

BUDDHISM IN A NEW LIGHT
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The Soka Spirit movement is a gold mine of opportunities to learn more about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. The basics of faith are now cast in new light, revealing their deeper meaning—with the Nichiren Sho-shu priesthood's views as points of contrast. For this reason, our understanding of the temple issue will naturally translate into a clearer view of our faith, into greater joy and benefit from our practice.

The meaning of faith, for example, once required a simple explanation, such as: We believe in the Gohonzon. Many of us assumed that it was impossible to have wrong faith in the correct object of devotion; faith, as long as placed in the Gohonzon, was a matter of strong or weak, not of right or wrong, we believed.

Now, thanks to the priesthood, we are learning that what matters is not only what we believe in but also *how* we believe in it, that what people sometimes think of as “faith” in the Gohonzon can be a problem.

Regarding the significance of the Gohonzon, the Daishonin states, “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 832). Interpreting this passage, the priesthood asserts: “The Gohonzon to which he refers is not the correct object of worship which one should worship. The Gohonzon to which he refers is the life of the Buddha nature endowed within our bodies” (*Refuting the Soka Gakkai's “Counterfeit Object of Worship”: 100 Questions and Answers*, p. 56). The priesthood here separates the object of devotion from our inherent Buddha nature; in other words, the Gohonzon to which we pray and the ultimate reality of our lives are two different things, so the priests say.

The priesthood's view of faith, however, contradicts the Daishonin's teaching as he admonishes us, “When we revere Myoho-rence-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-rence-kyo” (WND, 887). Those who follow the priesthood's teaching say that they believe in the Gohonzon, yet the way they do is the exact opposite of what the Daishonin teaches. The innermost reality of their prayer—whether they are conscious or unconscious of it—is: “The Gohonzon is all-powerful and worthy of respect, but I'm nothing, except in as much as I receive blessings through my faith in its power.” Whoever prays this way grows dependent, passive and weak; he or she remains insecure and frustrated because they are separate from the solution to their suffering and thus out of control over their own existence.

In contrast, true faith in the Gohonzon is to believe in the unconditional value of our lives as the Daishonin encourages us: “You, yourself, are a Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies [of a Buddha]. You should chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo with this conviction” (WND, 299–300).

Our faith in and reverence for the Gohonzon, therefore, must be reflected back to ourselves—as faith in and reverence for our own lives. Our innate Buddha nature is the object of our fundamental respect as it is represented in the Gohonzon; it must be recognized, cherished and praised daily through our prayer. Any form of self-disparagement, therefore, should have no place in our faith, in our prayer.

To see our own supreme potential and respect ourselves—despite our momentary appearance or the opinions of others—is of far greater significance and much more

difficult than to humble ourselves before some omnipotent entity. This is why true faith requires courage. But every bit of courage we exert to praise our lives will be richly rewarded with hope and freedom.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT:

- The problem of faith is often the problem of motivation. Do you sometimes pray out of fear and anxiety that you are essentially helpless in your circumstances?
 - In your prayer, are you begging while disparaging yourself (passive/authoritarian*) or are you determined to win while praising yourself (active/free)?
- * Of the attitude to seek identity and comfort in the relationship of submission and domination. Neither the one who submits nor the other who dominates is free because they are dependent on each other to verify their existences.*