

STUDY DEPARTMENT
Elementary Examination Sample Questions

The page numbers that appear in parentheses after each question direct the reader to where the answer can be found in the SGI-USA Study Program Elementary-Level Textbook or the August 1998 issue of Living Buddhism. (The material published in Living Buddhism is taken from Learning From the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, pp. 73–94, and Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra, volume 1 (55–43; 53–83; 133–40).

Most of the Oct. 25 exam questions will be in a multiple-choice format. Correct answers need only be selected from among several possibilities. Therefore, this sample test is more difficult than the actual exam will be. It is not necessary to learn the Japanese-language version of terms or principles. Also, of these sample questions, only 40 to 50 percent will appear on the exam, which is expected to consist of 30-some questions.

The Spanish, Korean and Chinese versions of these sample questions will be available soon either through the organization or in future issues of the World Tribune. The Japanese version of the sample questions will differ slightly from what appears here and will be available through the organization in August.

We hope this information will assist you in preparing for the exam.

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“Letter to the Brothers”

SGI-USA Study Program Elementary-Level Textbook (pp. 6–13, 22–25, 31–51 57–61, 67–74, 80–84, 89–104)

1. What was the crisis in the brothers’ lives that prompted Nichiren Daishonin to write this letter? (pp. 22–25)
2. According to this Goshō, what are the three reasons believers meet difficulties? (pp. 22–25)
3. The Daishonin states: “The three groups of men of Learning, however, had to suffer through the period of *sanzen-jintengo*, and the great bodhisattvas, through that of *gohyaku-jintengo*, because of the sin they committed by discarding the Lotus Sutra.” This shows what an unimaginably terrible sin it is. Why is it such a terrible sin to discard the Lotus Sutra? (pp. 31–34)
4. In the quote, “It is even more difficult than for a one-eyed turtle to find a piece of floating sandalwood or for someone to dangle Mount Sumeru from the sky with a fiber from a lotus stem,” what does *even more difficult* mean in a broader sense? (pp. 34–35)
5. The Daishonin uses many examples in this Goshō to point out the effects of following an erroneous teacher. One is a quote from Dengyō about the Great Teacher Tz’u-en, which states,

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“Even though he praises the Lotus Sutra, he destroys its heart.” Explain how someone destroys its heart. (pp. 35–38)

6. In the passage “If one befriends an evil person, he will lose his mind,” the Daishonin stresses the importance of not tolerating evil, because it will lead to abandoning faith. According to this Gosho, what do evil persons fool others into believing? (pp. 38–40)
7. In our lives we possess both fundamental darkness and fundamental enlightenment. The fundamental darkness can manifest itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven, which is the source of evil in bad friends. This force can also manifest itself internally as greed, anger and ignorance, which distort our understanding of the correct path of faith. According to this Gosho, what attitudes and actions will help us win in this battle against our fundamental darkness? (pp. 54–61)
8. The Daishonin uses the story of Shariputra offering his eye to the Devil of the Sixth Heaven who was posing as a Brahman to emphasize the importance of never abandoning our faith. Why did Shariputra renounce his bodhisattva practice? (pp. 57–61)
9. In the Gosho, the Daishonin encourages the husbands and wives from different perspectives. To the husbands he says: “Women are faint-hearted, and your wives have probably given up. Yet you must grit your teeth and never slacken in your faith.” To the wives he says: “You two wives should have no regrets even if you are harmed by your husbands because of your faith in this teaching. If you both unite in encouraging their faith, you will follow the path of the Dragon King’s daughter and become the model for women attaining enlightenment in the evil Latter Day of the Law.” What is he teaching them about the attitude an individual should have in the midst of hardship? (pp. 80–84)

Answer questions 10 and 11 based on this quote from the Maka Shikan: “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... You should be neither influenced nor frightened by them. If you fall under their influence, you will be led into the paths of evil. If you are frightened by them, you will be prevented from practicing true Buddhism.”

10. From where do the three obstacles and four devils originate? (pp. 94–100)
11. Explain why obstacles are confirmation we are progressing toward enlightenment? (pp. 94–100)
12. Although our happiness or enlightenment depends solely on our own efforts, not the actions of others, the Daishonin states: “When a husband is happy, his wife will be fulfilled. If a husband is a thief, his wife will become one, too.” Explain the meaning of these statements. (pp. 100–02)
13. In the passage “One should become the master of his mind rather than let his mind master him,” what does *mastering one’s mind* mean? (pp. 102–04)

“The Person and The Law”
SGI-USA Study Program Elementary-Level Textbook, pp. 107–27

14. Through the story of Tokusho Doji and his mud pie, Nichiren Daishonin is making two points about offerings. What are they? (pp. 115, 119)

15. Generally speaking, offerings to the Gohonzon take two forms. Explain them. (pp. 118–19)
16. In commending Tokimitsu's support over the years, the Daishonin writes, "[O]ne who makes offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law for even a single day will gain incomparably greater fortune than he would by offering countless treasures to the Buddha for one hundred thousand aeons." Explain the reason for this, comparing the teaching expounded by "the votary" with that by "the Buddha." (pp. 115–18)
17. Explain why we call Nichiren Daishonin "the original Buddha"? (p. 116)
18. What is the difference between Buddhahood as revealed by Shakyamuni and Buddhahood as revealed by the Daishonin? (pp. 116–17)

Answer the following questions based on this passage: "Although I live in such a forsaken hovel, deep in this mortal flesh I preserve the ultimate secret Law inherited from Shakyamuni Buddha at Eagle Peak. My heart is where all Buddhas enter nirvana, my tongue, where they turn the wheel of doctrine; my throat, where they are born into this world; and my mouth, where they attain enlightenment."

19. "I preserve the ultimate secret Law inherited from Shakyamuni Buddha at Eagle Peak." What does this statement refer to? (p. 121)
20. What does the Daishonin mean by "the ultimate secret Law"? (p. 121)
21. "My heart is where all Buddhas enter nirvana; my tongue, where they turn the wheel of doctrine; my throat, where they are born into this world; and my mouth, where they attain enlightenment." What does Nichiren Daishonin reveal by this statement? (p. 122)

Read this passage and answer the following question. "Since the Law is supreme, the Person is worthy of respect; since the Person is worthy of respect, the Land is sacred."

22. Explain this passage in terms of the life of Nichiren Daishonin. (p. 123)

Ichinen Sanzen (A Life-Moment Possesses 3,000 Realms); SGI-USA Study Program Elementary-Level Textbook, pp. 128–60

23. The figure *three thousand* is derived from *ichinen sanzen*'s component principles. Name these principles. (p. 131)
24. When T'ien-t'ai writes, "Life at each moment is endowed with the ten worlds," he means that within a single moment of life there exists the potential for ten conditions. List the ten worlds. (p. 135)
25. Explain the concept of the mutual possession of the ten worlds. (p. 135)
26. List the ten factors. (p. 136)
27. Explain the difference between the *ichinen sanzen* (a single moment possesses 3,000 realms) of

Nichiren Daishonin and that of Shakyamuni. (p. 138)

28. Contrast the six lower worlds with the four noble worlds in how they become manifest. (pp. 144–45)
29. Explain the major differences between the world of Bodhisattva and the worlds of the two vehicles? (p. 146)
30. The factor of “consistency from beginning to end” explains that both the beginning and end are inseparable. What is the “beginning” and what is the “end”? (p. 156)
31. What does the fact that “living beings are no more than a temporary union of the five components” tell us about how we should view our relationship with other “living beings”? (p. 159)
32. The realm of the environment also possesses the ten worlds. What is the difference between the environment and “living beings”? (pp. 159–60)

Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra volume 1, pp. 5–43, 53–83, 133–40

33. What are the different expressions of this “manifold Lotus Sutra”? And, what do they have in common? (p. 9)
34. “Votaries of the Lotus Sutra” refers to what people? (p. 12)
35. How did the Daishonin read the Lotus Sutra with his life? (p. 14)
36. What is the benefit of reciting the sutra? (pp. 16–18)
37. What are we praising when we do gongyo? (p. 21)
38. What four conditions must be met for a Buddha to expound the Law? (p. 30)
39. What is the crucial element in creating “that time?” (pp. 32–33)
40. What does *wisdom* mean? And how can we obtain it? (pp. 40–42)
41. What practice represents the quintessence of the Daishonin’s Buddhism? (pp. 56–57)
42. What is the most difficult undertaking there is? (p. 62)
43. What was the Daishonin’s sole intention? (p. 72)
44. Where does the world of Buddhahood appear? (p. 83)
45. What must be understood in order to grasp the vastness and profundity of life in its entirety? (p.

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46. What is “the eye of the Buddha?” (p. 138)
47. From the standpoint of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, what does the true entity of all phenomena mean? (p. 140)

“The One Essential Phrase” I & II (*Learning From the Gosho*, pp. 73–94)

48. According to Nichiren Daishonin, what was the significance of Lady Myoho-ama asking the question “Can one attain Buddhahood just by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo?” What is the importance to us of asking such questions? (pp. 73–74)
49. Explain what the concept of the six difficult and nine easy acts means in terms of our practice. (pp. 75–76)
50. Nichiren Daishonin states in this Gosho that “This is a sure indication that if you embrace the Lotus Sutra, you will certainly attain Buddhahood in your present form.” Explain in terms of the three properties of the Buddha what it means to attain Buddhahood in your present form? (pp. 77–78)
51. What is the basis for attaining Buddhahood in your present form? (p. 78)
52. Nichiren Daishonin explains that “Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is only one phrase, but it contains the essence of the sutra.” Explain what this quote means. (pp. 78–79)
53. Why does everything become a source of value when we base ourselves on daimoku? (pp. 78–81)
54. What does it mean to “ceaselessly chant daimoku” in terms of our practice? (pp. 84–85)
55. With what spirit should we read the Gosho and what is one indication that we are deeply reading the Gosho? (pp. 84–86)
56. The Daishonin states, “A candle can light up a place that has been dark for billions of years.” This phrase explains two important principles of faith. Name these two principles and explain them. (pp. 89–90)
57. In his lecture President Ikeda explains that “It is precisely when faced with challenging circumstances that we need to pray.” He also explains what the nature of our faith and prayer should be. Explain what attitudes keep us from realizing our dreams and what will lead us to our dreams. (pp. 91–92)
58. Explain the relationship between prayer and action. (pp. 92–93)
59. At the end of this letter, Nichiren Daishonin states “Do not doubt this in the least.” What shouldn’t we doubt and what encouragement does the Daishonin give us to back up his statement that we

shouldn't doubt? (pp. 89, 91–93)

Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue (pamphlet)

60. Nichiren Daishonin warns us that to fail to understand the fundamental principles of faith will make our practice an “endless painful austerity,” and that without correct understanding, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra. In light of the priesthood issue, what constitutes correct faith? (pp. 9–10)
61. “You, yourself, are a true Buddha who possesses the three enlightened properties. You should chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with this conviction” (MW-1, 30). How is this different from what the Temple teaches? (p. 13)
62. “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” (MW-1, 213). What does Nichiren Shoshu say about this concept? (p. 14)
63. How does the Nichiren Shoshu sect define the master–disciple relationship? (p. 15)
64. The most essential difference between the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu lies in the area of attitude and behavior. Describe that difference specifically. (pp. 15–16)
65. What prompted Makiguchi and Toda to question and defy the high priest’s instructions? (p. 18)
66. What are two of the three reasons why the temple claims the Gohonzon issued by the SGI are counterfeit, and why are those reasons not valid? (pp. 21–22)
67. Explain why the Gohonzon issued by the SGI is not counterfeit. (pp. 21–22)
68. Explain why members are exchanging their Nikken-transcribed Gohonzon for one transcribed by Nichikan, and if this means that there is a difference between these Gohonzon. (pp. 23–24)
69. Why shouldn't we visit a Nichiren Shoshu Temple? (pp. 25–26)
70. How should we view the continuous persecution of the SGI and President Ikeda that has been instigated by Nichiren Shoshu? (pp. 27–28)
71. Why don't the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu talk to each other? (pp. 29–30)
72. Is the unity of priesthood and laity essential? If so, why? If not, why not? (p. 30)
73. What effect will the priests' errors have on those who follow them, and what can we each do for those people? (pp. 31–32)
74. How will the temple issue affect the SGI in the future? (p. 33)

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