

## Questions & Answers on Faith: Why Do We Emphasize the Mentor-and-Disciple Relationship?

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**Q: Where does the emphasis Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism places on the mentor and disciple relationship come from?**

A: When Shakyamuni Buddha, a man enlightened to the Mystic Law of the universe, spoke to those who gathered around him to seek this Law, whatever he said later became what we call Buddhism. Originally Buddhism was a way of educating people — a course, if you will, in how to live, carried out through dialogue among ordinary people and a great teacher or mentor. This basic formula remains intact today in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI.

When we decide to start practicing this Buddhism, to receive the Gohonzon and chant, we naturally become part of this tradition.

To accept the Gohonzon also entails accepting Nichiren Daishonin as our teacher — he first inscribed the Gohonzon and his teachings are the basis of our practice. This is no different than in other religions: If we become Christians, we accept Jesus Christ and the Church as our teachers; if we become Muslims, we follow Mohammad's teachings, etc.

Nichiren Daishonin taught that the mentor–disciple relationship is essential in Buddhism. In one Goshō he even stated, “When the master and his disciple are not of the same mind, they cannot accomplish anything” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 218).

In Buddhism, the mentor's intent is to save all people from suffering and raise disciples who can carry on this mission into the future. Shakyamuni determined in the “Life Span” chapter, “At all times I think to myself: / How can I cause living beings / to gain entry into the unsurpassed way / and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha?” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 232).

So it is thus the way of the disciple to perceive the mentor's great compassion for all people and respond to it. The mentor–disciple relationship, then, can only reach fruition, can only really “come to life,” when the disciple realizes he or she has a mentor.

While starting to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism means taking Nichiren Daishonin as our teacher, we may not feel at first that he is our mentor. This feeling of course cannot be forced upon anyone — it has to come from inside. While Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism clearly teaches the necessity of the mentor–disciple relationship, it never orders that we accept this person or that person as our mentor.

The importance of having a mentor in faith has been encouraged by the SGI only because this is what Nichiren Daishonin taught. Thus the lifeblood of the mentor–disciple relationship has lived on in the organization's successive presidents, each courageous enough to assume the awesome task of being a mentor in modern times.

As the 65th high priest, Nichijun, testified in 1958:

The members of the Soka Gakkai today have been taught the principles of the Daishonin's Buddhism by their mentor, President Toda.... This is the true practice of the way of the Lotus Sutra.

SGI President Ikeda now continues this “true practice of the way of the Lotus Sutra” with the belief that upholding this relationship, leaving it to the next generation, is the very root of Buddhism.

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Subject: World Tribune 06/27/97 n.3145 p.9 WT970627p09

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Keywords: Answers Concepts Disciple Emphasize Faith Mentor Practice Questions Relationship Study  
Terms Tribune World