

**EXPERIENCE—SHOICHI SHIMAZAKI, SAITAMA, JAPAN
WAKING UP TO THE REALITY OF
NICHIREN SHOSHU**

Mr. Shoichi Shimazaki is the former head of the lay organization of Myojo-ji temple in Saitama, Japan. He shared his experience in the Dec. 1, 1999, 'Soka Shimpō,' the publication of the Soka Gakkai youth division in Japan.

I was the head of the lay organization of Nichiren Shoshu's Myojo-ji temple in Saitama. I quit the position for personal reasons in September 1996. Since then, I have been away from the temple, and the other day, Oct. 9, I officially left the temple.

I believe that you will see how corrupt the current Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and Myojo-ji's chief priest, Zuido Matsumoto, are through my account.

In July 1995, I was appointed head of Myojo-ji's lay believers. When I went to the temple to express my respect to the chief priest, his wife, in an arrogant tone, told me: "I am the queen of Myojo-ji temple. I am the lord of this temple. Whatever you want, you have to go through me."

At first, I could not comprehend what she had said. I was simply astounded at her high-handedness. From then on, I saw how she meddled in everything that lay believers spontaneously wanted to do at the lay leaders meetings. I then understood what she really meant. Since everyone always had to worry about what she thought about each issue, we resolved that we could not carry out our activities in a healthy manner. We requested the chief priest to ask her not to attend the lay leaders meetings any more.

Then, she stopped attending our meetings, which was good. But the chief priest became unable to make final decisions at the meetings. He would bring up each issue with his wife in their lodging quarters. Swayed by his wife, he often reversed decisions we had agreed upon at our meetings. It was obvious that his wife was controlling him behind the scenes.

He seemed to be at her mercy. At one point, I asked him about this, since the way he spoke at the temple had become timid and unnatural. His response was: "Because you are the head of the lay believers, I will tell you the truth. Hidden microphones are placed here and there in this temple, so that my wife can hear everything that we discuss." He even showed me where the microphones were, including in the four corners of the Gohonzon room, the conference room and the reception area.

I later found out that his wife, while in the lodging quarters, was always listening to every conversation through this system. She was checking everything said by the chief priest, the lay leaders and other believers. I felt: "This place is sick. This is not where we can learn about faith."

Yet I continued to make offerings to the temple as I was urged to do, including \$5,600 of carpeting, \$350 slippers and \$600 sandals. I eventually became concerned that Mr. Matsumoto and some lay leaders were misusing the temple's money. Mr. Matsumoto once harshly criticized me, "Why don't you quit your job so you can support the temple more?" Even though I tried to believe in the greatness of this faith, things like these made me doubt the integrity of Nichiren Shoshu and its priests.

My distrust of Mr. Matsumoto deepened in the summer of 1996.

One day when I arrived at the temple, the chief priest's mother told me not to go into the Gohonzon room. She seemed disturbed. I had a funny feeling about what she had told

me, so I dared to enter the room.

The room was usually open to everyone. But this time, it was shut tight. I felt a little uneasy and quietly peered inside. I could not believe my eyes! It was eerie—Mr. Matsumoto, together with a craftsman, was doing something to the wooden Gohonzon, which they had taken down from the altar and placed on the floor.

Actually, Mr. Matsumoto and this worker were attempting to remove from the Gohonzon the name of SGI President Ikeda, the person to whom this Gohonzon was designated. (President Ikeda had initiated the construction of the temple.) When I saw this appalling scene, I knew that, sooner or later, Nichiren Shoshu would collapse.

Removing President Ikeda's name was an act of insanity. This happened at other temples, too; it was evidence of the priesthood's deep-seated jealousy toward the SGI president. This outrageous conduct clearly showed that something was very wrong with the mentality of the priesthood.

If I were to sum up the nature of the Nichiren Shoshu priests, I would say in one sentence, "They love to be around money." Wherever they smell money, that's where they go. And they suck it all up. When lay believers are of no more use to them, they will abandon them. When I visited a temple member at his home, the chief priest's response was: "You don't need to do such a meaningless thing!" I wonder what made me follow such an incorrect teaching. I am ashamed that I could not see through the fundamental nature of the priesthood much earlier.

When I quit the position of head of the lay believers in September 1996, I wrote a letter to High Priest Nikken Abe denouncing Myojo-ji's corruption. I am proud of what I did. I am now resolved to wake up all my fellow temple members who are still being deceived by the priesthood.