

A Journey of Faith Within:

The Search for Happiness Outside Is the Cause of Unhappiness Inside

Your earnest resolve shows in your having traveled such a long way” (“Letter to the Mother of Lady Oto,” *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1223). With these words, Nichiren Daishonin

warmly encouraged a single mother who had traveled with her infant daughter all the way from Kamakura to Sado Island to visit her beloved teacher in exile. The journey this nameless woman⁴ undertook was an expression of her sincerity to support the Daishonin and seek his teaching.

The core of the Daishonin’s teaching may be found in the universality of Buddhahood within the lives of all people. Therefore, any notion of seeking enlightenment outside oneself—at some sacred site or in the person of a supposed saint—strikes one as absurd. If the word *pilgrimage* is understood as a journey to seek blessings at a distant shrine

● KEY POINTS I:

The Priesthood’s Two Major Slanders

Nichiren Shoshu committed two major slanderous acts toward Buddhism.

- (1) **Disrupting the unity of believers:** In 1991, the priesthood demanded that the Soka Gakkai be disbanded and then officially excommunicated it. Both before and since the excommunication, the priesthood has taken various measures to obstruct the SGI’s efforts, such as refusing to issue the Gohonzon to SGI members and denying their free access to the Dai-Gohonzon. An attempt to destroy a gathering of believers dedicated to the spread of the Buddha’s teaching is the most serious of the five cardinal sins in Buddhism.
- (2) **Distorting Buddhism:** In order to justify its action toward the SGI and silence believers’ criticism, the priesthood has been propounding the erroneous doctrine of the absolute authority of the high priest. The priesthood claims that “the supreme fundamental principle of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism” is to “obey the instruction of the high priest.” The priesthood’s insistence upon believers’ “absolute faith in and strict obedience to the high priest” completely contradicts Nichiren Daishonin’s emphasis on faith in the Gohonzon and faith in our inherent Buddhahood as well as his repeated admonition to “rely on the Law and not upon persons.”

or temple or from some holy man living in seclusion, then there is no place for pilgrimage in the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Some may insist that any travel we undertake as an expression of religious devotion — like the arduous treks undertaken by the Daishonin's disciples to visit him — are pilgrimages. If so, then the heart of such travel beats in our earnest resolve to seek out the truth of Buddhism that exists within our lives. A journey of faith, therefore, must be the *outward* expression of our *inward* search for our Buddhahood. The value of such travel, in other words, is not absolute; it is relative to our earnest resolve to seek the gem of Buddhahood buried deep within our lives, beneath our deluded self-disparagement. For the disciples of the Daishonin, traveling a long distance to visit their teacher was not an end in itself; rather, it was both an expression of their appreciation and support for the Daishonin and a vehicle for them to uncover the treasure of Buddhahood that was already in their hearts.

In the context of the Daishonin's Buddhism, leaving our homes for distant destinations for the purpose of faith is meaningful to the extent that it encourages and gives a concrete expression to this process of self-discovery. But if we embark on such a journey in search of something elsewhere upon which we think our happiness depends, then we in effect "think the Law is outside." Under such circumstances, the Daishonin suggests, our Buddhist practice would become "an endless, painful austerity" ("On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 3–4).

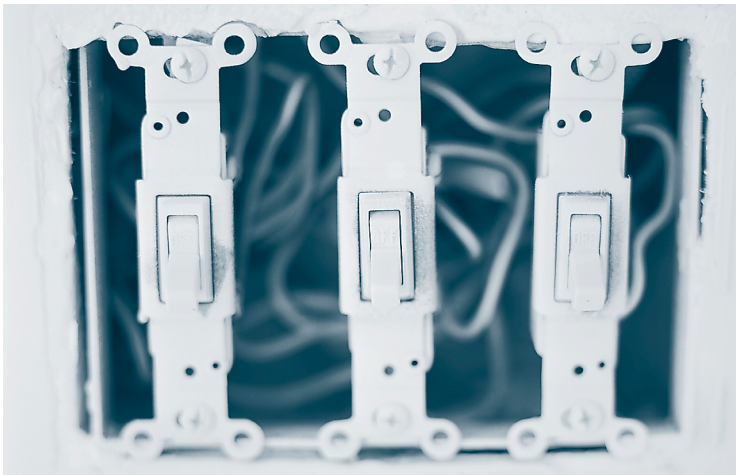
Since the excommunication in 1991, Nichiren Shoshu — on one hand — has denied SGI members access to the Dai-Gohonzon, which is enshrined at their head temple Taiseki-ji in Japan. On the other hand, it has continued to criticize SGI members for not visiting the head temple and therefore not having faith in the Dai-Gohonzon. So, according to the priests, "by giving its members the guidance that they are not to directly worship



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Seeming happy or being happy? Nichiren Daishonin teaches that genuine and lasting happiness comes only from within, through our realization of "the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings."

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Does he have the power
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the Dai-Gohonzon, the Soka Gakkai has become a truly evil organization.”⁵ With such harsh remarks as this, one may wonder what the priesthood’s real intent is in accusing believers of not doing what it prohibits them from doing.

What the priesthood is now teaching in this regard, however, amounts to seeking enlightenment outside oneself. Specifically, the priesthood asserts that the high priest personally has the power to determine who attains Buddhahood and who does not: “The master gives his sanction to a disciple’s enlightenment.... the sanctioning of the object of worship by the High Priest, who is the only person to be bequeathed the Daishonin’s Buddhism, is what makes the attainment of Buddhahood possible....”⁶

Instead of encouraging us to seek and reveal the Mystic Law within our lives, as Nichiren Daishonin did, the priesthood confines the Mystic Law to the physicality of the Dai-Gohonzon and to the possession of the high priest. The priesthood claims that the Mystic Law is not universal, nor is it inherent in our lives: “The mandala (the object of worship) is the Daishonin himself. There is no Mystic Law apart from the Daishonin.”⁷ In the same regard, the priesthood also asserts: “It is a great error to think that the Mystic Law exists outside of the flesh and blood body of the Daishonin. Those who take faith in this sect can and must not think any other way about this matter.”⁸ This stands in stark contrast to the Daishonin’s own clear statement: “You must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, p. 3).

According to the priesthood’s logic, now that the Daishonin is long gone, the current high priest becomes an object of worship: “When the priests and lay believers of the faith of Nichiren Shoshu have the occasion to be in the presence of the High Priest, with palms pressed earnestly together in sincere gratitude, we pay prayer-like reverence to him as the Master who embodies the Living Essence of the Body of the entirety of



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Is our enlightenment to be okayed by someone? The priesthood claims, “The master gives his sanction to a disciple’s enlightenment.” According to Nichiren Shoshu, the high priest personally has the power to determine who attains Buddhahood and who does not.

the Law of all existence, which has been passed down through the generations since the lifetime of the Daishonin.”⁹ The priesthood clearly wants us to believe that our lives are lacking the Mystic Law, so we must seek enlightenment outside, in the person and sanction of High Priest Nikken. Today, at the head temple, no one seems to hear the Daishonin when he states, “The entity of our life...is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, p. 4).

In light of current circumstances, our decision *not* to go on a pilgrimage to the head temple is the choice that accords with the Daishonin’s teachings and with the very meaning of pilgrimage — if such a notion should have any place in our faith. It is the wisest course of action to take for all of us who wish to practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism correctly and enjoy the great benefits it promises. This is because visiting the head temple now would defeat the purpose of such travel itself — that is, to find our own Buddhahood within. At the same time, by taking a stand not to visit the head temple, we effectively reject and refute the priesthood’s distortion of the Daishonin’s teachings. We are confirming that the way to enlightenment lies not outside, somewhere else, but in our inner journey to awaken our innate Buddha nature and activate the Mystic Law

within us. Conversely, making a pilgrimage to Taiseki-ji at this time will serve only as an obstacle to our spiritual journey to find the gem of Buddhahood within. The reasons for this are discussed in more detail below.

Protecting the integrity of the Daishonin’s Buddhism

The current Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, led by High Priest Nikken, promotes “absolute faith in and strict obedience to the High Priest”¹⁰ — a teaching that was never intended by Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin. The priesthood claims: “Even if one possesses a traditional Gohonzon, if the person worshipping it slanders the High Priest...there will be no benefits.”¹¹ Put simply, the priesthood regards our obedience to the high priest as more important than our faith in the Gohonzon.

The priesthood also declares: “The supreme fundamental principle of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is that it is indeed because we obey the instruction of the High Priest, the only person upon whom the Heritage of the Law has been bestowed and to whom it has been entrusted, that the Daishonin’s Buddhism is correctly transmitted to us. Faith in Nichiren Shoshu means keeping a strict watch over slan-



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Nichiren Daishonin writes from his exile: “I want people with seeking minds to meet and read this letter together for encouragement.” But the priesthood claims, “Only the high priest...judges what is correct and incorrect.” Is he the only person who can read and understand the Daishonin’s writings?

der, and we must always know that it is only the High Priest, the protector of the Heritage of the Law, who can judge whether or not the manner of teaching and the contents of a teaching are consonant with the Daishonin’s Buddhism, and it is he who judges what is correct and incorrect. It follows that if a person is shown that he has made an error by the priesthood, the fundamental attitude of faith in Nichiren Shoshu is one through which that person sincerely repents of and confesses his error, and thereby eradicates the wrong.⁷¹² According to Nichiren Shoshu, the high priest is the only person who can understand the Daishonin’s writings. The paramount concern for believers, therefore, lies not in their seeking and studying the Daishonin’s teachings, but in their obedience to the high priest. Once a believer is found guilty of “slander” by the priesthood, his or her only recourse is to “repent” and “confess.” The supreme virtue for a believer, according to Nichiren Shoshu, lies in obedience to the high priest, and thus the greatest sin is to disobey him.

These views contradict the Daishonin’s fundamental teaching, as he states: “What is most

important is that, by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo alone, you can attain Buddhahood. It will no doubt depend on the strength of your faith. To have faith is the basis of Buddhism” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND, p. 832). Contrary to the priesthood’s claim, the Daishonin clearly states here that the supreme virtue for a believer lies in faith in the Law and in the realization of one’s supreme potential of Buddhahood. Obedience to religious authority belongs to Nichiren Shoshu, but not to the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin.

Furthermore, the Daishonin stresses believers’ practice and study as expressing and sustaining faith in the Gohonzon: “Believe in the Gohonzon, the supreme object of devotion in all of Jambudvipa. Be sure to strengthen your faith.... Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND, p. 386). These statements by the Daishonin, and many more like them, make clear that our faith in the Gohonzon, supported by individual practice and study, is the foundation of his Buddhism.

Nowhere in his writings does he state that our “absolute faith in and strict obedience to the High Priest” are essential to our happiness.

The priesthood’s attempt to subordinate faith in the Gohonzon to obedience to the high priest — thereby obscuring the essential teaching of the Daishonin’s Buddhism — clearly amounts to slander of the Law. When we recognize such a transgression against Buddhism, it is important to withdraw our support from those who promote it. In this regard, the Daishonin says: “It is the way of the great devil to assume the form of a venerable monk.... Whatever they may say, however cleverly they may try to deceive you into discarding the Lotus Sutra, do not assent to it” (“Encouragement to a Sick Person,” WND, p. 81). Here the Daishonin warns us that the influence of authority, especially that of clergy, often works to dissuade us from faith in the Gohonzon, which is the “Lotus Sutra” of the Latter Day of the Law. The Daishonin urges us neither to condone nor support such a negative influence.

To go on a pilgrimage to the head temple at this time, therefore, would be to lend support to the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, which trivializes the importance of faith in the Gohonzon in order to strengthen the high priest’s authority. This would entail not only lending spiritual support to the priesthood’s slander, but material support as well, because participants in pilgrimage are required to make a financial contribution to the head temple. In this regard, the Daishonin stresses the importance of refraining from making financial contributions to misguided priests: “Now if

● KEY POINTS II:

Six Reasons Not to Go on Pilgrimage

Visiting Nichiren Shoshu’s head temple now is a bad idea because...

- (1) **Protecting the Law:** By refusing the pilgrimage of Nichiren Shoshu, we reject its slanderous acts (see “Key Points I”) and, in so doing, protect the integrity of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.
- (2) **Avoiding Complicity:** By visiting the head temple and paying the priesthood to worship the Dai-Gohonzon, we would be tacitly condoning and supporting its slanderous acts (see “Key Points I”), thus committing the “offense of complicity” in slandering Buddhism.
- (3) **Our Gohonzon Are the Same as the Dai-Gohonzon:** The Gohonzon in our homes are exactly the same as the Dai-Gohonzon in their beneficial power based on the Buddhist principle of the “dispersal of the Buddha’s body.” Furthermore, in accord with the principles of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings as well as the history and tradition of the Fuji school, believers do not need to pray to the Dai-Gohonzon directly.
- (4) **The High Priest Is Not the Gohonzon:** Nichiren Daishonin never taught that encountering a high priest is necessary for our happiness or enlightenment. The high priest is not the object of devotion.
- (5) **No Place Is Inherently Sacred in Buddhism:** No place, including the grounds of the head temple, is sacred in and of itself. The idea that by simply going there we would become enlightened or gain benefit has nothing to do with the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin, who taught, “To have faith is the basis of Buddhism.”
- (6) **To Work for Kosen-rufu Is to Have Faith in the Dai-Gohonzon:** Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon for all people. To have faith in the Dai-Gohonzon, therefore, is to pray and strive for the wide spread of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Visiting the head temple and thereby supporting the priesthood’s acts aimed at undermining people’s efforts for kosen-rufu (see “Key Points I”) would be to betray the Daishonin’s intent behind his inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon.



***Faith transcends distance.
So Nichiren Daishonin writes to
an elderly woman living on the
remote island of Sado, “Merely
seeing each other’s face would
in itself be insignificant. It is the
heart that is important.”***

all the four kinds of Buddhists within the four seas and the ten thousand lands would only cease giving alms to wicked priests and instead all come over to the side of the good, then how could any more troubles rise to plague us, or disasters come to confront us?” (“On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” WND, p. 23).

Our decision not to make a pilgrimage to the head temple is not merely passive resistance to the priesthood’s erroneous teaching; rather, it is a courageous act to protect the integrity of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, a cause that will enable us to accumulate good fortune and benefit. Our courageous stand to “Just say no!” to the priesthood’s attempt to promote obedience to the high priest over faith in the Gohonzon will protect the Daishonin’s essential teaching regarding the Gohonzon.

The Daishonin often stresses in his writings that we can eradicate our negative karma from the past through “the blessings obtained by protecting the Law” (“Letter from Sado,” WND, p. 305). Those who protect the Gohonzon are bound to be protected by the Gohonzon and

enjoy its immeasurable and beneficial power. As the Daishonin wrote to Lady Nichinyo: “A woman who makes offerings to such a Gohonzon invites happiness in this life, and in the next, the Gohonzon will be with her and protect her always” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND, p. 832). By not participating in a pilgrimage, we can protect the essential teaching of the Gohonzon, which amounts to protecting and nurturing the “Gohonzon within our lives,” that is, our own Buddhahood.

Turning away from the ‘offense of complicity in slander’

No matter how sincere we may be in our desire to see the Dai-Gohonzon, if we were to go on a pilgrimage to the head temple at this time, our action would support the priesthood’s misleading teachings.

Supporting those who attempt to confuse or distort the truth of Buddhism is to commit what the Daishonin calls the “offense of complicity in slander” and thus to share responsibility for their slanderous actions (“On Recommending This

Teaching to Your Lord and Avoiding the Offense of Complicity in Slander,” WND, p. 461).

Sincerity is important, but it should be tempered with reason and understanding. Otherwise, it could be easily exploited by those with self-serving intentions and become a cause for our misery and suffering. Some associate sincerity with naiveté and innocence, and knowledge and experience with pride or arrogance. Genuine sincerity, however, is tested by experience and fortified with knowledge and understanding. This is why the Daishonin cautions us: “Though one may perform meritorious deeds, if they are directed toward what is untrue, then those deeds may bring great evil, but they will never result in good” (“The Bodies and Minds of Ordinary Beings,” WND, p. 1134).

In the same regard, Nikko Shonin admonishes us: “You must not be seated together with slanderers of the Law for fear of committing the offense of complicity” (“The Twenty-six Admonitions of Nikko,” GZ, p. 1618). To participate in a pilgrimage sponsored by the priesthood, which has been twisting the Daishonin’s Buddhism for self-serving ends, is to be lost in the woods of confusion on our journey to find happiness.

The Gohonzon in our homes are the same as the Dai-Gohonzon

The Gohonzon enshrined in our homes are transcriptions of the Dai-Gohonzon, and they are exactly the same as the Dai-Gohonzon in their beneficial power based on the principle of the “dispersal of the Buddha’s body” (Jpn *bunshin santai*).

The Sutra of Infinite Meanings, which is regarded as a prologue to the Lotus Sutra, explains that the Buddha “dispersed” his body among many lands in order to lead all living beings equally to enlightenment. What is implied in this concept is the universality of the Buddha’s

compassion and of Buddhahood itself.

Buddhism is a universal teaching without bonds to a particular place; it allows people to attain enlightenment regardless of their location. Based on this principle, Gohonzon are reproduced so that all believers may enjoy the same benefit as if they were directly praying to the Dai-Gohonzon, wherever they might practice. Therefore, it has been always understood that when we pray to the Gohonzon enshrined in our homes, it is the same as praying directly to the Dai-Gohonzon.

The priesthood, however, now claims that we should “think of the Dai-Gohonzon as the root, and all other Gohonzons as branches and leaves,”¹³

suggesting that there is a fundamental difference in quality or effectiveness between the Dai-Gohonzon and the Gohonzon enshrined in

our homes. The priesthood also asserts that we need to worship the Dai-Gohonzon directly in order to enjoy the benefit of our practice: “There is absolutely no benefit in refusing to visit the Dai-Gohonzon...and worshipping just a household Gohonzon, which is a transcription of that Dai-Gohonzon.”¹⁴ It appears that the priesthood is oblivious to the principle of the “dispersal of the Buddha’s body.” As the same Buddha appears in many lands in the Sutra of the Infinite Meanings, the same Dai-Gohonzon is enshrined in each of our homes throughout the world.

The priesthood also seems to be confused about the foundation or what they describe as the “root” of the Gohonzon. Our faith in our innate Buddhahood is the source of the Gohonzon’s beneficial power. As the Daishonin states: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the

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The Lotus Sutra compares the beauty and strength of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to the lotus blooming in a muddy pond. All of us have the power to create our own happiness in the here and now, as Nichiren Daishonin states, “Wherever we dwell and practice the single vehicle, that place will be the Capital of Eternally Tranquil Light.”

mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... This Gohonzon also is found only in the two characters for faith” (“The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” WND, p. 832). When we pray to the Gohonzon in our homes with strong faith, we will naturally enjoy the full benefit of practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Seeking the Mystic Law outside ourselves, the Daishonin points out, is as foolish as “a poor man who spends night and day counting his neighbor’s wealth but gains not even half a coin” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, p. 3).

Furthermore, the priesthood’s emphasis on the direct worship of the Dai-Gohonzon over worship of one’s personal Gohonzon completely contradicts its own tradition. Throughout the history of Taiseki-ji, the successive high priests transcribed Gohonzon so that believers could practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism *without* directly praying to the Dai-Gohonzon. Hori Nichiko, the fifty-ninth high priest and renowned scholar of the history of Nichiren Buddhism, explained that the

Dai-Gohonzon was intended to “be kept in secrecy until the time of kosen-rufu.”¹⁵ High Priest Nichiko also wrote: “In the early times, this matter [i.e., the Dai-Gohonzon] was publicized neither within our school nor outside.”¹⁶

If directly praying to the Dai-Gohonzon were so important for one’s attainment of enlightenment, how could the priesthood have previously hidden its existence from believers and apparently even from many of its own priests? According to the priesthood’s recorded history, many believers in the past knew not even of the existence of the Dai-Gohonzon. High Priest Nichiko explained that only “those of strong faith with special connection” who were lucky enough to learn of the priesthood’s well-kept secret were allowed to “worship the Dai-Gohonzon with [the priesthood’s] reluctance.”¹⁷ One must assume that the early priesthood was not intentionally preventing the enlightenment of believers by hiding the Dai-Gohonzon; rather, this fact makes it clear that the dogma of the current priesthood that one must pray directly to the Dai-Gohonzon is a recent invention.

The high priest is not the Gohonzon

The priesthood claims, “By making this pilgrimage, we are able to change any sorrow with our single-minded yearning to see the Dai-Gohonzon, the embodiment of the Daishonin Himself, and to see the High Priest, the legitimate successor to Nichiren Daishonin.”¹⁸ Furthermore, the priesthood asserts that the high priest “possesses the Daishonin’s enlightenment as the True Buddha.”¹⁹

Did the Daishonin ever say that we must see a high priest to change our sorrow into happiness? Clearly not. Instead, the Daishonin always stressed the importance of maintaining faith and practice in the face of hardship. For example, he encouraged Shijo Kingo as follows: “Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law? Strengthen your power of faith more than ever” (“Happiness in This World,” WND, p. 681).

The Daishonin emphasized the importance of faith in receiving the essence or heritage of his Buddhism. He never described his teachings as being passed on by an exclusive heritage or lifeblood “received by only a single person”²⁰ as the priesthood asserts. For the Daishonin, the true heritage of Buddhism is nothing other than faith, and he struggled to share it with all people. For example, the Daishonin writes, “Nichiren has been trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra so that they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood” (“The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” WND, p. 217).

In fact, the Daishonin concludes the above letter by saying, “Even embracing the Lotus Sutra would be useless without the heritage of faith” (WND, p. 218). What we need for our happiness is the heritage of faith, not the esoteric heritage of the high priest. Neither seeing the high priest nor

obedience to him has a place in the Daishonin’s Buddhism or in our enlightenment. The high priest, after all, is not the object of devotion.

‘There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves’

Standing on the grounds of Taiseki-ji — where the Dai-Gohonzon is enshrined and Nikko Shonin once toiled to restore his mentor’s teaching after the five senior priests’ treachery — may give us a sense of history and an air of sacredness. But we must not allow those understandably human emotions to lead us to suppose that the head temple grounds are sacred in and of themselves and that by simply going there, we become enlightened or gain benefit.

In this regard, the Daishonin states: “If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, p. 4). Here the Daishonin suggests that we do not change our lives by moving from one place to another. We transform our suffering into a springboard for growth and happiness through faith and practice.

Nichiren Daishonin spent his last days at Mount Minobu, where he trained younger priests in Buddhist study and continued to encourage many disciples despite harsh living conditions and his failing health. Mount Minobu occupied a special place in the heart of Nikko Shonin. There he created many unforgettable memories of shared struggles to spread the Mystic Law with his beloved teacher. When the five senior priests strayed from the Daishonin’s teaching, and Hakiri Sanenaga, the lord of

We do not change our lives by moving from one place to another.



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Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon for all people to overcome their suffering and live in peace and happiness. Praying and striving for the worldwide propagation of the Daishonin's Buddhism, therefore, is to practice in accord with the spirit of the Dai-Gohonzon.

Minobu, committed a series of slanderous acts, such as erecting a statue of Shakyamuni and making offerings to the Pure Land school, Nikko Shonin knew that he had to leave the place, following his mentor's words: "I shall not live here if the lord of the province ever goes against the Law" ("Reply to Mimasaka-bo," *Hennentai Nichiren Daishonin Goshō*, p. 1729).

Later Nikko Shonin recounted his thoughts and feelings when he left Mount Minobu: "It is difficult to describe how sorry and regretful I felt when I left the valley of Minobu. On second thought, however, I realized that it was essential to carry on the teaching of the sage wherever I might be and establish it in the world. All the other disciples, however, committed treachery against their teacher. I, Nikko, alone understood the correct teaching of the original teacher and realized that I had to fulfill my true purpose. So I have never forgotten my original intent" ("Reply to Hara," *Hennentai Nichiren Daishonin Goshō*, p. 1733). Nikko Shonin knew that his commitment to protecting the integrity of the Daishonin's Buddhism was far more important than any nostalgia or sentimentality he felt for Mount Minobu.

The priesthood today often quotes the following passage from the Daishonin's writings to stress the sanctity of the head temple grounds: "Those who visit this place can instantly expiate the offenses they have accumulated since the infinite past and transform their evils deriving from the three types of action into the three virtues" ("The Person and the Law," WND, p. 1097). As context often decides the meaning of a word or passage in any text, it is important to know the context of this passage. First of all, "this place" in the above passage refers to Mount Minobu where the Daishonin was living, not to the head temple.

The Daishonin wrote this letter to Nanjo Tokimitsu upon hearing about his serious illness. At the beginning of the letter, he states, "I hope you will recover soon and come to see me" (WND, p. 1097). Obviously the Daishonin wanted his sick disciple to recover as quickly as possible; he wished to motivate Tokimitsu by giving him a concrete goal to visit Mount Minobu. In the same letter, the Daishonin explains that the character and quality of the environment depend upon

people and, ultimately, upon the teaching and philosophy they uphold: “Since the Law is wonderful, the person is worthy of respect; since the person is worthy of respect, the land is sacred” (WND, p. 1097).

Throughout this letter, the Daishonin praises Tokimitsu for his steadfast faith and practice over the years. The Daishonin makes it clear that the “remarkable rewards” Tokimitsu would enjoy are due to his selfless dedication to the spread of the Daishonin’s teaching, not to any future visit he might make to see the Daishonin. (Regarding another passage often quoted by the priesthood out of context, please see “Misreading to Mislead” on page 28.)

The Daishonin’s Buddhism is not bound to a specific locality; it is a universal teaching aimed at improving our inner state and thereby transforming our environment. In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” he succinctly makes this point: “Where you uphold and embrace the Lotus Sutra is the place of practice. It is not to be found elsewhere. The place of practice is the dwelling place of the living beings of the ten worlds” (GZ, p. 781). In “The Persecution at Tatsunokuchi,” the Daishonin explains that one can attain Buddhahood through his or her selfless dedication to the Lotus Sutra as its votary. He states, “Every place where Nichiren meets persecution is the Buddha land” (WND, p. 196). No place is in and of itself a Buddha land; a place may become a Buddha land because the people there reveal their innate Buddhahood through their faith and practice. It is not that people become Buddhas because they visit a Buddha land; rather, a land becomes a Buddha land because Buddhas are there.

It is all too human to imagine that our difficulties will magically disappear once we stand on supposed ‘sacred grounds’ and breathe its ‘sacred air.’ We must not, however, allow such human weakness to prevent us from challenging ourselves wherever we are. Any notion of pilgrimage that encourages an escapist

attitude toward life’s reality goes against the Daishonin’s Buddhism. After all, if we are to undertake a journey toward genuine happiness, it is our journey of faith within.

Ultimately, to transform our environment into a Buddha land, we must first become Buddhas ourselves. As the Daishonin states: “Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one’s own heart. Awakened to this, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called an ordinary person. The Lotus Sutra reveals this truth, and one who embraces the Lotus Sutra will realize that hell is itself the Land of Tranquil Light” (“Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light,” WND, p. 456). What matters most is not where we are, but what state of life we build within ourselves.

Practicing in accord with the spirit and intent of the Dai-Gohonzon

The priesthood misrepresents history as well as the Daishonin’s teaching when it states: “During the lifetime of Nichiren Daishonin, tozan²¹ was the pilgrimage made by believers to visit Him. The original meaning of tozan was to be able to directly serve Him and receive His instructions. At that time, Nichiren Daishonin’s appearance itself was the center of worship based upon faith.”²²

The Daishonin never told his disciples that they must see him in person or regard him as “the center of worship.” Instead, he urged his disciples to pray to the Gohonzon and serve the happiness of ordinary people by sharing his teaching with them — just as he himself did. Of course, he expressed his utmost appreciation to those who visited him on Sado Island or at Mount Minobu for their sincere faith and various offerings,

Where you uphold and embrace the Lotus Sutra is the place of practice. It is not to be found elsewhere.



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Is the Buddha too close to see? Nichiren Daishonin states, “We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance. Likewise, we do not see that the Buddha exists in our own hearts.”

without which his life would have been extremely difficult. Yet he never forced his disciples to visit him. On the contrary, he wrote to one of his disciples as follows: “How is it that you can have faith, though we have never met? It is, no doubt, the result of your karma from the past. Since the time has come for you to ensure the attainment of Buddhahood in your next lifetime, you now have aroused faith” (“Letter to Lord Matsuno,” GZ, p. 1379). Throughout his life, he consistently drove home the importance of faith to attain Buddhahood.

In the Daishonin’s Buddhism, distance presents no obstacle to faith. In this regard, the Daishonin states, “Therefore, wherever we dwell and practice the single vehicle, that place will be the Capital of Eternally Tranquil Light. And, without having to take a step, those who are our disciples and lay supporters can view Eagle Peak in India and day and night will go to and from the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light that has existed for all time. What a truly inexpressible joy it is!” (“Reply to Sairen-bo,” WND, p. 313). True freedom, the Daishonin indicates here, is not to go somewhere else, but to become the

kind of person we always enjoy being, regardless of external circumstances. The joy of practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism, therefore, is the joy of self-discovery. After all, the Mystic Law we are seeking is the essence of our lives. As the Daishonin explains, “Therefore, when you chant *myoho* and recite *renge*, you must summon up deep faith that Myoho-renge-kyo is your life itself” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, p. 3).

To truly connect with the Dai-Gohonzon is to practice in accord with its intent, rather than merely praying before it. The Dai-Gohonzon is not an idol of an external power or a relic of a savior who is now dead. The Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon for all people to overcome their sufferings and lead happier lives. Praying and striving for the worldwide propagation of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, therefore, is to practice in accord with the spirit of the Dai-Gohonzon. As the Daishonin says: “Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a

Bodhisattva of the Earth” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” WND, p. 385).

Seeing the Daishonin in person must have been an exciting and rewarding experience for those who were able to do so, but it was never as important as practicing sincerely for oneself and others as he taught. Indeed, among those who met him in person, some ultimately turned against him, including the five senior priests. Likewise, seeing the Dai-Gohonzon may sound attractive to us, but we must first consider what it means to practice based on the Dai-Gohonzon.

Praying physically before the Dai-Gohonzon is no guarantee that one’s faith will remain pure and correct. This is our personal responsibility. The fact is that although the priesthood today has direct access to the Dai-Gohonzon, they have deviated from the correct spirit of faith. Perhaps their complacency in believing that possessing the Dai-Gohonzon alone gives them special status in the world of faith is what caused their faith to deteriorate. Because the current priesthood distorts the Daishonin’s Buddhism in its efforts to shore up the high priest’s authority, choosing not to see the Dai-Gohonzon exactly accords with the Daishonin’s intent and spirit. If “Nichiren Daishonin resides in Taiseikiji... as the Dai-Gohonzon,”²³ as the priesthood says, the Daishonin would then certainly wish us to practice as he taught, rather than violate the spirit of his teachings simply to see him in person.

Toward a journey of faith within

Through many of his writings, as discussed above, the Daishonin makes it clear that much of our unhappiness results from the search for happiness outside. It may be worthwhile to quote the Daishonin once again as he admonishes us against the tragic foolishness of “a poor man who spends night and day counting his neighbor’s wealth but gains not even half a coin” (“On Attaining

Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” WND, p. 3). Those who believe that they must participate in the pilgrimage of Nichiren Shoshu are as if counting their neighbor’s wealth in vain. They are participating in the illusion conjured by the priesthood that their happiness is to be found outside themselves — in the physicality of the Dai-Gohonzon and the approval of the high priest.

Without consciously and clearly rejecting this misconception of happiness, it would be virtually impossible to accept the truth of happiness as expounded by the Daishonin. Each attempt to search for happiness outside begins with the assumption that people are incapable of building their own happiness and ends with its prefixed failure followed by self-disparagement that they are not good enough, thus reinforcing their original assumption. So this vicious cycle continues until their assumption turns into their conviction.

The true path to happiness, on the other hand, begins with the conviction that we are entirely capable of building our own happiness and proceeds inward to discover and experience our innate Buddhahood. Each time we challenge ourselves along this path, we deepen our faith in Buddhahood and become better prepared for the next obstacle. In this way, our lives become a joyful journey of self-discovery in which our happiness grows in the depth of our self-confidence and in the expanse of our compassion for others. Therefore, we may begin this inward journey of faith by rejecting the erroneous idea that happiness, enlightenment or Buddhahood can only be found elsewhere, and replacing it with the conviction that our lives are much stronger and more beautiful than we ever thought. ■

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