

**TEMPLE ISSUE: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS**  
**WHAT ABOUT AUTHORITARIANISM THAT MAY ARISE IN OUR ORGANIZATION?**  
**BY JEFF FARR, ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

Many of us have never had a close association with a Nichiren Shoshu priest. Many of us have never even talked to one of the priests (especially if we've don't live in one of the big cities where the six U.S. temples of Nichiren Shoshu are located). But we meet our SGI-USA leaders all the time. We know them very well—sometimes, we may feel, too well, like when we think that they are acting authoritarian. It could be that we feel they're just telling us what to do, or maybe we feel they're not listening to us.

It's only natural, then, that when these same leaders call the priests authoritarian, we may be a little skeptical. We've never seen the priests' authoritarianism firsthand. Our leaders' authoritarianism? Possibly, at times.

But when we say that the priests are authoritarian, what we really mean is that they're leading people away from correct faith in Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. They're using their position as priests to try to pull the kosen-rufu movement apart and replace the Daishonin's Buddhism with their own philosophy—basically, that everyone should obey them. They're calling it the Daishonin's Buddhism, but it's missing the core teaching that all people are equal.

The priests are much different, then, from SGI-USA leaders who, in the process of doing their human revolution, sometimes make mistakes in their dealings with members. SGI-USA leaders are ordinary people who can make unwise decisions, like all ordinary people do. But our leaders are not working to bring an end to kosen-rufu.

Needless to say, one of the important lessons of the temple issue is that we all have the potential to become authoritarian. We should all watch out for this tendency in ourselves, always being careful not to hurt other people through careless things that we say or do. And we should of course be determined to never become like the priests, who give no thought to the people's happiness and instead attempt to destroy it.

The Buddhist perspective of good friends and bad friends sheds light on all this. The temple issue has taught us that we have to be able to differentiate between good friends, who help us move toward the Law—toward our enlightenment—and bad friends, who deliberately seek to lure us away from it. This is what the Nirvana Sutra means when it says: "Bodhisattvas, have no fear of mad elephants. What you should fear are evil friends! Even if you are killed by a mad elephant, you will not fall into the three evil paths. But if you are killed by an evil friend, you are certain to fall into them" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 13).

Our leaders may not be perfect (sometimes they may even seem like mad elephants), but, when all is said and done, they are acting as good friends who help us to practice this Buddhism. Often, in fact, it's having to work with one another's imperfections that makes us practice more sincerely! SGI President Ikeda explains that "as comrades, we must be good friends with one another, encouraging one another and learning from one another. Soka Gakkai leaders are nothing but good friends" (June 25 *World Tribune*, p. 7).

Engaging in the SGI's education campaign on the difference between Nichiren Shoshu and the Daishonin's Buddhism can instill in us this profound perspective: At the heart of true religion is true friendship. A real religion is a gathering of good friends, of people who seek one another's happiness in addition to their own, of practitioners who seek enlightenment together as equals.

*Eight in a series*