

The Untold History of the Fuji School: The Origins of the Temple Issue

This series is based on The Dark History of the Fuji School: Revealing the Origin of the Nikken Sect (Ankoku no Fuji Shumonshi: Nikken Shu no Engen o Kiru) by Hajime Kawai, a vice senior advisor of the Soka Gakkai Study Department. To protect the fragile harmony between the priesthood and laity, the complete history of Nichiren Shoshu was not openly discussed in the past. This new series will give the whole story.

Introduction

TO most SGI members, the corruption of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood came to light at the end of 1990 with its plot to destroy the SGI. The root cause of the priesthood's present corruption and turmoil, however, dates back further in its history. The priesthood did not just suddenly become aberrant; rather, it has always had a tendency to become so. And this tendency became most evident when Nikken Abe, the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, initiated his plan to disband the SGI and bring its members over to his temples.

The second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, once remarked: "In the seven-hundred-year tradition of this school, there are, on one hand, some who were noble, pure and worthy of respect. But, on the other hand, you may find others like cats or rats" (*Complete Works of Josei Toda* [Jp. Toda Josei Zenshu], vol. 1, p. 30). As President Toda cautioned, throughout the history of Nichiren Shoshu, many high-ranking priests, including some high priests, distorted Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and sought personal gain by using their religious status and authority.

SGI President Ikeda, at the third SGI-USA Executive Conference, held in Boston on September 21, 1993, stated:

Corrupt priests who live off Buddhism and greedily devour the believers' offerings have been a constant in history.

The Nikken sect has become a truly corrupt and immoral school, while its priests, including Nikken, are nothing more than aberrant priests who transgress the teachings of Buddhism, as described above.

When the True Law is endangered by an avalanche of heretical Buddhist teachings, the Daishonin instructs us: "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" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 103).

In light of this writing, to thoroughly rebuke the great slander of the Law that is being perpetrated by the Nikken sect is to practice Buddhism in accord with the present time. (Oct. 11, 1993, *World Tribune*, p. 4)

Until recently, only certain events in the history of Nichiren Shoshu (i.e., the Fuji

School of Nichiren Buddhism) could be discussed—such as Nikko Shonin’s founding of Taiseki-ji (the head temple of Nichiren Shoshu); the selfless dedication of the third high priest, Nichimoku Shonin, to spread the Daishonin’s Buddhism; the restoration of the school by the ninth high priest, Nichiu; the establishment of the school’s doctrinal foundation by the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan; and the sect’s unprecedented development after World War II brought forth by the Soka Gakkai. In reality, however, “the pure stream of the Fuji School” was sporadic at best. The remaining history could only be described as “a muddy stream.”

The fifty-ninth high priest, Nichiko Hori, an eminent scholar of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, once lamented the widespread corruption within the priesthood, satirically paraphrasing the Lotus Sutra: “It has fallen upon my ears that the wise priests of the Latter Day—throughout their past, present and future existences—always keep this thought in mind: ‘How can I cause my purse to quickly acquire money?’ How could this be possibly true?” (*One-Hundred Sacred Admonitions* [Jp. Seikun Ippyaku Dai], p. 22). (The concluding part of the “Life Span” or the sixteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra actually reads: “How can I cause living beings to...quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?” [LS16, 232]) Nichiko pointed out that within the priesthood there have always been corrupt priests living off Buddhism.

But the current situation is worse than ever. Now that the high priest himself has gone astray from the Daishonin’s Buddhism, corruption has spread throughout the entire priesthood.

When we thoroughly examine the 700-year history of the priesthood, it becomes clear that the distortion of the Daishonin’s Buddhism and corruption have cast a long shadow. The sect’s history contains numerous precedents to the current corruption. Therefore, understanding the history of the priesthood gives us an invaluable insight into the current temple issue and an excellent opportunity to deepen our understanding of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

CHAPTER 1:

The five senior priests and their deviation from the Daishonin’s teaching

(1) Nikko Shonin’s departure from Mount Minobu

THE history of the Fuji school, the school founded by Nikko Shonin, began when he departed from Kuon temple at Mount Minobu. Because of his correct understanding of the Daishonin’s teaching and of his courageous action to propagate it despite numerous persecutions, Nikko Shonin inherited the spiritual legacy of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. In fact, the Daishonin entrusted Nikko Shonin with “the Law that Nichiren propagated throughout his lifetime” and referred to him as “the great leader of the propagation of true Buddhism” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1600). The Daishonin also designated his outstanding disciple as “a chief priest of Kuon temple at Mount Minobu” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1600). So why did Nikko Shonin feel compelled to leave Mount Minobu where his teacher spent his last years?

The direct cause of Nikko Shonin’s departure from Mount Minobu lies in the four slanderous acts of Hakiri Sanenaga, the steward of Minobu. Contrary to the

Daishonin's teachings, he had a statue of Shakyamuni made and regarded it as an object of worship; he visited a Shinto shrine; he made an offering to a stupa¹ of the Nembutsu sect; and he built a place of religious practice for the Nembutsu sect. Although Nikko Shonin strongly admonished Hakiri for his errors, he would not listen.

Regarding the steward's errors, the fifty-ninth high priest, Nichiko Hori, points out: "Of the four slanderous acts [of Hakiri Sanenaga] the gravest is his restoration of the Buddha's statue" (*Detailed Accounts of Nikko Shonin of the Fuji School*, p. 218). Viewing Shakyamuni's statue as an object of devotion completely contradicts the Daishonin's essential teaching that the Gohonzon is the basis of our faith and the fundamental object of devotion. Because of the gravity of Hakiri Sanenaga's behavior, Nikko Shonin refused to compromise.

In his writing "Reply to Mimasaka-bo," Nikko Shonin recounts the Daishonin's last will and testament: "When the steward [of Minobu] goes against the Law, I shall not reside here" (*Hennentai Nichiren Daishonin Gosho*,² p. 1729). Following the Daishonin's last instruction, and to protect the integrity of Buddhism, Nikko Shonin left the Minobu area and moved to the Fuji area.

Behind Hakiri Sanenaga's slanderous acts was the influence of Niko, a chief priest of the seminary at Minobu. He prompted the steward to go astray. Niko's strong influence on Hakiri Sanenaga is demonstrated in the steward's defiance toward Nikko Shonin. Sanenaga had been converted to the Daishonin's Buddhism by Nikko Shonin, so he regarded him as a teacher in the beginning. But when Nikko Shonin admonished the steward's behavior, he replied, "I have taken Minbu Ajari [Niko] as my teacher" (*Ibid.*, p. 1733).

Aware of the circumstances under which Sanenaga committed these slanderous acts, Nikko Shonin states in "Reply to Lord Hara": "These things are not the fault of Lay Priest [Hakiri]. They are solely the errors of the twisted priest" (*Ibid.*, p. 1733).

Niko propounded that "When those upholding the Lotus Sutra visit [a Shinto shrine], the Buddhist gods as well will come to that shrine" (*Ibid.*, p. 1732). In the Daishonin's treatise, "On the Pacification of the Land through the Propagation of True Buddhism" (Jp. Rissho Ankoku Ron), however, it states that when people ignore the Law, all the Buddhist gods (i.e., the protective forces in the universe that protect life) will abandon the land so that people's misery and suffering will increase. Based on the Daishonin's teaching, Nikko Shonin discouraged believers from visiting a Shinto shrine that would confuse them about which is the correct practice. But Niko allowed believers to visit Shinto shrines and criticized Nikko Shonin, stating that "Byakuren Ajari [Nikko] reads only non-Buddhist scriptures and is ignorant of the ultimate teaching of Buddhism" (*Ibid.*, p. 1732).

Niko became deviant both in his understanding of Buddhism and in his behavior. In "Reply to Lord Hara," Nikko Shonin describes Niko's aberrant behavior: Niko invited a painter to the estate of lay priest Moro'oka and had him paint a mandala. To consecrate the painted mandala, he gave a sermon for one day and one night and then got drunk on sake while holding fast to the offering he received for performing the consecration. Furthermore, heavily drunk, he sang

vulgar songs and made a laughingstock of himself (Ibid., p. 1734). Regarding Niko's disgraceful behavior, Nikko Shonin writes: "What could possibly bring more shame upon Nichiren than this?" (Ibid., p. 1734).

Commenting on Nikko Shonin's "Reply to Lord Hara," Nichiko Hori states: "Nikko Shonin states: 'What could possibly bring more shame upon Nichiren than this?' We priests and lay believers of the modern day must deeply understand his statement and regard it as golden words with which to admonish ourselves. We must not take these words lightly, thinking of them as empty words from six-hundred-some years ago" (February 1956, *Daibyakurenge*, p. 3).

(2) The betrayal of the five senior priests

OF the six senior disciples designated by the Daishonin, all except for Nikko Shonin betrayed their teacher's will and intent and attempted to destroy his teaching. On October 8, 1282, five days before his passing, at Ikegami in Musashi Province (present-day Ikegami in Ota Ward, Tokyo), the Daishonin designated Nissho, Nichiro, Nikko, Niko, Nitcho and Nichiji as "main disciples" but noted that "the order of listing is irrelevant" (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 8, pp. 2-3). The order of the Daishonin's designation indicates the order of conversion, not the order of seniority after his passing. So it does not contradict Nikko Shonin's inheritance of the Daishonin's teaching. It also demonstrates that the Daishonin did not entrust his teaching to Nissho and Nichiro. Otherwise, he would not have had to add "the order of listing is irrelevant." These "main disciples" would later be called "the six senior priests."

The Daishonin designated the six senior priests under the leadership of Nikko Shonin to protect and spread his teachings after his death. While designating Nikko Shonin as chief priest of Kuon temple at Minobu, the Daishonin also intended the other five senior priests to continue to take leadership in their assigned areas for the further propagation of the Law.

Nissho and Nichiro stayed in Kamakura; Niko in Mobara of Kazusa Province (present-day Mobara City, Chiba Prefecture); Nitcho in Mama of Shimousa Province (present-day Ichikawa City, Chiba Prefecture); and Nichiji in Fuji County of Suruga Province (present-day Fuji City and its vicinity, Shizuoka Prefecture).

Regarding the Daishonin's designation of the six senior priests, Nichiko Hori states that the Daishonin "asked them to become leaders for believers scattered in various areas and exert themselves in propagation, thus accomplishing the great desire of kosen-rufu."

On October 13, 1282, the Daishonin passed away peacefully at the estate of Ikegami Munenaka. His body was cremated, and Nikko Shonin brought the ashes back to Minobu for burial. At the end of January 1283, after having conducted a memorial service for the hundred-day anniversary of the Daishonin's passing, Nikko Shonin consulted other disciples and instituted a vigil for their teacher's grave at Minobu. Eighteen leading disciples were selected to take turns attending the grave by making offerings and prayers.

Each of the six senior priests and two of the rest were to stay at Mount Minobu for one month at a time and protect the Daishonin's gravesite. Of the eighteen priests, nine (Nichii, Nippo, Echizen-ko, Nitchi, Nichiji, Nichimoku, Nisshu, Nichiben and Nikke) had entered the priesthood under the direct or indirect guardianship and guidance of Nikko Shonin, demonstrating his outstanding leadership.

When the disciples eventually returned to their respective areas, Nissho took an annotated copy of the Lotus Sutra, which the Daishonin instructed to keep by his tomb. And Nichiro took a statue of Shakyamuni, which the Daishonin had received as a gift from the steward of Ito when he was exiled to Izu and had since kept by his side. The Daishonin also willed this statue to be kept by his tomb. Nissho and Nichiro never returned to Minobu as long as Nikko Shonin remained there, completely neglecting the vigil over their teacher's grave.

In his "Reply to Mimasaka-bo," Nikko Shonin explains his circumstances: "[The five senior priests] seem to have abandoned the grave [of the Daishonin]. Though they propounded a teaching not to discard one's teacher, they have already abandoned their own. It cannot be helped that they may be subjected to criticism in the secular world" (*Hennentai Nichiren Daishonin Gosho*, p. 1729).

When Nikko Shonin became chief priest of Kuon temple, Hakiri Sanenaga, the steward of Minobu, rejoiced: "I am pleased as if the late sage had come back once again" (*Detailed Accounts of Nikko Shonin of the Fuji School*, p. 164). But after Niko was designated as a chief of the seminary at Minobu in 1285, Sanenaga gradually came under his influence. Niko would not hesitate to bend the Daishonin's Buddhism to curry favor with the steward of the area; this eventually led to the various treacherous acts against the Daishonin's Buddhism.

(3) The five senior priests' jealousy toward Nikko Shonin

THE reason why the five senior priests could not support Nikko Shonin and betrayed the Daishonin's teaching lies in their jealousy toward Nikko Shonin. Their ill feelings toward the Daishonin's foremost disciple eventually clouded their vision and led them astray.

Of the five senior priests, Nissho and Nichiro became disciples of the Daishonin before Nikko Shonin did. To them, Nikko Shonin was a junior priest. Niko and Nitcho joined the Daishonin's order after Nikko Shonin, but they considered themselves his equals in status and seniority. Nichiji entered the priesthood under the guidance of Nikko Shonin, but he disliked obeying his senior. Their jealousy and base emotionalism influenced their judgment—they eventually stopped visiting Minobu and started to propound teachings contradictory to the teachings of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

Regarding the five senior priests' betrayal of Nikko Shonin, SGI President Ikeda commented:

Nichiko Shonin points out that the five senior priests disliked Nikko Shonin because he was strict in observing the Daishonin's teachings, as stated in the

“Rissho Ankoku Ron,” which forbade visiting Shinto shrines. Furthermore, at the base of their opposition to Nikko Shonin lay their intense jealousy toward him....

President Toda once said: “The epitome of men’s jealousy is that of Devadatta.” Jealousy distorts one’s thinking. Once under the sway of jealousy, our minds become susceptible to life’s devilish workings and give rise to a wicked desire for destruction. Devadatta, for example, grew intensely jealous of Shakyamuni and made an attempt on his life and created a schism in his order.

The five senior priests, because of their jealousy toward Nikko Shonin, opposed true Buddhism and caused dissension among the Daishonin’s followers. The mind racked by ugly jealousy obstructs the spread of Buddhism; this principle is still applicable today. (From an April 26, 1992, speech)

Besides jealousy toward Nikko Shonin, the five senior priests’ cowardice and ignorance of the Daishonin’s Buddhism played a role in their betrayal. After the Daishonin’s passing, Nissho and Nichiro—who lived in Kamakura, the seat of the shogunate government—were oppressed by the government, which threatened to destroy their temples. They managed to escape from this predicament by submitting an offer to pray for the government based on the Tendai practice. Fearing persecution and eager to preserve their security and social status, they curried favor with the government while compromising their teacher’s will and intent.

The five senior priests’ shallow understanding of Buddhism and weak faith led them to believe that the Daishonin was spreading the Lotus Sutra based on the Tendai doctrine. In this regard, Nikko Shonin explains: “The five senior priests proclaimed that Sage Nichiren’s teaching is that of the Tendai school, so they called themselves in their letters submitted to the government ‘the followers of the Tendai school’” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1601). They also nonchalantly allowed their junior priests to receive the precepts at the Tendai school’s head temple at Mount Hiei (*Ibid.*, p. 1602).

The five senior priests’ betrayal of the Daishonin’s teaching was detailed in Nikko Shonin’s writings such as “On the Matters That the Believers of the Fuji School Must Know” (*Fuji Isseki Monto Zonchi no Koto*) (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1601–09) and “Refuting the Five Senior Priests” (*Gonin Shoha Sho*) (*Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 1610–16). According to Nikko Shonin’s account, the five senior priests’ errors can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The five senior priests asserted that the Daishonin’s teachings belong to the Tendai school and that he spread the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, following the teaching of Dengyo.
- 2) They visited Shinto shrines in various places such as Ise, Mount Izu, Hakone and Kumano.
- 3) They regarded copying of the Lotus Sutra as a legitimate practice and encouraged it.

- 4) They allowed their disciples enter the priesthood and receive the precepts at the Tendai sect's head temple at Mount Hiei.
- 5) They called the Daishonin's letters written in the common language of the time (Japanese phonetic characters) as their teacher's shame and destroyed them.
- 6) They made a statue of Shakyamuni and regarded it as an object of devotion.
- 7) They disrespected Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin, hanging them behind Shakyamuni's statues, mistreating them by leaving them in a corridor or burying them with bodies or selling them off for profit.

Not only did the five senior priests go against the Daishonin's teaching, but they also slandered Nikko Shonin for admonishing their errors. As Minobu school scholars acknowledge in *The Doctrinal History of the Nichiren Sect*, there was nothing remarkable in the five senior priests' Buddhist study. They grew weak in faith, became fearful of persecutions, became oblivious to the Daishonin's desire to spread the Law and eventually went completely astray from the Daishonin's teaching. These characteristics shared by the five senior priests are applicable to those who betrayed Buddhism throughout its history.

In "Document for Entrusting Kuon Temple at Mount Minobu," dated October 13, 1282, the Daishonin states: "The teachings expounded by Shakyamuni for fifty years I have transferred to Byakuren Ajari Nikko. He shall be a chief priest of Kuon temple at Mount Minobu. Those who betray him, be they lay believers or priests, shall be known as slanderers of the Law" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1600). When the five senior priests started opposing and denouncing Nikko Shonin, they further proved themselves to be "slanderers of the Law."

In "Letter from Sado," the Daishonin also warns his followers of the treachery of priests against Buddhism: "Neither non-Buddhists nor the enemies of Buddhism can destroy the Buddha's True Law, but the Buddha's disciples definitely can. As the sutra says, a parasite in the lion's bowels will devour the lion" (MW-1, 35). The Daishonin's premonition came true soon after his passing. The five senior priests, as "the Buddha's disciples," that is, ecclesiastics, attempted to destroy their teacher's work from within. As the Daishonin points out, throughout the history of Buddhism, its decline and corruption have been caused by priests, especially those of high status. The history of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is not an exception to this historical pattern. In this regard, President Ikeda comments: "The Daishonin clearly states that it is not enemies from outside but rather 'Worms within the lion's body'—meaning high-ranking priests within Buddhism and, more particularly, their feelings of jealousy [toward those who practice Buddhism correctly]—that will destroy Buddhism" (May 25, 1992, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

4) The five senior priests and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood

THE five senior priests' betrayal of the Daishonin is instructive for those of us practicing today. And Nikko Shonin's resolute and uncompromising action to refute the five senior priests' erroneous teachings and clarify believers' confusion

may be regarded as an example of how a Buddhist must act.

Regarding the danger of priests becoming an obstacle to the spread of Buddhism, President Ikeda quotes Nichiko Hori and comments:

The 59th high priest, Nichiko Shonin, was convinced that it was obstacles from within, rather than from without, that would obstruct the flow of kosen-rufu, causing it to stagnate and dry up.

Nichiko Shonin said: "The flow of the Law of Nichiren Daishonin is frequently obstructed. Obstacles arise from both within and without, but those from within inflict the most serious wounds.... With external obstacles, even if they interrupt the flow [of kosen-rufu], it will revive again after a period of time. With internal obstacles, however, the flow is interrupted as a result of a complete drying up [of the flow itself], thus it is not as easy to revive. Unless we all profoundly recognize this point, the prospects of seeing the dawn of kosen-rufu even in 1,000 or 10,000 years will be extremely dim."

As an example of "obstacles from within," Nichiko Shonin lists the five senior priests, who turned their backs on Nikko Shonin and caused rifts among the believers, and the slander of Temmoku [a priest who, despite having met the Daishonin during his lifetime, put forward his own doctrines; his heretical views were later refuted by Nikko Shonin].

Nichiko Shonin keenly perceives that it is the activities of evil priests within the sect itself that present the greatest obstacles and impediments to the flow of kosen-rufu. He makes this statement by way of warning to future generations. And just as he asserted, evil priests who are bent on destroying the Buddhist Law have now appeared just like Devadatta [in the time of Shakyamuni Buddha] and the five renegade senior priests [in the time of Nikko Shonin]. We must on no terms allow the flow of kosen-rufu to be blocked by them. Evil must be destroyed. (March 23, 1992, *World Tribune*, p. 5)

The treacherous nature of the five senior priests is essentially consistent with the basic tendency of the current Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in that it has gone completely astray from the Daishonin's teaching. The priesthood's denial of the equality of lay believers and priests; its attempt to insert itself as an intermediary between believers and their enlightenment by claiming control and authority over the Gohonzon and its view of the high priest as the sole embodiment of the Daishonin's teaching—none of these has a basis in the Daishonin's Buddhism. Furthermore, the priesthood conforms to the behavior of the five senior priests in its jealousy and slander toward the SGI, especially its president, for pointing out its errors.

A parallel can also be drawn between Nichiren Shoshu's head temple, Taiseki-ji, degenerating into a slanderous place and Mount Minobu as a slanderous place due to the slander of Buddhism committed by Hakiri Sanenaga. The SGI discourages its members from visiting Taiseki-ji for the similar reason

Nikko Shonin had to leave Mount Minobu where his teacher had spent his last years. In this regard, President Ikeda states:

Moreover, by excommunicating the Soka Gakkai, an organization that has appeared in accord with the Buddha's will and decree, Nikken tried to "cut off" the flow of kosen-rufu. Just as Mount Minobu had turned into a place where the Daishonin's spirit could no longer dwell, Taiseki-ji, under the control of Nikken, has turned into a "place of slander."

Those visiting Taiseki-ji now, far from gaining benefit as a result, would surely incur the Daishonin's censure; they stand to receive only punishment.

The fact that the Dai-Gohonzon bestowed upon the entire world is the basis of our faith remains unchanged. However, to donate money to Nikken in order to see the Dai-Gohonzon would amount to condoning his slander of the Law. One who supports slanderous priests in effect are guilty of the same offenses as they are. Those who commit acts implicating themselves in the offenses of others become, in a word, "accomplices."

Those who join slanderers of the Law in worshipping the Dai-Gohonzon are sure to be sternly rebuked by the Daishonin: "Far from struggling against the Buddha's enemies, you made offerings to them. How can you account for your action?" (December 20, 1993, *World Tribune*, p. 5)

In the same speech, President Ikeda uses the metaphor of "a clear cool pond" from the Lotus Sutra to illustrate why a visit to Taiseki-ji would amount to a betrayal of the Daishonin's intent and teaching:

The "Medicine King" chapter of the Lotus Sutra likens the sutra to "a clear cool pond [that] can satisfy all those who are thirsty."

In other words, just as the water of a pond can quench people's parched throats, the Lotus Sutra "irrigates" people's lives, dousing the flames of sufferings of earthly desires.

Interpreting this passage for the present age, we can say that the Dai-Gohonzon is being compared to a "clear cool pond." However, the area surrounding this "clear cool pond" has now become a swamp of slander. To reach the pond, one must travel through the swamp. The pond is still every bit as clear as before, but because of the surrounding swamp, one's life will be defiled when he or she tries to approach it. This is how some people metaphorically describe the current situation.

Continuing with the same analogy, even if one does not go directly to the pond, clear water flowing from the pond wells up from the spring that is in our home. There is no difference at all between the water of the pond and that of the spring.

Nittatsu Shonin gave clear guidance (on September 7, 1962) on this point, saying, "The Gohonzon enshrined in your altar is, itself, the life of Nichiren Daishonin." (December 20, 1993, *World Tribune*, p. 5)

In the Daishonin's Buddhism, what connects us with our innate Buddhahood is our faith. In this sense, whether or not we directly pray to the Gohonzon may be considered secondary to our faith. President Ikeda points out that our faith—not our physical proximity to the object of devotion—leads us to our enlightenment as follows:

For example, the Daishonin wrote to his follower Lord Matsuno, whom he had never met: "How is it that you can have faith in Nichiren, though you have never met him? It is, no doubt, the result of good causes you have planted in your life in the past. Since the time has come when you are certain to attain Buddhahood in your next life, you now have aroused faith." (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1379)

Today, we could say that "not to have met the Daishonin" is equivalent to "not having physically chanted before the Gohonzon" and also, naturally, "not having physically chanted before the Dai-Gohonzon."

The Daishonin exclaimed how wonderful it was that Lord Matsuno had taken faith in spite of the fact that he had never met the Daishonin or not personally, assuring him that he would certainly attain Buddhahood.

Our heart, our faith is extremely important. The Daishonin states: "Faith alone is what really matters" (MW-1, 246).

Attaining Buddhahood is not decided by such externals as to whether we have met the Daishonin or not, or whether we have physically chanted before the Dai-Gohonzon.

It also goes without saying that to assert that a person does not have faith unless he or she visits the head temple Taiseki-ji is a complete contradiction of the Daishonin's words. Those who make this assertion are betraying the Dai-Gohonzon, the embodiment of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. How can the enemies of the Dai-Gohonzon possibly expect to receive benefit even if they chant before the Dai-Gohonzon? As it states in the Gosho, if you have faith, everything you do is communicated to the original Buddha. It is communicated to the Dai-Gohonzon. The Daishonin will definitely praise your faith as wondrous. (February 1994 *Seikyo Times*, p. 14)

In the same regard, President Ikeda also remarks:

We should look upon the Gohonzon enshrined in each of our homes as the life of the Daishonin, the entity of the original Buddha. When chanting daimoku with that conviction, it is the same as if we are worshipping the Dai-Gohonzon itself right where we are.

Nittatsu Shonin also said (on November 23, 1977): "Wherever the Gohonzon is enshrined, that place, in a broad sense, takes on the significance of the high sanctuary. The sincere daimoku you chant to that Gohonzon with a concentrated mind free of all extraneous thoughts is instantly

received by the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary of true Buddhism. The place where you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is instantly transformed into Eagle Peak. And this is where you attain Buddhahood in your present form.”

Wherever you may be in the world, if you believe in the Gohonzon and chant daimoku with sincere faith, you are in contact with the Dai-Gohonzon at that moment and in that place. The claim that unless you visit the head temple you will not acquire true benefit is a great falsehood in violation of the teachings of Nittatsu Shonin. (November 1993 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 28–29)

Nikko Shonin left Mount Minobu, a place dear to him, as an expression of his resolve never to compromise his teacher’s will and intent. His departure from Mount Minobu actually prevented the Daishonin’s Buddhism from being polluted by the five senior priests’ corruption. In the spirit of Nikko Shonin, the SGI is now discouraging its members from visiting Taiseki-ji because doing so would condone the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood’s erroneous claims.

No matter where we may be, whether we are physically in front of the Gohonzon or not, as long as we pray with sincere faith, we can manifest the Buddha’s life from within. The fact that SGI members throughout the world are receiving benefit from their practice is eloquent testimony to the importance of faith as taught by the Daishonin. □

To be continued

1. stupa: A kind of shrine in India where the relics of Shakyamuni or other saints are housed. They originated from burial mounds and are usually dome-shaped or mound-shaped.

2. *Hennentai Nichiren Daishonin Gosho*—compilation of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings published by the Soka Gakkai in 1973. The writings in *Hennentai Nichiren Daishonin Gosho* are arranged chronologically; and it also includes two letters by Nikko Shonin (“Reply to Mimasaka-bo” and “Reply to Lord Hara”), which are not in *Gosho Zenshu*.

Gosho Zenshu is the first compilation of Nichiren Daishonin’s writings published by the Soka Gakkai in 1952.