

How Did It All Begin?

The Origin of Group Pilgrimage

Although the priesthood promotes pilgrimage to its head temple as “essential”²⁴ or “fundamental,”²⁵ the institution of pilgrimage, that is, periodically organized group pilgrimage, dates back only to 1952 when it was initiated by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda in order to support the destitute priesthood.

The Nichiren Shoshu temples sustained significant damage during the war: Much of the head temple burnt down, and many branch temples were destroyed in air raids. Furthermore, in December 1945, Taiseki-ji (the Nichiren Shoshu head temple) lost its farmland in the postwar agrarian reform, which the government was promoting as part of the nation's democratization. This agrarian reform was instituted between 1946 and 1948. Nichiren Shoshu 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 hardship. In this dire financial situation, the Nichiren

● KEY POINTS:

The priesthood gives an impression that group pilgrimage is a centuries-old tradition, but history tells us otherwise.

- (1) **President Toda Started Group Pilgrimage:** In order to support the impoverished priesthood, which had lost its farmland through Japan's postwar agrarian reform, the Soka Gakkai initiated monthly group pilgrimage to the head temple in 1952.
- (2) **The Priesthood's Plan to Promote Taiseki-ji as a Tourist Attraction:** In 1950, the priesthood met with local officials to discuss their plan to promote the head temple as a tourist attraction. President Toda's opposition prevented the plan.

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 concrete plans to promote tourism at Taiseki-ji. Conference participants discussed a scenic road, a tourist information center at the head temple's Sanmon Gate and a new lodging facility, for example.

President 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. Instead, to relieve the head temple of its financial burden, Toda organized group pilgrimages of Soka Gakkai members to Taiseki-ji. This was in spite of the fact that the number of Soka Gakkai members at the time was relatively small, and their financial prospects were no more hopeful than that of the priesthood. (At the end of 1951, the Soka Gakkai's total membership was reported as 5,728 households.²⁶⁾)

While the Soka Gakkai membership steadily increased and continued to spread Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through the 1950s, it also began making many contributions to the priesthood. On the head temple grounds, Soka Gakkai members' financial contributions made possible the restoration of the Five-Storied Pagoda, the repair of the Somon Gate, the construction of the 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 by the Soka Gakkai, 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. 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" (*Complete Works of High Priest Nichijun*, p.1620).

(For more details on the postwar condition of Nichiren Shoshu, see *The Untold History of the Fuji School*, pp.125-138.) ■



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Taiseki-ji grounds, as they appeared before Mr. Toda initiated a pilgrimage program to support the destitute school.