

STANDS TO REASON: A Simple Inheritance

By JEFF FARR

Associate Editor

Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless eons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other. Therefore, to chant Myoho-rence-kyo with this realization is to inherit the ultimate law of life and death. (“Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 22)

Heritage: Something handed down through the ages. It could be a culture. A tradition. A building. A law.

The whole idea of heritage has been at the core of contentions between the SGI and the temple: How do we inherit the Law? Is it through the lineage of the priesthood, supposed to be “maintaining” the Law's purity? Or is it through our pure faith, directly connected to the Law? The SGI and the temple have opposing takes on this.

Sairen-bo, one of Nichiren Daishonin's Sado Island converts, a former Tendai priest, wondered about this and sought an explanation directly from the Daishonin. In this 1272 response, the Daishonin makes it clear that we inherit the Law simply through the act of chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo — through our own action in faith. He says nothing about a priest being the middle man in this inheritance process.

But the temple, in *100 Questions and Answers*, argues that we do need a middle man — a big middle man named the high priest. In the temple's view, the Law is inherited by just one person at a time, and that person is *always* high priest.

One high priest hands down the Law to another high priest and another and another. If we obey whoever is high priest — and the temple does use the word *obey* a lot in its literature — then and only then can we, too, inherit the Law.

Besides the fact that in Nichiren Shoshu's history, the Law was *not* always handed down so smoothly (see the current *Living Buddhism* series “The Untold History of the Fuji School”), the whole idea is *wrong*. Again, it's not written in any of the Daishonin's letters that the high priest is this kind of a mystic go-between. What *is* written about the heritage is clear: Chanting with faith is it. We are the inheritors. We are it. This is the SGI's position.

The whole point of the Daishonin's Buddhism, after all, is that the Law exists in each of us. Through chanting with faith, we bring it out. That's why elsewhere the Daishonin says to “never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself,” that “the Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people” (MW-1, 213). That we should seek it through the high priest is a priestly invention. A bad invention.

The Nichiren Shoshu temples today remind me of silence, a deep silence: In the temple, we're basically all supposed to be quiet. No questions. Nothing to say.

We need the high priest to whisper in our ears to even come alive. Then, though, we *still* have to be silent. We have to obey him. We always have to listen to him, he doesn't have to hear us. “Children should be seen and not heard.”

I imagine that if you believe what the priests say, if you follow their “teachings” long enough, a pervasive silence eventually steals over your entire life. You become like a deserted town on a holiday: The shops all closed, the playgrounds empty, no one home.

Silent. And sad.

That's the kind of town few of us would want to visit, the kind of town most of us would want to leave as soon as possible.

Sixteen in a series

Title: Opinion: A Simple Inheritance

Subject: World Tribune 08/14/98 n.3204 p.2 WT980814p02

Author: Jeff Farr

Keywords: Inheritance Issue Opinion Reason Simple Stands Temple Tribune World