

## CHAPTER 3

# The Schism After Nichimoku

On May 22, 1333, a few months after Nikko Shonin's passing, the army of Nitta Yoshisada defeated the ruling Hojo

### *A Seventy-Two-Year Land Dispute*

clan, bringing an end to the Kamakura shogunate. When Emperor Godaigo reestablished the imperial government in Kyoto, Nikko's successor, Nichimoku, felt that it was an opportune time to remonstrate with the sovereign and proclaim the validity of the Daishonin's Buddhism. So, at the beginning of November, Nichimoku, accompanied by two of his disciples—Nichizon and Nichigo—went to Kyoto.

He wasn't content to live quietly at Taiseki-ji but, following the spirit of this teacher, actively devoted himself to propagating the Daishonin's teachings, traveling far and wide to do so.

On his way to the nation's new political center, however, Nichimoku collapsed—probably due both to age and exhaustion from cold weather—at Tarui, Mino Province. On November 15, he died at age seventy-four, bringing closure to a life dedicated to the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Nichigo returned to Fuji with Nichimoku's ashes. Nichizon went on to Kyoto and waited for an opportunity to remonstrate with the government.

Before his passing, Nichimoku designated Nichigo as the chief priest of Renzo-bo, a lodging temple on the grounds of Taiseki-ji. But Nichigo later had a dispute over doctrine with Nichido, the fourth high priest (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 9, p. 36). Eventually his arguments were rejected by the majority of priests at Taiseki-ji, and he was forced to leave for Awa Province where he had once been sent to propagate the Daishonin's teaching.

Nichigo felt a strong sense of rivalry with Nichido. It is said that when Nichimoku left for Kyoto to remonstrate with the imperial government, he unofficially designated Nichido as his successor (*Detailed Accounts of Nikko Shonin of the Fuji School*, p. 478). Since Nichimoku had to retain his position as high priest to represent the Fuji School in remonstrating with the imperial government, his transfer of the office of high priest to Nichido was conducted privately. After the private appointment, Nichido moved into Dai-bo, the lodging temple for the high priest, and assumed administrative responsibilities for Taiseki-ji.

To attain superiority over Nichido, Nichigo schemed to obtain control of the property around Renzo-bo of Taiseki-ji from Nanjo Tokitsuna, the steward of the area and head of the Nanjo family. As the fifth son of Nanjo Tokimitsu, the donor of Taiseki-ji's property, Tokitsuna had great influence over the management of Taiseki-ji. Concerned with status and wealth, Nichigo asserted his property right against Nichido and, in so doing, violated the intent of Nikko Shonin, who declared: "Those of insufficient learning who are bent on obtaining fame and fortune are not qualified to

call themselves my followers” (GZ, 1618).

All of Taiseki-ji’s land had been donated by Nanjo Tokimitsu to Nikko Shonin. Nanjo Tokitsuna, however, wrote up a new deed for the east side of Taiseki-ji’s property and transferred it to Nichigo on the condition that Tokitsuna’s second son, Go’omaru, who was still very young at the time, become Nichigo’s successor. The son would later be known as Nichiden.

Based on the deed from Nanjo Tokitsuna, Nichigo lodged a complaint with the governor of Suruga Province. The provincial government acknowledged Nichigo’s right for the time being, and he returned to Renzo-bo at Taiseki-ji and built a hall nearby to enshrine the Daishonin’s image. Nichigo also schemed to gain the support of the priests at Omosu Seminary, vigorously asserting his authority over Nichido.

Nichigo, however, met with strong resistance from many priests and was once again forced to leave Taiseki-ji. When Nichigo left, he took a statue of the Daishonin and a Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin. He moved to Awa Province and established Myohon-ji at Hota. He also built a seminary at Koizumi near Ueno where Taiseki-ji was located. This seminary later became known as Kuon-ji.

Nichigo died in 1353, but for more than seventy years his followers continued to argue for control of the eastern portion of Taiseki-ji. Nanjo Tokitsuna’s son Nichiden, by then the second chief priest of Myohon-ji, filed a suit with the Imagawa family, the ruling clan of Suruga Province, and eventually regained control of the property.

Taiseki-ji, headed by Nichiji, the sixth high priest, appealed the decision to the more powerful Uesugi family of the Kanto region, which included Suruga Province. At last, the governor of the Kanto region ordered the governor of Suruga

Province to transfer the deed for the eastern part of Taiseki-ji to its original owner—Taiseki-ji. When Nichiden died in 1416 at age seventy-seven, this long dispute effectively ended. Nichiden’s entire life was spent on this land dispute.

The seventy-two-yearlong land dispute, born out of Nichigo’s greed for status and wealth, resulted in Taiseki-ji’s considerable decline and impeded the further spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

After Nichimoku’s passing in 1333, Nichizon continued his trip to Kyoto. It is said that in the following year, he had an

audience with the imperial government and received a piece of property in the nation’s capital where he established Jogyo-in temple.

***Nichizon Establishes Shakyamuni’s Statue as an Object of Devotion***

Nichizon is known for having been expelled from Omosu Seminary by Nikko Shonin for vacantly staring at falling leaves during a sermon (see chapter 2 for more explanation). Nichizon took faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism under the tutelage of Nichimoku. Formerly a Tendai priest, however, he could not correctly grasp the Daishonin’s teaching that people’s disregard of the Lotus Sutra and their faith in lesser teachings cause the Buddhist deities (the positive functions of life and the universe) to abandon the land, thus inviting disaster. There are reports that he performed an “eye-opening ceremony” on a statue of Amida Buddha as well as Bodhisattva Jizo (Skt Kshitigarbha). Nichizon also enshrined Shakyamuni’s statue and the statues of his ten major disciples as objects of worship. This demonstrates that Nichizon misunderstood the Daishonin’s Buddhism and went against the intent of Nikko Shonin. Because the branch

school derived from Nichizon advocated the recitation of the entire Lotus Sutra and the worship of Shakyamuni's statue, it gradually distanced itself from Taiseki-ji.

Nichidai, one of Nichizon's disciples, founded Juhon-ji in Kyoto. When Juhon-ji and Jogyo-in were burned down by the priests of Enryaku-ji in 1550, Juhon-ji chief priest Nisshin combined the two temples and established Yobo-ji (also pronounced as Yoho-ji).

Nichigo and Nichizon, who accompanied Nichimoku on his last trip to remonstrate with the government, strayed from the Daishonin's Buddhism because of their desire for status and wealth and their shallow knowledge of Buddhism. Soon after the deaths of Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku in 1333, a little more than fifty years after the Daishonin's death, the Fuji School already gave rise to two unorthodox offshoots—one from Nichigo and another from Nichizon. Because of their distortion of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the Fuji School declined significantly and lost its momentum in spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Furthermore, on January 7, 1334, at Joren-bo (also known as Hyakkan-bo) on the grounds of Taiseki-ji, Nissen, one of Nikko Shonin's six main disciples, and Nichidai, one of Nikko Shonin's six new disciples, debated whether a practitioner should recite the "Expedient Means" chapter of the Lotus Sutra as part of the Buddhist practice.

Nichidai, who was a nephew of Nikko Shonin, had studied at Omosu Seminary. Nikko Shonin appointed him as chief priest of the seminary although he was young. In his debate with Nissen, Nichidai asserted that one could benefit from the "Expedient Means" chapter, which is from the theoretical first half of the Lotus Sutra. But the priests at the seminary criticized Nichidai for his position, and the steward

of the area also did not support him. So, although he was the chief priest, he was forced to leave Omosu Seminary (which later became known as Kitayama Honmon-ji) and move to Nishiyama. There he established Hokke-do (which later became known as Nishiyama Honmon-ji). With the expulsion of Nichidai, Nishiyama Honmon-ji and Kitayama Honmon-ji vigorously fought each other over the orthodoxy inherited from Nikko Shonin.