

## RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION BY JOSEI TODA

*Josei Toda was the second president of the Soka Gakkai and is responsible for rebuilding the organization after World War II. He was imprisoned during the war for his opposition to the Japanese military government's policies. He died in 1958. February 11, 2000, was the one-hundredth anniversary of President Toda's birth. The following is a translation of an essay published in the inaugural issue (July 1949) of The Daibyakureng (The Great White Lotus), the Soka Gakkai's study journal, and reprinted in Collected Works of Josei Toda, vol. 1, pp. 5–8.*

The intellectual elite despise today's religion. Particularly in our country [Japan], they tend to regard all religion — established and new alike — as some sort of superstition. A view of religion grounded in genuine Buddhist philosophy, however, reveals that it is the intelligentsia of modern Japan who deserve Shakyamuni Buddha's rebuke and contempt.

Is Buddhism incompatible with the knowledge of modern science? Is Buddhism unnecessary for modern living? To answer these questions, one must know Buddhism itself. I therefore stress the need to examine the roots of these issues and awaken the religious community, while simultaneously disproving the erroneous ideas about religious faith that are generally accepted in society.

Today, in the world of religion, superstitious beliefs are becoming rampant. They often make claims of blessings, advertising cases of illnesses being cured or the poor becoming rich through special prayers. The objects of their faiths, however, cannot be validated by any kind of Buddhist philosophy. It is also difficult to call a belief a true religion if its purpose does not go beyond instilling self-discipline or providing an opportunity for social interaction and spiritual relaxation.

In the Buddhist community, priests act merely as custodians of funeral services and cemeteries, treating their priestly role as a business from which to earn a living. Their teachings and sermons have nothing to do with people's daily lives; removed from the masses, they can be described as no more than useless burdens. If religion had no relation to how we live, then the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha or Christ would have been meaningless. Needless to say, everything Buddhism teaches is related to living, and the practice of it is meant to be applied to daily life.

The entirety of Buddhism as it is practiced today, however, runs contrary to Shakyamuni's intent. The cause of this lies in the fact that priests today have fallen into ritualism, have become preoccupied with protecting their personal interests, and have come to disregard the lives of the people. Furthermore, believers themselves are unconcerned about which religious denomination they belong to. They hold not the slightest doubt, even though they are asked to give large donations to temples that offer nothing to their lives. They have supported these temples simply as a tradition handed down from their ancestors.

Religion is originally a guiding principle for living; therefore, it must be an integrated part of our daily lives. When people think of religion, they must first rid themselves of their concern for status or the traditions of the past. If they are Buddhists, they must once again adopt the perspective of Shakyamuni and thereby judge the condition of Buddhism. The several millions of priests and lay believers who claim to be Nichiren's followers must make

their judgment from the viewpoint of Nichiren Daishonin, the school's founder. After the Daishonin's death, however, his school split into many branches, and one distorted view gave rise to many more. After repeated schisms, each branch held obstinately to its own doctrine without distinguishing right from wrong or the straight from the crooked. Gradually, each school developed a passive and regressive attitude, turning into a religion that has no bearing on people's lives. Taking advantage of this situation, new religions have been popping up everywhere.

If today's intellectuals or youth were asked how the invocation of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo differs from that of Namu Amida Butsu,<sup>1</sup> I wonder how many of them could respond. They most probably could not give a satisfactory answer. Society has given up on Buddhism, and people see no need for Buddhism in their daily lives. Furthermore, no one has thought to examine the reasons for this situation in a philosophical, scholarly manner. We, however, in pursuing the essence of Buddhism indicated in the Lotus Sutra, have discovered a limitlessly profound philosophy and the unparalleled power that derives from its practice. Today people are aiming for the lofty goal of building a nation that is based on morality and culture. It is at this time, I believe, that the essence of Buddhism must become known to the world so that it may illuminate and ennoble the goals upheld by nations and peoples.

It is with this in mind that we publish this journal of religion, *The Daibyakurenge*. It is my hope that here scholars, priests and lay believers may very freely express their opinions and beliefs, discarding the wrong in order to uphold the right and the lesser good in favor of the greater good. In this way, we will seek and clarify the true teaching and principles of Buddhism in order to establish correct faith as a guideline for a new way of living. □

1. Namu Amida Butsu: Also called the Nembutsu. The invocation used by the Pure Land sects of Japan. "Namu Amida Butsu" means devotion to Amida Buddha. The Pure Land sects assert that one can attain rebirth in the Pure Land of Amida Buddha by chanting this phrase.