

PERSPECTIVE
SOKA SPIRIT IS THE STRUGGLE TO DEFINE WHO WE ARE
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SGI-USA's "Soka Spirit" movement is not just a new name for the Temple Issue. It is an outgrowth of our deepening understanding of the issue. While the former term belies, perhaps, a preoccupation with the wrongs of the Nichiren Shoshu temple, Soka Spirit, I believe, accurately gives expression to an emerging desire to understand and give voice to what it means to correctly practice Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism. This has always been the spirit of the Soka Gakkai presidents, thus the term *Soka Spirit*.

I was going through a period of suffering last year, really determined to break through, using my practice to propel me through the rough times and searching inside myself for the answers. Not coincidentally I found myself surrounded by friends and others experiencing similar pain in their lives. This was my great fortune.

Taking action for the sake of others at a time when I really felt at the bottom myself not only lifted me out of my own depression but instilled in me a deep desire to do whatever it takes to help heal the ills of humanity. The bodhisattva spirit truly emerged to a degree I'd never experienced before. I made a determination that I will not only show great proof through my faith, but also profoundly deepen my understanding of this Buddhism, of how and why it works, so that I can inspire hope in others through my own absolute conviction. I had experienced 13 years of Buddhist practice with ever-increasing faith, now I was aiming for absolute conviction.

Once I made this determination and started focusing my prayer in this way, it wasn't long before I was asked to facilitate a region Soka Spirit meeting.

"Why me?" I asked. I am not on this committee nor have I ever been especially interested in or involved with the temple situation. Being agreeable by nature and somewhat curious as well, I replied that I would do it.

That evening I realized how much I didn't know and how important this Soka Spirit issue is. I could also see that it was SGI President Ikeda's prime point, and for that reason alone I felt I must take action to deepen my understanding.

Even though the gathering of members was still called the Temple Issue Committee, I could see that the issue was essentially concerned with my questions: What do we, as an organization, as a religious philosophy and practice, truly have to offer the world? Why are we different than other similar organizations? What, exactly, makes the SGI correct, and Nichiren Shoshu incorrect with regard to the Daishonin's Buddhism? Why should temple members disassociate from the temple?

We really need to know the answers to these questions. Not just parroting responses we've picked up in meetings or in publications. We really need to understand these points for ourselves, and on the basis of that understanding, convey our absolute conviction to others.

This issue is of prime importance. The Soka Spirit movement, and our actions to refute High Priest Nikken Abe's false portrayal of the Daishonin's Buddhism, are our great opportunity to deepen our understanding of our faith and to define who we, and the SGI, are.

The process also enables us, individually and as an organization, to accomplish our human revolution. Such self-scrutiny based on faith definitely reveals both the good and

the bad, and gives us the opportunity to further cultivate that which we like about our organization, while creatively challenging and seeking solutions to that which we do not like.

President Ikeda's expressed desire when establishing the first chapters in the Americas that we become a unique organization, dedicated to the happiness of the American people, fulfilling our mission in our own way. It is up to us to wrack our brains and selflessly struggle to create an SGI-USA that can be a great home for the American people. In short, the situation with High Priest Nikken and the priesthood is our incredible benefit because it is causing us to really self-reflect, struggle and grow.

In addition to this issue being an opportunity, it is also a necessity. The Daishonin repeatedly tells us that obstacles, devilish influences and enemies will appear without fail when we propagate and correctly practice Buddhism. He says, "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 501).

And "Something uncommon also occurs when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood. At such a time, the three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat" (WND, 637).

Most of us can attest to the occurrence of obstacles when we are striving to achieve something great in our own lives, especially in the realm of faith. Looking at the body of believers as a whole, our excommunication and the attacks upon our organization by Nichiren Shoshu are proof that our organization is on the right track. The Daishonin tells us in no uncertain terms that persecution is inevitable; it is par for the course in the process of attaining enlightenment.

The evening I stumbled upon my first Soka Spirit meeting was a turning point. From the moment I made a determination to deepen my understanding of this issue my life began to transform at an accelerated rate. One of the first things to happen was that I became aware of the influence of the fundamental darkness within my own life. I saw the ways in which my thoughts, words and actions toward others were sometimes arrogant, hurtful or divisive. I saw in myself the same "bully-ish" tendencies I'd always abhorred in others.

I determined to win over these tendencies and become infinitely more kind, considerate and compassionate. My work relations, friendships and family relationships have deepened considerably and become more mutually fulfilling. A pervading sense of justice is germinating inside of me, and I have begun to see the world and life itself through the eyes of one committed to upholding justice. I now believe nothing is a greater source of happiness than this.

SGI Deputy President Einosuke Akiya says: "What do we need to do in order to attain an indomitable state of life? In short, we have to fight against evil. By defeating great evil, we establish within ourselves an indestructible state of life of great good. The element *ku* [in the word *kudoku*, or benefit] means eliminating evil, while the element *doku* refers to the virtue one acquires by bringing about good (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762). Only by actively opposing evil can we defeat the inclination to remain passive observers, the negative tendency to tolerate or even accommodate evil. Through unflagging efforts to eradicate evil, we without fail positively transform our lives and experience a true revolution in state of life."

I would encourage everybody who doesn't feel involved with the Soka Spirit issue to begin to get involved in some way. Even if it's just by chanting about it or studying.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “If you light a lamp for another, your own way will be lit” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1598). By the same token, when we begin to take action to fight against whatever forces appear as the enemies of people’s happiness, we simultaneously win over those enemies that threaten our personal happiness and, as President Ikeda says, “experience a true revolution in one’s state of life.”