

Study Department Entrance Examination

The SGI-USA Study Department held the Entrance Examination on April 19. Each answer was worth 3 points except for No. 33, which was worth 4 points. A perfect score was 100. (See box at the bottom of p. 15 for answers.)

Part I: The Life of Nichiren Daishonin

Q1. What was the teaching that Nichiren Daishonin proclaimed on April 28, 1253?

- (A) The Lotus Sutra, expounded by Shakyamuni.
- (B) The Orally Transmitted Teachings.
- (C) Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.
- (D) Hinayana Buddhism.
- (E) T'ien-t'ai's *ichinen sanzen*.

Q2. Describe the significance of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in terms of Nichiren Daishonin's identity.

- (A) He revealed himself to be greater than common mortals.
- (B) He began to carry out the role of Bodhisattva Jogyo.
- (C) He underwent a change of heart.
- (D) He revealed himself as the Buddha who is one with the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.
- (E) The Tatsunokuchi Persecution was the end of a series of persecutions that had befallen him.

Q3. Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly stated in his writings that a Buddha is what?

- (A) A superior being.
- (B) A person without problems.
- (C) A person who will appear after kosen-rufu is achieved.
- (D) An awakened common mortal.
- (E) One who attains happiness only in the afterlife.

Q4. To foster the faith of the disciples he was training at Mount Minobu, the Daishonin gave an important series of lectures. What were these lectures on, and under what name were they set down in writing by Nikko Shonin?

- (A) The events from the Tatsunokuchi Persecution until his retirement to Minobu — "On the Buddha's Behavior."
- (B) The inappropriateness of Shakyamuni's teachings in the Latter Day of the Law — "Teaching, Practice and Proof."
- (C) Spreading the teaching to save all people — "Repaying Debts of Gratitude."
- (D) Understanding the time and the appropriate teaching — "The Selection of the Time."
- (E) Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra — "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings."

Q5. What activity by Nichiren Daishonin's followers caused the authorities to persecute them?

- (A) As the followers of the Daishonin became more active in propagation, the authorities began to persecute them.

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- (B) As the followers of the Daishonin began accepting the teachings of other sects, the authorities began to persecute them.
- (C) As the followers of the Daishonin began gathering together to study the Daishonin's letters, the authorities began to persecute them.
- (D) As the followers of the Daishonin stopped going to the temples of other sects, the authorities began to persecute them.
- (E) As the followers of the Daishonin began to slander government officials, the authorities began to persecute them.

Q6. Why did five of the six senior priests abandon the Daishonin's teachings after he died?

- (A) They gave up their faith when accused as spies for the Mongolian invasion.
- (B) Upon examining various documents, writings and treatises, they determined that the Daishonin's philosophy contradicted Shakyamuni Buddha's teachings.
- (C) The desire to marry, have children and accumulate money was very strong and they did not care for the strict guidelines set down by Nichiren Daishonin.
- (D) The steward of the Minobu area, Hakiri Sanenaga, refused to allow them to visit the temple there and threatened to behead them.
- (E) They did not really understand the Daishonin's teachings and his intent in faith, believing he had only taught a form of Tendai Buddhism.

Q7. What was Nikko Shonin's purpose in writing "The Twenty-six Admonitions?"

- (A) The purpose was to enable lay believers to comprehend the role of the priesthood.
- (B) The purpose was to help believers understand the true meaning of practice for oneself and practice for others.
- (C) The purpose was to protect the purity of the Daishonin's teachings and convey a correct understanding of the Daishonin's intention.
- (D) The purpose was to explain why the lay believers were persecuted and why the Dai-Gohonzon was inscribed after the Atsuhara Persecution.
- (E) The purpose was to teach the meaning and consequence of slanderous thoughts, words and deeds.

Part 2: "On Attaining Buddhahood"

Q8. What does it mean to "perceive the nature of your own life"?

- (A) To understand the source of the world's problems.
- (B) To understand that we can always be forgiven for our bad karma.
- (C) To realize our shallow understanding of life.
- (D) To realize that Buddhahood exists at the most fundamental level of life.
- (E) To realize that we share a common destiny with all people.

Q9. What is the Daishonin trying to illustrate by using the analogy of a poor man counting his neighbor's wealth day and night?

- (A) Good fortune includes material wealth.
- (B) Money is not the answer to a happy life.
- (C) Only by depending on our own Buddha nature can we overcome the sufferings of birth and death.
- (D) If we are preoccupied with other people's good fortune, we cannot focus on creating our own.
- (E) By associating with "good friends," those who have good fortune, we will eventually gain our own

fortune.

Q10. What constitutes the attitudes of non-Buddhists according to this letter?

- (A) Perceiving the true nature of our life and the lives of others.
- (B) Striving to have confidence in our Buddha nature.
- (C) Seeking the Law outside oneself.
- (D) Never being swayed by external circumstances or obstacles.
- (E) Strengthening our conviction to change our destiny.

Q11. What does this letter emphasize as a key element in our Buddhist practice?

- (A) That we cannot change our destiny without the help of others.
- (B) That we should summon up deep conviction that Myoho-rence-kyo is our life itself.
- (C) That we should not fear death.
- (D) That we will perceive the nature of our life through abandoning the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.
- (E) That we will grow through overcoming hardships.

Questions 12-13 are based on the following passage:

“It [the Jomyo Sutra] further states that if the minds of the people are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 4).

Q12. What Buddhist principle is illustrated by this passage?

- (A) The oneness of the Person and the Law.
- (B) The oneness of life and its environment.
- (C) The oneness of body and mind.
- (D) That faith manifests itself in everyday life.
- (E) That earthly desires are enlightenment.

Q13. According to the Daishonin’s emphasis, where should we understand the Buddha land to be?

- (A) In the west.
- (B) It is actually an eastern land where Taho Buddha lived.
- (C) In the heavens where the Buddhist gods dwell.
- (D) Wherever someone chants Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.
- (E) Where the correct object of worship is physically enshrined and at least one priest resides.

Q14. According to Nichiren Daishonin, what sort of belief constitutes an inferior teaching?

- (A) That we have unlimited potential within ourselves.
- (B) That the Law, or Myoho-rence-kyo, is our life itself.
- (C) That we can make our lives what we want with sincere prayers.
- (D) That we are the creators of our own dreams and futures.
- (E) That we must appeal to a power separate from and higher than ourselves.

Q15. According to this letter, what is “the direct path to enlightenment”?

- (A) Chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with a realization that our lives are the Mystic Law itself.

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- (B) Mastering all the Buddhist scriptures and copying them for future generations.
- (C) Accumulating wealth.
- (D) Attracting caring people to us.
- (E) Practicing whatever religion or philosophy that suits our personality.

Part 3: “The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon”

Question 16 is based on the following passage:

“Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality which reigns over all life’s functions.... The Gohonzon is found in faith alone. As the sutra states, ‘Only with faith can one enter Buddhahood’” (MW-1, 213).

Q16. No one has unwavering faith from the outset. How can we define faith at the beginning of our practice?

- (A) Absolute belief that priests alone possess a supreme power that enables people to attain Buddhahood.
- (B) Our refusal to ask questions.
- (C) Having doubts.
- (D) Refusal to read anything but the *World Tribune*.
- (E) An expectation that our life will become happier as a result of Buddhist practice.

Q17. When we chant daimoku to the Gohonzon, we experience the interaction of the four powers. Two of the four powers are 1) the power of the Buddha and 2) the power of the Law. How can we activate the power of the Buddha and the power of the Law in our own lives?

- (A) By asking others to chant for us.
- (B) Through the power of skepticism.
- (C) By resolving to chant when we have more time.
- (D) By really believing in the Gohonzon to the point we do not need to chant.
- (E) Through our own powers of faith and practice.

Q18. Shakyamuni’s disciple Shariputra was considered to be the “foremost in wisdom,” yet even he could not attain enlightenment through his wisdom. How did he attain enlightenment?

- (A) Through faith in the Buddha’s teachings.
- (B) Through meditation on the true nature of life.
- (C) By practicing Buddhist austerities for many lifetimes.
- (D) By giving up his study of Buddhism and becoming simple-minded.
- (E) By giving away his eye to an evil Brahman.

Q19. According to Nichiren Daishonin, what two actions arise from faith?

- (A) Practice for ourselves and for others, and study.
- (B) Chanting for our personal wants and needs each morning and evening.
- (C) Going to meetings at least once a week and reading books about Buddhism to deepen our

theoretical understanding of it.

- (D) Chanting during the day, and begging for alms in the evening.
- (E) Studying Buddhism and teaching others to practice it; if we do those two things, there's no need to chant — that's only for beginners.

Q20. Down the center of the Gohonzon, inscribed in Chinese characters, are the words “Nam-myoho-rence-kyo — Nichiren.” What Buddhist principle does this indicate?

- (A) Whatever we will it to mean.
- (B) The oneness of life and its environment.
- (C) The oneness of the Law and the Person.
- (D) The oneness of body and mind.
- (E) The oneness of the Law and the Land.

Part 4: “Happiness in This World”

Q21. Why is it important to elevate our inner life-condition?

- (A) Because we are already Buddhas, we are essentially already at the highest level and need not elevate our inner life-condition.
- (B) Because fame, wealth and social status are superficial and easily subject to change, while inner happiness arising from our life itself is absolute and indestructible.
- (C) Because the higher the life-condition, the greater the social status.
- (D) Because without a high life-condition, people will just look down on us. When our life-condition is high, we are in a position to look down on them.
- (E) Because without elevating our life-condition, we will never understand how bad our life really is.

Q22. Why does Nichiren Daishonin state that “There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo”?

- (A) When we chant, other people do our work for us.
- (B) When we chant, others realize that we are right and they are wrong, which makes for a much more peaceful world.
- (C) When we chant, we realize that we don't need to concern ourselves with others, saving ourselves lots of time and energy.
- (D) When we chant, our problems disappear like dew in the morning sunlight.
- (E) When we chant daimoku, our lives become one with the Law, enabling us to draw forth inexhaustible strength, wisdom, joy and hope.

Q23. How is “joy derived from the Law” different from the “joy derived from desires”?

- (A) “Joy derived from the Law” is legal pleasure; “joy derived from desires” is illegal pleasure.
- (B) “Joy derived from the Law” is described in theory in the Goshō; “joy derived from desires” is the real experience of it.
- (C) “Joy derived from the Law” is the happiness and protection we receive from living according to society's norms; “joy derived from desires” is more intensely pleasurable because it is “forbidden fruit.”
- (D) “Joy derived from the Law” is dependent on others; “joy derived from desires” is dependent on the Law.
- (E) “Joy derived from the Law” is based on the eternally unchanging Mystic Law; “joy derived from desires” is temporary and soon gives rise to unhappiness and dissatisfaction.

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Q24. Why is attributing the cause of our happiness or unhappiness to someone else contradictory to the teaching of the Lotus Sutra?

- (A) The Lotus Sutra teaches that happiness is found in good circumstance and good people; without them we cannot be happy.
- (B) The Lotus Sutra teaches that other people are the foundation of our happiness.
- (C) The Lotus Sutra teaches that heredity determines the people around us; that happiness is inherited.
- (D) The Lotus Sutra teaches that the state of life of others can create or destroy our happiness; hence the importance of praying to find good friends.
- (E) The Lotus Sutra teaches that our happiness does not depend on others, because only through our own efforts based upon faith can we become happy.

Q25. Ultimately, to what does being a Buddha of absolute freedom refer?

- (A) It refers to those striving to achieve kosen-rufu who have a direct connection with the Law through faith and practice.
- (B) It refers only to Nichiren Daishonin.
- (C) It refers to priests.
- (D) It refers only to Nikko Shonin and the successive high priests.
- (E) It refers to the extent we can be absolutely free to do whatever we like even if we don't legally enjoy such freedoms.

Q26. Why does Nichiren Daishonin tell Shijo Kingo to "strengthen your faith more than ever?"

- (A) Those with weak faith in the past have no possibility of victory in the present and future.
- (B) Having weak faith in the past is unimportant; if one's faith is strong from this moment forward, it is the greatest power people have.
- (C) Shijo Kingo had weak faith, and the Daishonin did not trust his faith much.
- (D) Shijo Kingo was a coward; only those courageous in faith can wield the sharp sword of the Mystic Law.
- (E) Weak faith is uncommon in this Buddhism.

Q27. What is the purpose of our practice of faith?

- (A) We practice faith to fully enjoy life, to lead the happiest possible existence.
- (B) We practice faith to serve the priests.
- (C) We practice faith to believe in the mystical; what we cannot imagine, hear or observe.
- (D) We practice faith only to learn how to accept our sufferings and problems.
- (E) We practice faith to learn why other people are making us unhappy and what we can do about it.

Part 5: Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue

Q28. How does Buddhism characterize opposition by authority?

- (A) A sign of the authority's wisdom.
- (B) A sign that we should stop spreading this Buddhism until the time is ripe so that we won't meet any persecutions.
- (C) A sign that we are practicing correctly.
- (D) A sign of the authority's limitless concern for our happiness.
- (E) A sign that we are not practicing correctly.

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Q29. What is the meaning of obstacles to our Buddhist movement?

- (A) We're on the wrong path.
- (B) We're on the right path, but we're practicing too hard.
- (C) We should stop propagating Buddhism to preserve freedom of religion.
- (D) We're experiencing the natural consequences of our efforts to propagate Buddhism.
- (E) We're practicing incorrectly because only wrong teachings get opposition.

Q30. What does opposition from the priesthood mean to the SGI?

- (A) The priesthood's opposition means that the SGI is wrong.
- (B) The priesthood's opposition means that this is not the time for kosen-rufu.
- (C) The priesthood's opposition means that we have liberated ourselves from its authoritarianism and can now widely spread this Buddhism exactly as the Daishonin taught.
- (D) The priesthood's opposition means that we SGI members are not Bodhisattvas of the Earth.
- (E) The priesthood's opposition means that SGI should apologize for our mistakes and protect the temple no matter what as the Goshu teaches us.

Q31. What is meant by "correct faith"?

- (A) To practice as Nichiren Daishonin taught, share his convictions and develop our lives in accord with that understanding.
- (B) To practice in accord with the 700-year traditions established by the priesthood.
- (C) To practice in our own way, with complete freedom.
- (D) To practice as an individual without influence from other believers.
- (E) To practice in accord with what those in positions of authority say is right.

Q32. What is Nichiren Shoshu's position on the equality between lay members and priests?

- (A) Nichiren Shoshu advocates democratic equality of priests and lay believers.
- (B) Nichiren Shoshu advocates the superiority of lay believers to priests.
- (C) Nichiren Shoshu says that only some priests are superior to lay believers.
- (D) Nichiren Shoshu says it is a "sin" to even speak of the equality of priests and lay practitioners.
- (E) Nichiren Shoshu says that lay believers are equal to priests and can freely offer constructive criticism.

Q33. Nichiren Shoshu's view of the Gohonzon contradicts Nichiren Daishonin's view. Which of the following does not reflect the Daishonin's view of the Gohonzon?

- (A) The Gohonzon is a manifestation of the Daishonin's life as an enlightened human being.
- (B) The Gohonzon is no different from the enlightened potential within all ordinary people.
- (C) The Gohonzon is the embodiment of the Buddha's wisdom and compassion.
- (D) The sanctioning of the object of worship by the high priest, who is the only person to be bequeathed the Daishonin's Buddhism, is what makes the attainment of Buddhahood possible.
- (E) Our power of faith and our practice to the Gohonzon enables us to tap the powers of the Law and the Buddha.
- (F) Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.
- (G) The Daishonin never mentions in his writings the necessity of a special ceremony conducted by a priest to empower the Gohonzon.

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