

CHAPTER 16

The Destruction of the Grand Main Temple

In his sermon at Taiseki-ji on April 5, 1998, High Priest Nikken revealed his plan to transfer the Dai-Gohonzon from the Grand Main Temple to the newly renovated Hoan-den on the head temple grounds.

After attributing Japan's recent earthquake, volcanic eruption and tsunami to "the great slander of Ikeda's Soka Gakkai," Nikken stated that the SGI has become "the organization with which the great Law of Nichiren Shoshu must not be allowed to have any relationship." He then referred to the Grand Main Temple as "the largest thing to which they [SGI members] were related in the past." The high priest justified his decision by saying, "In order to completely refute the great slander of Ikeda and others, it is now most appropriate to transfer the Dai-Gohonzon out of the Grand Main Temple as quickly as possible."

Toward the end of his sermon, Nikken also stated that he would take "measures appropriate to the current circumstances" about the Grand Main Temple, which he described as "useless ruins of gigantic stature." He also hinted at his plan to build a new hall of worship, which he called "Ho'an-do." The demolition of the Grand Main Temple soon began, despite

strong voices of protest from SGI members as well as from architectural and academic communities around the world. By the end of 1998, the once-majestic structure was leveled.

The Grand Main Temple was built in 1972 to house the Dai-Gohonzon. Its construction was supported by approximately 8 million Soka Gakkai members in Japan and overseas who donated more than ¥35.5 billion (approximately \$100 million at the exchange rate of the time). At the time of the temple's completion, Nittatsu Hosoi, the sixty-sixth high priest, declared the Grand Main Temple to be "a great edifice that shall be the high sanctuary of the temple of the true teaching at the time of kosen-rufu."

On October 11, 1972, when the Dai-Gohonzon was transferred from the Hoan-den to the Grand Main Temple, Nittatsu further clarified the significance of the new building. He said: "I have decided that from now on and for all eternity we will worship this Gohonzon of the high sanctuary at this Grand Main Temple and pray for the believers' attainment of Buddhahood in their present forms as well as for the fulfillment of their great desires of the present and future existences, thereby designating [the Grand Main Temple] to be the great edifice in which to pray for world peace."

Nichiren Shoshu's doctrines concerning the lineage and infallibility of the high priest state that the pronouncements of a high priest must be upheld and honored as sacred. Yet Nikken's transfer of the Dai-Gohonzon out of the Grand Main Temple clearly contradicts the previous high priest's intentions.

This and the building's subsequent demolition also contradict Nikken's past statements in support of his predecessor. For example, on March 26, 1972, Nikken, who was then Nichiren Shoshu Study Department chief, stated, "Naturally, at the time of kosen-rufu, the Grand Main Temple of Taiseki-ji

will become the high sanctuary mandated in ‘On the Three Great Secret Laws’ and the ‘Minobu Transfer Document.’”

Nikken abruptly reversed his position immediately after implementing Operation C. He announced his sudden change of stance in sermons on January 6 and 10, 1991, shortly after the priesthood took the first of its punitive measures against the SGI by dismissing Daisaku Ikeda as chief representative of all Nichiren Shoshu lay organizations. He indicated that the significance of the building as the high sanctuary at the time of kosen-rufu was not a certainty. In retrospect, it is clear that through this reversal, Nikken was laying the groundwork for the building’s demolition.

In these January 1991 sermons, Nikken claimed that Ikeda arrogantly overstepped his bounds as a lay believer by referring to the Grand Main Temple as the high sanctuary at its groundbreaking ceremony on October 12, 1968. The high priest claimed that no one in Nichiren Shoshu—not even High Priest Nittatsu—had ever referred to the Grand Main Temple as the high sanctuary mentioned in the Daishonin’s “On the Three Great Secret Laws.” Nikken asserted that Ikeda dared to define the significance of the Grand Main Temple without the high priest’s instruction. He attributed the conflict between the priesthood and the SGI to this instance of Ikeda’s alleged arrogance and subsequent failure to issue an apology.

But when the text of Nikken’s two sermons appeared in the February 1991 issue of the *Dai-Nichiren*, the priesthood’s study journal, there were some significant revisions. Added to the texts of his sermons was the statement: “I wish to amend my remarks because I discovered some statements made by High Priest Nittatsu prior to 1968 regarding the significance of the Grand Main Temple which make reference to ‘On the Three

Great Secret Laws' and the 'Minobu Transfer Document.'" This correction effectively nullified Nikken's accusations.

Although the SGI, in an open letter to the priesthood, pointed to the lack of grounds for his accusations, Nikken never responded to the SGI or amended his position regarding the significance of the Grand Main Temple. It is now clear that as early as the beginning of 1991, Nikken was attempting to lay a doctrinal basis for the demolition of the Grand Main Temple. (For more information about Nikken's 1991 sermons and the SGI's letter of inquiry, see *Issues Between the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood and the Soka Gakkai*, vol. 4, published by the Soka Gakkai International in 1992.)

Nikken's removal of the Dai-Gohonzon from the Grand Main Temple and his subsequent demolition of the building have important implications. First, Nikken's sudden decision reflects his autocratic rule within Nichiren Shoshu. Although some reformist priests had warned of the possibility of the Dai-Gohonzon's removal from the Grand Main Temple as early as 1997, the high priest's announcement and subsequent transfer of the Dai-Gohonzon came as a surprise to most of the more than seven hundred chief priests of Nichiren Shoshu temples, including those assigned to lodging temples on the head temple grounds.

The notice outlining the high priest's decision was transmitted by facsimile to branch temples on the night of April 5, 1998. It states that the high priest, "reflecting upon the recent great slander committed by Daisaku Ikeda's Soka Gakkai, gave the profound guidance that it would be in accord with the true intent of the founder Nichiren Daishonin to transfer the Dai-Gohonzon of the high sanctuary of True Buddhism back to the Hoan-den from the Grand Main Temple, which was built at the request of Daisaku Ikeda."

The removal of the Dai-Gohonzon was planned and implemented by Nikken's close associates and Taiseki-ji's Department of Internal Affairs. Compared to the openness and grandeur of the transfer ceremony held in 1972 upon completion of the Grand Main Temple, the 1998 transfer was conducted by a small group of priests at dusk. At a service held the next day, the high priest explained that the plan had been carried out abruptly due to "circumstances that allowed no prior discussion." He apologetically added that the details of the decision would be published in the April 10 issue of *The Daibyakuho*, the organ of Nichiren Shoshu's lay organization. One can easily speculate that the suddenness of the move, and its communication only after the fact, was intended to forestall any opposition from within the ranks of the priesthood or the Hokkeko laity. Once the Dai-Gohonzon was moved, opposing the decision was an exercise in futility. Such tactics underscore the autocratic nature of Nikken's leadership.

The second important implication of Nikken's removal of the Dai-Gohonzon and his destruction of the Grand Main Temple is the contradiction of his predecessor's instruction. According to the current priesthood, all successive high priests have received a mysterious transmission from the Daishonin, so each high priest's instructions must be revered and followed as if they were the instructions of the Daishonin himself. Nikken's contradiction of his predecessor's teaching regarding the Grand Main Temple is of note since it indicates the priesthood's current dogma regarding the high priest's infallibility is arbitrary. It is cited only where it is convenient in silencing criticism toward the current high priest.

Nikken claims to have received the lineage of the high priest position from the sixty-sixth high priest Nittatsu. Yet, by destroying the Grand Main Temple, Nikken clearly went

against his predecessor's instructions. On April 28, 1972, Nittatsu issued an official statement titled "Admonition" to clarify the significance of the Grand Main Temple. It reads: "The Grand Main Temple is the actual high sanctuary of this time. . . . In other words, the Grand Main Temple is a great edifice that shall be the high sanctuary of the temple of the true teaching at the time of kosen-rufu." In his sermon on April 5, 1998, Nikken claimed that the Soka Gakkai "applied pressure" on the priesthood to define the Grand Main Temple as the high sanctuary at the time of its construction. Yet, Nittatsu himself, in the face of similar allegations by anti-Gakkai factions within Nichiren Shoshu, clearly stated: "My true intent does not lie outside my admonitions and sermons." The demolition of the Grand Main Temple, in this sense, was the demolition of the priesthood's own doctrine concerning the authority of the high priest.

Furthermore, Nikken's decision also constituted a gross deception of the laity. Previously, he had made many statements in support of Nittatsu's view on the Grand Main Temple. For example, in March 1972, as Nichiren Shoshu Study Department chief, Nikken stated: "Naturally, at the time of kosen-rufu, the Grand Main Temple of Taiseki-ji will become the high sanctuary mandated in 'On the Three Great Secret Laws' and the 'Minobu Transfer Document.'" In the postscript of *On the High Sanctuary* published in December 1974, Nikken states: "At that time [of kosen-rufu], the present Grand Main Temple will be the main hall of the temple of the true teaching. This is clear from the 'Admonition' issued on April 28, 1972." Furthermore, in October 1982, commemorating the tenth anniversary of the completion of the Grand Main Temple, Nikken states as high priest: "The Grand Main Temple is a fundamental place to observe Buddhist teachings

and precepts where the people of the world repent and eradicate their sins. It is an edifice that is most suited for the conditions of the present time of world kosen-rufu both in its name and substance.”

If Nikken was pressured, as he claims, into adopting the position of Nittatsu and the Soka Gakkai, then, as Study Department chief of the priesthood, he was knowingly misleading eight million believers in supporting their donation of millions of dollars to a construction project whose fundamental significance he did not believe in.

In his April 1998 sermon, Nikken explained that he decided to remove the Dai-Gohonzon “in order to completely refute the grave slanders of Ikeda and others.” Thus Nichiren Shoshu under Nikken has set forth a doctrinal basis for the destruction of the Grand Main Temple. Because it was built by the Soka Gakkai and Ikeda, whom the priesthood has deemed to be slanderers, it should be torn down. Nikken seems somehow to be implying that the tearing down of temples donated to his school by those he now deems slanderers is an act of refuting slander. Yet many temples in Nichiren Shoshu were once temples of other Buddhist sects. They were built and donated by people with erroneous views of Buddhism. Yet they have never been torn down. In fact, neither Nichiren Daishonin, nor any high priest of the Fuji School before Nikken had ever demolished a building on the grounds that it had been built or donated by slanderers. There is absolutely no doctrinal or historical precedent for such an action.

In addition, if the Grand Main Temple must be destroyed simply because it was built at the request of the SGI president and by the donations of Soka Gakkai members, logic and faithfulness to principle would demand that Nichiren Shoshu

also vacate, if not demolish, all other buildings and properties donated by the Gakkai—approximately 80 percent of Taisekiji’s current real estate holdings as well as a number of large structures and numerous lodging temples on the head temple grounds. Since Ikeda was inaugurated as the third president in 1960, the Soka Gakkai built and donated 320 temples to the priesthood. In addition, the Gakkai has funded the complete or partial renovation of many existing temples.

While Nikken claims that the Grand Main Temple had to be destroyed because the SGI has become “the organization with which the great Law of Nichiren Shoshu must not be allowed to have any relationship,” he clearly fails to apply the same logic or principle to the priesthood’s other buildings and properties donated by the Soka Gakkai. This lack of consistency and self-contradiction can be best understood when we view Nikken’s justification of the destruction as the elimination of slander as a pretext. The purpose of this pretext was to rationalize an act that was actually arbitrary and motivated by emotional resentment.

The demolition of the Grand Main Temple, in an ironic reversal of Nikken’s intent to “refute the slander of Ikeda and

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others,” actually awakened many SGI members to the essential meaning of the high sanctuary in the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The high sanctuary is one of the Three Great Secret Laws; that is, one of three core elements of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. These three are the object of devotion of true Buddhism (i.e., the Gohonzon), the invocation of true Buddhism (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo) and the high sanctuary of true Buddhism. These are

called “secret” because they had been never revealed before the Daishonin. Needless to say, the Daishonin’s intent was to make those “secrets” to happiness and peace known to all people. While it is easily understandable that the Gohonzon and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are viewed as essential to the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the importance of the high sanctuary, which is really a building, needs some explanation.

The term *high sanctuary* is an interpretation of a Chinese term that, more literally, means “precept platform” or “ordination platform.” This originally meant a place of religious practice where people accept various ascetic precepts—rules of practice and discipline—which they agree to uphold to achieve their salvation. In the Daishonin’s Buddhism, however, there is no need to keep such austere precepts, because practicing with sincere faith in the Gohonzon alone is equivalent to accepting all the Buddhist precepts. All we need to attain enlightenment is our faith and practice.

For this reason, wherever people practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism with faith in the Gohonzon is generally regarded as the high sanctuary of true Buddhism. But the Daishonin also talks of the high sanctuary with more specificity: “When the sovereign of the nation establishes this Law, the high sanctuary of the temple of the true teaching shall be built at Mount Fuji” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1600). So while the high sanctuary is generally where people practice Buddhism with faith, he also envisioned a very specific place where those committed to propagating the Mystic Law would gather.

It must be noted, however, that the Daishonin does not simply ask his future disciples to build a hall of worship. He makes it clear that the high sanctuary be built “when the sovereign of the nation establishes this Law.” In other words, the high sanctuary must be built only as a result of the wide

spread of his teaching. “The sovereign of the nation” in our present democratic age essentially means the people. Put simply, the substance of the high sanctuary cannot be limited to a physical structure; it essentially lies in the propagation of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The true meaning of the high sanctuary is to be found in our faith as well as in our efforts to spread the Daishonin’s Buddhism. In this sense, it may be said that the three most important elements in the Daishonin’s Buddhism (i.e., the Three Great Secret Laws) are the Gohonzon, Nam-myohorenge-kyo and the wide spread of Buddhism through individual believers’ sincere faith. The Daishonin established the first two himself, and he entrusted his future disciples with the last, which gives meaning to the first two.

Nikken’s demolition of the Grand Main Temple, in a sense, helped SGI members remind themselves of the real significance of the high sanctuary and reaffirm their commitment to propagate the Daishonin’s Buddhism. As long as SGI members continue to spread the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the Three Great Secret Laws remain intact, even though the Grand Main Temple no longer stands. However, if efforts for propagation cease, then the Daishonin’s Buddhism becomes incomplete, no matter how magnificent an edifice may be built.

Thus, Nikken’s destruction of the Grand Main Temple, has encouraged SGI members to internalize the meaning of the high sanctuary. And to fully realize the inner implications and significance of any event or phenomena is the proper spirit of Buddhism.