

STANDS TO REASON: The People Are the King's Parents

By JEFF FARR

Associate Editor

The king makes the people his parents. (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1554)

The Atsuhara Persecution, in which a Tendai priest conspired with government officials to persecute farmers practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, was the worst ordeal the Daishonin's believers ever faced. In 1279, the crisis peaked when Atsuhara village believers were tortured and three of them executed.

The persecution had begun years before, in 1275. The believer who stood up to lead everyone on the road to victory (which finally came in 1281) was Nanjo Tokimitsu, to whom this letter was written in 1279.

It's often said that the Atsuhara Persecution — or rather the believers' unwavering faith during this trial — is what inspired the Daishonin to inscribe the Dai-Gohonzon for all humanity. He felt that the Atsuhara farmers had shown that strong faith had become the rule rather than the exception among his followers. The Atsuhara believers, although by and large practicing Buddhism only a short while, were willing to give up their lives for faith; this was true conviction in the Daishonin's eyes.

In this letter, the Daishonin tells Tokimitsu that “the king makes the people his parents.” A Buddha reveres the people above all. How could a Buddha not revere people so determined to protect the Law as the Atsuhara farmers?

On March 16, 1958, President Toda made the same point. He called the Soka Gakkai the king of all religious organizations: The Soka Gakkai was king precisely because it made the people its parents; it existed solely to serve them. Each Soka Gakkai member, working for the happiness of all people, was to Toda a king. Or a queen — he didn't mean the term to be gender specific.

For 40 years, SGI President Ikeda has been teaching this spirit to succeeding generations of SGI members. In a recent essay on true democracy (July 17 *World Tribune*), he used this quote “The king makes the people his parents” to emphasize again that “the spirit of Buddhism is to see the noble Buddha in the people — in fact, in each individual.”

Shouldn't our experience of eight years of the temple issue — of seeing what happens when a “king” goes against Buddhism and disrespects the people — inspire us to aspire even more to this spirit of leadership? Seeing what happens when a king completely loses the spirit to serve (or never has that spirit), when he condemns millions through undeserved excommunications, when he destroys the monuments to peace that they have put their hearts (and money) into...isn't this all a loud, loud wake-up call? Yes.

In Buddhism, *everyone* can become a true king or queen. And this Buddhist “royalty” likewise *reveres everyone*. The people, indeed, are our parents.

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Title: Opinion: The People Are the King's Parents

Subject: World Tribune 07/31/98 n.3202 p.2 WT980731p02

Author: Jeff Farr

Keywords: Issue King Opinion Parents People Reason Stands Study Temple Tribune World