

**SOKA SPIRIT STUDY
WHO IS THE 'ORIGINAL TEACHER'?**
BY JEFF KRIGER
SGI-USA VICE STUDY DEPARTMENT LEADER

This new series will clarify the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood's mistaken interpretations of Nichiren Daishonin's writings.

A pamphlet distributed by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood aimed at inspiring doubt about the Gohonzon to which SGI members practice reads: “Be absolutely certain to be led to the attainment of Buddhahood by not breaking from the original Master of all mankind.’ (‘Admonitions against Slander,’ *Shinpen*, p. 1040; ref. *M.W.*, Vol. 1, p. 166). This explains that we must completely follow the Way of Master and Disciple to realize our road to Buddhahood. For us, to proceed to the original Master of all mankind means that we must faithfully follow the guidance of the High Priest, the general head priest” (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's "Counterfeit Object of Worship": 100 Questions and Answers*, p. 9).

In *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, the above quote from “The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood” (formerly titled “Admonitions against Slander”) reads, “Above all, be sure to follow your original teacher so that you are able to attain Buddhahood” (WND, 748).

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood is asking us to interpret these words to mean that following its head priest, Nikken Abe, is to follow the “original Master of all mankind.”

Honju is the Japanese term translated by the priesthood here as “the original Master of all mankind” and in *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* as “original teacher.” *Hon* of *honju* means original, fundamental or true, and *ju* means to follow. *Honju* therefore literally means whom, or that which, one originally followed, or one's original teacher.

Differences in wording aside, these two translations communicate the same basic message: We should not be mistaken as to who our original teacher of Buddhism is, and we should take care to follow that teacher always. Immediately after the quoted sentence, Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Shakyamuni Buddha is the original teacher for all people, and moreover, he is endowed with the virtues of sovereign and parent. Because I have expounded this teaching, I have been exiled and almost killed” (WND, 748).

Earlier in this writing, the Daishonin points out that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the embodiment of the fusion of reality and wisdom that is entrusted by the Buddha to Bodhisattva Superior Practices and others to propagate in the Latter Day of the Law.

While referring to Shakyamuni Buddha as the “original teacher,” the Daishonin also makes clear that he himself is fulfilling the mission of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, the leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, to whom the Buddha specifically entrusted the task of upholding and spreading this teaching.

“Shakyamuni Buddha” mentioned above is not the Shakyamuni historically depicted, the Buddha who attained enlightenment under the bodhi tree. Instead, this is the Shakyamuni revealed in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, who actually first attained enlightenment in the remote past, countless kalpas ago. Even this Buddha became enlightened at a particular point in time through his practice of the Law always present in the universe. That Law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the original teacher by which all Buddhas, including Shakyamuni, attain enlightenment.

In addition, from the standpoint of faith, we should view the Daishonin—the Buddha

who directly expounded that Law — as our original teacher.

A Buddhist teacher is one who actively expounds the principle by which all people can overcome suffering and attain supreme happiness, enlightenment. The Daishonin, more than any Japanese person of his time, wrote and spoke tirelessly in order to teach ordinary people how to overcome suffering and achieve ultimate happiness. In these writings, he expresses his immense, compassionate will for the happiness of all people in the future.

Who is qualified to share his mission as a genuine teacher of Buddhism? The Daishonin clarifies, “If you are the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” (WND, 385). This is the key to what it means to “follow” one’s original teacher. It is not to passively obey or show deference, but to teach the Law with the same mind—the same compassionate spirit and courage—as one’s original teacher. This should be the standard by which we assess any teacher of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, as well as our own bodhisattva practice.

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, in asserting that following Nikken Abe is to follow one’s “original teacher,” makes no mention of our true original teacher—Nichiren Daishonin. Such assertions are precisely what this Goshō passage warns us against.