

General Discussion

A booklet entitled "... the background, meaning, content and spirit ..." by the former chief priest of the New York Temple, Reverend Kando Tono, has been distributed recently to many NSA members. Its purported objective is to correct the mistakes of the Soka Gakkai and NSA and to show the way of correct faith.

We must always be willing to listen to a righteous and constructive opinion when it is given. However, to judge responsibly the validity or merit of that opinion, we must carefully consider its source—that is, the character, motivation and situation of the person voicing that opinion. It is very easy to speak righteous words. But what about the intention or action which accompanies these words? And what is their result? If these righteous sounding words are spoken by a person with self-serving or ulterior motives, then they will tend to confuse and discourage the people who listen to them. In reality, that state of confusion and discouragement might be the precise effect an evil intentioned or deluded person hopes to accomplish. This is a familiar tactic used by people who want to disrupt or destroy the harmony or unity of any group. Other tactics commonly employed are innuendo, half-truths, distortions and outright falsehood.

We must also point out that despite Reverend Tono's contention, no nefarious or self-serving plots existed to keep from members

1 In the Days of Shakyamuni Devadatta fulfilled this role to Shakyamuni Buddha. Trying to rival with him on the strictness of practice¹ and teaching.

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information that was essential to their faith. Neither were attempts made to conceal wrongdoings to protect the leaders of our lay organization. No one denies that confusion and misunderstanding existed in the past between some priests and other lay believers, between some lay believers and other lay believers, and between various groups within the priesthood. This is well established. However, these problems were dynamic, constantly changing and evolving. From the early '70s, when minor disagreement began to arise within the body of Nichiren Shoshu believers, until the past few years, the true nature of these problems was not readily apparent. All that was evident to most people was that great disharmony was erupting among believers in all parts of the world—in the laity and in the priesthood.

What was essential during this period of growing turmoil was to protect the faith of innocent believers, and this was the overriding and fundamental concern of all sincere priests and leaders. To publicize the difficulties other people are undergoing is against the spirit of the Soka Gakkai. To publicize the shortcomings or faults of fellow believers is against the teaching of Nichiren Dai-shonin. "The Fourteen Slanders" Gosho (October 1979 *Seikyo Times*) which 67th High Priest Nikken Shonin quoted in his First Formal Sermon (see page 43) cautions:

The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: "The offense of uttering even a single derogatory word against the priests or laymen who believe in and preach the Lotus Sutra is even graver than that of abusing Shakyamuni Buddha to his face for an entire aeon." The Lotus Sutra also states: "[If anyone shall see one who embraces this sutra and tries to expose that person's faults or evils, he shall in his present life be afflicted with white leprosy.] whether what he speaks is the truth or not." Take these teachings to heart, and always remember that believers in the Lotus Sutra should absolutely be the last to abuse each other. All those who keep faith in the Lotus Sutra

are most certainly Buddhas, and one who slanders a Buddha commits a grave offense.

Many American members mistakenly believe that it is Japanese custom that prompts Nichiren Shoshu to discourage negative comments. It is not because of local custom but because it is the Daishonin's teachings that great care is taken to avoid widespread, indiscriminate or unnecessary discussion of negative situations. It is for no reason other than to protect the harmonious unity of believers and to avoid planting the seeds of slander that such a principle exists in Nichiren Shoshu. Its purpose is to help us stay on the correct path of faith, facing the Gohonzon and the goal of *kosen-rufu* rather than being distracted by the imperfections which all human beings possess.

Please understand that it is only after the greatest provocation, and after years of patient attempts to resolve those differences without disturbing the members, that we ourselves now speak openly about Reverend Tono's misguided beliefs. In fact, he was well-known in Japan for trying to turn members visiting the Head Temple, Taiseki-ji against the lay organization. Despite this knowledge, when he was assigned as priest of the New York Temple, senior members and leaders tried to work with him and respect him as a Nichiren Shoshu priest. No effort was made to politicize the situation or turn members against him. It was his own actions and his betrayal of their trust that caused sincere members to reject him. Reverend Tono's persistent campaign to disrupt the unity of the Soka Gakkai and NSA members, against the express wish of the high priest who is trying to restore harmony, can no longer be sanctioned by silence. It was Reverend Tono who chose to disseminate to hundreds of innocent members throughout the country his negative and biased accusations based on half-truths, rumors and issues that have long ago been resolved. Despite his

avowal that this was to help the members, in fact, it was to further his own personal interests and the objectives of those he represents—the so-called *Shoshin-Kai* or dissident priests and their deluded lay followers. This is the group primarily responsible for creating the disharmony that has plagued Nichiren Shoshu for the past ten years. One of our pledges as lay believers of the Soka Gakkai is to protect the priesthood of Nichiren Shoshu. We can no longer allow members to believe that this man represents the wishes or intentions of High Priest Nikken Shonin.

The "Admonitions Against Slander" Gosho says:

To seek enlightenment without repudiating slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water. No matter how sincerely one believes in the Lotus Sutra, any violation of its teachings will surely cause him to fall into hell, just as one crab leg will ruin a thousand pots of lacquer. This is the meaning of the passage in the Lotus Sutra, "The poison has penetrated deeply, causing them to lose their minds."

To observe the unhappy effect that the *Shoshin-Kai's* distorted teachings have upon members is very sad. People with strong, happy life-conditions working sincerely for *kosen-rufu* become negative, malcontent and dispirited in their practice of *shin gyo gaku* (faith, practice, study). Foolishly believing that the members of the *Shoshin-Kai* act and speak as devoted Nichiren Shoshu priests, they listen sincerely to their propaganda and suffer the consequences in diminished benefit from their practice. They often cut themselves off from old friends in faith who have stood beside them for years, withdraw from their Buddhist activities and even eventually give up their faith entirely. It is a very sad and serious situation.

You may be wondering specifically what effects the actions of this group have had on our organization. As an NSA member,

you may have witnessed bitter debates about the appropriateness of various activities. Perhaps you have had the sad experience of seeing your fellow members suddenly become very critical of the organization and stop practicing or withdraw from their responsibilities, or for no apparent reason begin to turn against their senior members or leaders who raised them in faith. You may have been the recipient of phone calls spreading rumors about other members or mysterious literature—such as Reverend Tono's pamphlet. You may also have noticed for a period of time there were almost no Buddhist activities in your area, or that *shakubuku* seemed impossible to do. Maybe you have just heard vague references to "problems in the organization." All of these phenomena are manifestations of devilish functions at work within our organization.

Nichiren Daishonin never denied that differences would exist among his followers. He only urged us to overcome these differences. In the "Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" Goshō, he says:

All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō with one mind (*itai doshin*), 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. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation. When you are so united, even the great hope for *kosen-rufu* can be fulfilled without fail. But if any of Nichiren's disciples should disrupt the unity of *itai doshin*, he will destroy his own castle from within.

In a recent speech in Vancouver, Canada, which the high priest made after receiving Reverend Tono's pamphlet, he clarified the fundamental cause of the problems which were besetting Nichiren Shōshū believers as *Dairokuten no Mao*, or the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven. He said this is the negative force harbored in the

universe "which seeks to hinder true Buddhists' correct faith, destroying their spirit to continue and forcing them down the paths of evil, even to the point of abandoning their practice." In his speech, he continued:

Especially in recent years, this negative force has been assailing Nichiren Shoshu from all directions—from within the ranks of its believers and from without as well . . . attacks from within come from those who appear to be practicing true Buddhism, but who in truth are not. Bedeviled, they try to block the progress of those who do practice correctly and they even try to destroy the very fabric of our unity.

Devils exerted themselves in the days of Nichiren Daishonin as well, so we must deeply contemplate the fact that the Daishonin overcame these forces with the supreme power of his Buddhahood. Today, these same devilish forces are apparent in many forms in Japan, but you needn't worry about them in the least, for we who embrace the correct Law can absolutely defeat them. As protectors of true Buddhism, we lay believers and priests, myself included, have been deflecting the intrigues and vicious plots of these bedeviled people as they have arisen.

Of course, I am sure that these people, motivated by their jealousy and hatred of those with the true faith, will continue to disseminate their false, fabricated and malicious propaganda throughout the world . . . I hope you will not be swayed by such people or such propaganda in the least, but that you will continue your sincere practice of true Buddhism without ever giving in to the slightest doubt.

Unfortunately, over the years, a deliberate effort has been made by formerly trusted leaders of the Soka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood to take advantage of their positions for their own benefit. They worked in a deceitful way to undermine the efforts being made to resolve the differences existing between the priesthood and laity and within the laity itself. Over time they extended their evil influence to many parts of the world—focusing

especially on NSA. Their actions culminated in the punishment of 200 priests and the defrocking of six others for continued attacks against the Soka Gakkai despite repeated warnings from the high priest. The basis for these disciplinary actions was their *ha wagoso* (destroying harmonious unity).

Reverend Tono speaks of this situation in his booklet, but in a manner distorted to his advantage. He maintains that the label *ha wagoso* should not be applied to criticisms made against the Soka Gakkai but only to actions which disrupt the harmony of the priesthood. This is a gross simplification and a disservice to the members he leads. "The Fourteen Slanders" Gosho makes clear that criticism should be avoided among all believers. Again, this is not to say that righteous opinions should not be listened to—we must always be willing to speak openly and warmly with one another. However, the important factor is the fundamental life-condition of the person making the criticism. If he is sincere and speaks for constructive purposes, then his words will produce positive results; for example, the members' faith will deepen and their life-conditions will be raised. If the intention is evil, the opposite effects will occur. The members will become negative, discouraged, and tend to withdraw from their fellow believers.

The Daishonin explains in "On the Buddha's Behavior" how the ranks of believers are often threatened from within, by the "three obstacles and four devils":

The fifth volume of the *Maka Shikan* states: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere." It also states: "A wild boar scraping a gold mountain only makes it glitter, rivers flowing into an ocean increase its volume, fuel added to fire only makes it burn higher, and the wind inflates the body of the *gura*." If, with the mind of the Buddha, one practices the Lotus Sutra as the Buddha

taught, in the right manner and at the right time, then these seven obstacles and devils will confront him. The Devil of the Sixth Heaven is the most powerful. He will possess one's sovereign, parents, wife or children, fellow believers or evil men, and through them will attempt in a friendly manner to divert him from his practice of the Lotus Sutra, or will oppose him outright.

From a faith standpoint, we can say that this devilish function has manifested itself in our organization and like "the parasite in the lion's bowels" is eating away at the fabric of our unity. With strong, sincere prayers to the Gohonzon we must defeat this devilish function so that we can have heart-to-heart communication and move freely towards our goal of individual enlightenment and *kosen-rufu*. For our sake and for the sake of future believers, we must continue to strengthen our faith and deepen our understanding so that we can be rid of the evil influence of *Dairokuten no Mao*.

In his pamphlet, Reverend Tono repeatedly charged that the Soka Gakkai never addressed any of the issues or problems that arose during the turbulent period of the late 1970s. This is simply not true. Reverend Tono also stated repeatedly that sincere reflection and repentance have not occurred as a result of these difficulties, but this is ridiculous and without foundation. Reverend Tono's own failure to accept the sincere self-reflection of his fellow believers, and his tendency to regress to the past, continuing to criticize and attack, are the actions of a person who has lost his passion for *kosen-rufu* and forgotten the will of the Daishonin.

Although Reverend Tono is unwilling to accept it, 66th High Priest Nittatsu Shonin and 67th High Priest Nikken Shonin have both compassionately reflected upon all past difficulties and have given guidance and direction for the priesthood and the laity. They have repeatedly said not to refer to the Soka Gakkai as being slanderers. Reverend Tono chooses to ignore this guidance. The

impression is often given that the high priests were not fully aware of the problems and that this is why they gave the direction they did. This is absurd. They have a total and fundamental understanding from which they give their guidance.

The former High Priest Nittatsu Shonin commented in his November 1978 speech:

There certainly has been friction between Nichiren Shoshu and the Soka Gakkai during the last several years. As you know, this recently developed into disturbances. In the light of the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, it obviously is a very unfortunate thing to continue to see such a plight. Allowing it to linger will not only make us a laughing stock but also result in destroying Nichiren Shoshu itself.

The 67th High Priest Nikken Shonin, who was selected by Nittatsu Shonin to receive the heritage of the Law, spoke at length on this subject at his Formal Succession Ceremony on April 6, 1980 at the Head Temple, Taiseki-ji (see page 23):

Taking all these things into consideration, Honorary President Ikeda, as the responsible person at that time—specifically in his article entitled “Reflections on the 23rd Anniversary of the Death of My late Master” in the April 2nd *Seikyo Shimbun* (called “Reconfirming Our Fundamental Mission” in the *Seikyo Times*, May 1980)—has taken a comprehensive view of the situation, outlined the main problems and profoundly re-examined himself. I take his self-reflection as an apology to the Three Treasures of the Original Buddha, the Law, and the Priesthood—an apology which is truly filled with sincerity and courage and, at the same time, based on his deep faith.

When I consider the faith, experience and organizational management of the Soka Gakkai, which are solidly based on the Gohonzon, and when I think of Honorary President Ikeda's unprecedented *shakubuku* result of seven million and eight hundred thousand households in Japan, as well as his achievement for peace and culture

worldwide, I believe the Soka Gakkai and Honorary President Ikeda are, respectively, a very necessary organization and a very necessary leader for global propagation in the future.

Additionally, in a directive issued from the Head Temple on October 8, 1979, it was stated:

Both priests and laymen should no longer allow themselves to be lost in a dispute which has already been resolved. It is foolish to remain at odds with each other. We must make all-out efforts to accomplish our goal of world *kosen-rufu* by helping and encouraging each other in *itai doshin*. Now is indeed the time for us all to dedicate ourselves to introducing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to others.

When Reverend Tono's actions are observed, it becomes obvious that it is he himself who has failed to deeply self-reflect on the intention of the high priest. Actually, Reverend Tono's efforts to spread his propaganda among the members in his temple began to intensify at about the time the high priest made his April 6th speech. His single mindedness persisted to the point that innocent believers coming to the temple for encouragement in faith had their own problems dismissed while he consistently initiated dialogues on the faults of fellow believers and the lay organization. Despite many efforts made to communicate with him by sincere leaders concerned about their members, and in total disregard of their pleas for his patience and understanding, he carried on his personal mission to criticize, using the temple as his podium. As a basis for his judgments, he often used information dredged up from weekly Japanese magazines which were exploiting and sensationalizing the situation for their own profit. He also began to travel extensively among the membership, leaving the temple unattended and unavailable to the members who wished to chant to the temple Gohonzon. During this same period, Reverend Tono went so far as to host a dissident priest from Japan and to hold secret meetings with

NSA members. This was without the knowledge of the Head Temple and against the wishes of the high priest.

Among the topics then discussed were the right of the high priest to give direction in faith and the possibility of forming a lay organization in New York centering around Reverend Tono. This situation became so bad that members of pure faith who were not interested in political intrigue began to feel that they could not go to the temple. Members wanting memorial services there for their deceased loved ones were hesitant because he would even use these sensitive occasions to attack the Soka Gakkai when he was specifically asked not to do so. Contrary to its purpose as the center of faith, the temple became instead the center of rumor and mischief. These actions hardly seem those of a person who sincerely seeks to foster harmony and understanding among the disciples of Nichiren Daishonin.

Still not satisfied, Reverend Tono went so far as to make irresponsible statements questioning the legitimacy of the high priest's heritage of the Law. The situation worsened until Reverend Tono was finally removed from his position as chief priest of the New York Temple and recalled to Japan. Even then he continued to defy the direction of the high priest. Despite the fact that he was given instructions to return to Japan in late April, he delayed his departure for one month. His reason was that he had broken his nose while playing football the day before he was to leave New York and therefore could not travel. During that month he prepared anti-Gakkai material, which the high priest had already strictly and repeatedly admonished him about, and he continued his campaign to spread confusion and mistrust among the membership.

This campaign, however, was not limited to the Soka Gakkai but was extended to include the high priest. It was not uncommon during that month to hear members debating whether they should

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accept the direction of the high priest or recognize his lineage—in other words, whether he was indeed the high priest. At the same time, it was rumored that a leader of the *Shoshin-Kai* was actually the real 67th high priest—and not Nikken Shonin to whom Nittatsu Shonin had legitimately entrusted the heritage.

Reverend Jicho Maekawa, Overseas Bureau Chief from the Head Temple, commented on this unhappy situation at a meeting at the New York Temple on April 12, 1981, when Reverend Tono was relieved of his position as chief priest. He cautioned:

With our simple-mindedness we should not try to judge the high priest of the Head Temple. It would be like a firefly laughing at the sun . . . The high priest is trying to nurture NSA and SGI throughout the world. It is necessary to realize this great understanding he has. A person who cannot realize this is not a believer. The issue is whether we protect this organization or create destruction. In December the high priest commented that everyone should center around General Director Williams and create unity. Before you are an NSA member, you are a believer in Nichiren Shoshu. Nichiren Shoshu believers follow the high priest.

When Reverend Tono finally left New York, it was hoped that NSA members would be free of the negative influence of the *Shoshin-Kai*. This was not to be the case. He had managed to win the allegiance of a small corps of former NSA members. They assisted him in writing his pamphlet and distributing it around the country. They also began actively campaigning to persuade NSA members to join their group, focusing their efforts mainly on weak and insecure members who could least afford to fall victim to their ploys and on intellectuals who were captivated by their theoretical arguments. To this day they continue their anti-Soka Gakkai and anti-high priest attacks, seemingly blind to the seriousness of the path they have chosen.

It's finally Begun!
The King Devil is attacking us

Not content to harass individual members, they recently sent an anonymous mailing of anti-Soka Gakkai literature to the media in various cities identifying themselves as the "New York Truth Squad." Seeking to generate negative publicity about the Nichiren Shoshu lay organization and its leaders, they undermined the efforts of sincere members to propagate Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, in effect opposing the Buddha's will. The only thing left to question or disparage was the validity of the Dai-Gohonzon itself and this some of them began to do in late June. The benightedness of these formerly sincere believers had now reached its apex. In denying the heritage and denying the Law, they had in effect denied Nichiren Daishonin's true Buddhism and the religion of Nichiren Shoshu.

We mention all these details with the sincere prayer that, by being aware of these devilish schemes, you will be able to recognize them for what they are—*sansho shima*—and not be swayed. The "On Persecutions Befalling the Buddha" Gosho says, "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken even a bit, demons will take advantage." Let us offer deep and profound prayer to the Gohonzon that we ourselves will not succumb to these influences.

As Reverend Eido Fujimoto, General Administrator of Nichiren Shoshu, explained at the opening of the Chicago Temple on June 27, 1981:

For 700 years Nichiren Shoshu has inherited and protected the Dai-Gohonzon of the *Honmon-no-Kaidan* and the dignity of the Law which has been transmitted through each successive high priest based on the pure lifeblood of the Law from the time of Nichiren Daishonin, the founder of the sect. Protecting this dignity of the high priest is important because we can have a correct attitude in our faith only through receiving guidance and direction from the high priest who has inherited the Law. If a person should deviate from or

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oppose his directions, he would be unable to attain true happiness even though he embraced the Gohonzon.

In this sense, I sincerely ask that the American members strive to strengthen the harmonious unity between priesthood and laity by maintaining a correct attitude in faith and by following the guidance of SGI President Ikeda and centering your support on General Director Williams.

In his speech to members in Vancouver following his attendance at the Grand World Peace Culture Festival and the opening of the Chicago Temple, High Priest Nikken Shonin clarified the three things that we believers in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism must do:

First, we must maintain faith in the Gohonzon without ever harboring the slightest doubt.

Second, we must do morning and evening gongyo and chant daimoku assiduously.

Third, we must teach the greatness of this practice, of this Law, to people of all races who do not yet know of the existence of true Buddhism. Put another way, we must teach others that practicing Buddhism is the way to become truly happy.

... in the last half-century, it has been the sincere efforts of the Soka Gakkai in Japan, and its offshoots NSA in America and NSC in Canada, that have been instrumental in the international propagation of the Daishonin's Buddhism... I would like you to appreciate the fact that you belong to such a beautiful organization which has been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism sincerely and correctly. I hope you will contemplate this point deeply and, based upon the Daishonin's spirit, further advance in the unity of *itai dashin* so that you can establish your own true happiness and develop the cause of *kosen-rufu*.

With this background material in mind, we offer this pamphlet, hoping you stay forever on the correct path of faith as defined by Nichiren Daishonin and the successive high priests. □