

# Misreading to Mislead

A passage often quoted by the priesthood to promote pilgrimage is the following: “Now this place, too, is like that. It is the place of the cluster of blessings where the Buddhas and bodhisattvas dwell. The blessings of the Lotus Sutra, which I have recited over these many years, must be vaster even than the sky. Thus, by having come here frequently year after year, it is certain that within this lifetime you will eradicate the karmic hindrances you have accumulated since the beginningless past” (“The Place of the Cluster of Blessings,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1070).

With a narrow interpretive translation of this passage, the priesthood claims: “It is an immense mistake to think that if one simply prays to the Gohonzon, it is unnecessary to make either pilgrimage to the Head Temple or visits to the local temple. In ‘Reply to Shijo Kingo’ (Japanese, *Shijo Kingo-dono Gohenji*), the Daishonin explains to Shijo Kingo that the act of making a Tozan pilgrimage carries the source of the great benefit of extinguishing the evils which we have committed as a result of our slanders of the Law since time without beginning. ‘Now making a pilgrimage to

## ● KEY POINTS:

- (1) **The Priesthood Takes the Gosho Out of Context:** In order to fit Nichiren Daishonin’s writings into its own agenda, the priesthood often cites passages out of context. The meaning of a passage, however, can be easily misrepresented.
- (2) **What Matters Is Action, Not Place:** Throughout his writings, the Daishonin stresses our sincere prayer and action as the votaries of the Lotus Sutra. He never taught the inherent sacredness of any particular place nor its necessity to our enlightenment; rather, he taught that any place is as virtuous as the people who inhabit it.

this place where I live contains all of the accumulated blessings of the Buddha and Bodhisattvas. And it is certain that making such a pilgrimage will, in this lifetime, extinguish all of the evils that one has committed since time without beginning.’ It is the work of devils which makes one disobey these kinds of golden words....”<sup>29</sup>

***The mind misleading is  
the mind misled.***



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The priesthood's translation of this passage requires some comments. First of all, it must be noted that there are no words in the original Japanese text that correspond to "making a pilgrimage" in the first sentence as in the priesthood's translation. "This place" is the subject of the first sentence, not "making a pilgrimage." Furthermore, the unmarked omission of the second sentence — which reads "The blessings of the Lotus Sutra, which I have recited over these many years, must be vaster even than the sky" — seems intended to divert the reader's attention from the Daishonin's emphasis on faith and practice as the source of blessings rather than the physical location itself. Last, the original Japanese word *sankei*, which the priesthood translates as "making such a pilgrimage" in the last sentence, indicates a personal visit to a shrine or temple, not an established institution of religious practice as suggested by the use of the word "pilgrimage" here. There is a fine line between translation and interpretation, but the priesthood here seems to go too far on the side of interpretation in its eagerness to justify its claim.

As in the passage from "The Person and the Law," the priesthood quotes the above passage from "The Place of the Cluster of Blessings" out of context and makes a significant leap in logic.

In the beginning of this letter, the Daishonin tells Shijo Kingo: "In any event, there can be no doubt about your enlightenment in your next life" (WND, p. 1069). Then he recalls Kingo's dedicated efforts to support and protect the Daishonin over the years. Reminiscing about the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, for example, the Daishonin writes: "You were even prepared to give your life had I in fact been executed. In what lifetime could I possibly forget it?" (WND, p. 1069). From the context of the letter, it becomes clear that the Daishonin is telling Kingo that he "will eradicate the karmic hindrances..." because of his selfless dedication over the years. Furthermore, the Daishonin stresses that Mount Minobu is "the place of the cluster of blessings" because he is "a votary of the Lotus Sutra" (WND, p. 1070), not the other way around.

As in many other writings, the Daishonin emphasizes the action of a practitioner as a votary of the Lotus Sutra; he does not indicate in any way an inherent sacredness of a place. Taking this passage out of context and drawing the conclusion that we can eradicate our negative karma by making a pilgrimage to the head temple — this can only be described as a distortion of the Daishonin's intent behind his letter to Shijo Kingo. ■