuals or groups have always been part of the equation of such persecution, which the Daishonin and his disciples experienced firsthand:

I was kept at Eichi for more than twenty days. During that period seven or eight cases of arson and an endless succession of murders took place in Kamakura. Slanderers went around saying that my disciples were setting the fires. Government officials thought this might be true and made up a list of over 260 of my followers they believed should be expelled from Kamakura. Word spread that these persons were all to be exiled to remote islands and that those disciples already in prison would be beheaded. It turned out, however, that the fires were set by the Nembutsu and Ritsu. believers to implicate my disciples. There were other things that happened, but they are too numerous to mention here. (MW-1, 184)

As long as the SGI continues to grow and is socially involved, we can expect groundless accusations about the organization to ensue.

In "[On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings](#)," the Daishonin warns us:

From the very day you take faith in this teaching, you should be fully prepared to face the three kinds of persecutions. (mw-i, 99)

While it is not as likely that we will be persecuted as individuals, as a Buddhist group we are certain to be.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism says that it is ordinary people who have power -a message sure to incur the wrath of entrenched authority in any day and age. Criticism and attack by certain vested interests thus go with the territory. Rather than being surprised by them, we can actually take pride in them, for they offer proof that the SGI's movement is on the right track.

11. WHY DON'T THE SGI AND NICHIREN SHOSHU TALK TO EACH OTHER?

Dialogue is a Buddhist tradition - it is a nonviolent way of resolving conflicts and assumes the presence of frankness, openness and equality between the two parties involved. This may be why many sutras are presented in the form of conversation between Shakyamuni and his disciples, and why Nichiren Daishonin used dialogue as a literary framework for many of his important writings, such as the "[Rissho Ankoku Ron](#)." In accord with the importance Buddhism places upon dialogue, the SGI sought every possible opportunity to speak with the priesthood as the conflict arose toward the end of 1990. But, to the SGI's great disappointment, the priesthood refused to talk.

When the priesthood suddenly submitted its letter of inquiry at the regular communication conference on December 13, 1990, demanding a written response within seven days, the SGI suggested that they discuss any unresolved issues through face-to-face discussion rather than exchanging documents. The priesthood officials seemed at first to agree with the SGI's suggestion, but four days later, the SGI received the same document in mail. Though the SGI tenaciously communicated its desire to resolve any differences through dialogue, the priesthood adamantly refused.

On January 2, 1991, only few days after the priesthood's sudden and unilateral removal of SGI President Ikeda from the position of chief lay representative, Soka Gakkai President Akiya and General Director Morita went to Taisei-ji only to be told by a temple official that they were "unworthy of receiving an audience with the high priest." Furthermore, at the end of 1990, the priesthood notified the SGI of a clause added to Nichiren Shoshu's rules that lay believers may be expelled if they, in either speech or writing, "criticize" the high priest.

In November 1991, the priesthood sent the SGI a letter ordering it to disband. And within the same month, the SGI received a notice of excommunication.

The SGI values dialogue with society as well as among its membership. However, we should always keep in mind that we promote dialogue as a means to achieve a deeper and wider understanding of such universal values of humanism as freedom, equality and the sanctity of human life. This is why the SGI will not hesitate to conduct dialogue with those of different faiths or creeds with regard to shared concerns for the happiness and well-being of society and the world. Yet, the SGI will never compromise its beliefs and goals. Likewise, within the context of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the SGI regards *kosen-rufu* as a foundation for dialogue.

Dialogue allows believers of the Daishonin's Buddhism to transcend their differences and unite for their mutual goal of *kosen-rufu*. It does not follow, however, that we compromise our beliefs just to have a dialogue.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nammyohorenge-kyo with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all the differences among themselves....When you are so united, even the great hope for *kosen-rufu* can be fulfilled without fail" (MW-1, 23). Here he emphasizes the importance of the unity among believers as a means to achieve *kosen-rufu*, but never as a goal in and of itself. Obviously, it is backwards to think that unity must be achieved even at the cost of compromising the Daishonin's spirit.

Also, some believe that the presence of priests is indispensable to the preservation and spread of the Daishonin's teaching, or assume Buddhism cannot survive without a priestly class. Yet, a priestly class is not an essential element of Buddhism; it is a tradition born out of the social and historical context of India, China and Japan as Buddhism migrated through these countries. Originally, the responsibility of the transmission and preservation of Buddhism rested with the *samgha* or Buddhist order. The *samgha* initially consisted of both priests and lay believers, but the priestly class eventually dominated.

Samgha came to denote the priestly class and became the etymological origin for the word for Buddhist priests both in Chinese and Japanese. The original significance is not the priestly class per-se, but those who are deeply committed to preserving and spreading Buddhism in its purity, be they priests or lay believers. For this reason, in many writings, the Daishonin exhorts believers - priests and laity alike - to study and spread his teaching. The SGI's splendid progress of *kosen-rufu* over the last seven years without the priesthood also attests that the priestly class is not a necessity in Buddhism.

There is no need to think it is essential to seek unity with priests who neither uphold nor spread Buddhism correctly. Such priests disqualify themselves as members of the *samgha*.

Judging from the present situation, the priesthood might consider dialogue based on their aforementioned conditions - that the SGI apologize for "slander" it did not commit and promise to disband. But that would be contrary to the promotion of *kosen-rufu* and contrary to the Daishonin's intent.

While the SGI has no official line of communication with the priesthood, it has been striving to express its views and reveal the reality of the current leadership of the priesthood to priests and lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu through publications and through individual members' discussion. The SGI also has a close relationship and ongoing dialogue with reformist priests who have seceded from Taiseki-ji.

In this sense, despite the temple's obstinate refusal to meet, the SGI has been continuing its efforts to communicate with it. While always open to the possibility of open and frank dialogue, the SGI will not compromise its goal of *kosen-rufu* nor its own integrity just to create a cosmetic unity with a priestly class that does not share that conviction.

12. WHAT EFFECT WILL THE PRIESTS' ERRORS HAVE ON THOSE WHO FOLLOW THEM, AND WHAT CAN I DO FOR THOSE PEOPLE?

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is clear when it comes to describing the strictness of the law of cause and effect. It expounds that great benefit and joy win accrue to those who uphold the

Mystic Law, while great loss or punishment will be incurred by those who slander this Law or cause harm to its practitioners.

Even in the secular realm, those who disparage a person of true integrity and character ultimately do damage to their own integrity and character. This effect is even more profound in the realm of Buddhism, which deals with the deepest aspects of life. By disparaging those who uphold the Daishonin's spirit and work for the happiness of others, Nikken and his followers debase their own lives on a profound level, sowing the seeds for tragic loss and future misery. This has already become clear from the accounts of those who have come back to the SGI after practicing with the temple for a number of years.

According to the Daishonin's teachings, inconspicuous loss or punishment is the worst effect a person can receive from slandering the Law, though it is not immediately apparent. He describes this process as follows:

They are like men who have already been sentenced to execution and are awaiting their turn in prison. While they are in prison, regardless of what evil acts they may commit, they will receive no further punishment other than the death sentence already passed upon them. (MW-7,121)

In Buddhism, conspicuous gain or loss occurs quickly, making it easier for individuals to realize the correctness or error of their ways. Inconspicuous loss, on the other hand, is characterized by a gradual downward spiral. While the word *punishment* is used, it should not be viewed as retribution from an external force or function. It corresponds to a deterioration of one's inner state of life, which gradually comes to manifest itself externally.

Since the priesthood and its followers have committed or tacitly supported the great slander of trying to destroy the Daishonin's Buddhism, falsely accusing SGI members of all sorts of misdeeds and errors, they are surely accumulating inconspicuous punishment.

It is only natural that we feel compassion for those destined to suffer, even if they have denounced us. And it is only natural to want to help them escape such misery. Though the law of causality is strict, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is based on compassion. The Daishonin asserts, "It is important to speak with even greater conviction to those who slander [the Mystic Law]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1123).

Even Shakyamuni put more effort into saving Devadatta, his greatest betrayer, than anyone else, stating that parents are most concerned about their sick children. When we speak with great conviction and compassion about the reality of the temple issue, we eventually can convince temple followers to disassociate from the temple and its slander or even rejoin the SGI.

People who have returned to the SGI from the temple have reported experiencing a substantial revitalization of their faith, a deepened understanding of Buddhism and increased JOY. Many have also become vocal about the priesthood's behavior they have personally experienced, so others will not make the same mistake they did.

In speaking with temple members, as with anyone, we of course need to use common sense and approach them with warmth and respect. There is no set way to talk to anyone, no best place or time. Each person is unique.

Through our strong and consistent prayer to save people from misery and lead them to happiness, we can arrive at the best way to approach them. Through this and ongoing dialogue, the wisdom we summon forth in the process will create benefit both for ourselves and the other person.

13. HOW WILL THE TEMPLE ISSUE AFFECT THE SGI IN THE FUTURE?

Buddhism is concerned with winning. To win in this case means to help as many people as possible understand what is at the core of this issue. This will prove the correctness of our practice and open the way for the humanism of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to become accessible to all.

It is for the people's happiness and for kosen-rufu - that we pray for Nikken's resignation.

In "[On the Treasure Tower](#)," the Daishonin writes:

In the Latter Day of the Law, there is no Treasure Tower other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra. It follows, therefore, that those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, irrespective of social status, are themselves a Treasure Tower and likewise they themselves are Taho Buddha. (MW-I, 30)

Today, we are experiencing what has been called a Soka Renaissance, a result of our struggle against the priesthood's authoritarianism and regressive dogmatism. We no longer need to hesitate in stating our conviction that all can become happy without exception, and that the SGI practices Buddhism exactly as the Daishonin taught.

We are entering an age when the truth of the Daishonin's Buddhism will be revealed. In one sense, that truth has been partially obscured behind the formalities and mystique of authority created by the priesthood. We can now re-examine which formalities are valuable and which are not.

While formality has a place in Buddhism, it should never be used to control people nor should it be allowed to block the progress of kosen-rufu.

Our prayer and efforts from now on will focus on bringing the teachings of the Daishonin's Buddhism to society so that it may become a world religion in the truest sense.