

## **FROM 'MY DEAR FRIENDS IN AMERICA' BUDDHISM HELPS US ANSWER LIFE'S QUESTIONS**

**SGI President Ikeda says that Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism can help us find answers to questions like 'What is the meaning of my life? What is my mission? What is my relationship to the universe?'**

*From SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 3rd SGI-USA Executive Conference, Boston, Sept. 21, 1993.*

The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin represents the very quintessence of Buddhism. "What is the meaning of my life? What is my mission? What is my relationship to the universe?" The Daishonin's Buddhism can help us find the answers to these questions. It can, in the words of Socrates, help one "Know thyself."

If I may make rather broad generalizations, one might say the mission of scientists is to pursue truth, the prime concern of business people might be to make a profit, and that of politicians might be holding the reins of government.

Buddhism, however, fundamentally contains all spheres of learning and the entire spectrum of value. Consequently, those who embrace and practice the supreme sutra—the Lotus Sutra—are kings and queens of humanity.

In this respect, the SGI is a gathering of kings and queens, a gathering of Bodhisattvas of the Earth. In particular, all of you gathered here today are leaders of Buddhism. You are striving to lead people to happiness. There is no more noble or respectable mission than this.

Leading people to happiness is the responsibility of a leader. I would like you to be kings and queens of action and of seeking spirit toward Buddhism. I also hope you will become kings and queens of eternity, of happiness, of philosophy, of wisdom, of family harmony, of life and of society. Moreover, I am convinced that the members in Boston are kings and queens of intellect.

The truth is always found in our immediate reality. When I use the words *kings* and *queens*, it doesn't mean that you are going to become some kind of superhuman being. You are still and always will be a human being.

No matter what airs they may put on or how high a position they may rise to, human beings can never be anything more than human beings. Therefore, those who behave with the utmost humanity, who shine in the way that human beings really should, are true kings and queens.

For us SGI members, our immediate reality includes gongyo. It also includes personal guidance and discussion meetings. In our actual day-to-day efforts shine the brilliance of kings and queens and the light of Buddhism. I hope you will take note of this fundamental point.

**Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism has the power to constantly revitalize culture.**

Because this meeting is being held in Boston, the city of culture, I would like to talk a little about the subject of culture today.

At the 5th Soka Gakkai Young Men's Division General Meeting in 1956, the 65th high

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priest, Nichijun, spoke of the relationship between Japanese culture and Buddhism. He referred to the cultural reform initiated by Prince Shotoku and the great cultural movement of the Heian Era started by the Great Teacher Dengyo. Nichijun observed that as both these examples indicate, a profound cultural movement ensues when the True Law prospers and spreads in accordance with the “time.”

In the Latter Day of the Law, it is the Daishonin’s Buddhism that has the power to constantly revitalize culture—keeping it fresh and alive. It is also the source for the creation of a vibrantly pulsing culture of humanism.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda maintained that “culture represents turning wisdom into knowledge.” He once said: “[Culture means] giving wisdom a concrete form, if you like; in other words, putting [wisdom] into a form in which it can be used by people. For example, something like a baby’s diaper is a marvelous example of culture. Just because it is a diaper, that doesn’t give one the right to denigrate it as a lowly form of culture. The person who invented the diaper must surely have possessed great wisdom, wouldn’t you say? ...

“True culture is the product of one’s wisdom. Therefore, the greatest culture can derive only from the greatest wisdom.... I state unequivocally that today there is no greater wisdom than the Mystic Law. As long as this wisdom exists, humanity can avoid many crises and eventually develop a truly glorious culture. To do so, it is necessary to realize kosen-rufu—the only path, I believe, left to human-kind.... In this respect, I feel I am perfectly justified in describing kosen-rufu as a cultural movement of the highest order.”

We have earnestly pursued this path that President Toda indicated, and we have built a network of peace, culture and education throughout the world. Today, we stand on the brink of a great age of global exchange. We have launched a great cultural movement based on humanism, with the whole world as our stage.

### **To denigrate culture is to denigrate human intellect and wisdom.**

During my dialogue with the late British historian Arnold Toynbee, we discussed the relationship between civilization and religion. Dr. Toynbee said: “I believe that a civilization’s style is the expression of its religion. I quite agree that religion has been the source of the vitality that has brought civilizations into being and has then kept them in being” (*Choose Life*, p. 309).

Dr. Toynbee also said that what he defined as higher religions “are the kind that modern man needs.” [He defined higher religions as “those that bring an individual human being into direct contact with the ultimate spiritual reality instead of giving him only indirect contact with it through the medium of either a nonhuman natural force or an institution embodying collective human power.”] And he agreed that “a universal system of laws of life, such as is presented in Buddhism, is likely to be a less misleading representation of ultimate spiritual reality [than either a pantheon or a unique god]” (p. 326).

Also, the former Soviet prime minister, Mikhail Gorbachev, said, “With respect to the role that religion will play in building a new civilization and a new world, I believe a world religion is indispensable for us to usher in such a new era.”

With every passing moment, humanity is moving closer to a new age of world religion. In contrast, as you know, Nichiren Shoshu denigrates and despises culture. To denigrate culture is to denigrate the fruits and achievements of human intellect and wisdom; it is an expression of contempt for human beings themselves.

## **Rebuking Nichiren Shoshu's great slander means practicing Buddhism correctly today.**

Decades ago, the 59th high priest, Nichiko, pointed out the corrupt state of Nichiren Shoshu priests: “[There are some priests of our school] who proclaim it is a virtue to put on a grand pretense of faith and move the believers to tears with their eloquence and then milk them of offerings. They say they acquire benefit from doing so because they satisfy the believers, even if just for a short time. They declare themselves to be fulfilling their duty to the head temple and performing a service to society. And their own pockets are satisfied as well, they say. What is more, they have the audacity to say that this way everyone is kept happy....

“Their attitude is highly immoral. By their behavior, they are harming both themselves and others. Many of those who betray Buddhism and degrade Nichiren Shoshu appear from among the ranks of priests such as these.”

Corrupt priests who live off Buddhism and greedily devour the believers' offerings have been a constant in history.

Nichiren Shoshu has become a truly corrupt and immoral school, while its priests, including High Priest Nikken Abe, are nothing more than aberrant priests who transgress the teachings of Buddhism. When the True Law is endangered by an avalanche of heretical Buddhist teachings, the Daishonin instructs us: “At such a time, one must set aside all other affairs and devote one's attention to rebuking slander of the correct teaching. This is the practice of shaku-buku” (*The Writings of Nichi-ren Daishonin*, p. 126).

In light of this Goshu, to thoroughly rebuke the great slander of the Law that is being perpetrated by Nichiren Shoshu is to practice Buddhism in a way that accords with the present time.

## **When we diligently work for kosen-rufu, we truly embrace the Gohonzon.**

As you know, it has recently been announced that the SGI will confer the Gohonzon—based on one transcribed by the 26th high priest, Nichikan—upon members around the world. This news has been greeted with great joy not only throughout the United States but in countries around the globe. Today, I would therefore like to talk a little about the significance of “embracing the Gohonzon.”

In the Goshu “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin writes: “Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained are all contained within the five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo. If we believe in these five characters, we will naturally be granted the same benefits as he was” (WND, 365).

This is a famous passage that elucidates the principle of “embracing the Gohonzon is in itself enlightenment.” President Toda said the following about this Goshu passage: “‘The five characters of Myoho-rence-kyo’ refers to the Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws. ‘Shakyamuni's practices and the virtues he consequently attained’ refers to all the practices and resulting virtues of Shakyamuni as described in the provisional [pre-Lotus Sutra] teachings, and in the theoretical and essential teachings [of the Lotus Sutra].

“One can attain the state of Buddhahood just through the benefit of embracing the Dai-Gohonzon, without requiring any meritorious deeds, the accumulation of any other benefit, or undergoing some kind of arduous practice.

“What then is the meaning of ‘to embrace’? There are several ways in which this may be interpreted. But I feel that it is best viewed from the standpoint of the significance of the Three Great Secret Laws and of the three categories of action—thoughts, words and

deeds. It goes without saying that the fundamental meaning of ‘to embrace’ is to believe in the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws and to simply and wholeheartedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo....

“If you receive the Gohonzon and then merely enshrine it in your room, you are embracing the Gohonzon in outward form only.

“The daimoku of the Three Great Secret Laws has two aspects: one is faith and the other is practice. To carry out the daimoku of practice, you have to chant daimoku for yourself and for others. This is the daimoku of the Latter Day of the Law.

“If you simply have [the Gohonzon] enshrined in your room, then, even if you profess faith in it, you cannot be said to truly embrace the Gohonzon.”

You SGI members who are diligently making efforts for kosen-rufu and assiduously performing gongyo and chanting daimoku are people who truly embrace and believe in the Gohonzon. The good fortune you possess, therefore, is immeasurable, and the fact that you will attain enlightenment is guaranteed.

### **To respect the SGI members is to be a true follower of Nichiren Daishonin.**

In another Goshō, the Daishonin writes: “When we revere Myoho-renge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This is what is meant by ‘Buddha’” (WND, 887).

In regard to this passage, President Toda commented: “The body of the person who chants daimoku to the Gohonzon in itself becomes the entity of the object of devotion. This is clear. Surely this very action constitutes ‘embracing the Gohonzon’ in the truest sense.”

The 66th high priest, Nittatsu, once remarked that the life of the Daishonin is in itself the Gohonzon. He said: “If we believe single-mindedly in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we ourselves become the Gohonzon. Furthermore, we become the noble entity of the life of the founder, the Daishonin. This is the true meaning of attaining Buddhahood in our present form.”

I therefore ask that all of you chant single-mindedly to this Gohonzon, harboring not the slightest doubt in your heart; and I ask that you establish the kind of profound faith where you can realize in the depths of your life that your mortal body itself becomes the entity of the life of the Daishonin and the Gohonzon.

In the Goshō “The Entity of the Mystic Law,” the Daishonin writes on this principle: “In essence, the entity of Myoho-renge-kyo is the physical body that the disciples and followers of Nichiren who believe in the Lotus Sutra received from their fathers and mothers at birth” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 512).

In his “Commentary on ‘The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,’” Nichikan writes, “When one embraces and has faith in this Gohonzon and chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, one’s life immediately becomes the object of devotion; it becomes the life of the Daishonin.”

How worthy of respect then are the lives of those who pray for the realization of kosen-rufu day after day and who make painstaking efforts and chant daimoku for the sake of the Law and for the happiness of others!

The offense of Nichiren Sho-shu, in denigrating these noble members and excommunicating the SGI, is just as grave as the crime of persecuting the Daishonin

himself. Those who respect and cherish the members of the SGI, the children of the Buddha, with all their heart are true followers of the Daishonin.

The Daishonin writes: “Now, however, we have entered the Latter Day of the Law, and the medicines of these various schools no longer cure the people’s illnesses. Moreover, all the Japanese have become *icchantika* [people of incorrigible disbelief] and people of grave slander. Their offense is even worse than that of killing one’s father or mother, fomenting a rebellion, or causing a Buddha to bleed. Japan is filled with individuals whose respective offenses exceed even those of one who were to gouge out the eyes of all the human beings of a major world system, or raze all temples and pagodas in the worlds of the ten directions. Consequently, the heavenly deities glare down furiously upon our nation day after day while the earthly deities tremble in continual rage” (WND, 414–15).

In a later passage of this same Goshō, the Daishonin goes on to state that, when learned priests and those who observe the precepts slander the Law, their offense is especially grave, since they are the very ones who ought to be leading people toward the correct path.

### **Those who try to destroy the SGI disrupt the unity of believers.**

Commenting on the phrase “fomenting a rebellion” mentioned in this Goshō, Nichikan said: “Even rebelling against the ruler of one’s nation is deemed a grave offense. How much worse then is the offense of betraying the eternal rulers of the three existences, the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin” (“Commentary on ‘On Offering Prayers to the Mandala of the Mystic Law’”).

The priests of Nichiren Sho-shu, who have utterly betrayed the Daishonin’s spirit, are guilty of the greatest treachery against the original Buddha.

Nittatsu said the following about the same Goshō: “This passage mentions ‘fomenting a rebellion,’ but this refers to the offense of disrupting the unity of believers, in other words, those who disrupt the harmoniously united body of believers—an offense classified as one of the five cardinal sins....

“The unity of believers refers first and last to the body of believers who worship the True Law. To disrupt their unity is the gravest offense of all.

“All those in the body of believers who embrace faith in the True Law attain Buddhahood without exception. For this reason, any attempt to obstruct or hinder them constitutes a far graver crime than any in the secular world.”

Those who attempt to destroy the SGI, the harmoniously united body of believers working to achieve the widespread propagation of the True Law, are guilty of the serious offense of disrupting the unity of believers. Nittatsu’s words clearly confirm this.