

QUESTION of the MONTH: ‘Why did you exchange your Nikken-transcribed Gohonzon?’

As long as there’s an organization of the Daishonin’s followers practicing as the Goshu teaches, that’s where you’ll find me. I’ve broken through too many dependencies to backslide now and deny that I alone have the power to access my Buddhahood. How could a high priest even consider obstructing this privilege we each inherently possess? I exchanged the Nikken Gohonzon not because of his calligraphy but rather to stand up and support the movement and wonderful fellowship of believers called the SGI.

— RICHARD CASSELMAN, West Hollywood, Calif.

I felt as if I was playing for two teams. I mean I was full force supporting the SGI, but then I still had the Nikken Gohonzon. I could not be part of both. One cannot be on good terms with good and evil at the same time. I know what’s right for me.

— A.J. CASTANEDAS, Fort Hood, Texas

Recently, members in my district were encouraging me to exchange my Nikken Gohonzon. I did not see the value in doing this exchange. However, after chanting I realized that exchanging the Gohonzon would be a cause to stand up to Nikken. If I were to keep the Nikken Gohonzon I would be encouraging injustice. On July 2, I received the Nichikan Gohonzon. I have never felt so close and connected to my practice and to the SGI.

— ALICE WATSON, San Jose, Calif.

In December 1990–January 1991, we witnessed in Japan the great difference of attitude between SGI members and Nikken’s followers. For the very first time we felt that our true mentor was Mr. Ikeda, because he was struggling against the evil, the hypocrisy and the ingratitude as Nichiren would have done. When the day came, we were happy and honored to receive the Gohonzon from the SGI, as we believed (and still believe) that Mr. Ikeda’s policy in promoting kosen-rufu is the right one in accordance with the “26 Admonitions” by Nikko Shonin.

— STEFANO CIRELLI and LUCIA BATTAGLIOLI, Milan, Italy

I exchanged the Gohonzon only after I had stated to my leaders what I truly felt about this issue, as my first reaction was of disbelief. I mean, I couldn’t follow the raw emotions that surfaced at first. Only when a senior leader told me to follow what was in my heart, not what people told me, did I convince myself to do it. Now, in hindsight, I deeply appreciate the whole episode as a moment where my practice was shaken to the core and I had to grapple with my fundamental darkness.

— FRANCISCO PALACIO, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

When our priest said the temple issue began with SGI President Ikeda’s speech against authoritarianism, my mind was made up. The temple continues to regard itself as superior to us. Too much suffering is caused with that kind of thinking. I also asked our priest what his concept of world peace was. His answer was that we should all center on the local temples. The SGI has spread this Buddhism like no one else ever has! I returned the Nikken-transcribed Gohonzon to let them know I want world peace.

— TESSIE METCALF, Wheaton, Md.

At first I was a little resistant to exchanging the Gohonzon. I thought, well since we have a choice, there is really no need. And since both Gohonzon work, it doesn’t matter. When I

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learned how Nichikan's spirit was to restore Nichiren Daishonin's teaching, I felt the eternal nature of that sincerity pulsate in our organization. By exchanging the Gohonzon, I would be casting my vote in the universe to get the negative influence of Nikken out of my life. I really feel that world peace is within our reach when we stand up for the dignity of the human being in this way.

—FREDERICK FRIEDLAND, San Francisco

When the opportunity arose to exchange the Nikken Gohonzon for the Nichikan Gohonzon, I knew there was nothing wrong with the one I had had all that time because of the tremendous benefits I received during the first decade or so of my practice. However, I asked myself, if President Ikeda had a Nikken Gohonzon, what would he do? The answer was clear, so I traded mine in during the first chance offered. As long as we "rely on the Law, not upon persons," I really don't think it matters which one we chant to.

— LIZ CARTER, Denver

Nine years into my practice, in 1983, I received a Gohonzon transcribed by Nikken. Even though it had a gorgeous green-gold satin backing, I was immediately depressed by it and puzzled by my reaction. I hadn't felt this way before. Excommunication by Nikken spurred my desire to exchange this Gohonzon. Right away I felt a clear difference in chanting to the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan, a lightness and joy. Clear proof that the life-condition of the transcriber *deeply* affects those who chant to it. It has revolutionized my practice and helped me continue to chant.

— JANE DOUGLAS YOUNG, New York

I participated in the Gohonzon exchange because I saw it as a special opportunity to breathe new determination and vitality into my practice. I was experiencing many obstacles, my life-condition was low, and my practice was in a slump. Since receiving this beautiful new Gohonzon, I have overcome several significant obstacles, introduced a friend to the practice, challenged myself by teaching weekly "Gosho school" for new members, and improved my attitude toward my practice.

— AMY LATHECROW, Bakersfield, Calif.

In the beginning, I incorrectly viewed the situation as a power struggle between President Ikeda and Nikken. But after I began a personal and group study campaign, I started to understand the importance of having the Daishonin's spirit to stand up against injustices and to root out evil. Exchanging the Nikken-transcribed Gohonzon was a taste of true freedom.

— MAUDE O'DONNELL, Houston

After I had spent a few years in the temple movement, I saw how empty and threadbare it truly was. I returned to the SGI and began to feel how lifeless chanting to the Nikken Gohonzon was. I decided to make the choice for "life" — to receive the new Gohonzon. I feel refreshed and vigorous since then, and I have received many benefits.

— PATRICIA WOOLMAN, Alhambra, Calif.

Returning the Nikken Gohonzon made me feel like finally I had a concrete course of action to take, in addition to daimoku, to fight against Nikken. To me, it was the ultimate rejection and act of finality — like saying, "I don't want you."

— CLAUDIA WELLINGTON, New York

Thanks to all who responded!

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