

## EDITORIAL: Directly Facing the Problem

By DAVE McNEILL

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**Do we all have a ‘little Nikken’ inside us? No, says Dave McNeill — we shouldn’t confuse combating our inner weaknesses with directly battling Nikken through the power of words.**

I remember the first meeting I attended after the temple issue began. Someone asked me, “How can the high priest be so wrong?” After some discussion, we concluded that there was a lesson here: If the high priest — an ordinary person ostensibly entrusted with protecting the teachings — can become so deluded about the truth, so can we all. In Buddhism, we call this tendency to be diverted from our path to enlightenment our *fundamental darkness*, a tendency that we must win over every day.

Around then, too, the SGI started saying that our fight with the temple was a fight for justice, a fight against authoritarianism — and that this is the Soka Gakkai spirit. This was only a year or so after the SGI-USA had begun its own self-reformation based on SGI President Ikeda’s February 1990 guidance.

So it wasn’t surprising when a young man expressed his frustration about the temple issue, saying, “The only people I know who are authoritarian are my boss and my Buddhist leaders.” Of course, in the years since then, we’ve all learned that Buddhism really *is* about standing up for justice and against authoritarianism in *all its forms*.

From these two encounters, I learned that there are two broad applications of the spirit with which we are battling Nikken: the resolve to fight our own negative tendencies and the resolve to fight evil wherever it appears.

Indeed, many people have come to see personal relevance in the priesthood issue by way of grasping these two essential lessons. Some people have even gone so far as to say that, when fighting negative thoughts or self-perceptions, they are battling the “little Nikken” within them. Or when they stand up to some injustice in their daily lives that they are making a cause to defeat Nikken.

Personifying all forms of negativity as Nikken might be useful in some respects, but it also might lead to some confusion.

Nikken is not *in you* or in your unfair boss. Nikken is Nikken is Nikken. Fighting your inherent negativity or working for human rights are important tasks of the bodhisattva, who has pledged to battle all forms of evil that try to destroy people’s happiness. But such actions in and of themselves do not *directly* work to defeat Nikken’s influence in the world. Taking such actions go a long way toward defeating evil and bringing about your happiness and the happiness of all people, but working directly to defeat Nikken’s influence is a whole other matter.

One of the best ways to directly fight his influence, of course, is to talk about it, with a solid determination to protect the purity of the Daishonin’s teachings. Everyone can talk or write about Nikken’s wrongheaded teachings, sharing their views and helping others understand the real issues.

And it’s not only about having some new logic or sure-fire argument, either. When we talk with others about this issue, what is most important is the trustworthiness we can establish with our listeners. President Ikeda once said that he joined the Soka Gakkai long before he understood this Buddhism — because when he heard Josei Toda talk about Buddhism, he knew this was a man he could trust.

When someone faces their crucial moment with the priesthood issue, they won’t

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necessarily remember our impeccable logic. Striving for clarity is one thing, but what they'll remember most is our heart — our concern for their happiness, our sincerity, which comes through in whatever we say.

Directly speaking out about Nikken is a source of great personal growth. In fact, it is in standing up to Nikken, and the bastardization of the Daishonin's teachings that he represents, that we gain the life force needed to do our complete inner reformation. This in turn gives us the internal power and influence needed to affect change in society.

As the Daishonin writes, "Only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove his real strength" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 35). To truly battle evil, we first must be able to identify it in all its manifestations. But Nikken's evil is unique to Nikken.

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