

**No Other Way of Knowing
STANDS TO REASON
Lessons for today from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin
By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor**

If you propagate it, devils will arise without fail. Were it not for these, there would be no way of knowing that this is the true teaching. (“Letter to the Brothers,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 145)

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this in 1275 to encourage the two Ikegami brothers. Their father was pulling out all the stops to hinder their Buddhist practice — he hated them being Buddhist. First he disowned one, then told the other that he would do the same to him. It was a crazy situation.

But the Daishonin knew that Ryokan, the chief priest of the Ritsu sect, a close friend of the father, was pushing the father’s buttons to make him do these things. Ryokan was using the father to get at Nichiren Daishonin.

This was happening at a time when the Daishonin had retired to Mount Minobu and through many letters was encouraging his followers in a renewed wave of propagation. As disciples like the Ikegami brothers propagated the Law, they experienced similar persecutions to what the Daishonin had been through before them. He would essentially tell them: “I’ve been there. Don’t worry,” and share his experiences.

To these brothers, the Daishonin also pointed out that being persecuted proves that your teaching is true. In other words, whenever an idea has something great to offer the people, something liberating for them, there will always be those who try to suppress it. They don’t want it to ruin their plans to keep people in check or make money off of people. Ryokan was one of those who tried to suppress people — an arrogant priest if ever there were one.

A few years previous, Ryokan and some priests from another sect, Nembutsu, fearing that the Daishonin’s compelling remonstrations to regent Hei no Saemon would have some effect (and that they would then lose their priestly influence on the government) targeted the Daishonin for serious character assassination. And it was Ryokan and these Nembutsu priests who went so far as to hire thugs to set fires and even murder people in Sagami Province, then accuse the Daishonin’s followers of committing all the crimes. This led directly to the Daishonin’s exile to Sado Island. Ryokan was more like a drug lord than a priest!

Obviously, if Ryokan et al. didn’t think the Daishonin’s teachings were powerful, they would have left him alone. They would never have gone to such extremes.

The same paradigm is in effect today. The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood isn’t jealous of the SGI just because it’s a large organization or because it has a lot of money — the truth is the priesthood knows the SGI has a compelling message for the world’s people. The priests are riled by the increasing international influence that the SGI’s philosophy of humanism is having. They have little, if any, such influence.

This brings up what I call the polluted river principle. When you walk alongside a polluted river — the kind with lots of trash floating in it, the kind that stinks — you appreciate more how great a clean river is.

Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is like a clean river, which all of us in the SGI are part of — we’re the waves on the top, we’re the currents inside it. The priesthood, then, with its jealousy toward the SGI, has become the polluted river that makes us grateful for our clean river. Were it not for this polluted river, perhaps we wouldn’t understand as much as we do now how great our river is.

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Title: Opinion: No Other Way of Knowing
Subject: World Tribune 01/23/98 n.3175 p.6 WT980123p06
Author: Jeff Farr
Keywords: Issue Knowing Opinion Other Reason Stands Study Temple Tribune World