

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA FAITH IN THE GOHONZON

SGI President Ikeda raises the question ‘What is the basic cause behind the Soka Gakkai’s phenomenal growth?’ He answers that it’s ‘the great power of the Gohonzon and the faith of the Soka Gakkai members.’

I have heard that a well-known and respected Japanese scholar of religion has said: “The development of the Soka Gakkai is one of the great miracles of postwar Japan. The Gakkai has encountered many difficulties, but it has overcome each of them brilliantly and continues to grow and develop even further. I have deep respect for it.”

The Soka Gakkai is a bright sun of hope rising in the skies of the 21st century. Its history has been marked by an uninterrupted series of persecutions — mountain upon towering mountain, wave upon crashing wave. But like a massive, indestructible rock, it has withstood all the buffeting. Until today, it rings with the cheers of the people’s victory and happiness.

What is the basic cause behind the Soka Gakkai’s phenomenal growth? The great power of the Gohonzon and the faith of the Soka Gakkai members. As the famous passage from Nichikan Shonin’s “*Commentary on ‘The True Object of Worship’*” states: “If you have faith in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even for a short while, no prayer will go unanswered, no offense unexpiated, no good fortune unbestowed, and no righteousness unproven.”

In exact accord with this passage, the noble members of the Soka Gakkai have placed their faith in the Gohonzon. They have chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo earnestly, praying and challenging themselves with all their might, and as a result have triumphed in all their endeavors.

On the upper left-hand side of the Gohonzon, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the words “Those who make offerings [to the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will enjoy good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles.” The ten honorable titles are the 10 names or epithets of the Buddha that describe his many virtues. They are: Thus Come One; Worthy of Offerings; Right and Universal Knowledge; Perfect Clarity and Conduct; Well Gone; Understanding of the World; Unexcelled Worthy; Leader of People; Teacher of Gods and Humans; and Buddha, the World-Honored One. [Other versions of the ten honorable titles also exist.]

The Buddha is called Worthy of Offerings, for example, because he is qualified to receive offerings and respect from others. Since he correctly perceives reality in its entirety, he is called Right and Universal Knowledge. As he has perfected both wisdom and practice, he is called Perfect Clarity and Conduct. And thanks to his transcendence above the world of delusion and his attainment of enlightenment, he is called Well Gone (to the world of enlightenment).

He is called Understanding of the World because he comprehends everything in it completely. And he is called Leader of People because he courageously instructs people and helps them refrain from doing wrong. He is called Teacher of Gods and Humans because he guides all human and heavenly beings.

These 10 names are like a badge of honor, a medal given to someone who has mastered the study of humanity and the art of leadership.

The Daishonin teaches that the blessings obtained from embracing faith in the Mystic Law and making offerings to the Gohonzon are even greater than the blessings received from making offerings to Buddhas possessing such illustrious titles.

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Next year will mark the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai by Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, its first and second presidents, respectively. It will also be 40 years since I, as third president, inheriting the spirit of these great mentors, first opened the door to worldwide kosen-rufu.

Over the years since our organization's founding, we have faced and defeated the nefarious schemes of the three powerful enemies and succeeded in spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism around the world. Through our efforts, people in 128 nations and territories today embrace faith in the Gohonzon. This achievement represents an unprecedented offering to the Law in the history of Buddhism.

The words inscribed on the Gohonzon promise that as a result of the benefit we accumulate through our Buddhist practice, we will be reborn in lifetime after lifetime as great leaders of foremost wisdom and character, able to pursue our path unhindered.

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On the upper right-hand side of the Gohonzon, however, are also the words "Those who vex or trouble [the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will have their heads split into seven pieces." This phrase, "their heads will split into seven pieces," can also be expressed as "their minds will be split into seven pieces" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 201). In other words, the minds of those that slander the Gohonzon or persecute the practitioners of the Mystic Law will fall apart in shreds.

The disintegration of the mind means the collapse of one's spiritual and emotional center. Just as a folding fan with a broken pivot falls apart, the core of what makes a person human becomes disordered. When that happens, of course, they can no longer distinguish right from wrong or good from evil. They will come to hate what is good and right, and thus destroy themselves, sinking into the darkness of hell.

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The words written on the upper left- and right-hand sides of the Gohonzon—"good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles" and "their heads split in seven pieces"—demonstrate the strictness of the law of cause and effect. They show the uncompromising outcome of any struggle in the realm of Buddhism.

Mr. Makiguchi would frequently say: "The Gohonzon has great power. It is inconceivable that it should bring forth great benefit [in response to good], without also bringing forth punishment or negative effects [in response to evil]. For instance, a father who lacks the strength to scold his children [when they have done something wrong] will also lack the power to bring them happiness. Try chanting intently to the Gohonzon. Can't you hear it saying, 'Those who vex or trouble [the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra] will have their heads split in seven pieces'?"

In his essay "*The History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai*," Mr. Toda introduces Mr.

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Makiguchi's ideas on this subject and states: "Benefit and punishment are the substance of our real, everyday lives, together forming the totality of a life of value. They [the Nichiren Shoshu priests] had forgotten this important fact. I can still vividly recall their state of panic and confusion when Mr. Makiguchi brought this subject up. They painted a truly comical picture. Thus, I am dumbfounded to see some of these same degenerate priests now act like they have known this concept [of benefit and punishment] all along. On the other hand, some ignorant priests are still not aware of this principle even now. I am saddened rather than surprised by their ignorance."

It was more than ignorance, though, because these contemptible priests went on to attack Mr. Makiguchi vehemently, accusing him of going against the school's teachings when he discussed punishment when he was propagating the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Their actions are, in fact, a perfect example of "those who vex or trouble" the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. The very fact that they tried to coerce the Soka Gakkai into accepting the Shinto talisman during World War II is clear evidence of their insanity, or—in the words of the Sutra—of their heads being split into seven pieces.

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The Daishonin's successor and second high priest, Nikko Shonin, says in "*Guidelines for Believers of the Fuji School*" that the five senior priests who betrayed the Daishonin "one and all denigrated this object of fundamental respect [the Gohonzon]." He clearly points out their grave offense. It is the spiritual descendants of those five senior priests who make up today's Nikken sect.

The Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of the sun, illuminating the entire world. In the Daishonin's writings, there is the passage "The king of the asuras, angered at the deity Taishaku, shot an arrow at the sun god, but the arrow came back and struck the king himself in the eye" (MW-4, 240). This is an apt description of the Nikken sect, which is shooting arrows at the Buddhism of the sun—and of what will happen as a result of their folly.

In other words, since the negative effects of their actions will return to them without fail, they are advancing inexorably down the path of self-destruction. This is the destruction warned against in the admonition "their heads will split into seven pieces."

The Daishonin also declares, "If we surmise the degree of benefit according to that of punishment, then there can be no doubt that my followers will enjoy 'good fortune surpassing the ten honorable titles'" (MW-6, 226). The beneficial power of the Gohonzon is indisputable! The triumph of Buddhism is clear! The benefit accruing to the SGI, which acts in accord with the Buddha's will and decree, is immeasurable.

My comrades, my noble friends! Bathed in the brilliant light of happiness—and with ever-growing strength and dignity—let us dance onto the stage of the dazzling Century of Soka together!