

STANDS TO REASON: Don't Look Down on Us

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Do not look down on my disciples!... Do not despise them! Do not look on them with contempt! (“On the Four Stages of Faith and the Five Stages of Practice,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 225)

How can I change my karma from the past?” A question many of us sometimes ask. This was the main question in a list of questions that the believer Toki Jonin asked Nichiren Daishonin, leading to this answer in letter form, written probably in 1277.

The year 1277 was a crucial one in the Daishonin's life: Some of his staunchest supporters were being persecuted for their faith, for their support of him, and he was doing his best to encourage them all. Shijo Kingo was having serious troubles with his boss, Lord Ema (Kingo's peers had a smear campaign going against him, which influenced Ema). Munenaka Ikegami was being disowned (for the second time) by his father, a Kamakura government official under Ryokan's influence. And the Daishonin was telling all his followers to keep chanting in the face of all persecutions, to keep changing their karma through perseverance.

To their persecutors, his message was also loud and clear: “Do not look down on my disciples!” The Daishonin wanted to say this to everyone in Japan.

More than 700 years later, Nikken's demolition of the Grand Main Temple is a modern example of a powerful person looking down on the Daishonin's disciples and persecuting them. Eight million disciples contributed the funds for the temple's construction, and Nikken now says that (almost all of) these 8 million have become slanderers. Thus, the building has to be torn down.

In a letter to a U.S. congressman who protested the demolition, Nichiren Shoshu Overseas Bureau Chief Kotoku Obayashi says that the SGI members have “tainted” the high sanctuary; we have “perverted” it. “Purity” must be restored through the demolition.

What?!

If Nikken believed that we were Buddhas or would become Buddhas or even had the potential to become Buddhas, wouldn't it be difficult for him to just throw away the magnificent temple we gave to Taiseki-ji? Or to excommunicate us twice, telling us that he was shutting our door to enlightenment? When the Daishonin says in the same letter that his disciples “are like an infant emperor wrapped in swaddling clothes, or a great dragon who has just been born” (MW-6, 225), he asks us to see human beings not only for what they are today but for what they will become someday. In essence, we *are* Buddhas. We and our descendants will prove Nikken wrong.

Throwing away the donations of millions of disciples. Excommunicating the millions. Deeming the millions who do not agree with you to be slanderers. Writing them off — forever. Looking down on them. They “cling to grandiose edifices and begrudge money they gave long ago as offerings,” Obayashi writes.

If religion is to serve the people, what kind of a religion is it that views the people this way?

A non-religious religion.

A religion not worthy of support.

Fourteen in a series