

## **'Imminent Collapse' Story Doesn't Hold Up**

**By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor**

**Santa Monica, Calif., May 12**

Since the priesthood's announcement last month that it will soon demolish the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo), some U.S. priests and temple members have continued saying that the reason for this is structural deficiencies found in the building. Claiming that corrosive ocean sand was mixed in the Main Temple's concrete, they say that the temple's reinforcing bars are weakened to the point of imminent collapse. Rusty stains on the temple's marble are the proof of all this, they say.

There are two main reasons to doubt these claims. First, no evidence of them has been presented, while evidence countering them is available in abundance. For instance, the Taiseki-ji: Construction Work Record, published in 1974 by the Joint Corporate Entity for the Construction of the Grand Main Temple, contradicts the ocean sand theory. "Absolutely no sea sand was used as an aggregate for the concrete, as it had been decided from the beginning to use gravel from the Fuji River," it says.

Second, the priesthood has never actually gone on record backing the idea that the building is unsafe. Even Nikken, when announcing the Dai-Gohonzon's transfer from the building, didn't mention anything about the structure being unsound.

Those who claim the Main Temple unsafe cite the Jan. 16 issue of Emyo, a Nichiren Shoshu newspaper, as their source. But Emyo in turn cites no authorities on the matter: no architects, no contractors, no engineers. According to Emyo, the rust in itself proves that the temple is about to fall over. And U.S. temple members who say they've seen the rust themselves have also jumped to this conclusion.

Meanwhile, Kimio Yokoyama, chief architect of the Main Temple, cries for a "professional investigation as to why such stains appeared. Upon the findings of such an investigation, appropriate measures must be taken." He points out that "it is extremely hasty to conclude that the steel inside the structure has started to 'rust' based on surface stains." He asks, "If a blemish appeared on a person's skin, would that be enough to conclude his or her whole body was in jeopardy?"

Yoshimune Zaitso, one of the Main Temple's general contractors, adds that "many engineers [about 120] pooled their expertise and developed new technology for the Grand Main Temple. Much of this new technology had a great influence on steel structure construction that came later.... The Grand Main Temple pioneered welding technology for steel structures that is now used in the construction of super skyscrapers."

Professor Kiyotaka Kawase of the University of Niigata's engineering department, a witness to the painstaking efforts of men like Yokoyama and Zaitso to then devise the highest-grade concrete for the temple, has also expressed his outrage. He argues that "although Japan's concrete engineering field has undergone a variety of experiences and advances over the past quarter century, Taiseki-ji's Grand Main Temple undeniably served as a key starting point." For years after its completion, Kawase says, concrete engineers referred to state-of-the-art concrete as "the kind used at Taiseki-ji."

The bottom line here is that no professional investigation of the Main Temple's current condition has been done. So there's no way to say its roof is about to cave in.

Perhaps foreseeing protests from all the individuals and companies that spent eight years constructing the Main Temple — and are very proud of what they accomplished — Nikken's stated reason for removing the Dai-Gohonzon and destroying the building is simply to "refute the great slander of Ikeda and others." Nikken may also be fearing another protest from the 7,000-member Japan Institute of Architects, which, when he

Title: Opinion: 'Imminent Collapse' Story Doesn't Hold Up

Subject: World Tribune 05/22/98 n.3192 p.1 WT980522p01

Author: Jeff Farr

Keywords: Collapse Doesnt Hold Imminent Issue News Opinion Story Temple

claimed in 1995 that the head temple's Grand Reception Hall could not withstand an earthquake, protested its tear-down.

Thus the "great slander" rationale has become Nichiren Shoshu's official line, and the reasoning set forth in Emyo has been untouched, at least by Nikken and the priesthood in Japan. That Emyo's reporting is still being used in the United States calls into question just what Emyo is. Emyo is published by the Myokan-ko, a chapter of lay members affiliated with priests at one of the lodging temples at the head temple; its editors are lay leaders, although priests are very involved behind the scenes at the newspaper. While Emyo is widely circulated among the temple membership and has been used by Nikken to set forth various positions on issues, Nikken and his priests do not see it as their official voice. For that they have the Dai-Nichiren and their missives from the Administrative Office. They use Emyo to get their more controversial messages out to their membership, to try a lie out, but can, when need be, distance themselves from Emyo, shirking responsibility for its fabrications.

Of late, Nikken has been publicly distancing himself from Emyo. At a ceremony on April 19, Nikken told his audience that an April 16 report in Emyo, which purported that his seating platform in the new Reception Hall was "raised so that [the high priest] may have a complete view of the interior and see the lay believers..." was incorrect. Nikken pronounced: "That article is wrong. [The seat] was raised because I could not see the Gohonzon well from my vantage point."

To sum up: Given that Emyo is the only Nichiren Shoshu publication to run with the imminent collapse story, that Nikken has never publicly commented on this story, and that Nikken is currently distancing himself from Emyo, U.S. priests and temple members who share the story as if it were the Nichiren Shoshu party line are doing a great disservice to whomever will listen to them. Not every U.S. temple is publicly propounding the Main Temple's imminent collapse; in fact, only the Los Angeles temple has explained the demolition this way at a meeting. But through conversation and via the Internet, priests and temple members across the country continue to tell this tall tale, to temple members and SGI-USA members, as if it were the gospel truth.

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