

**THE UNTOLD HISTORY OF THE FUJI SCHOOL:
THE ORIGINS OF THE TEMPLE ISSUE (15)
CHAPTER 15: THE SGI'S CONFERRAL OF THE GOHONZON**

This installment on the history of the transcription of the Gohonzon is partly based on a translation of Mikio Matsuoka's pamphlet A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon in the Taiseki-ji School, published by the Institute of Oriental Philosophy in 1997.

The last installment (in the April issue) explained how the priesthood devised Operation C, a plan to destroy the SGI lay organization, and the excommunication of SGI members on November 28, 1991.

(1) The Gohonzon: The object of devotion for all people

ON September 7, 1993, about two months short of the second anniversary of its excommunication by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, the SGI announced its decision to issue the Gohonzon to its members worldwide. It was one of the defining moments of the SGI's lay Buddhist movement because the decision signaled the return of the object of devotion from the hold of clerical authority to its rightful heirs—ordinary people who practice the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Gohonzon issued by the SGI were reproduced from a Gohonzon transcribed by the twenty-sixth high priest, Nichikan, in 1720. This particular Nichikan Gohonzon was in the possession of Joen-ji, a temple in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan. In his June 6, 1993, letter to Soka Gakkai President Einosuke Akiya, Joen-ji Chief Priest Sendo Narita, who had seceded from Taiseki-ji in protest to the high priest's abusive policy toward the SGI, proposed that the SGI start reproducing Gohonzon based on the Nichikan Gohonzon in his temple's possession (text of letter appears on page 37). In his letter, Chief Priest Narita states: "The existing situation, in which Nikken has unjustly terminated the conferral of Gohonzon upon Soka Gakkai members, convinced me that the best and most just course—as well as the course that, I feel, would win the approval of the Daishonin—would be to enable Soka Gakkai members to receive *okatagi* Gohonzon based on this Gohonzon" (*On the Conferral of the Gohonzon by the Soka Gakkai: A Collection of Reference Material*, p. 4). (Editor's note: *Okatagi* Gohonzon refers to any Gohonzon reproduced on a printing press. The word *okatagi* literally means a wood block print.)

On August 23, 1993, the Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu and the Association of Youthful Priests Dedicated to the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu issued a joint resolution in support of Narita's proposal. In the resolution, the thirty reform priests who had seceded from Taiseki-ji stated: "We declare that the Soka Gakkai is qualified in every way to confer *okatagi* Gohonzon based on the Gohonzon transcribed by High Priest Nichikan, and assert that by so doing the Soka Gakkai will fulfill a sacred mission consistent with the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin" (*Ibid.*, p. 6). Following the discussion and approval by the council and other committees, the Soka Gakkai decided to accept Chief Priest Narita's proposal.

Before this historic decision, conferral of the Gohonzon—the basis of the faith and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism—was regarded by the priesthood as the high priest's prerogative. And lay believers had been long taught to support that view. After the excommunication in November 1991, many SGI members had been forced to practice

without the Gohonzon. The priesthood had taken advantage of the situation and used its monopoly of the Gohonzon as leverage to entice Gakkai members to secede from their lay organization and join a temple parish.

UPON learning about the Gakkai's decision, the priesthood expressed its concern: "The Soka Gakkai will begin to independently bestow Gohonzons [sic] and, thus declaring complete independence from Nichiren Shoshu..." (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. 2). In the same publication, the priesthood also said: "The Soka Gakkai is a group that has been excommunicated by Nichiren Shoshu, and has absolutely no relationship with Nichiren Shoshu" (*Ibid.*, p. 1). Those seemingly contradictory statements—declaring that the Gakkai had initiated independence, then that the priesthood's prior excommunication had severed the relationship—demonstrate the complex anxiety the priesthood felt toward its former believers; its wish was that even after being excommunicated, they would still feel dependent upon its clerical authority. The priesthood has been clearly aware that its continued prosperity may depend on the return of its former believers. The priesthood's dependence upon its excommunicated laity, whom it despises, has been a source of mixed reactions toward Gakkai members.

The significance of the SGI's decision to issue the Gohonzon may be viewed from two perspectives. First, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for all people throughout the world. His fundamental desire was to make the Gohonzon available to all who sincerely practice his teaching, thus enabling them to create indestructible happiness. For example, the Daishonin writes to Abutsu-bo, an elderly believer on Sado Island: "Faith like yours is so extremely rare that I will inscribe the Treasure Tower especially for you" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 30). "The Treasure Tower" here refers to the Gohonzon.

The second perspective in the development of the priesthood's dispute with the Gakkai is that Nikken, using his position as high priest, arbitrarily stopped granting Gohonzon to SGI members. His purpose was clearly to undermine and eventually disable the SGI. Because members cherish the Gohonzon, and because Gohonzon were now unavailable to SGI members who sought them, people would feel compelled to leave the lay organization for the temple, which would provide them with Gohonzon so long as they renounced their association with the SGI. Nikken's action clearly runs counter to the Daishonin's intent in inscribing the Gohonzon, which he described as "the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 212).

This is evident in light of the fact that the SGI has been the sole organization consistently dedicated to propagating Nichiren Daishonin's teachings in this century.

Because of these circumstances—and based on its sense of responsibility as a harmoniously united order (*samgha*) of the Daishonin's Buddhism—the SGI decided to make Gohonzon available to its worldwide membership. It was a decision made solely to preserve the integrity of the Daishonin's Buddhism by replying to the sincerity of those seeking the Gohonzon and, thereby, further promoting the spread of the teaching—a mandate that the Daishonin entrusted to his future disciples.

Since the SGI announced its intent to confer Gohonzon, the priesthood has been denouncing the Gohonzon issued by the SGI as "counterfeit." Their reasoning is as follows: 1) "It does not receive the sanction of the High Priest"; 2) "It is not bestowed by the Head Temple"; and 3) "It is arbitrarily manufactured by the Gakkai" (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, compiled by the Nichiren Shoshu Doctrinal Research Committee. Nichiren Shoshu Temple, 1996, p. 12).

Title: The Untold History Of The Fuji School

Subject: Living Buddhism 06/99 v.99 n.6 p.32 LB9906p32

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Keywords: Chap. Conferral Fuji Gohonzon History Matsuoka Mikio Priesthood School Untold

FURTHERMORE, the priesthood maintains that a Gohonzon issued without the high priest's "eye-opening ceremony" is counterfeit (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. 9; *Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, pp. 36–39). According to the priesthood, however, the practical meaning of the eye-opening ceremony apparently is not that the high priest must infuse his presumed spiritual power, which he claims to have inherited from the Daishonin, into every Gohonzon issued by the head temple. In this regard, the priesthood states: "Up to now, the Gohonzons [sic] granted to believers at the branch temples have all been sanctioned by the High Priest, that is, their eyes have been opened" (*Ibid.*, p. 37). The priesthood also claims: "In Nichiren Shoshu from the ancient past, the High Priest's sanction was essential for everything related to the Gohonzon. The arbitrary copying of the Gohonzon and the conferral of the copies by the Gakkai today are unpardonable acts" (*Ibid.*, p. 39). In light of those statements, all the explanations that the priesthood has been putting forth against the SGI's Gohonzon essentially boil down to one argument: They are counterfeit because the high priest did not authorize them.

The term arbitrary in the temple's usage can only be interpreted to mean "in a way not according with the high priest's intention," which was essentially to punish those affiliated with the Gakkai by depriving them of the Gohonzon. However, it is the high priest's sudden denial of the Gohonzon to those seeking it that better fits the definition of an arbitrary act.

Regarding the reproduction and conferral of the Gohonzon, the priesthood maintains: "The only person who is able to transcribe the innermost enlightenment of the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary is the High Priest who received the bestowal of the lifeblood to only a single person from the Daishonin.... During the seven hundred year [sic] history of Nichiren Shoshu, priests other than the High Priest, even if they were of eminent virtue, erudite or experts at calligraphy, have never transcribed the Gohonzon. However, there are instances where a retired High Priest transcribed the Gohonzon after being commissioned to do so by the current High Priest" (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, pp. 29–30). According to the priesthood, the reason the high priest alone can transcribe the Gohonzon and authorize its printing and conferral is that he alone "received the bestowal of the lifeblood to only a single person from Nichiren Daishonin." In a nutshell, the priesthood asserts that unless Gohonzon are transcribed by the high priest and their printing sanctioned by him, they are not legitimate and constitute a grave doctrinal error.

The history of the Fuji School, however, contradicts this. There are numerous recorded instances in which priests other than the high priests transcribed Gohonzon since the earliest period of the Fuji School. According to the priesthood, those transcriptions of Gohonzon would be "unpardonable acts," since no one but the high priest can transcribe Gohonzon. Despite numerous records of such instances, however, there is no evidence of protest from anyone in the Fuji School, including the successive high priests. Its own history suggests, therefore, that the priesthood's assertions lack substance.

(2) The history of the transcription of the Gohonzon

IN February 1332, when Nikko and Nichimoku were still alive, Nissen, one of Nikko's six main disciples, transcribed a Gohonzon and conferred it to one of his parishioners

(*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 8, p. 214). There is no record of either Nikko or Nichimoku opposing Nissen's transcription.

According to a document written in 1340 and attributed to Nichizon, one of Nikko's disciples, Nikko instructed that in the Fuji School, only one designated disciple should transcribe Gohonzon in order to keep the "lantern of the Law" lit (*Complete Works of the Nichiren School*, vol. 2, p. 418). On the other hand, the same document records that after the Daishonin's death, his six senior disciples started to transcribe Gohonzon, and there was no dispute among them about their right to produce transcriptions (Ibid.). From those records, it may be surmised that Nikko made it a general rule that only one designated priest is to transcribe Gohonzon in order to maintain the order of the school.

For this reason, it was permissible for Nissen, who resided in the distant province of Sanuki, to transcribe a Gohonzon for one of his parishioners. It must be noted that Nikko's reasoning behind limiting the transcription of the Gohonzon to one designated person lay in maintaining order within the school. And the purpose of transcription was to keep the "lantern of the Law" lit—to keep the Gohonzon available to believers. There was no mention of any mysterious or exclusive power possessed by a high priest that would inject the Daishonin's soul into a transcribed Gohonzon. Other records further confirm this point.

During the late fourteenth century, after the deaths of the second high priest Nikko and the third high priest Nichimoku in 1333, priests of the Fuji School other than the high priest at Taiseki-ji transcribed many Gohonzon (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 8). For example, Nissen transcribed two Gohonzon in 1337 and one in 1338. Nichigo, one of Nikko's six new disciples at the Omosu Seminary, transcribed two in 1344, two in 1345 and one in 1350. (The dates of two additional Gohonzon transcribed by Nichigo are unknown.) In 1340, Nichizon had a wooden Gohonzon made from a Gohonzon by Nichimoku. Nichimyo, one of Nikko's six disciples at the Omosu Seminary, transcribed one in 1344. Nichiman, Nikko's disciple on Sado Island, transcribed one in 1352 and another in 1357. Nichidai, one of Nikko's six new disciples at the Omosu Seminary, transcribed one in 1388. While those Gohonzon were transcribed by priests other than the high priest during the tenures of the fourth high priest Nichido (1333–39), the fifth high priest Nichigyō (1339–65) and the sixth high priest Nichiji (1365–1406), none of those high priests at that time left any record of denouncing those transcriptions as unorthodox. It is especially noteworthy that Nichigyō never accused Nichigo, his adversary in an embittered land dispute over Taiseki-ji, of transcribing Gohonzon in an unauthorized manner and thus violating the high priest's alleged prerogative.

In other words, during the early days of the Fuji School after Nikko established Taiseki-ji and appointed Nichimoku as his successor in 1290, the priesthood intended to limit the transcription of the Gohonzon to one designated person for the orderly management of the Fuji School. However, it did not consider transcription of the Gohonzon by a priest other than the high priest to be a grave doctrinal error. For this reason, Nichiu (1402–82), the ninth high priest, allowed chief priests of the branch temples to transcribe the Gohonzon. He states in "On Formalities": "Those at branch temples who have disciples and lay patrons may transcribe the amulet [i.e., the Gohonzon]. However, they should not place their seals on it. . . . Those at branch temples who have disciples and lay patrons may transcribe the mandala [i.e., the Gohonzon] yet may not place their seal on it" (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 71).

Those Gohonzon transcribed by chief priests at the branch temples and without the transcriber's written seal were considered temporary, conferred before believers received one transcribed by the high priest. By allowing chief priests to transcribe the Gohonzon,

yet asking them not to affix their personal seals, Nichiu tried to accomplish two things: meeting the needs of believers who would not be able to receive Gohonzon otherwise, while maintaining order within the school regarding the transcription of the Gohonzon. Since Gohonzon transcribed by chief priests were considered temporary and usually without transcription date or name of a transcriber, not many of them survive today. Nonetheless, there are enough recorded instances to verify the Fuji School's practice of transcribing Gohonzon by priests other than the high priest. For example, according to Jundo Nose's *Miscellaneous Records* (Jpn Shokiroku), Nissho, the thirty-second chief priest of Jakunichi-bo, a lodging temple on the head temple grounds, transcribed a Gohonzon for the parish of a Shinto shrine near the head temple in 1823 (vol. 7, p. 355). When Nissho transcribed this Gohonzon, the forty-ninth high priest Nisso and the retired forty-eighth high priest Nichiryō were residing at Taiseki-ji, so there was no immediate need for Nissho to transcribe a Gohonzon on behalf of the high priest. Nissho was a veteran priest at Taiseki-ji who served eight high priests, and he probably simply responded to a request from his local parish.

In 1860, Nichigen, a disciple of Nissho and the thirty-third chief priest of Jakunichi-bo, also transcribed a Gohonzon for one of his parishioners (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 7, p. 242). The dates and the transcribers' names for this Gohonzon appear on the back probably because it was customary that only the high priest place his seal on the Gohonzon. Both Nissho and his disciple Nichigen were high-ranking priests at Taiseki-ji but did not become high priests. Nevertheless, they still transcribed Gohonzon and conferred them to their parishioners.

There are also records of Gohonzon whose transcribers are unknown. Since the high priest customarily placed his seal on Gohonzon he transcribed, it is certain that these Gohonzon were transcribed by someone other than a high priest. In 1760, during the tenure of the thirty-third high priest Nichigen, someone other than the high priest transcribed a Gohonzon dedicated to a Shinto deity and kept it at Honjo-ji, a branch temple of Taiseki-ji (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 7, p. 226).

As a side note, during the eighteenth century, many Gohonzon were transcribed for Shinto shrines near Taiseki-ji and its other branch temples, supposedly to call forth the power of Shinto deities dwelling there. Often these Gohonzon, many of which were transcribed by high priests, were requested by lay parishioners for a Shinto shrine in their home village. Such parishioners rarely understood the tenets of the Daishonin's Buddhism concerning the Gohonzon, and incorporated into their beliefs aspects of Shintoism and other forms of Buddhism. The priests who transcribed Gohonzon for this purpose must surely have known this and that it violated the guidelines set down by Nikko, the founder of the Fuji School. One such Gohonzon, for example, bears the inscription, "Bestowed to summon forth the body of the god of the Tenman Shrine." Nevertheless, the doctrinal legitimacy of these "Shinto Shrine" Gohonzon was never questioned.

THERE were two Taiseki-ji priests who became chief priests of Myoren-ji, a prominent old temple of the Fuji School near Taiseki-ji, who transcribed Gohonzon for parishioners. On March 1, 1707, Nichiju, a disciple of the twenty-fourth high priest Nichiei, became the twenty-fourth chief priest of Myoren-ji. At that time, Nichiei still held office at Taiseki-ji. From that time until 1727, when Nichiju left his position at Myoren-ji, he continued to transcribe Gohonzon for his parishioners and the chief priests of branch temples that belonged to Myoren-ji. (Myoren-ji and its branch temples joined Nichiren Shoshu, under the head

temple Taiseki-ji, in 1950. Before that, it was regarded as one of the eight head temples of the Fuji School that maintained its own branch temples. Taiseki-ji was also one of these eight.)

According to one source, Nichiju transcribed eleven Gohonzon while he was chief priest of Myoren-ji (*Ideas of the Fuji School* [Jpn Fuji Monryu Shiko], ed. Mitsuaki Osawa; no. 4, p. 9). During this time, Nichiei (24th), Nichiyu (25th), Nichikan (26th), Nichiyo (27th) and Nissho (28th) became high priests successively at Taseki-ji, but none of them criticized Nichiju for transcribing Gohonzon. Neither was Nichiju excommunicated by his teacher Nichiei. Even after he went to Myoren-ji, Nichiju maintained friendly ties with Taiseki-ji.

In 1727, when he retired, Nichiju appointed Nichiho, a Taiseki-ji priest and disciple of the twenty-seventh high priest Nichiyo, as chief priest of Myoren-ji. Between 1727 and 1732, Nichiho transcribed Gohonzon for his parishioners, for three of which records exist (*Ideas of the Fuji School*, ed. Mitsuaki Osawa; no. 4, p. 10). After he left Myoren-ji, Nichiho returned to Taiseki-ji and became the ninth chief priest of Renzo-bo, one of the lodging temples on the head temple grounds. In 1736, the twenty-ninth high priest Nitto transferred the lineage of high priest to Nichiho, who then renamed himself Nitchu. There is no record of Nitchu being criticized for having transcribed Gohonzon before he received the lineage.

Nichiju and Nitchu demonstrate the Taiseki-ji priesthood's view that the transcription and conferral of the Gohonzon is an administrative responsibility of priests. Myoren-ji, as a head temple, had to meet the needs of its own parish and branch temples.

UNDER circumstances similar to those of the thirtieth high priest, Nitchu, the nineteenth high priest Nisshun and the twenty-second high priest, whose name was also pronounced Nisshun (though spelled with different Chinese characters), both transcribed Gohonzon before they assumed the post of high priest. Earlier, the nineteenth high priest Nisshun became the chief priest of Taiseki-ji in the summer of 1641 without receiving the lineage of high priest from his predecessor, the eighteenth high priest Nissei. Nissei fell out of favor with Kyodai-in, an influential lay patron, which forced him out of office. With strong backing from Kyodai-in, Nisshun was selected as Nissei's successor (*The Sacred Scriptures of Nichiren Shoshu* [Jpn Nichiren Shoshu Seiten], p. 763). (Editor's note: Kyodai-in was an adopted daughter of Tokugawa Ieyasu, the founder of the Edo shogunate government and widow of Hachisuka Yoshishige, a governor of Awa province in Shikoku Island.)

For approximately four years, though out of office, Nissei refused to transfer the lineage. Until he finally received the lineage of high priest from Nissei on October 27, 1645, Nisshun carried out various responsibilities—including the transcription and conferral of Gohonzon—as chief priest of Taiseki-ji, but not as high priest of the school. There are two records of Gohonzon transcribed by Nisshun before he received the lineage of high priest. He transcribed one on January 8, 1645, and another on February 28 of the same year—approximately ten and eight months, respectively, before he received the lineage (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 2, p. 101; vol. 3, p. 104).

THE twenty-second high priest, also named Nisshun, received the lineage of high priest from the twenty-first high priest Nichinin in 1680 (*The Chronology of Nichiren Shoshu and the Fuji School* [Jpn Nichiren Shoshu Fuji Nenpyo], p. 257). In 1676, four years earlier, however, Nisshun transcribed a Gohonzon for the parish of Shinko-ji in the Chiba area (*Miscellaneous Records* [Jpn Shokiroku], vol. 7, p. 254). It is not certain where Nisshun was

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at that time, but he was not high priest of Taiseki-ji. Nisshun was the first Taiseki-ji priest who became a teacher at the Hosokusa Seminary in Chiba. Probably because of his reputation as an erudite priest, the parish of Shinko-ji near the seminary might have asked Nisshun to transcribe a Gohonzon.

In addition to the Gohonzon transcribed by persons other than the high priest, the school's history also reveals numerous records of ordinary priests reproducing the Daishonin's original Gohonzon as well as Gohonzon transcribed by some prominent high priests such as Nikko and Nichikan. In the process of reproduction, a priest would place the original beside the new reproduction and copy it as exactly as possible. Or the image would be traced on thin paper placed atop the original. An artisan would then use the copies made in this manner to carve a wooden Gohonzon, or a wood block template, from which further reproductions would be printed.

In February 1836, for example, Nikki, the chief priest of Butsugen-ji in Sendai, copied a Gohonzon that Nikko had transcribed in 1303 and had a wooden Gohonzon made from the copy. He then removed a Gohonzon transcribed by the thirty-seventh high priest Nippo from the temple altar and enshrined this wooden Gohonzon in its place (*Miscellaneous Records* [Jpn Shokiroku], vol. 8, p. 215). While he described the process in writing on the back of the wooden Gohonzon, Nikki did not mention anything about receiving sanction from the high priest at Taiseki-ji to reproduce Nikko's Gohonzon or whether the high priest conducted an eye-opening ceremony on it. (At that time, the fiftieth high priest Nichijo and the retired forty-eighth high priest Nichiryō were present at Taiseki-ji.)

ACCORDING to *Miscellaneous Records*, while some wooden Gohonzon carry the high priest's signature, many others bear no such inscription or record. Furthermore, there is only one wooden Gohonzon in existence that bears a record of a high priest having performed an eye-opening ceremony upon it. This wooden Gohonzon was made after a Gohonzon transcribed by Nikko in 1306 (*Miscellaneous Records*, vol. 15, p. 445). Furthermore, in *Miscellaneous Records* and other documents, there are many records of Gohonzon reproduced through wood block printing whose templates were produced by those other than the successive high priests. These include Gohonzon reproduced from the Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin in 1282 and which were kept at Kyodai-ji in Tokushima Prefecture and widely distributed throughout Japan; Gohonzon reproduced from the Gohonzon transcribed by Nikko in March 1306 and kept at Honko-ji in Shizuoka Prefecture and other temples; and Gohonzon reproduced from the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan in 1718 and widely distributed during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. The same 1718 Gohonzon by Nichikan was also conferred upon Gakkai members after World War II. None of these *okatagi* Gohonzon bear the high priest's signature, indicating that their templates were transcribed by someone other than a high priest. Those numerous records indicate clearly that the high priest's sanction or eye-opening ceremony was not a necessary condition for the reproduction of Gohonzon.

SOME high priests of modern times have claimed that the lineage of high priest is an absolutely necessary condition for the transcription of the Gohonzon. For example, fifty-sixth high priest Nichio (1848–1922), states: “Unless one receives the bequeathal of the Golden Utterance to the direct successor, one can never transcribe the object of worship” (*Dispelling Illusion and Observing One's Mind* [Jpn Bennaku Kanjin Sho], p. 212, as trans-

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lated in *Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, p. 29). Nichio's claim is either an indication of his ignorance of the school's history or a blatant attempt to revise the tradition for the sake of aggrandizing the high priest's authority. In light of the recorded history of the Fuji School, the high priest's prerogative over the transcription and conferral of the Gohonzon is merely an administrative device to maintain the orderly relationship between Taiseki-ji and its branch temples and thereby prevent internal schism. It was never meant as a doctrinal or metaphysical necessity. For this reason, there are abundant records of Gohonzon transcribed by priests without the lineage of high priest.

The current priesthood's claims against the Gohonzon issued by the SGI clearly contradict the precedents set down in the Fuji School's own history. Furthermore, the transcription from which this Gohonzon is derived was made by Nichikan, the twenty-sixth high priest recognized by both the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai as the "restorer of the Fuji School." (For more discussions regarding the reproduction of the Gohonzon and its history, please refer to "A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon" and "The Recent History of the Conferral of the Gohonzon" in *Reaffirming Our Right to Happiness: On the Gohonzon Transcribed by High Priest Nichikan*, published by the SGI-USA in 1996.)

(3) The true meaning of the Gohonzon

WITH the priesthood's excommunication in 1991, the SGI was liberated from the priesthood's authoritarianism in several important areas. The SGI's decision to issue Gohonzon to its worldwide membership in 1993 freed the lay Buddhist movement from myths promulgated by the priesthood that shrouded the significance of the Gohonzon for a long time.

Before this epochal decision, the priesthood deliberately led lay believers to think that they must leave matters pertaining to the Gohonzon—especially transcription, printing and conferral—to the priesthood because they involve a level of mysticism beyond the grasp of ordinary practitioners. The priesthood's attitude toward the Gohonzon also promoted the view of the Gohonzon as an external entity endowed with mysterious powers that exert control over the lives of believers.

The SGI's conferral of Gohonzon, however, has helped to clarify correct faith in the Gohonzon. It is no longer a magical object, the understanding of which is veiled behind an alleged mysterious and exclusive heritage of an elite individual—the high priest. Meanwhile, the truly "mystic" quality of the Gohonzon has been made clear: that is, its power to call forth, in response to the believer's powers of faith and practice, the "Gohonzon"—the enlightened life-state of Buddhahood equal to that of the Daishonin—from within his or her life. As the Daishonin states: "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself.... The Gohonzon is found in faith alone" (MW-1, 213). Put another way, from the viewpoint of SGI members, the Gohonzon has ceased to be an object of spiritual dependency and has become the genuine object of their religious devotion and practice as intended by the Daishonin—a mirror to reflect their own inner enlightenment.

To be continued.

The Origin of the Eye-Opening Ceremony

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The practice of conducting an eye-opening ceremony began in about 100 A.D., when images of the Buddha were first produced in India. It is not a practice that dates back to the origins of Buddhism. The eye-opening ceremony was conducted to lend credence to images of the Buddha carved by Buddhist teachers of the day as objects of worship. Once a statue was made, its eyes were “opened” through some religious ceremony.

After such ceremonies became an established practice, they served as an important source of support for both the authority and income of priests. However, looking at history, we see that this phenomenon, which appeared well after Buddhism was established, has no relation to the original and essential spirit of the Buddhist religion and today amounts to no more than a meaningless formality.

In Japan, the eye-opening ceremonies were especially a practice of the Shingon sect. In fact, the term *eye-opening* (Jpn *kaigen*) generally came to be associated with esoteric Shingon. Nichiren Daishonin criticized such ceremonies by that sect (MW-4, 35).

There is no record at all that the Daishonin performed an eye-opening ceremony for Gohonzon. It was a practice incorporated into the Fuji School later by the priesthood.

Mr. Einosuke Akiya
President
Soka Gakkai

June 6, 1993

Dear Mr. Akiya:

The chain of events perpetrated by Nikken, including the arbitrary excommunication of the Soka Gakkai and, above all, the unspeakable injustice of terminating bestowal of Gohonzon upon its members, have filled me with a deep sense of indignation. Finally, in November 1992, after much soul-searching, I, as chief priest of Joen-ji temple [in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan] decided to secede from the head temple, Taiseki-ji.

Every deed and action of Nichiren Daishonin, the original Buddha, throughout his life was dedicated to kosen-rufu. His sole wish was to save all humankind. Thus, it deeply pains me to think how saddened and angered the Daishonin, who always displayed such infinite mercy and compassion toward his believers, would surely be if he learned that people’s seeking spirit toward faith was being denigrated and the flow of kosen-rufu obstructed. I firmly believe he would not tolerate such a situation.

There is nothing more terrible than the betrayal of the sacred intent of the founder, who declared, “If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity.” (MW-4, 272)

From the very first, I was deeply moved by the way in which the members of the Soka Gakkai, despite being unjustly denied the right to receive the Gohonzon by the head temple, have been advancing kosen-rufu in Japan and countries throughout the world with even greater vigor and energy than before, centering around SGI President Ikeda.

The Soka Gakkai members' tenacious struggles to realize kosen-rufu only convinces me all the more that they genuinely practice correct faith and have a seeking spirit toward the Daishonin's Buddhism. As such, no group of people is more qualified to pray before the Dai-Gohonzon that was bestowed by the Daishonin upon the entire world. Since the Daishonin's Buddhism is dedicated to the realization of kosen-rufu, I have been filled with a fervent desire to lend my support and encouragement in some way to the members of the Soka Gakkai who are struggling with such sincerity and devotion to this cause.

Joen-ji temple, which was founded some 690 years ago, has among its treasures a Gohonzon transcribed (in 1720) by the 26th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, Nichikan Shonin. The existing situation in which Nikken has unjustly terminated the conferral of Gohonzon upon Soka Gakkai members convinced me that the best and most just course—as well as the course that, I feel, would win the approval of the Daishonin—would be to enable Soka Gakkai members to receive *okatagi* Gohonzon based on this Gohonzon. I have brought this matter before a meeting of my colleagues in the Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu, where it was given unanimous approval. Hence, the reason for my tendering this proposal for your organization's consideration.

If your organization should accept this proposal, nothing would give me greater joy. It is a proposal made solely on the basis of faith and inspired by my sincere wish to enable the members of the Soka Gakkai, who demonstrate such great seeking spirit toward the Daishonin's Buddhism, to freely pray to the Gohonzon, for the furtherance of kosen-rufu.

Very truly yours,
Sendo Narita
Chief Priest
Joen-ji Temple