

## STANDS TO REASON: Matching the Sutra

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**As the Buddha taught in his will — to follow the Law, not the person — you should not trust those who do not preach in accord with the sutras, no matter how wonderful they may appear. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 9)**

Nichiren Daishonin lived at a time when the various Buddhist sects were vying for popularity — for more believers, for more influence with the government officials. There were many charismatic priests around supposedly preaching the Law but who were mostly in religion to gain power.

How many of them had a philosophy that could save the nation? The Daishonin knew that his was the best philosophy. But he also realized that it wouldn't be enough just to broadcast his belief to everyone and expect them to agree with him. He had to educate people, he felt. He had to teach them certain standards by which they could judge a correct religion from an incorrect one, a good religious leader from a corrupt one. He hoped that then people would realize the greatness of his teachings.

His point was simple in this 1260 letter to an unknown recipient: You shouldn't trust priests whose words don't match the sutras, especially the Lotus Sutra, Buddhism's highest teaching. Rather, you should judge these priests by whether they are walking and talking what Buddhism teaches. Were the priests of the day sharing the real deal or just making up things that sounded good?

The greatest divergence Nikken has made from the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin's letters is, as I mentioned last time, his new teaching that he alone knows the way to enlightenment. The temple says that only through association with Nikken can we become happy, and this clearly does not match the Buddhist teachings: Both the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin's writings emphatically state that we attain enlightenment through our own efforts.

The U.S. temples have of late been using the following analogy of a tree to explain Nikken's stance: The Dai-Gohonzon is the tree roots, Nikken is the trunk, the Gohonzon enshrined at the branch temples are the branches, and the Gohonzon at members' homes are the leaves. So if we don't follow Nikken, the temples say, our individual Gohonzon become like fallen, withering leaves, cut off from the trunk of benefit, Nikken. By contrast, the Daishonin teaches that "the Gohonzon is found in faith alone" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 213).

The Daishonin also mentions in the above quote to "follow the Law, not the person." The idea that we shouldn't trust those whose words don't match the sutras ultimately suggests that we should trust ourselves. Near the end of his life, as the Daishonin shares here, Shakyamuni instructed his disciples to depend on themselves and the Law, on no one and nothing else. SGI President Ikeda has said that this is "the very heart of Shakyamuni's lifelong teachings."

Whenever I read one of Nikken's speeches or messages, like his New Year's message in the January *Nichiren Shoshu Monthly*, I get the impression he's the great pretender — pretending to know the heart of Buddhism but knowing little of it. When Nikken encourages the temple members to visit the new Grand Reception Hall, which opens this month, saying that it "should not be viewed as a mere architectural accomplishment," that "it contains countless, immeasurable significances as a symbolic representation of the refutation of all heretical beliefs and erroneous teachings," he reminds me of one of those

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guys outside a show tent at the county fair yelling at passersby to come inside, promising he's got the wonders of the world. I feel sorry for the tens of thousands of temple members hoping that what's inside Nikken's show tent will live up to his spiel, plopping their cash into his hands, not realizing they're about to be taken. Not realizing that there's *nothing* inside.

*Six in a series*

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