

## STANDS TO REASON: A Strong Spiritual Bond

By JEFF FARR

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**All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate law of life and death. (“Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 23)**

This letter to Sairen-bo never ceases to amaze me — Nichiren Daishonin discusses the crucial topic of the heritage of the Law in the wisest way here. He knows how important it is to fully clarify his view for the future, so he shows the issue in all its dimensions. His answer is meant to satisfy, to leave no room for doubt.

And we’re lucky to have it, now that the temple issue is happening.

After pointing out that the main way to inherit the Law is through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and having faith, the Daishonin emphasizes the “spiritual bond” among those who chant. Keeping this bond strong is also inheriting the Law, he explains. When we unite, we inherit the Law.

Nichiren Shoshu, though, has a new interpretation of this passage: The Daishonin actually meant, according to the priests, that the heritage “would never flow without believing in and obeying the High Priest.... The lifeblood of faith flows when one respects the High Priest as one’s Buddhist master...” (*100 Questions and Answers*).

What happened to “transcending all differences” and uniting? What happened to the spiritual bond? The priesthood’s definition sure doesn’t sound like the bond that the Daishonin is talking about — it doesn’t match his words at all.

The whole idea that the high priest is the lifeblood of the Law is a weak attempt on the priests’ part to lend Nikken and themselves legitimacy where, based on what the Daishonin set down in writing, they have none.

The spiritual bond espoused by the Daishonin is a celebration of humanity, of people uniting, of the transcending of differences among us. Not of one man with special powers, not of any authority figure.

Apparently, it’s a celebration to which the Nichiren Shoshu priests are not invited, or to which they’ve uninvited themselves. They only want to come if they’re the guests of honor.

After all, the priesthood looks down on SGI members — as if we were insects to be caught and kept in a bottle. This mind-set lets them maintain their feeling of superiority; thinking this way, they try to keep themselves from having to face their nagging self-doubt.

Insects, though, are resilient. T.S. Eliot once feared a spider surviving a shipwreck and himself drowning. “If the ship goes down,” he wrote, “[the spider] is prepared and will somehow persist....”

There must be within the priesthood today something of the same fear: That the priests are sinking, while the SGI members whom they discounted are sailing away safely. That the 1,000 Nichiren Shoshu priests have no heritage of the Law — have nothing, in fact — to pass on to the future, while the millions of SGI members have captured the lifeblood of faith through their strong spiritual bond and will continue to take responsibility for the future of the Law.

*Seventeen in a series*

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