

## STANDS TO REASON: Against the Intent of This Sutra

By JEFF FARR

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**There is a difference if one chants the daimoku while acting against the intent of this sutra. There are many forms of slander that go against the correct practice of this sutra. (“The Fourteen Slanders,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 207)**

The Fourteen Slanders,” written in 1276, is another of the later letters that Nichiren Daishonin sent from his retirement at Mount Minobu. This one was to Matsuno Rokuro Zaemon Nyudo, a believer who had written the Daishonin with a question that had been troubling him: “How great is the difference between the blessings received when a sage chants the daimoku and the blessings received when we chant it?” The Daishonin’s answer was simple: “One is in no way superior to the other” (MW-3, 207).

Matsuno’s question might seem silly. Basically, it was like asking “Are the benefits a smart person gets from chanting better than mine?” There’s no difference, the Daishonin assures him.

Taking Matsuno’s question seriously and praising him for asking it, the Daishonin uses his answer to expand on the idea of correct practice — to stress that it’s not enough just to chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. You have to be in accord with the Lotus Sutra’s teachings, too, if you want to experience the full benefit of practicing Buddhism.

The religious practice of the temple and the SGI may seem identical. Both groups chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to the Gohonzon. Both study the Daishonin’s writings. Both try to spread their practice.

But by “acting against the intent of the sutra,” the temple diverges from correct practice. *Acting against the intent* means, in one sense, to chant with a contrary spirit and understanding to the Daishonin’s. The Daishonin, after all, emphasizes in “The Fourteen Slanders” that we should practice as expressed in this Lotus Sutra passage: “We care nothing for our bodies or lives / but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way” (*The Lotus Sutra*, pp. 194–95). The Law, the unsurpassed way, the road to enlightenment, should be the center of our practice, of our lives.

In the temple, though, this spirit is skewed. Since “the high priest alone receives the Buddhism of the Daishonin,” as one U.S. chief priest said in a lecture earlier this month, Nikken becomes the way. And this misunderstanding then misinforms prayer in the temple. In the same lecture, this chief priest told his audience that “having faith in the present High Priest Nikken Shonin” is the very foundation of correct practice; people wind up essentially praying to him. This “grave offense” of going against the intent of Buddhism — for following another way than the unsurpassed way — “piles up until it sends one plummeting to hell” (MW-3, 216), the Daishonin writes.

The Daishonin lists the 14 slanders, from arrogance to grudges, and, if you take a close look at them, they all boil down to not seeking the Law. Not being selflessly committed to it. Not making the unsurpassed way our own.

“The ultimate measure of faith is found in the spirit to devote one’s life, far transcending any quest for personal merit,” SGI President Ikeda explains in an upcoming “Third Stage of Life” installment. “This spirit of devotion is true selflessness. It is to cast aside selfish desires. It is complete dedication to the Law and to humanity.

At the end of “The Fourteen Slanders,” the Daishonin describes the freedom to which a life so committed leads. He promises Matsuno, “To your amazement you will see that the

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entire universe is the land of Tranquil Light” (MW-3, 217). Your mind will take flight into the universe, he seems to say.

When we deepen our resolve to travel the way, our minds and our lives soar. With-the-intent practice is like flying. Against-the-intent practice is like plummeting.

*Ten in a series*

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