

An Explanation of Nikko Shonin's 26 Admonitions

The following is part of a speech SGI President Ikeda gave at the Kansai Executive Conference, held at the Kinugasa Ikeda Hall in Kyoto, Japan, on October 24, 1992. The speech was originally published in the November 23, 1992, issue of the World Tribune.

WHAT is the standard that the followers of Nikko Shonin, the heirs to the true lineage of Nichiren Daishonin, must observe? Needless to say, it is articles of warning that the second high priest set down on the thirteenth day of the first month of the third year of the Genko era (1333). These are the admonitions that Nikko Shonin, at age 88, gave to his disciples one month before his death. For what purpose did he write down these warning articles?

In the preface, he states: "I will here set forth some articles for the sake of later students of Buddhism. This is solely because I treasure the [Daishonin's] golden words regarding kosen-rufu" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1617).

Again, in the concluding passage, he writes, "I have set forth these 26 articles for the sake of the eternal salvation and protection of humankind" (GZ, 1619).

Until the moment of his death, Nikko Shonin's life blazed with the great wish to accomplish kosen-rufu and lead all people to happiness—to realize the Daishonin's decree.

Herein lies the original spirit of the correct school [of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism].

Again, in the concluding passage, Nikko Shonin strictly warns: "Those who violate even one of these articles cannot be called disciples of Nikko" (*ibid.*).

These articles of warning were originally intended for priests. Nonetheless, we in the SGI, awakened [to our mission] as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, have strictly put these admonitions into practice.

President Toda composed and dedicated the following poem to youth:

You, young people,
engraving in your hearts
the twenty-six precepts,
dedicate your lives
to the path of the Mystic Law.

The "twenty-six precepts" in this poem refers to Nikko Shonin's twenty-six warning articles. President Toda urged young people to struggle for kosen-rufu, just as the second high priest admonished, with the spirit of not begrudging their lives.

Now, I would like to read and explain each of the individual warning articles.

1. The doctrines of the Fuji school must not differ in the least from the teachings

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of the late master.

THE Fuji school is the line of Nikko Shonin's followers. The "late master" is Nichiren Daishonin.

One can sense the profound spirit of Nikko Shonin in his having made this the first warning article. To not differ in the least from the teachings of the Daishonin—this is the most basic essential of the correct school. This passage is documentary proof of [what it means to have] a direct connection with the Daishonin. It is the foundation of the correct school. Today, only the SGI practices and abides by this admonition.

The Nikken sect teaches that "one must not differ from Nikken"—not that "one must not differ from the Daishonin." The foundation is erroneous. Far from "not differing in the least," the Nikken sect is acting completely contrary to the Daishonin's teachings. Specific examples of this are well known to all of you.

2. The doctrines of the five senior priests differ in every regard from the teachings of the late master.

THE true nature of the five senior priests is revealed by their betrayal of the master. The members of the Nikken sect are the Latter Day followers of the five senior priests.

It must be concluded that each of the doctrines established by the Nikken sect in recent times, including their alteration of the doctrine of the three treasures, differs in every regard from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

The five senior priests criticized the correct teachings of Nikko Shonin; they claimed that he was "establishing a different teaching and had lost the Way." The priesthood [of the Nikken sect], while deeply immersed in its own slander of the Law, vilifies the correct practice of the SGI. On this point as well, the actions of the priesthood perfectly mirror those of the five senior priests.

3. There will [in the future] appear persons who slander our school, saying that the Goshō are forged writings. You must not associate with such evil priests.

IT was Nikko Shonin who treasured the Daishonin's writings, giving them the honorific appellation *Goshō*, which literally means the "honorable writings." In addition to lecturing on the Goshō himself, he collected the Daishonin's writings and left behind many copies in his own hand for later generations.

To treasure and base oneself on the Goshō—this is the prime foundation for and the essential spirit of the followers of Nikko Shonin.

The five senior priests disregarded many Goshō, including most of the Daishonin's letters, on account of their being written in a mixture of Chinese characters and Japanese phonetic syllabary. They also slandered Nikko Shonin

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for revering the Daishonin's writings as "Gosho" and for delivering lectures on them. They went so far as to bleach the paper on which the Daishonin had written certain Gosho [so that it could be reused for other purposes], or else consigned them to flames. Further, they labeled as forged writings and repudiated those Gosho that showed their own ideas in a disadvantageous light.

Nichiko, the fifty-ninth high priest, once commented: "In deprecating the Gosho, [the five senior priests] certainly were guilty of turning their backs on the master."

The Soka Gakkai published the *Nichiren Daishonin Gosho Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin) with the editorial supervision of Nichiko, and we have applied ourselves to strict Buddhist study with discipline like that of master swordsmen. We take pride in the fact that, as followers inheriting the true legacy of Nikko Shonin, we have made the Gosho our foundation.

The priesthood is so determined to establish the high priest as the foundation that it has distorted the true path. It has even gone so far as to advance the peculiar claim that "to make the Gosho the foundation is egotistic." As I will explain later, making the high priest of the time the foundation itself amounts to betraying Nikko Shonin's articles of warning. Article 3 states that one must not associate with or follow such evil priests.

4. Those who produce forged writings and say that they are Gosho, or who practice with the view that the essential and theoretical teachings [of the Lotus Sutra] are the same, are parasites in the lion's body.

NIKKO Shonin says that there will appear evil priests who use forged writings to suit their needs, who fail to distinguish between the theoretical and essential teachings and who practice false teachings.

Before and during World War II, there was a priest in Nichiren Shoshu who advocated the false doctrine of *shimpon busshaku*, which asserts that the Buddha of absolute freedom is a manifestation of the Shinto deity (the Sun Goddess). Even after the war, the priesthood, rather than taking this evil priest to task, instead took punitive action against the Soka Gakkai, which had confronted him for his offenses.

The five senior priests and their modern-day counterparts, unaware of the most profound concepts of the essential teaching (i.e., the Daishonin's Buddhism) and theoretical teaching (i.e., Shakyamuni's Buddhism), could not revere Nichiren Daishonin as the original Buddha. Today, the members of the Nikken sect, while claiming that they have inherited the tradition of Nikko Shonin, base themselves on Nikken rather than the Daishonin. Truly, they are "parasites in the lion's body" of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

5. You should refrain from indulging in poetry or non-Buddhist works, or from engaging in idleness and chatter without [having the aim of] rebuking slander.

THE Daishonin states: "Though one may have been fortunate enough to be born

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as a human being..., if he fails to study Buddhism and to refute its slanderers but simply spends his time in idleness and chatter, then he is no better than an animal dressed in priestly robes" (MW-3, 215).

Many priests, freely using lay followers' offerings and failing to carry out the practice of propagation, have succumbed to sensual pleasures. While living in the lap of luxury, they have wiled away their time in "idleness and chatter" and indulged in the crass amusements of the nouveau riche. The Daishonin says that while donning the garments of teachers of the Law, inwardly such priests are animals.

6. Lay believers should be strictly prohibited from visiting [heretical] temples and shrines. Moreover, priests should not visit slanderous temples or shrines, which are inhabited by demons, even if only to have a look around. To do so would be a pitiful violation [of the Daishonin's Buddhism.] This is not my own personal view; it wholly derives from the sutras [of Shakyamuni] and the writings [of Nichiren Daishonin].

THE SGI has all along strictly condemned slander, exactly as Nikko Shonin admonishes; this is a fact that is known to all. President Makiguchi's death in prison ultimately resulted from his refusal to compromise with slander.

By contrast, as successive revelations have made clear, the priesthood has become mired in slander.

The current high priest set up a family tombstone in the cemetery of a Zen temple, even conducting a ceremony to consecrate it there, and then left the temple grounds without refuting the mistaken views of the Zen priests, only to go on to a banquet. This shows just how erroneous the priesthood's faith is.

Nichiko once remarked, "A person who puts on a show of strictly refuting slander while inwardly guilty of accommodating slander is a monster."

Even well after the war had ended, Shinto talismans and other slanderous objects of worship continued to exist in Nichiren Shoshu temples—from local branch temples to the head temple itself. It was due to the efforts of Soka Gakkai members that these slanderous objects were discarded. Members from the early days can readily attest to this.

The Soka Gakkai instructed the priesthood to discard the slanderous objects of worship. It was due to the Soka Gakkai that Nichiren Shoshu was revived as the orthodox school of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

7. Disciples of ability should be allowed to devote themselves to the study of the Goshō and other doctrines of Buddhism, without being pressed to perform miscellaneous services for their teachers.

THIS is the spirit of selecting and raising capable people. The Daishonin's way of training his disciples is not an authoritarian system of apprenticeship. What is important is that each person be enabled to manifest his or her abilities fully and freely and carry out activities for the sake of the Law and kosen-rufu.

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The priesthood, instead of warmly raising people, forces people into submission, and capable people are systematically oppressed through harassment and violence reminiscent of the old Japanese army. Such practices represent a fearful deviation from Nikko Shonin's articles of warning.

8. Those of insufficient learning who are bent on obtaining fame and fortune are not qualified to call themselves my followers.

THE Daishonin refers to priests who merely seek profit and others' reverence, while not practicing properly themselves, as "priests with the hearts of dogs" (MW-4, 93), or "Law-devouring hungry spirits" (ibid.).

Nichiko once decried conditions within the priesthood stating: "The passage at the end of the *jigage* (verse) section of the 'Juryo,' or 16th, of the Lotus Sutra reads, '[This is my constant thought:] How I can cause all living beings to quickly attain Buddhahood?'"

This refers to the immense compassion of the original Buddha who is continually active over the three existences.

"However, the desire that ceaselessly preoccupies the priests of these degenerate times over the three existences is, 'How can I increase my wealth and quickly become rich?' It is truly deplorable to hear such things."

In view of his declaration that such priests "are not qualified to call themselves my followers," Nikko Shonin would certainly excommunicate the present priesthood. This is all too clear.

9. Until they are well versed in the difference between the provisional and true teachings, followers of later generations should visit this temple, setting aside the debt of gratitude they owe to their parents and teachers, and undertake various studies in order to free themselves [from the sufferings of birth and death] and attain the Way.

THE purpose for visiting the head temple is to contemplate and gain freedom from the sufferings of birth and death and to attain the Way of the Buddha. It is so that, with earnest devotion to Buddhist practice, one may sever one's attachments to the secular world and wholeheartedly devote oneself to "various studies." In essence, it is to learn correct faith.

Yet the head temple today, much to the contrary, is even more occupied with secular concerns than lay persons in society.

Priests marry and have families [although celibacy is the traditional practice of Buddhist priests, as is indicated in Article 25] and there is no serious study of any kind. Pervaded by an air of discrimination and violence, it has become a place where the faith of acolytes is destroyed and corrupt priests are nurtured.

10. Unless you have a thorough understanding of and firm faith in the teachings [of Nichiren Daishonin], you should not study T'ien-t'ai's doctrines.

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WHILE Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is concerned with "actuality," T'ien-t'ai's doctrine is concerned with "theory." It was the five senior priests who—failing to realize the monumental difference between the actual teaching and the theoretical, a difference comparable to that between heaven and earth—called themselves "disciples of T'ien-t'ai" [when pressured by the Kamakura government after the Daishonin's death].

If one delves into the doctrines of T'ien-t'ai before one has a profound grasp of the Daishonin's Buddhism, there is a danger that one may lose one's bearings and deviate from the path of correct faith.

Such admonitions notwithstanding, at the head temple, priests who have not yet made a thorough study of the Goshō lecture haphazardly on T'ien-t'ai doctrine. Moreover, priests' lack of earnestness in studying the Goshō itself runs counter to this article.

11. Followers of this school should engrave the teachings of the Goshō in their lives and thereby inherit the ultimate principles expounded by the master. Then, if they have any leisure time, they should inquire into the doctrine of the T'ien-t'ai school.

THE sixty-fifth high priest, Nichijun, clarified that this article is an admonishment of the tendency then prevalent to consider the Daishonin's teachings from the standpoint of T'ien-t'ai's doctrine. He made the point as follows, "The Daishonin's teachings are determined in every respect by the Daishonin's Goshō."

Here, Nichijun stresses the importance of basing ourselves on the Goshō.

Nikko Shonin states that his followers should "engrave the teachings of the Goshō in their lives" and "inherit the ultimate principles from the master."

The members of the Nikken sect have engraved not even a single word or phrase of the Goshō in their lives.

What's more, they have completely desecrated the path of master and disciple between themselves and Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin as well as the path of master and disciple between themselves and preceding high priests. Their actions epitomize the betrayal of the master. The Nikken sect on the most fundamental level goes against Nikko Shonin's admonition, "Followers of this school ... should inherit the ultimate principles expounded by the master."

12. You should be inclined to engage in discussion or deliver lectures [on Buddhism], and you should refrain from pursuing secular concerns.

WE can interpret this as an admonition to continually seek the Buddhist Way, persevere in our practice and study of Buddhism and advance toward kosen-rufu.

Yet I wonder if there is anyone in the Nikken sect who is inclined to engage in

earnest discussion or deliver lectures on the Law.

Neither spreading the teachings to others nor talking about Buddhism among themselves, they are a gathering of "Law-devouring hungry spirits." This is the reality of the present priesthood; it has completely turned its back on Nikko Shonin's admonitions.

13. Until kosen-rufu is achieved, propagate the Law to the full extent of your ability without begrudging your life.

THIS admonition, termed by Nichiko the "principle for all generations to come" and the "first principle of eternal importance," is the unchanging standard that is the most crucial and pivotal of the twenty-six warning articles.

The sixty-sixth high priest, Nittatsu, once remarked: "It is Soka Gakkai members who, embodying the spirit of spreading the teachings even at the cost of their lives, are safeguarding Buddhism, protecting the Dai-Gohonzon of the high sanctuary and carrying out the practice of propagation for the sake of the eternal transmission of the Law.

"At the same time, by overcoming all manner of persecutions by slanderous people, Soka Gakkai members are carrying out the practice of the 'six difficult and nine easy acts'¹ with their lives, and accomplishing kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law."

It is the SGI that is putting this admonition into practice. Our history is a golden record of our efforts to put this admonition into practice.

While the SGI has always put kosen-rufu first, the priesthood has always placed its own self-preservation above all else, thereby hindering the progress of kosen-rufu.

Where in the priesthood can one find people spreading the teachings "without begrudging their lives"? In stark contrast, not only do its members lead indulgent lives, but they are even seeking to destroy the SGI and to bring the flow of kosen-rufu to a halt. Such priests are enemies of the True Law and enemies of Nikko Shonin.

Without defeating these enemies of the Buddha, realizing the kosen-rufu of the True Law will be impossible. Therefore, just as Nikko Shonin admonishes, we must continue to pursue them without begrudging our lives. A person who does so will accumulate tremendous benefit.

14. As for practitioners who treasure the Law more highly than their own lives, even if they are but humble teachers of the Law, you must hold them in great esteem, revering them as you would the Buddha.

ARTICLES 14, 15 and 16 concern faith, practice and study, respectively.

With these three admonitions, Nikko Shonin teaches that faith is concerned with the individual's practice and real ability. It is not a person with outward status or position but one who is actually spreading the teachings and advancing

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kosen-rufu who should be respected.

Article 14 admonishes us that we should revere as a Buddha those who spread the teachings without begrudging their lives.

This is an anecdote I have mentioned before, but a television program once aired footage of a woman Soka Gakkai member propagating this Buddhism, making her a target of ridicule.

Nittatsu explained that he was so moved at viewing the TV program that he cried and bowed his head to the woman, “because I saw in this poor woman a noble Buddha working to save the people.”

Nittatsu also once remarked, “The offense of those who speak ill of and obstruct the votaries of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law—we who embrace faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism—is in fact more serious than the offense of Devadatta, who for a long time bore great malice toward Shakyamuni in his actions, words and thoughts.”

The phrase *practitioners who treasure the Law more highly than their own lives* refers to SGI members. Who apart from SGI members could it possibly indicate? The offense of evil priests who disdain and seek to plunge respectable SGI members into difficulties far exceeds that of Devadatta.

15. You should revere a teacher of the Law who engages in its propagation as a sacred priest, even though he may be your junior.

AS the testimony of priests who have severed ties with the head temple makes clear, discrimination along hierarchical lines pervades the priesthood to an extreme degree.

The current priesthood is totally out of accord with Nikko Shonin’s admonition that persons excelling in faith and practice should be respected, even though they may be of low rank or junior in age or position.

The SGI, by contrast, treasures those who practice in earnest, even though they may have joined only recently, prays for their growth and seeks to give them guidance and training in faith. For precisely this reason, we have succeeded in creating a steady stream of capable people for kosen-rufu and have raised many young successors.

The appellation *a teacher of the Law who engages in its propagation* refers to the SGI. However, inspired by contempt for the SGI, the priesthood excommunicated us.

16. Even though they may be lowly, you should deeply respect and regard as your teachers those whose understanding of Buddhism surpasses your own.

SESSON Doji learned the Law from a lowly demon. Herein lies the Buddhist spirit of seeking the Law.

This spirit, too, is entirely lacking in the priesthood, which is dominated by authoritarian and discriminatory attitudes.

The SGI is a world where people study together and support one another in seeking the Law—irrespective of social standing, profession or age—as members of the Soka family. Further, it is a realm where seniors apply themselves to raising their juniors, burning with a sense of responsibility to enable them to become more capable than they are themselves.

It is a world of equality; a world where one's real ability counts; a world based on the Law.

17. Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views.

NIKKO Shonin strictly warns that we must not follow a high priest who undermines Buddhism and the Law.

Nikko Shonin's inclusion of this article among the twenty-six admonitions clearly demonstrates that he did not think that the high priest was infallible.

On the contrary, we can infer that Nikko Shonin was concerned about the emergence of the kind of high priests who should not be followed. For this reason, we have refused to follow Nikken, who propounds his own views, and we have strictly taken him to task for his slander of the Law; in so doing, we have been carrying out a practice that exactly accords with the admonitions of Nikko Shonin.

President Toda once wrote:

In June 1943, Soka Gakkai leaders were ordered to the head temple. The Rev. Jikai Watanabe, on behalf of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, suggested that the Soka Gakkai direct its members to temporarily accept the Shinto talisman [to appease the authorities]. This suggestion was made with the current and retired high priests on hand as witnesses.

Again, in the "Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko," Nikko Shonin states that we should not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views. In this spirit, President Makiguchi flatly refused to accept the Shinto talisman and then left the head temple. (—from "The History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai")

It is precisely because President Makiguchi refused to go along with the authorities, persevered in following the true teaching and stood by the admonitions of Nikko Shonin to the end that the path of kosen-rufu was not lost.

Again (in August 1951), shortly after his inauguration as the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda spoke as follows:

At this time 700 years after the founding of true Buddhism, the entire body of Nichiren Shoshu believers amounts to a mere 10 or 20,000 households throughout the country. The present reality shames us before the two masters [Nichiren Daishonin, founder of true Buddhism, and Nikko Shonin, founder of the Head Temple Taiseki-ji].

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My heart is filled with trepidation at the thought of how the two masters would decry this situation and take us to task were they here today. My sense of unworthiness and shame pains me mentally and physically....

It is truly most unfortunate that at such a time as this there should be some in the priesthood who obstruct the advance of propagation out of senseless feelings of jealousy.

President Toda felt personally responsible for kosen-rufu. He stood up alone in the vanguard and took direct leadership of the propagation campaign.

However, far from cooperating with the Soka Gakkai, the priesthood at the time refused to show any understanding whatsoever. In addition, some priests, succumbing to irrational feelings of jealousy, actively obstructed efforts to propagate this Buddhism.

For President Makiguchi, too, the lack of understanding and obstructive actions of priests had been a constant source of irritation. And, in the end, he died in prison as a result of the priesthood's betrayal.

President Toda continued: "The long tradition of this school (Nichiren Shoshu), dating back 700 years, is on the one hand noble and pure, truly something that is worthy of respect. Nevertheless, it is bound to be plagued by 'mice and stray cats.' But eventually it will be rid of them, so there is nothing to worry about."

Sadly, the priesthood today has been overrun "by mice and stray cats." Odious priests, who prey on the Daishonin's Buddhism like so many stray cats and hungry mice and spend their time frantically jostling for offerings, must be driven off from the world of faith directed toward advancing kosen-rufu.

And what in fact has happened is that these corrupt priests, finding it impossible to remain in the pure world of kosen-rufu, have left it of their own accord.

18. Even if a view is set forth unanimously by a conference [of believers], the high priest should repudiate it if it goes against the Buddha's Law.

THIS warning article is paired with Article 17. The phrase *if he [it] goes against the Buddha's Law* is found in both.

The basic point is that truth or falsity should be determined neither by authority (i.e., by the high priest) nor by the weight of the view of the multitude (i.e., by a conference of believers). In all matters, what counts most is whether something accords with the correct Buddhist teaching. And it goes without saying that the Daishonin's golden words are the standard to be used in making any such determination.

In using his authority as high priest in an attempt to crush the correct views of the believers based on the Gosho, Nikken is going completely against this admonition.

19. Black robes should not be worn [by priests].

SINCE the time of Nichiren Daishonin, it has been part of the code of the Fuji school that priests should wear robes of a light-grey color [contrary to the black robes worn by priests of other sects]. In the first place, the reason for this was to protect the correct teaching. A sutra passage states, "Wearing black robes is slanderous; those who do so will certainly fall into hell."

By admonishing priests to wear garments different in color from those of the priests of other sects, Nikko Shonin taught that they should always conduct themselves in a manner befitting followers of Nichiren Daishonin. Being immediately recognizable as priests of the Fuji school, they would have to be careful to conduct themselves properly and in an upright manner. The spirit of this warning article is that followers of the Fuji school, as the Daishonin's followers, should be careful to ensure that their conduct and their faith are free of any blemish.

However, priests of the Nikken sect change their priestly robes to be less conspicuous in their immoral pursuits, with some going so far as to use pseudonyms to further conceal their identity.

The conduct of Nichiren Shoshu priests has become so deplorable that light-grey robes have now come to symbolize the height of priestly decadence. How Nikko Shonin would deplore the current state of affairs.

20. Jikitotsu should not be worn [by priests].

JKITOTSU are ornamental garments, pleated from the waist down, that are generally worn by priests of other sects. Nikko Shonin admonishes that priests must not wear ornate robes, but should be simple in their attire.

Thus, even though he may not be wearing a *jikitotsu* per se, a priest who wears such costly and luxurious robes as Nikken does is going completely against the spirit of this admonition.

21. You should not sit together with slanderers of the Law [at religious ceremonies] for fear of suffering the same punishment as they.

IN October 1922, a Nichiren Shoshu high priest (the fifty-seventh, Nissho) sat down together with the high priests of the Nichiren sect (Minobu school), the Kempon Hokke sect and other schools of the Nichiren sect and read the "Juryo" chapter and chanted daimoku in a ceremony led by the high priest of the Minobu school.

This high priest had joined representatives of other Nichiren schools in petitioning the government to grant the Daishonin the title of "Great Teacher (Daishi)." They gathered at a ceremony held to commemorate the conferral of the title of "Great Teacher of the Establishment of the True Teaching (Rissho Daishi)." [By joining the leaders of these heretical sects in this undertaking,] this high priest, in

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stark contrast with the conduct of the Daishonin, sought to ingratiate himself with the authorities.

After this, there was also a high-ranking priest (the sixtieth high priest, Nichikai, Nikken's father) who drafted a memorandum stating that the Daishonin's sacred tomb was at Minobu and submitted it to the government authorities.

Trampling on the sublime spirit of Nikko Shonin, who departed from Minobu [because of slander], these former high priests aligned themselves with the slanderers of Minobu. By acting in such a manner, they incurred the same offense as the Minobu school; they committed great slander.

22. You must not accept offerings from slanderers of the Law.

TO accept offerings made by slanderers is to condone their slander. The result of accepting offerings from slanderers, as with the previous warning article, is that one suffers the same retribution as they.

For this reason, priests who do not refute the mistaken views of lay followers who enshrine slanderous objects of worship, yet accept offerings from such followers, are turning their backs on this admonition.

Also, after the war, to increase the revenues of the impoverished head temple, the priesthood at one time planned to follow the example of other slanderous temples and turn Taiseki-ji into a tourist site. It was President Toda who stopped them from doing this. Thus the Soka Gakkai saved the priesthood from accepting the offerings of non-believers.

In light of this warning article, the contradictions in the priesthood's stance—in accusing the Soka Gakkai of slander while at the same time accepting the donations of Soka Gakkai members and living in temples donated by the Soka Gakkai—become apparent. In short, their true motive lies not in abiding by Nikko Shonin's admonitions but in amassing wealth; they have not the slightest interest in the distinction between correct and erroneous Buddhist teachings. Some people even believe that money is the current priesthood's object of worship.

23. Carrying a sword or staff in order to protect the Buddhist Law is permissible. However, [weapons] should not be worn when presiding over religious services, though accompanying priests may be permitted to carry them [to protect themselves and others].

NICHIKO commented on this warning article, saying, "This article applied to weapons of self-defense during certain periods of social unrest and turmoil in feudal times."

We should ponder the solemn spirit of Nikko Shonin conveyed by the clause "in order to protect the Buddhist Law." No matter how dangerous the circumstances, to protect the Buddhist Law, we must not begrudge our lives.

The SGI has persevered in protecting the Buddhist Law while undergoing great persecutions to pioneer kosen-rufu in the midst of the harsh realities of society. In this sense, we have truly put the spirit of this admonition into practice.

By contrast, the members of the priesthood, having completely relied on the SGI's efforts to protect Buddhism and Nichiren Shoshu, have grown decadent. They know nothing of the spirit to protect the Buddhist Law. All that concerns them is their own base self-preservation.

24. [At religious ceremonies] young acolytes should not occupy seats lower than those of high-ranking lay followers.

NIKKO Shonin instructs priests on the fundamental attitude they must take. He says that priests must not flatter or curry favor with lay followers who lack faith, even if they be of high social standing, because to do so would amount to degrading the Law.

In explaining this warning article, Nichiko once pointed out: "During times of strife, the warrior was all-powerful. In religious circles, the ordinary non-ranking priests faced poverty and hardships in their daily lives; therefore they tended to show the powerful feudal clans special treatment, which led the warrior to grow arrogant."

Simply put, though they might be impoverished, priests must not court money. Placing Buddhism above the mundane concerns of their daily lives, priests must possess the dignity to win the respect of lay followers. They should respect not people of high standing or power but people of faith. This is the spirit that Nikko Shonin stresses in this article.

However, not only have the members of the Nikken sect gone money-mad, but taking advantage of the respect and reverence that SGI members showed them, they discriminated against and looked down on lay followers.

Furthermore, they have denigrated and persecuted the SGI—a most praiseworthy organization of faith made up of ordinary people who have no special standing in society.

They are going completely against Nikko Shonin's admonition to make Buddhism the standard and not to fawn upon people of high standing.

25. My disciples should conduct themselves as holy priests, patterning their behavior after that of the late master. However, even if a high priest or a priest striving for practice and understanding should temporarily deviate from [the principle of] sexual abstinence, he may still be allowed to remain in the priesthood [as a common priest without rank].

THIS admonition is clear documentary proof that Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin absolutely prohibited priests from marrying.

The term *holy priests*, which may also be interpreted as pure priests, denotes priests who refrain from marrying and eating meat. That Nichiren Daishonin

himself had neither wife nor children, nor ate meat, is clear from the Gosho passage, "I, Nichiren, have neither wife nor children, nor do I eat fish or fowl" (MW-5, 6).

Again, to his follower Sairen-bo, he wrote: "Even a priest who belongs to one of the provisional sects should do so [observe the precepts not to marry or eat meat]. It goes without saying that it applies even more so to a practitioner of the True Law" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1357).

Nichiko, touching on this admonition, once remarked: "I see the present situation as a temporary anomaly.... Eventually and as a natural development, I pray, we will reform ourselves and return to the conditions that prevailed during the time of our founder, Nichiren Daishonin, and Nikko Shonin, who succeeded him and established the head temple." [Nichiko himself observed the precept of celibacy throughout his life.]

Based on the premise that a priest who has relations with a woman should by rights be defrocked and made to return to secular life, Nikko Shonin here stipulates that, in the event that a high priest temporarily deviates from the principle of sexual abstinence, his rank should be reduced to that of common priest.

Nichiko comments on this admonition, "It can only be interpreted as meaning that the person should lose the position of high priest and descend to a low status."

Far from "temporarily deviating," Nikken, by his repeated shameless conduct and the fact that he is married, has long continued to defile the character of the school and bring disgrace upon the chair of the high priest. Nikko Shonin clearly directs that such a person should be removed from his post and stripped of his rank. Those who go against this admonition are traitors of Nikko Shonin.

26. You should treasure those practitioners who are skilled in difficult debate, just as the late master did.

THE phrase *skilled in difficult debate* is from a passage of the "Yujutsu" (Emerging From the Earth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. These are words spoken in praise of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Nichiren Daishonin devoted himself to raising people of outstanding ability, comparable to those described in this sutra passage. For example, in a doctrinal debate with a scholar of the Tendai sect, the Daishonin appointed Nichimoku to represent him. To the astonishment of many, the youthful Nichimoku completely refuted the learned priest.

There are many masters of propagation in the SGI who have developed formidable skill in difficult debate. All along, we have highly praised, respected and honored the courageous practitioners of kosen-rufu who refute false teachings and spread the true teaching, thereby leading people to take faith in the Gohonzon. This is the tradition of the SGI.

For this reason, while spreading the True Law throughout the world, we have been able to prosper along with the Law.

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Without people who spread the Law, kosen-rufu would never be anything more than an empty dream. In this final admonition, Nikko Shonin reiterates the point that those who spread the Law should be treasured.

The Nikken sect, however, looked down on, used and ultimately excommunicated the Soka Gakkai—an order of emissaries of the original Buddha and practitioners of propagation.

In reading each of these warning articles, it becomes clear that the present priesthood has gone against every one of Nikko Shonin's admonitions and trampled on their spirit.

Nikko Shonin states, "Those who violate even one of these articles cannot be called disciples of Nikko." This is the strictness of the path of master and disciple. The priesthood, which has violated not one but every article, is an "anti-Nichiren Daishonin" and "anti-Nikko Shonin" group who has separated itself from the lifeline of the True Law.

Today, there is no legitimate body apart from the SGI—no body that inherits and carries on the correct teaching and practice directly connected to Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin. In light of Nikko Shonin's articles of warning, in light of the Goshō, and in light of the reality of worldwide kosen-rufu, this is something that no one can deny.

The priesthood recovered its legitimacy thanks to the Soka Gakkai. The Soka Gakkai made Nichiren Shoshu the correct school (*shoshu*) again. However, by excommunicating the Soka Gakkai, the priesthood has of its own accord completely cut itself off from the world of correct faith. Without the Soka Gakkai, it has become a heretical school.

The SGI is the order of the original Buddha. Those who advance together with the SGI will definitely enter the path of attaining Buddhahood. Their lives will be bathed in great benefit and fortune over the three existences. □

1. Six difficult and nine easy acts: A series of comparisons set forth by Shakyamuni in "The Emergence of the Treasure Tower"(eleventh) chapter of the Lotus Sutra to show how difficult it will be to embrace the sutra in the evil age after his death. (Refer to *A Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*, p. 400–01.)