

CHAPTER 12

The Soka Gakkai's Postwar Expansion

On July 3, 1945, Josei Toda was released from the Toshima Penitentiary in Tokyo to find his country burned to ashes, people in utter misery and destitution, and the Soka Gakkai nearly destroyed. Jailed in the same facility as his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Toda read the Lotus Sutra and continued to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in his cell. His study and prayer in prison eventually led him to a profound awakening—an awakening to his mission to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism as a leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. These are the bodhisattvas described in the Lotus Sutra who would become the sutra's devout practitioners long after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha. Upon his release from prison, Toda was resolved to realize the will of his late mentor, who had died in confinement, and spread the Daishonin's teaching throughout war-torn Japan. He wasted no time in beginning the reconstruction of the Soka Gakkai.

In January 1946, Toda renamed the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (“Society of Value-Creation Education”) the Soka Gakkai (“Society of Value Creation”), indicating his broader vision to promote the Daishonin's Buddhism throughout all aspects of society, beyond its application in education. He soon

held discussion meetings and led propagation efforts. In July 1949, he published *The Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai's monthly study journal. In April 1951, he also began the newspaper, *Seikyo Shimbun*.

Toda was inaugurated the second Soka Gakkai president on May 3, 1951. Approximately 3,080 members signed the petition for Toda's inauguration. They represented the active membership of the Gakkai. In his inaugural speech, Toda made a bold declaration: "While I am alive, I will achieve the propagation of 750,000 households by my own hand. If this cannot be achieved in my lifetime, please do not hold my funeral. Just dispose of my body off the coast of Shinagawa" (*Complete Works of Josei Toda*, vol. 3, p. 433).

With Toda's inauguration, the Soka Gakkai launched full-fledged activities to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism. Many people began taking faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism each year. By the end of 1951, the membership had grown to 5,700 households; by the end of 1952, to 22,000 households; in 1953, to 70,000 households; in 1954, to 170,000 households; and by the end of 1955, to 300,000.

Envisioning a dramatic increase in membership, Josei Toda submitted a request to Nissho, the sixty-fourth high priest, to transcribe a Gohonzon for the wide propagation of the Daishonin's Buddhism. In response, the high priest transcribed a Gohonzon with the inscription, "For the achievement of the wide spread of the Great Law through compassionate propagation" and conferred it upon the Soka Gakkai on May 20, 1951. This Gohonzon is symbolic of the Gakkai's essential role, its dedication to broadly disseminating the essence of Buddhism.

The Nichiren Shoshu temples sustained significant damage during the war: The head temple burnt down, and many

branch temples were destroyed in air raids. Furthermore, in December 1945, Taiseki-ji lost its farmland in the postwar agrarian reform, which the government was promoting as part of the nation's democratization. The landowners who rented out their land to tenant farmers instead of farming themselves had to sell off their farmland to the government at a fixed price. The government in turn sold those tracts of farmland to tenant farmers. This agrarian reform was instituted between 1946 and 1948. As a result, Japan's land-holding gentry class was virtually eliminated, and the lives of tenant farmers were much improved.

Taiseki-ji had owned a vast tract of farmland donated by its patrons, which it had rented out to farmers for hundreds of bushels of rice per year. The head temple had long depended on the income from this farmland for its operation. So when it lost that farmland in the postwar agrarian reform, the priesthood faced severe financial hardship. The chief priests of the lodging temples on the head temple grounds had to cultivate empty lots and hillsides themselves for meager crops—just enough to keep them from starvation. They did not have enough money even to buy candles for the altars. In this dire financial situation, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood appealed desperately to its parishioners for more financial support.

In November 1950, the priesthood decided to promote Taiseki-ji as a tourist attraction to generate additional income and held a conference at the reception hall to discuss how. Besides representatives of the priesthood, the mayor of Fujinomiya, the chief of Ueno Village, executives of Fujinomiya's tourist association and local news reporters attended the conference.

During the conference, participants discussed concrete

plans to promote tourism at Taiseki-ji. For example, a scenic road, a tourist information center at the head temple's Sanmon Gate and a new lodging facility were suggested. It was also proposed that Taiseki-ji hold a dance to attract young people in the spring and autumn.

During the war, the priesthood curried favor with the military regime and compromised the Daishonin's teaching as part of its wartime strategy to survive. And it nearly led to ruin. The priesthood's plan to promote the head temple as a tourist attraction, however, tells us that it learned little about the importance of upholding the integrity of Buddhism from its wartime experience.

Toda was enraged to hear the priesthood's plan, stating that tourists who were not seeking the Gohonzon must not be allowed on the head temple grounds. His strong opposition prevented the plan from being realized. To relieve the head temple of its financial burden, Toda organized group pilgrimages of Gakkai members. This was in spite of the fact that the number of Gakkai members at the time was relatively small, and their financial prospects were no more hopeful than that of the priesthood.

Toda often expressed his belief that when the True Law is about to be obscured and driven to extinction, that is precisely the time for its true development and broad propagation to begin. Toward 1952, which marked the beginning of the seven-hundredth year since the Daishonin established his Buddhism in 1253, Toda emphasized the necessity of spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism and urged Gakkai members to awaken to their mission as the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The celebration to commemorate the establishment of the Daishonin's Buddhism was held at Taiseki-ji on April 27 and 28, 1952. Attended by four thousand Gakkai members, the event was unprecedented in scale for both the priesthood and the Gakkai at that time. On April 24, the Soka Gakkai published *The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* (Jpn Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu), which had been edited by Nichiko Hori, the retired fifty-ninth high priest and renowned historian of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

The publication of the Daishonin's writings marked the beginning of the Gakkai's broad-based study movement, solidifying the Gakkai's philosophical foundation. In his preface to *The Collected Writings*, Toda compares Buddhist study to the strict discipline of swordsmanship (GZ, 1). Toda was passionate about the importance of Buddhist study in one's practice.

On the evening of April 27, during commemorative activities at the head temple, Soka Gakkai youth division members found out that Jimon Ogasawara was also staying at the head temple. During World War II, Ogasawara had propounded the erroneous doctrine that regarded the Buddha as a transient manifestation of the Shinto goddess in order to curry favor with the Japan's militaristic regime. He also worked to induce the government to persecute the Gakkai, leading to the imprisonment of Makiguchi and Toda. Ogasawara's presence at the head temple on this auspicious occasion came as a great surprise to the youth division members because he had been long expelled from the priesthood (see chapter 11 for more details).

The youth division members met Ogasawara at one of the lodging temples on the head temple grounds and refuted his erroneous doctrine. Then they escorted him to the grave of

Makiguchi where he wrote a letter of apology to the Daishonin for distorting the Daishonin's teachings. This is known as the Ogasawara Incident.

During the war, Ogasawara pushed for the merger of Nichiren Shoshu and the Minobu-based Nichiren School. He was said to have had a secret agreement with the Nichiren School that allegedly promised him the position of general administrator or the chief priest position at Taiseki-ji or Seicho-ji. Furthermore, Ogasawara attempted to have High Priest Nikkyo arrested on the charge of treason. Ironically, Ogasawara's attempt to take control of the head temple encouraged the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood to stray further from the Daishonin's Buddhism and support Shintoism and the government's war efforts. Since Ogasawara corrupted the Daishonin's Buddhism, incited persecutions against the Soka Gakkai, and attempted to control the head temple for personal gain, he should have been condemned as an enemy not only to the Daishonin's Buddhism and the Gakkai but also to the priesthood.

When youth division members reprimanded Ogasawara's offenses at the head temple, however, the priesthood was not pleased. Though it was a sincere action to protect the integrity of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the head temple administration regarded the incident as a disruption of an auspicious celebration. It also viewed the Gakkai's refutation of Ogasawara as challenging the high priest's prerogative to decide what is orthodox and what is heretical. The Nichiren Shoshu executive priests thought it was inappropriate for lay believers to refute any priest who had been ordained under the high priest's authority. Put simply, the incident was viewed as arrogance by lay believers toward the authority of the priesthood as well as the high priest.

Many priests throughout Japan expressed their discontent.

For example, the chief priest of the Osaka parish issued a letter of protest against the Soka Gakkai on May 13, condemning its action as “an insult to the entire priesthood.” The parish of the Kyushu area passed a resolution on May 21 calling for disciplinary action to be taken against the Soka Gakkai. While the priesthood never publicly condemned Ogasawara for his wartime behavior, it severely attacked the Soka Gakkai’s action as an insult to the priesthood. The priesthood’s emotional reaction to the Ogasawara Incident clearly reflected its deep-seated insecurity and need to maintain a sense of superiority and control over the laity.

In the middle of May, following the incident, the priesthood published the April issue of *Dai-Nichiren*, its official monthly magazine. This belated April issue contained notice of Ogasawara’s reinstatement, as of April 5, into the priesthood. In other words, the priesthood retroactively re-admitted Ogasawara to the priesthood after the incident. This provided a pretext for accusing the Soka Gakkai of criticizing a Nichiren Shoshu priest on the head temple grounds.

Actually Ogasawara was reinstated into the priesthood soon after the war. On March 31, 1946, Nichiman, the sixty-third high priest, restored Ogasawara’s status as a Nichiren Shoshu priest. His reinstatement was public knowledge within the priesthood as he ran for a position on the Nichiren Shoshu council in 1947. According to an April 28, 1947, publication, Ogasawara was not elected. However, when the Soka Gakkai inquired about Ogasawara’s status, the priesthood on numerous occasions denied that he was a Nichiren Shoshu priest. For example, the May 1951 issue of *Dai-Nichiren* contains the following notice from the Nichiren Shoshu administrative office: “The *Seikyo Shimbun* reported that a priest who had filed a suit against High Priest Nikkyo

Suzuki and attempted to disband Nichiren Shoshu still remains at the head temple. It must be clarified, however, that there is no such priest among the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood.” So naturally, when the incident took place, none of the Soka Gakkai members suspected that Ogasawara was a Nichiren Shoshu priest.

On June 28, 1952, the Nichiren Shoshu council met to discuss the Ogasawara Incident. The council passed a resolution calling on Toda to submit a letter of apology to the head temple through the chief priest of the branch temple to which he belonged, ordered his dismissal from the position of chief lay representative, and barred him from visiting the head temple.

Outraged by this resolution, the Soka Gakkai youth division visited the council members one by one and tried to convince them of the unjust nature of their decision. Through their efforts, the situation gradually improved. On July 24, Nissho, the sixty-fourth high priest, issued a written admonition to Toda. In response, Toda submitted a letter of apology, in which he expressed his confidence in the action taken by the youth division. He states in the letter: “When we see those in our school who are weak in their faith in the Great Pure Law and leaning toward slander of the Law, because we keep the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin deep in our hearts . . . we tend to be uncompromising in our battle. . . . Since I believe that our action did not contradict the golden words of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin in the slightest, I am not ashamed to call myself a believer of Nichiren Shoshu before the Gohonzon. Therefore, I will not resign from the position of chief lay representative.”

Later Ogasawara lodged a complaint with police against Soka Gakkai leaders, including Toda, and a police investigation

of the incident followed. However, Ogasawara filed a complaint also against the high priest, and as a result he was strongly criticized within Nichiren Shoshu. Eventually he retracted his complaints. Even after he caused so much turmoil, the priesthood took no disciplinary action against Ogasawara.

The Ogasawara Incident highlighted the priesthood's desire to protect its authority, as well as its tendency to look condescendingly upon lay believers. Instead of making the Daishonin's teachings a guideline for its behavior, the priesthood allowed its decisions to be driven by these baser motives. In addition, the priesthood was afraid that if it allowed the Gakkai to rebuke Ogasawara for his actions during the war, it would be subjected to the same criticism due to its wartime support of Shintoism and the military regime. In short, the priesthood wanted to protect itself against any possible criticism from the laity.

This incident, however, did not in the least shake the Gakkai's confidence in the Daishonin's teaching or its movement to spread it. When Toda heard about the council resolution to prohibit him from visiting the head temple, he said: "It is all right if they want to bar me from visiting the head temple. It is not as if we cannot attain enlightenment unless we go to the head temple. The Daishonin's writings clearly explain this principle."

In August 1952, the Soka Gakkai was incorporated as an independent religious organization. Toda was keenly aware of

***Propagation Led
by Josei Toda***

the priesthood's authoritarianism and its limitations in terms of its ability and sense of responsibility for the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism. With incorporation, the Soka

Gakkai's propagation efforts made further progress as it could now take the initiative and full responsibility for its actions.

Although the Gakkai strove to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism, the priesthood was not cooperative. Most Nichiren Shoshu priests did not understand the Gakkai's earnest efforts in propagation. Many were even critical. In those early days of the Soka Gakkai's development, there were about one hundred branch temples throughout Japan and ten in Tokyo. Only two temples in Tokyo were willing to conduct initiation ceremonies for new converts introduced by Soka Gakkai members. As the Gakkai conducted its propagation nationwide, more branch temples gradually started to conduct initiation ceremonies.

Because there were virtually no new converts before the existence of the Soka Gakkai, Nichiren Shoshu priests were not accustomed to conducting initiation ceremonies. (Most parishioners and their families had belonged to Nichiren Shoshu temples for generations, and as such, had been considered believers from birth.) As more people took faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism, President Makiguchi saw practical merit in a solemn ceremony to encourage converts in their new faith and draw a distinction between the Daishonin's Buddhism and their previous religious affiliation.

In the Daishonin's Buddhism, however, embracing the Gohonzon in and of itself is to accept the supreme Buddhist precept, so a ceremony was not strictly necessary. When the Daishonin's Buddhism spread rapidly after the war due to the Gakkai's efforts, not many priests knew how to conduct initiation ceremonies, and sometimes Gakkai leaders had to assist priests in doing so.

New members were encouraged by their Soka Gakkai sponsors to remove objects of other Buddhist beliefs so that

they might not be confused about their fundamental object of devotion, which is the Gohonzon. The priesthood, however, remained lax in this area. For example, some lodging temples on the head temple grounds continued to enshrine the Shinto talisman even after the Gakkai's organized pilgrimages had begun. As late as the mid-1950s, Soka Gakkai youth division members encouraged one lodging temple to remove a Shinto talisman.

Inspired by Soka Gakkai members, some priests removed objects of other faiths from their temples. For example, in 1953, the chief priest of Myofuku-ji in Fukushima Prefecture removed various Buddhist statues that had been kept at the temple for the previous six hundred years. The temple members, whose families had belonged to the parish for many generations, however, fiercely opposed the removal of those religious objects. On the nights of April 18 and 19, 1953, a mob of disgruntled temple believers stormed the temple, throwing stones and vandalizing the grounds. The police were called, and criminal charges were filed. Later, twenty-two temple members were expelled from Nichiren Shoshu.

Like Myofuku-ji, many branch temples, especially those in northeastern Japan, had kept religious objects from other Buddhist sects for centuries. Also, many temple believers living in the vicinity of the head temple enshrined the objects of other faiths and thus drew Gakkai members' attention. But the priesthood took no significant action regarding this.

Although the head temple professed strict adherence to the Daishonin's and Nikko Shonin's teachings in matters of Buddhist doctrine, it continued to allow its branch temples and parishioners to enshrine objects of other faiths. In this regard, Nichiko Hori, the fifty-ninth high priest, states: "Those who appear to be strict with regard to the slander of

the Law yet are lenient in reality are monstrous” (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. 1, p. 153).

While the Soka Gakkai continued to spread the Daishonin’s Buddhism, it also began making many contributions to the priesthood. On the head temple grounds, Gakkai members’ financial contributions made possible the restoration of the Five-Storied Pagoda, the repair of the Somon Gate, the construction of Hoan-den, the construction and renovation of lodging temples, the construction of the Grand Lecture Hall, and so on.

Furthermore, numerous branch temples were constructed and donated by the Gakkai. With the rapid progress of propagation, the priesthood soon attained an unprecedented level of prosperity. The postwar restoration of the priesthood was made possible solely through the Soka Gakkai’s efforts. In this regard, Nichiko Hori once said to Toda: “Mr. Toda, if it weren’t for you, Nichiren Shoshu would have already collapsed.”

With the advent of the Soka Gakkai and its rapid development after World War II, a new era of the Daishonin’s Buddhism was unfolding. On New Year’s Day in 1956, Nichijun, the sixty-fifth high priest, stated: “When I look back over the last seven hundred years and compare them with our circumstances today, it is apparent that we have undergone a great transformation; a new era in history has been created. That is, through the propagation of the Soka Gakkai, the True Law has spread throughout the nation. The unprecedented expansion of our order is being realized. In this regard, future historians will probably define the first seven hundred years [since the Daishonin’s establishment of his Buddhism] as an era of protection by the priesthood, and the era thereafter as an era of spread and propagation”

(*Complete Works of High Priest Nichijun*, p. 1620).

Nichijun continues: “Seven hundred years after the Daishonin’s establishment of his Buddhism, wide-scale propagation began. The current propagation of the True Law seems to hold profound promise. In this regard, I sense something extraordinary about the Soka Gakkai’s appearance, about its relationship with the Buddha” (ibid., p. 1622).

Nichijun realized that the priesthood’s role to preserve the Daishonin’s teaching was ending, and the Soka Gakkai’s era of propagation had begun. Nichijun stated at the seventh Soka Gakkai general meeting on December 7, 1952: “I entrust the great propagation of the Law to the members of the Soka Gakkai” (ibid., p. 308). This statement, leaving the spread of the Daishonin’s teachings to Gakkai members, apparently arose from Nichijun’s awareness of the priesthood’s lack of ability in spreading Buddhism on its own.

On March 11, 1955, the Soka Gakkai held an official debate with the Minobu-based Nichiren School in Otaru, Hokkaido. Instructed by Toda, the Gakkai representatives completely refuted the Minobu Nichiren School’s distortions of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. While the priesthood was unable to represent itself in debate, the Gakkai clearly validated the correct teaching of the Daishonin through its grasp of Buddhist teachings.

On September 8, 1957, during a youth division athletic meet in Yokohama, Toda made a historic declaration against the use of nuclear weapons, urging the young people present to communicate the Daishonin’s emphasis on the respect for life and thus bring lasting peace to the entire world. With his antinuclear declaration, Toda laid the philosophical foundation for the SGI’s movement to promote peace and culture based on Buddhism.

By the end of 1957, the Gakkai's membership grew to more than 760,000 households, surpassing Toda's lifelong goal of 750,000 households and thereby solidifying the foundation of the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism in Japan. His goal complete, Toda died on April 2, 1958. He was fifty-eight. At the eighteenth Soka Gakkai general meeting held soon after Toda's death, on May 3, 1958, High Priest Nichijun stated: "In the Lotus Sutra, great bodhisattvas equal in number to the grains of sand of sixty-thousand Ganges rivers, led by four leaders including the foremost, Bodhisattva Superior Practices, gather at the assembly of Eagle Peak and pledge to spread Myoho-rence-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law. Those bodhisattvas are now appearing as they promised at the assembly on Eagle Peak.

"It was President Toda who, as their leader, called forth those bodhisattvas; it was in the Soka Gakkai that they gathered. In other words, it was President Toda who manifested the five and seven characters of Myoho-rence-kyo as 750,000 [bodhisattvas]" (*Complete Works of High Priest Nichijun*, p. 357). As Nichijun eulogized, Toda, inheriting the will of his mentor, Makiguchi, had reconstructed the Soka Gakkai and laid the foundation for the spread of the Law in Japan in accord with the teachings of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.