

## STANDS TO REASON: Twisted Understanding

By JEFF FARR

Associate Editor

**More than laymen or women, it is the priests with twisted understanding who are the Buddha's worst enemies. ("Letter to Niike," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 257)**

Nichiren Daishonin's "Letter to Niike" (1280) was written two years before he died. The Daishonin's later writings were mostly letters of encouragement to his believers, who continued to write to him and visit him at Mount Minobu until the end. Niike of this letter's title was one of these sincere believers, a samurai of the Kamakura regime.

The Daishonin retired to Minobu in 1274 to eternalize his Buddhism — to take all the needed measures to make sure it would last. Isn't it telling that in the final phase of eternalizing his Buddhism, he wrote so much to his believers? He was also training priests at Minobu, but perhaps he intuited that the common people would really be the ones to eternalize his Buddhism, not priests.

In "Letter to Niike," the Daishonin clarifies that the "worst enemies" of Buddhism will, in fact, be priests. SGI-USA Study Department Vice Leader Greg Martin explained this recently in his "Right From Wrong" series, stating that "the enemies of Buddhism do not appear as ordinary people but as priests who...hold distorted views" (Feb. 27 "Seize the Day").

After the Daishonin's death in 1282, it was indeed the senior priests who started entertaining distorted views, not the believers. The only senior priest who remained true to the Daishonin's spirit was Nikko Shonin — one out of six — and joining him were many of the believers.

It was an ordinary believer, Nanjo Tokimitsu, who protected Nikko when he left Minobu, welcoming him to the Tokimitsu estate (in the Fuji area) and helping him found the head temple near there. It was the believers who built the first building at the head temple. And it was the believers who were entrusted by Nikko, along with his successor, Nichimoku, to propagate the Daishonin's Buddhism into the future.

In short, the Daishonin's Buddhism would never have made it without the people. The temple often talks of how the priesthood has maintained its purity over 700 years, but the new series "The Untold History of the Fuji School" in *Living Buddhism* shows what a shaky history the priesthood actually has in protecting the Law.

When the Daishonin says that "priests with twisted understanding...are the Buddha's worst enemies," the flip side is that ordinary people — with healthy faith — are the Buddha's greatest allies. Later in "Letter to Niike," the Daishonin, using the example of one of his contemporaries, says, "Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple is believed to be a living Buddha, but men and women who believe in the Lotus Sutra should be seated above him" (MW-1, 257). Today, Nikken pretends to be a living Buddha; he lets his followers call him the "Daishonin of modern times." He deceives by saying that only through knowing him can we know happiness. As the men and women of the SGI, we are the people who are really upholding the Lotus Sutra. And we should be seated high above Nikken. We are the living Buddhas today.

The Buddha's worst enemies, priests, will always be first to wage war on what Buddhism teaches, the Daishonin suggests. And it is the worst sort of war that they wage: war that can capture our faith and twist it; war that can even twist us into adoring our enemies and, wittingly or not, despising what Buddhism teaches.

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Author: Jeff Farr

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