



Reaffirming Our Right to Happiness

On the Gohonzon
Transcribed by
High Priest Nichikan

Contents

Behind the SGI's Decision To Issue the Gohonzon	7
Rebutting the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood's Condemnation of the Soka Gakkai's Conferral of the Gohonzon	10
Answers to Commonly Asked Questions About the New Nichikan Gohonzon	59
A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon	74
The Recent History of the Conferral of the Gohonzon	82

Behind the SGI's Decision To Issue the Gohonzon

On September 7, 1993, adopting a proposal from Sendo Narita, the chief priest of Joen-ji, a temple in Tochigi Prefecture, Japan, the SGI announced that it would start issuing Gohonzon, reproduced from a Gohonzon transcribed in 1720 by Nichikan, the 26th high priest of Taiseki-ji, to its members worldwide.

Many SGI members who practiced without the Gohonzon since Nichiren Shoshu's refusal to grant them the Gohonzon were overjoyed at the news. And many others, filled with hope, have been looking forward to a bright future of the spread of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and a flourishing of the Soka Renaissance toward a world that embraces truly humanistic ideals.

The significance of the SGI's decision can be seen from the following two perspectives: First, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for all people throughout the world. His fundamental intent and desire in doing so was to make the Gohonzon available to all who sincerely seek to practice his teachings, thus enabling them to establish indestructible happiness through their faith and practice.

Second, in the development of the priesthood issue, Nikken Abe, abusing his position as high priest, arbitrarily stopped granting the Gohonzon to SGI members, with the express purpose of destroying the SGI, which, since its inception, has been single-mindedly promoting kosen-rufu and had supported the priesthood. Nikken's action runs completely counter to the Daishonin's fundamental intent and spirit behind inscribing the Gohonzon.

In light of these circumstances -- and based on its responsibility as the body of believers selflessly and harmoniously practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism in modern times -- the SGI has decided to make the Gohonzon available to its membership. The SGI's decision was made solely to protect the Daishonin's Buddhism, to reply to the sincerity of those purely seeking the Gohonzon, and to further promote kosen-rufu, thus fulfilling the expectation the Daishonin placed in his future disciples.

The priesthood claims: "The Soka Gakkai is a group that has been excommunicated by Nichiren Shoshu, and has absolutely no relationship with Nichiren Shoshu" (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. I). Despite their denial of any relationship to the Gakkai, however, priests still seem to be obsessed and grow nervous about the SGI's every action: "The Soka Gakkai announced that they will begin to independently bestow Gohonzons and, thus declaring complete independence from Nichiren Shoshu" (*ibid.*, p. 2). From these two statements, it is clear what status the priesthood expects us, as SGI members, to maintain: excommunicated, but dependent.

Since the SGI's recent announcement, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and the Hokkeko (a group of lay believers affiliated with the Nichiren Shoshu temples) have been propounding and spreading groundless accusations that have no basis in the Gosho or in any of the Daishonin's teachings, calling the Gohonzon issued by the SGI "counterfeit."

The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood asserts that the Gohonzon issued by the SGI are "counterfeit" because:

1. They have not been authorized by the high priest.
2. They have not received the legitimate "eye-opening" ceremony.
3. They are not issued by the head temple. (*ibid.*, p. 9)

This booklet attempts to address these and other accusations brought by the priesthood and demonstrate the validity of the SGI's decision in light of the Daishonin's teachings.

The SGI is the only group of believers that has brought Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to the entire world, that has been carrying out the Daishonin's will- kosen-rufu -- in reality. With conviction in the SGI's profound mission for kosen-rufu, and by further polishing our faith and practice, we can show Nikken and his supporters, through actual proof, the great power of the Gohonzon. As the Daishonin states: "Even more valuable than reason and documentary proof is the proof of actual fact" (MW-6, III).

Rebutting the Nichiren Shoshu Priesthood's Condemnation of the Soka Gakkai's Conferral of the Gohonzon

The following is a point-by-point rebuttal to charges made by the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood in a document they published called *NST News, Special Issue: Soka Gakkai Announces Issuance of Counterfeit Gohonzons*, in which the priesthood argues that the Gakkai does not have the right to confer the Gohonzon on its members.

Items in the framed boxes are headlines and quotes taken from *NST News, Special Issue*. The text in the shaded boxes below is printed as it appears in the *NST News*. Any regular brackets “[]” are as they appear in the original text. Any special brackets “{ }” include text we have added for clarity, based upon the full text of the NST document. “NST” is the acronym for the religious corporation “Nichiren Shoshu Temples” in the United States.

NST allegation #1

{Gohonzon issued by the SGI are counterfeit because} they have not been authorized by the high priest.

One should never worship anything as a Gohonzon that has not been authorized as such by the High Priest, who has inherited the Heirloom of the Law, even if it was inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin himself, or even if it transcribed by Nikko Shonin or any of the successive High Priests. This has been a basic tenet Shoshu for seven hundred years (*NST News, Special Issue*, P.3-4).

Rebuttal to allegation #1

(i) Nichiren Daishonin, in a letter known as “The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon,” writes: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... The Gohonzon is found in faith alone. As the sutra states, ‘Only with faith can one enter Buddhahood’ (MW-1, 213).

Here, the Daishonin teaches us that it is our faith that taps the Gohonzon’s power, and that the locus of that power

is within us. If we believe in the Daishonin's words, how can we accept the idea that anyone, by virtue of his or her assumed religious authority, can "switch on" or "switch off" the power of the Gohonzon? Yet Nikken would have us believe he possesses such power.

According to the above NST statement, the authority of the high priest alone gives the Gohonzon its power. Even Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin himself, the priesthood asserts, have power only by dint of Nikken's permission. Are we therefore supposed to believe that the Dai-Gohonzon, which the Daishonin bestowed upon all humanity, has power only by virtue of Nikken's authority? What would Nichiren Daishonin think of this statement?

(ii) The Gohonzon issued by the SGI will be reproduced from a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan, the 26th high priest of Taiseki-ji, based upon the Dai-Gohonzon. In terms of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, it is obviously a valid object of worship.

(iii) The Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon for all people throughout the world. This is exemplified in the Daishonin's words, "Showing profound compassion for those ignorant of the gem of ichinen sanzen, the True Buddha wrapped it within the single phrase Nam-myohorenge-kyo, with which he then adorned the necks of those living in the Latter Day" (MW-I, 82).

Especially for those who sincerely sought to practice his teachings, the Daishonin spared nothing of himself to inscribe the Gohonzon. He wrote to Abutsu-bo, a sincere elderly believer in Sado, saying, "faith like yours is so

extremely rare that I will inscribe the Treasure Tower especially for you" (MW-I, 30).

Nowhere in the Gosho does the Daishonin state that we need permission from a high priest to tap the unlimited powers of the Buddha and the Law embodied in the Gohonzon or to benefit from our practice. The Daishonin himself states, "Whether or not your prayer is answered depends upon your faith; [if it is not,] the fault in no way lies with me, Nichiren" (MW-5, 305).

The Daishonin here admonishes us to depend on no one — not even the Daishonin himself — and nothing other than our faith to answer our prayers. As he wrote: "faith alone is what really matters. No matter how earnestly Nichiren prays for you, if you lack faith, it will be like trying to set fire to wet tinder. Spur yourself to muster the power of faith" (MW-I, 246).

(iv) In the past, many branch temples of Nichiren Shoshu reproduced and issued Gohonzon on their own without the high priest's permission. [See "A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon," p. 74.] If the priesthood continues to insist that the SGI's Gohonzon are counterfeit because they are not authorized by the high priest, it would have to deny its own recorded history. Examining this history, it becomes apparent that the absolute, exclusive authority over the Gohonzon by the high priest is a "basic tenet" that exists exclusively in the imagination of the present-day priesthood.

NST allegation #2

The high priest is endowed with complete authority of the Gohonzon.

The transmission document *Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon Transmitted From Master to Disciple* states, ‘This [the transcription of the characters “Nichiren” on the Gohonzon by the transcribing High Priest] specifically means that each High Priest corresponds [in function] to Nichiren’ (*Fuji Shugaku Yoshu*, vol. I, p. 32). This indicates that all of the doctrines relating to the Gohonzon are transmitted throughout the ten thousand years of the Latter Day of the Law through the exclusive transmission of the Heritage of the Law from one High Priest to the next. It is in this that the solemn transmission of the Entity of the Law exists. (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. 3)

Rebuttal to allegation #2

(i) This “Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon” passage does not refer to the transmission of secret teachings about the Gohonzon exclusively through the successive high priests or imply the existence of a mystic spiritual entity (“the heritage of the entity of the Law”) possessed and transmitted only by high priests.

“Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon” records the Daishonin’s orally transmitted teachings and Nikko Shonin’s comments on the meaning of various inscriptions on the Gohonzon, as well as instructions on the transcription of the Gohonzon. This particular passage simply indicates that when transcribing the Gohonzon, the high priest must write “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nichiren” down the center, exactly as the Daishonin did.

After the Daishonin’s passing, his senior disciples — other than Nikko Shonin — wrote “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” down the center of the Gohonzon, but added their own names below instead of “Nichiren.” They regarded the inscription “Nichiren” under “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” on the Gohonzon only as a signature, and failed to understand the significance of the oneness of the Person and the Law this expressed. In light of these circumstances, Nikko Shonin explains in this passage from “Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon” the importance of writing “Nichiren” on the Gohonzon. Could Nikko Shonin have intended the words “each high priest corresponds to Nichiren” as a magic formula that automatically turns each high priest into a true Buddha? It does not seem likely. There is nothing magical or supernatural in Buddhism. Nikko Shonin meant this as an admonition to each high priest that he is transcribing the Gohonzon on the Daishonin’s behalf, not his own. He is instructing them to write the Daishonin’s name, not their own, on the Gohonzon. Instead of taking Nikko Shonin’s spirit to heart, Nikken has completely twisted it, trying to use this admonition as a carte blanche endorsement of his own authority.

(ii) Gohonzon issued by the SGI are reproduced from the Gohonzon that High Priest Nichikan transcribed in exact accord with the instructions of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin, including those in the “Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon.” They are therefore correct and valid Gohonzon of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

(iii) All of the so-called transfer documents at Taiseiji already have been published. Regarding the transfer documents that he himself received as the 66th high priest, Nittatsu once stated: “Nichiko Shonin [the 59th high priest who was also a noted Buddhist scholar] has published everything. There is, therefore, nothing special or secret about it.” There exists no secret teaching in Daishonin’s Buddhism possessed exclusively by the high priest.

NST allegation #3

When 35th High Priest Nichion Shonin received the Transmission of the Law, he was honored with the following words from 33rd High Priest Nichigen Shonin.

Nichigen Shonin gave me the instruction, “Once you have accepted and stored this ultimate secret Law [of the Gohonzon] within yourself, [the inner realization of] Nichiren, Nikko, Nichimoku, and all the successive High Priests up to Nichi’in, Nichigen, and including you, is all one entity. Realize that at this point in the Latter Day of the Law it is you Nichion who is the

present High Priest possessing the three virtues of sovereign, teacher and parent, so that all the Daimoku chanted by those who believe in the teachings of Taiseikiji is the Nam-Myoho-Renge- Kyo of the secret Law of your inner realization.

The 56th High Priest Nichio Shonin, further explained:

The Transmission of the Entity of the Law entails the legitimate entrustment of the golden utterance [of the Buddha]. If one has not been successively entrusted with the golden utterance, one is decidedly unable to transcribe the Gohonzon.

How does the Soka Gakkai interpret these passage? It must be understood that the profound doctrines relating to the Entity of the Law of the Gohonzon are definitely transmitted solely from one High Priest to the next, and that complete authority concerning the Gohonzon is possessed by only one person — the High Priest (*NST News, Special Issue*, p. 10).

Rebuttal to allegation #3

(i) “The secret Law” in Nichigen’s words above refers to nothing other than the Dai-Gohonzon of the Three Great Secret Laws. It does not refer to a “secret entity” possessed only by the high priest to the exclusion of all others.

There are no secrets in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It is not a hermetic, esoteric or occult teaching. The "Three Great Secret Laws" (indicating the Dai-Gohonzon, Daimoku and the High Sanctuary of True Buddhism) are called so because before Nichiren Daishonin, they were "hidden in the depths" of the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin revealed and clarified them for all humanity so that all people could attain Buddhahood equally in the Latter Day of the Law.

When we have faith in the Dai-Gohonzon ["the secret Law"] and chant daimoku, we can manifest the Daishonin's life-condition, that is, the Buddha nature, from within our own lives. Thus we become "one entity" with the Daishonin. In the above passage, Nichigen encourages his successor, Nichion, that he is "one entity" with Nichiren Daishonin by virtue of his faith in the Dai-Gohonzon.

During this time, Taiseki-ji's validity was being criticized and strongly attacked by other Nichiren sects. This statement thus instilled confidence in Nichion that he, among all the other high priests of the various sects, was directly connected to the Daishonin because of his faith in the Dai-Gohonzon. It was not intended to exclude everyone else from the possibility of having such a connection with the Daishonin. Nor was it meant to imply that Nichion, simply by becoming high priest, was automatically equivalent to the true Buddha himself, regardless of any faith or effort on his part. Nichigen's words are to emphasize the importance of accepting the Dai-Gohonzon with sincere faith, to assert the head temple's validity based on faith in the Dai-Gohonzon, and to emphasize the important responsibility of

the high priest to protect the Daishonin's Buddhism.

(ii) Immediately prior to the passage from Nichio, quoted by NST above, Nichio defines "the entity of the Law" as the Dai-Gohonzon, stating: "The entity of the Law specifically transferred is the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary, which is enshrined at this temple." (*Bennaku Kanjin Sho*, p. 212). In fact, Nichio (56th high priest, who served from 1889-1908) was the first to ever use the phrase "heritage of the entity of the Law." "The transmission of the heritage of the entity of the Law," which the priesthood now claims is a secret entity only possessed by high priests, actually indicates the transference of the responsibility to protect the Dai-Gohonzon and preserve it for humanity.

"The legitimate entrustment of the golden utterance" indicates those transfer documents pertaining to the Gohonzon, such as the "Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon." Here Nichio emphasizes the importance that whoever transcribes the Gohonzon understands the instructions of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin regarding the Gohonzon.

Gohonzon issued by the SGI are produced from a Gohonzon that High Priest Nichikan transcribed exactly following the instructions of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin. Therefore, they do not contradict in the least what Nichio states in this passage.

(iii) The above two passages by Nichigen and Nichio were written to exalt the orthodoxy of Taiseki-ji based on faith in the Dai-Gohonzon over other Nichiren denominations. It is important to bear in mind the historical circumstances behind the writings of the successive high priests in

order to grasp their intent and significance.

(iv) Nowhere in the Gosho does the Daishonin mention a “heritage of the entity of the Law” transmitted only through successive high priests. When he writes of “the heritage” (Jpn. *kechimiyaku*) in the Gosho, the Daishonin is referring to the heritage or lifeblood of faith. He states:

Be resolved to summon forth the great power of your faith, and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of your death. Never seek any other way to inherit the ultimate law and manifest it in your life....Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra. (MW-I, 25)

The heritage of the Law -- the lifeblood of faith -- is the universal means by which all people can attain enlightenment. The concept that the heritage of the Law was intended as the exclusive property of any select “lineage” of persons is, in fact, an idea that the Daishonin vigorously fought against.

The Daishonin wrote: “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. But instead they attacked me time and again, and finally had me banished to this island” (MW-I, 24). The priesthood’s claim of an exclusive right to the heritage of the Law is a feudal concept that clearly betrays the spirit of equality for which the Daishonin risked his own life.

NST allegation #4

The Soka Gakkai has absolutely no qualification to confer the Gohonzon.

The concept of “practice towards kosen-rufu” which denies the Transmission of the Heritage of the true Law from High Priest to High Priest is nothing but an empty theory far removed from the fundamental teachings of the Daishonin.... A passage from the Gosho “On the True Cause” reads:

[The documents of] this Heritage [of the school of the Essential Teachings of the Lotus Sutra] and [the documents of] the essential matters of the Gohonzon are documents of the Transmission of the Law from Nichiren to the successive master of the seat of the Law. They concern the Transmission bestowed [on Bodhisattva Jogyo] at the Treasure Tower, the Transmission of the Heritage of the Law exclusively from one to the next.

Therefore, absolutely no one is qualified to bypass the High Priest and arbitrarily manufacture and confer the Gohonzon of Nichiren Shoshu, even in the form of wood block reproductions of a Gohonzon (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 11-12).

Rebuttal to allegation #4

(i) According to Nichiko, the 59th high priest and renowned Buddhist scholar, the passage quoted above was added later to the text of ‘ ‘On the True Cause” by someone other than the Daishonin or Nikko Shonin. (In *The Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. I, p. 8, Nichiko underlines this passage and adds a cautionary footnote explaining that it was appended at a later date, long after the Daishonin wrote the body of the letter.)

(ii) The purpose of the passage quoted by NST is to assert that the Daishonin’s important writings such as this Gosho “On the True Cause” and other transfer documents regarding the Gohonzon, including “Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon,” had been transmitted through the high priests at Taiseki-ji.

However, these writings were hardly “secret documents” known only to the successive high priests at Taiseki-ji. The original manuscript of ‘ ‘On the True Cause” does not exist. High Priest Nichiko had to compile the text of this Gosho based on a copy made by Nichiji, the fifth high priest, and two other copies made and preserved at temples of other Nichiren schools (*The Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. I, p. 8). Nichiko also had to rely on a copy made by a priest from a different Nichiren school in order to compile “Seven Teachings on the Gohonzon” (ibid., p. 33). It is strange that Nichiren Shoshu has been claiming exclusive possession of these documents when High Priest Nichiko himself had to go outside of Taiseki-ji to gain access to them.

Because all of the Daishonin’s important writings and transfer documents already have been published, the high priest possesses no secret teachings to which he alone is privy, nor does the priesthood in general. This passage, which was added to the end of “On the True Cause” after the Daishonin’s and Nikko Shonin’s time, still in no way supports Nikken’s claim to exclusive authority over the Gohonzon. “Exclusive transmission” refers to the Daishonin’s designation of Nikko Shonin as his legitimate successor. This was based on Nikko Shonin’s faith and practice, and his courage to endure persecutions alongside the Daishonin. Because he practiced with the same spirit and intent as Nichiren Daishonin, he was qualified to inherit the Daishonin’s teachings for posterity.

(iii) Regarding the heritage of the Law, the Daishonin writes: “The heritage of the Lotus Sutra flows within the lives of those who never forsake it in any lifetime whatsoever-- whether in the past, the present or the future” (MW- I, 23). In this Gosho passage, the Daishonin clearly defines the heritage of the Law as our faith in the law of Nam- myoho- rengo-kyo.

In “The True Entity of Life,” the Daishonin further explains the important connection of our faith to kosen- rufu: “No matter what, maintain your faith as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and forever exert yourself as Nichiren’s disciple. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And since you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of the Buddha from the remotest past” (MW-I, 93).

In the passage “If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth” lies an essential aspect of our faith. Those who are of the same mind as Nichiren Daishonin are those who practice with the awareness that they are Bodhisattvas of the Earth, that is, those who fight for others’ happiness for the sake of kosen-rufu. Our dedication to kosen-rufu -- to the peace and happiness of all people -- is fundamental to our faith and is the source of good fortune that permeates past, present and future.

As the Daishonin wrote, “Without the lifeblood of faith, it would be useless to embrace the Lotus Sutra” (MW-I, 25). Even if one does gongyo and chants daimoku to the Gohonzon, if he acts counter to the “mind of Nichiren,” in other words, acts to interfere with kosen-rufu or to harm those who strive to accomplish it, that person will be destroying his own good fortune.

Without faith and practice dedicated to kosen-rufu, no one, not even a high priest, can inherit the lifeblood of faith from the Daishonin. This is Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

(iv) The SGI has developed to the extent it has because it is the only group of believers in modern times that unstintingly practices the Daishonin’s Buddhism in harmonious unity, with the aim of accomplishing kosen-rufu. Many millions of people have changed their karma, developed good fortune and shown proof of victory in their lives by practicing together in the SGI. This is clear evidence that the lifeblood of faith from the Daishonin is alive and pulsating within the SGI.

In this regard, Nichiren Daishonin wrote:

All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren’s propagation. When you are so united, even the great hope for kosen-rufu can be fulfilled without fail. But if any of Nichiren’s disciples should disrupt the unity of *itai doshin*, he will destroy his own castle from within. (MW-I, 23)

The Daishonin bestowed the Gohonzon upon all the people of the world. He never intended it for possession by only a few. And the role and responsibility of making the Gohonzon available for those who sincerely seek to practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism naturally rest with the believers who are united in working toward the goal of kosen-rufu. With this qualification and responsibility, based on the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the SGI is conferring the Gohonzon upon its members.

NST allegation #5

“Faith based on the Dai-Gohonzon”
without pilgrimage to the Head Temple
is an obvious contradiction.

As Nichiren Daishonin proclaims, “I, Nichiren, infuse my life into sumi and inscribed the Gohonzon,” The Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary enshrined at Taiseikiji is the spirit and embodiment of the true Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin. How can people who do not wish to worship the Dai-Gohonzon call themselves believers with a direct connection to the Daishonin?... We must always bear in mind that regardless of the time or circumstances, there can be no true means of attaining Buddhahood if one separates oneself from the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary and from the Head Temple Taiseikiji (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 12-13).

Rebuttal to allegation #5

(i) Our faith in the Dai-Gohonzon has nothing to do with our physical proximity to it. The Daishonin inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon for all people. When we pray and dedi-

cate our lives to kosen-rufu, our faith rests solidly in the Dai-Gohonzon because we are in complete accord with the Daishonin’s intent in revealing it.

We may be oceans apart from the Dai-Gohonzon. Many of us have never seen it. But as long as we have faith, when we do gongyo and chant daimoku to our personal Gohonzon, or even, when necessary, to a blank wall, we are actually worshipping the Dai-Gohonzon.

Because parents love their children and children care about their parents, they remain as parents and children. Some children live far away from their parents, but what binds or separates them as parents and children is their love or its absence. Likewise, what makes it possible for us to connect with the Daishonin’s life and tap the same Buddha nature in our own lives is nothing other than our spirit of faith to seek the Daishonin’s heart. As the Daishonin states: “The Gohonzon is found in faith alone” (MW-I, 213).

To Sennichi-ama, the elderly wife of Abutsu-bo, who lived on the remote island of Sado and probably would never have a chance to see the Daishonin again, he wrote:

It is a thousand *ri* across the sea and mountains from Sado to this province. You, as a woman, have held fast to your faith in the Lotus Sutra; and over the years you have repeatedly sent your husband here to visit me in your place. Surely the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni, Taho and all other Buddhas of the ten directions know of your devotion.... Though you remain in Sado, your heart has come to this province.

The way of attaining Buddhahood is just like this. Although we live in the impure land, our minds reside at Eagle Peak. Merely seeing each other's face would in itself be insignificant. What matters is one's heart. (MW-5, 288-89)

How enraged the Daishonin would be to learn of someone who boasts that he can sever this beautiful, heart-to-heart bond between mentor and disciple while claiming to be heir to a secret lineage! From this Goshō, it is clear that what is most important in our practice is not our physical proximity to the Dai-Gohonzon but our sincere "heart of faith" dedicated to kosen-rufu.

In another Goshō, the Daishonin admonishes us to "Believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart" (MW-I, 120). Yet he never wrote anything to the effect that "proximity to the Dai-Gohonzon is so crucial, you must always strive to worship it directly. Therefore, you must follow and abide by the wishes of whomever may possess it, no matter how malicious or self-serving their intention, since they alone hold the key to your enlightenment."

Nichiren Daishonin, whose state of life is described as that of "the Buddha of absolute freedom," would never intend our faith to be so dependent on the whims of others. The priesthood's intent in emphasizing that we must physically worship the Dai-Gohonzon is none other than to force our dependence upon them, since they now physically possess the Dai-Gohonzon. There is a saying that "possession is nine-tenths of the law." When it comes to the "Buddhist

Law," however, our sincere faith and practice, not possession, is the crucial factor.

(ii) Currently, a visit to Taiseki-ji, which is controlled by a corrupt priesthood, and worshipping the Dai-Gohonzon, involves mandatory offerings to Nikken' and his supporters who slander the Daishonin's Buddhism and contrive to dismantle and destroy the SGI. To make offerings to such people is equivalent to supporting their intent and thus complying with their offense.

In this regard, the Daishonin wrote: "Though one may perform meritorious deeds, if they are directed toward that which is not true, then they may bring great evil but they will never result in good" (MW-6, 281). Therefore, from the standpoint of faith, SGI members have refrained from visiting Taiseki-ji, even if their desire has been simply to see the Dai-Gohonzon.

NST allegation #6

Gakkai's counterfeits constitute slander towards Nichikan Shonin.

In an explanation of reverence for the Three Treasures of the Latter Day of the Law in his work "On the Three Robes of Nichiren Shoshu," Nichikan Shonin discussed the Treasure of the Priest as follows:

I offer my sincere devotion to Nikko Shonin, the great master of propagation, the primary High Priest of the ten thousand years of Mappo and the founder of the Head Temple Taiseikiji. I offer my sincere devotion to the High Priest Nichimoku Shonin, the master of the seat of the Law and to each of the successive High Priests to whom the Law is transmitted. In this way, one should single-mindedly chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and fix one's mind on the Three Treasures, fingering the prayer beads.

In short, Nichikan Shonin taught that the Buddhism of the Heritage of the Law means chanting Daimoku with faith in the Three Treasures, which are the true Buddha Nichiren Daishonin (Treasure of the Buddha), the Dai-Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary (Treasure of the Law) and Nikko Shonin and the successive High Priests (Treasure of the Priest). According to Nichikan Shonin himself, this is the direct path to attaining enlightenment.

In other words, Nichikan Shonin revered all the successive High Priests, who each received the legitimate Heritage of the Law, as the Treasure of the Priest. There can be no worse defilement of Nichikan Shonin than for the Soka Gakkai, a dissident organization that repudiates the Heritage, to maliciously take advantage of a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan Shonin to commit one slander after another (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 13-14).

Rebuttal to allegation #6

(i) In this passage, High Priest Nichikan discusses the successive high priests after Nikko Shonin as those who are supposed to protect and spread the Daishonin's Buddhism--the function of the Treasure of the Priest. Actually, all believers who perform this function -- the protection and spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism -- are included in the Treasure of the Priest as Nichikan states in "On the Three Treasures": "Believers of this school shall be included [in the Treasure of the Priest] as well" (*Complete Writings of the Successive High Priests*, vol. 4).

In his work "The Practice of This School," however, High Priest Nichikan clarifies that the Treasure of the Priest in which we should place our faith when chanting daimoku is Nikko Shonin alone. Nichikan states, "The Treasure of the Priest from time without beginning is the founder of Taiseikiji [Nikko Shonin]" (*Six-Volume Writings*, p. 226). With regard to the remainder of the successive high priests, Nichikan revered them to the extent that they lived up to the spirit of the role of the Treasure of the Priest to protect and spread the Daishonin's Buddhism as Nikko Shonin did.

Nichikan's statement that the Treasure of the Priest includes lay believers as well as priests is completely in accord with the original meaning of the "treasure of the priest." Actually, the Japanese character so, translated as "priest" in "Treasure of the Priest," fundamentally indicates the sangha, or the Buddhist Order, which included the "four types of believers": monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen.

In general, the treasure of the Priest is understood in Buddhism and even in Japanese society in general to mean “all those who uphold and propagate the Buddha’s teachings.” This is the definition that appears in standard Japanese dictionaries. In this sense, the SGI accords with this general definition of “Treasure of the Priest;” while Nikko Shonin is the specific “Treasure of the Priest” --whose exemplary faith and practice as a disciple of the Daishonin we should all emulate. Nikken and his supporters, through his behavior that has betrayed the spirit of Nikko Shonin, has severed any relationship he might have had with the “Treasure of the Priest.”

(ii) High Priest Nichikan was well aware that not all the successive high priests lived up to the spirit and role of Nikko Shonin. For example, Nichikan wrote a treatise called “Teachings for the Latter Day” to refute erroneous doctrines brought into Taiseki-ji from another Nichiren school temple by Nissei, the 17th high priest. These errors included the worship of a statue of Shakyamuni and the recitation of the entire Lotus Sutra, practices that completely countered the instructions and intent of Nichiren Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

When we study the life and accomplishments of Nichikan, there is no doubt that he would praise the SGI’s decision to make available the Gohonzon he transcribed from the Dai-Gohonzon for those who seek to sincerely practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism. He certainly would rejoice at the SGI’s efforts to reproach Nikken’s injustices and schemes in exact accord with Nikko Shonin’s admonition: “Do not follow even the high priest, if he goes against the Buddha’s Law and

NST allegation #7

“Counterfeit Gohonzons”: a repeat of the Gakkai’s 1977 heresy of the reproduced wooden Gohonzon.

The Gakkai deceived its members by reporting in the *Seikyo Shimbun* on October 24, 1978 that: “With the permission of High Priest Nittatsu Shonin, we have respectfully made wooden Gohonzons.”

Afterwards, Nittatsu Shonin addressed the issue of those objects of worship manufactured by the Gakkai saying: “The Gakkai transformed some of its Gohonzons into wooden form, but I knew nothing about it.” (*Renge*, July 1978). As he stated here, these “Gohonzons” were made without Nittatsu Shonin’s permission.

Receiving strict direction from the priesthood, the Gakkai was forced to publicly disclose:

We have received repeated direction from the High Priest on the matter of the Gohonzons that we impudently had carved, and have surrendered them to the Hoanden (Taiseikiji’s storehouse). From now on, in matters that concern the Gohonzon, such as handling and procedures, as well as the concerns of the present

situation, we will deeply respect the tenets of Nichiren Shoshu and redouble our efforts as we proceed forth in strict conformity. (special study meeting text)

At that time, with the Gakkai's apology, and on the premise that it would never make any such mistakes again, Nittatsu Shonin closed further discussion on the matter of the creation of the imitation "Gohonzons." The Soka Gakkai is now trampling on the generous spirit of Nittatsu Shonin. The Gakkai is once again acting arrogantly and maliciously in arbitrarily reproducing the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan Shonin and distributing the copies. The Gakkai is committing a grave slander (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 14-15).

Rebuttal to allegation #7

(i) In 1974, the Soka Gakkai asked High Priest Nittatsu for permission to have several of the Gohonzon in its possession, including the *joju* Gohonzon enshrined at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, transferred into wooden form in order to preserve them. At that time, Nittatsu responded that because these Gohonzon belong to those who received them, they may be transferred into wood in order to cherish them based upon faith, indicating that it was up to the Soka Gakkai if they wished to do so. Nittatsu stated that this was not something for others to meddle in. He further stated that transferring paper Gohonzon into wooden form is an

accepted practice from the past and that there is no particular problem with the procedure.

(ii) Upon obtaining Nittatsu's permission, the Soka Gakkai proceeded, in 1974, to have eight Gohonzon reproduced in wooden form. The *Seikyo Shimbun*, in issues dated January 4 and July 17, 1975, reported that the *joju* Gohonzon at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters and the Kansai Headquarters respectively had been transferred to wood. The priesthood expressed no complaint or objection to this at the time.

(iii) In 1977, two years after the Gakkai transfer of these Gohonzon to wood had been made public, a group of young priests -- who were later expelled from Nichiren Shoshu and formed a group called the Shoshinkai -- began using this issue as a pretext to attack the Gakkai in league with Masatomo Yamazaki, a former Gakkai legal counsel later found guilty of extortion and sentenced to prison.

(iv) In 1978, these Shoshinkai priests gained so much influence within the priesthood that the Nichiren Shoshu Administrative Office could no longer ignore them. Pressed by these Shoshinkai priests about the Soka Gakkai's wooden Gohonzon, Nittatsu stated at a certified priests' guidance meeting in June 1978: "The Gakkai transformed some of its Gohonzons into wooden form, but I knew nothing about it." He then said: "However, I understood and acknowledged it afterwards. Therefore, I ask that you please do not fight with one another over this matter."

Taking Nittatsu's statement "I knew nothing about it" out of context, Shoshinkai priests continued to blame

and attack the Gakkai. On a later occasion, Nittatsu stated regarding the same issue: "I had received a request from the Gakkai. I thought that I would receive an official document of request later, but I did not." At that time, however, the priesthood had no prescribed procedure or instructions regarding such a request.

(v) On September 2, 1978, Soka Gakkai leaders met with High Priest Nittatsu and asked him about the handling of the wooden Gohonzon. On that occasion Nittatsu stated, "It is all right if all [the wooden Gohonzon] are kept at the Gakkai headquarters as treasures of the Soka Gakkai." When the *Seikyo Shimbun* reported this the next day, Shoshinkai priests pressed Nittatsu again, stating, "The high priest was deceived and taken advantage of again by the Gakkai." To help the priesthood resolve its internal turmoil, the Soka Gakkai returned the seven wooden Gohonzon to the head temple, except for the wooden joju Gohonzon at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters.

(vi) Nevertheless, the Shoshinkai priests continued to attack the Gakkai on the pretext of these wooden Gohonzon. Therefore, Nittatsu issued an October 3, 1978, memorandum, stating, "All discussions about the Soka Gakkai's wooden Gohonzon will be prohibited henceforth."

(vii) On November 7, 1978, at a representative Soka Gakkai leaders meeting, Takehisa Tsuji, then a Soka Gakkai vice president and now chairperson of the Soka Gakkai Executive Advisors Conference, made the following comments:

In this sense, as far as the wooden Gohonzons which the Soka Gakkai carelessly allowed to be inscribed, we have already dedicated them all to the Treasure House of the Head Temple based on the guidance we received from the high priest. Henceforth, regarding the treatment of the Gohonzon and the procedure for receiving it, we will value the time-honored way of Nichiren Shoshu in a much stricter manner. (*World Tribune*, February 5, 1979, p. 6)

Regarding this statement, Mr. Tsuji has since testified that on the night before this meeting, the priesthood requested strongly that he insert the word *carelessly* [impudently in NST's translation] in order to silence the clamoring of the Shoshinkai priests and settle the priesthood's internal turmoil. The Soka Gakkai accepted this request solely to protect High Priest Nittatsu and help the priesthood to resolve its internal confusion.

(viii) Regarding these wooden Gohonzon, at a meeting with priests and their families on May 29, 1979, Nittatsu said: "The Gakkai's wooden Gohonzon were transcribed and engraved exactly after the Gohonzon of Nichiren Shoshu. Therefore, they are not counterfeit." Nichiren Shoshu General Administrator Nichijun Fujimoto also testified in a Tokyo District Court on July 8, 1982: "Upon receiving permission from Nittatsu Shonin, the Soka Gakkai had its eight paper Gohonzon transferred into wooden form. This is something neither to be criticized nor to be called a slander of the Law."

It may be noted that the Shoshinkai priests had expressed virulent anti-Soka Gakkai sentiments for quite some time. In this sense, their use of the wooden-Gohonzon issue was actually an expression of their general animosity toward the Gakkai, fearing that the Soka Gakkai and its facilities would supplant their future authority as chief priests. These priests later sued Nikken and the priesthood, alleging that Nikken did not actually or legally inherit the office of high priest from Nittatsu.

While in the past supporting the Soka Gakkai's right to have produced these Gohonzon -- as in the above testimony by Nichijun Fujimoto -- the priesthood under Nikken is now contradicting itself simply to support its own agenda against the Gakkai.

(ix) Mr. Takeshi Akazawa, president of Akazawa Choyo, Inc., and the Buddhist craftsman directly involved in making the wooden Gohonzon for the Gakkai, made the following statement in an interview for the *Seikyo Shimbun*:

[High Priest Nittatsu] had known about the Gakkai's wooden Gohonzon from the beginning. I heard about it directly from both [High Priest Nittatsu] and President Ikeda. I heard from President Ikeda in January 1974.

[Question: Was this before you started to transfer the Gohonzon into wooden form?]

Yes, it was. At the end of 1973, I heard from the Soka Gakkai Headquarters that it wished to transfer several of its Gohonzon into wooden form. At that time,

I replied, "If you let the high priest know, it would be reassuring for us." In January 1974, when I met President Ikeda, he spontaneously told me: "I have reported to the high priest about the Gohonzon. The high priest has told me that it would be all right [to transcribe the Gohonzon into wood] because it is being done in order to protect and cherish them. So please rest assured."

On a different occasion, I directly confirmed that [High Priest Nittatsu] had agreed to this from the beginning. In autumn 1974, I had an audience with [High Priest Nittatsu] to discuss a matter of business in a reception room in the high priest's living quarters. After discussing the business at hand, just as the high priest was about to leave, he suddenly turned to me and asked: "By the way, Akazawa is carving the Gakkai headquarters' Gohonzon, isn't it?" I replied, "Yes." The high priest then asked, "Are you doing others?" I replied: "Yes, we have. Actually, President Ikeda told me that he had already reported this to you." The high priest said: "Yes, I heard about it from President Ikeda. He asked me if he could have five or six more Gohonzon done." He then left the room. (*Seikyo Shimbun*, September 30, 1993)

(x) The transfer of paper Gohonzon to wooden has been a common practice in Nichiren Shoshu. For "example, Nichiko, the 59th high priest, had the Gohonzon that Nichiren Daishonin inscribed for the Imperial Palace reproduced in wooden form and worshiped it. This procedure has

also been common at branch temples of Nichiren Shoshu as well. Myohon-ji temple in Chiba Prefecture reproduced ten wooden Gohonzon based on a photograph of one paper Gohonzon.

In a similar procedure, Jozen-ji in Miyazaki Prefecture had seven wooden Gohonzon made. The Soka Gakkai's reproduction of wooden Gohonzon in 1974 was done in exact accord with the doctrines, traditions and procedures of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and was done by the craftsman commonly employed by Nichiren Shoshu to carve its wooden Gohonzon.

NST allegation #8

Worshipping counterfeits while preaching slander: the Gakkai is no different from the Nichiren Shu Denomination.

The believers of the Nichiren Shu Denomination Minobu worship Shakyamuni as the true Buddha claim that teachings of Nichiren Daishonin do not include the doctrine of the Transmission from one single individual (High Priest) to another. They view the pure orthodoxy of Taiseki-ji with enmity. Even if followers of the Nichiren Shu Sect pray day and night to a mandala inscribed by the Daishonin, it is evident that they will never be able to attain enlightenment.

In the same way, the Gakkai today looks up to Mr. Daisaku Ikeda as if he is the true Buddha and views Taiseki-ji as an enemy. If the members pray to the Gakkai counterfeit object of worship, they will not only be barred from attaining enlightenment, they will certainly fall into hell.

However sacred the Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan Shonin, a reproduction of this Gohonzon made without legitimate permission has utterly no relation to the Dai- Gohonzon of the High Sanctuary, and is nothing more than a material object. Such objects of worship are similar to counterfeit bank notes made by copying real bank notes. The members of the Gakkai, who will pray to these counterfeit objects of worship and inevitably fall into hell, are pitiable indeed (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 15-16).

Rebuttal to allegation #8

(i) Other Nichiren denominations do not view Nichiren Daishonin as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law but instead regard him as a Bodhisattva-priest subordinate to Shakyamuni Buddha. For this reason, they fail to recognize the Gohonzon, which embodies the oneness of the Person and the Law, as the fundamental object of worship. Confused, they worship statues of Shakyamuni and other objects along with Gohonzon.

The SGI firmly believes in Nichiren Daishonin as the

Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law and, since its inception, has been declaring so without compromise to the rest of the world. Furthermore, the SGI embraces nothing other than the Gohonzon as the fundamental object of worship. The faith of the SGI is solely based on the orthodox teachings of the Daishonin's Buddhism and is clearly different from that of other Nichiren schools including Minobu. The Soka Gakkai, in fact, represented by Daisaku Ikeda and other youth, thoroughly refuted the Minobu sect in the famed Otaru Debate of 1955.

(ii) Although believers of other Nichiren sects may chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to Gohonzon inscribed by the Daishonin himself, because their understanding of the Daishonin's teachings is shallow and distorted, as mentioned above, they cannot tap the beneficial power of the Gohonzon.

Likewise, even if Nichiren Shoshu priests and Hokkeko members pray to the Gohonzon (though it has become clear through the testimony of many that priests at Taiseki-ji tend to be extremely lax in this area), because they believe their enlightenment depends on the authority of the high priest -- an erroneous teaching that has no basis in the Goshō-- and because they support an individual who actively attempts to destroy kosen-rufu, they will not benefit from their practice.

Our sincere faith and practice dedicated to kosen-rufu are what are most important in tapping the powers of the Buddha and the Law embodied in the Gohonzon. As Nichikan states, "Those who exert the powers of faith and practice will accomplish the practice of observing one's mind through the

powers of the Buddha and the Law" (*Selected Commentaries of Nichikan Shonin*, p. 455). "Observing one's mind" means to call forth Buddhahood from within one's life.

(iii) The Nichiren Shoshu priesthood's own recorded history indicates that Nichiren Shoshu priests themselves very often have been "no different from the Nichiren Shu Denomination." In 1922, for example, other Nichiren sects, including Minobu, petitioned the emperor to bestow the title "Great Teacher Rishō" upon Nichiren Daishonin. At that time, Nisshō Abe, the 57th high priest of Taiseki-ji, willingly signed the joint petition along with the other, slanderous Nichiren schools.

At the ceremony to celebrate the emperor's bestowal of that title, Nisshō joined a group of priests from these errant sects in the recitation of the sutra, which was led by the high priest of the Minobu sect (to which the NST News is now comparing the SGI). According to the clear guidelines of Nikkō Shonin, Nisshō's conduct clearly constitutes shameless complicity in slander of the Law.

To begin with, the petition to the emperor to bestow the title of "Great Teacher" upon Nichiren Daishonin gravely debased the Daishonin's spirit. The title "Great Teacher" is the highest honor an emperor can bestow upon a priest. The fact that Taiseki-ji petitioned the emperor to bestow this title upon the Daishonin means that Taiseki-ji must have complied with Minobu's and the other sects' view of the Daishonin as merely a priest-Bodhisattva. This deprecated the Daishonin's status as the Buddha of the Latter Day, subordinating him to the ruler. This act clearly betrays the

priesthood's desire at the time to ingratiate itself with the authorities and be accepted by the other Nichiren schools, no matter what the Daishonin or Nikko Shonin would have thought about the matter.

(iv) On September 29, 1941, the Nichiren Shoshu Study Department issued a memorandum instructing the deletion of passages from the Gosho. Targeted were those passages that place the Sun Goddess, which Shinto considers a supreme deity, or the nation's sovereign, in a role subordinate to the Buddha or the Buddhist Law. For example, the priesthood deleted the following passage where the Daishonin declares himself to be the Buddha of the Latter Day, stating: "I am the foremost sage in the entire world" (MW-2, 259).

This Nichiren Shoshu study department memorandum also prohibits use of the deleted passages, stating, "Do not quote [them] in sermons or lectures." Nichiren Daishonin never quailed before authority, nor did he ever court favor of any kind from the rulers of his nation. When offered status and his own temple by the authorities of his day in exchange for his silence about the errors of other sects, he adamantly refused. The actions taken by the priesthood cited above are grave betrayal of the Daishonin's Buddhism and are no different from other erroneous Nichiren denominations, including the Minobu sect.

(v) In his letter titled, "On the Buddha's Behavior," the Daishonin states, "One may make use of my counsel, but if I am not given due respect as the votary of the Lotus Sutra, then the country will perish" (MW-I, 190). Although, on

the surface, some may appear to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism, if they go against the true intent of his teachings, they will in effect be slandering the Law itself thereby bringing suffering not only upon themselves but also inviting destruction upon society.

High Priest Nissho, who signed the joint petition requesting bestowal by the emperor of the title of "Great Teacher" upon the Daishonin with Minobu and other Nichiren sects in 1922, developed a malignant tumor in his lower jaw and died the following year. In June 1945, High Priest Nikkyo, who instructed the deletion of the Gosho passages, accepted a Shinto talisman and tried to get the Gakkai to accept it as well to escape government pressure, died tragically in a fire at the head temple. Had he lived, he would have witnessed the utter destruction and defeat of Japan's military machine, which, to appease, he had been willing to compromise the Daishonin's Buddhism.

The Buddhist Law elucidated by the Daishonin does not discriminate based on status or position. Even a high priest will suffer retribution if he slanders the Law or betrays Buddhism. If an ordinary believer with no rank or status practices with the same sincerity, spirit and courage as the Daishonin did, then the state of life he or she manifests will not be inferior in the least to any of the successive high priests.

(vi) The priesthood's analogy, comparing Gohonzon issued by the SGI to "counterfeit bank notes," is puerile, at best, and may even be said to shortchange the dignity of the Gohonzon. Yet if the priesthood insists upon using this analogy, let us try to view it in the proper perspective based

upon the events that have taken place.

First, it is important to note that the high priest has never inscribed Gohonzon. He transcribes or copies them based on the Dai-Gohonzon. Following the priesthood's contention, if the Gohonzon being issued by the Gakkai are counterfeit because they are copies, all Gohonzon produced by Nichiren Shoshu, including those transcribed by Nikken, would be counterfeit as well.

Genuine bank notes are reproductions of an original template. As long as they are printed in accord with the rules to which the people of the nation agree and have adopted, they are accepted as real bank notes bearing monetary value, which can be used to pay for goods and services.

Imagine the following scenario: A president or prime minister of a democratic country attempts to usurp power through a coup. He dissolves the congress, the people's representatives, and declares himself the absolute authority. The treasury secretary, part of his cabinet, announces: "Only money with my signature on it will have any value from now on. Any other currency will be invalid. Only those who pledge allegiance to this administration will be issued these notes!" The people, however, resist and re-establish an electoral system of government, which votes to issue money once again on behalf of the people. Forced into exile, the president-turned-dictator and his treasury secretary continue to cry that the people's notes are counterfeit. Yet the people can go back to their former state of prosperity using the new currency, which differs only in that it is signed by a different treasury secretary. These notes, produced by the

mandate of the people, are valid based upon the good faith the people and businesses have placed in them.

The people entrust the treasury secretary with the responsibility of printing and circulating bank notes to contribute to the welfare of the people. Even though the treasury secretary is directly involved with the printing of bank notes, the authority to issue bank notes fundamentally rests with the government, that is, the people.

The analogy of bank notes certainly does not do justice to the power and the dignity of the Gohonzon. Traditionally, however, successive high priests at Taiseki-ji have been entrusted with the role of transcribing Gohonzon and issuing them to those who sincerely seek to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism. Yet the responsibility for reproducing the Gohonzon fundamentally derives from the will of the Daishonin to accomplish kosen-rufu. Now that the priesthood has abused and betrayed its role, this responsibility naturally rests with those who unstintingly practice the Daishonin's Buddhism in harmonious unity toward kosen-rufu.

Nikko Shonin spent the major part of his life transcribing the Daishonin's Gohonzon for the benefit of believers. There even exists a Gohonzon, the *ofude-dome* Gohonzon (Gohonzon of the Last Writing), that Nikko Shonin transcribed while practically on his deathbed. This Gohonzon's weak brush strokes attest to Nikko Shonin's waning life force at the time. In contrast to Nikko Shonin's selfless dedication in providing the Gohonzon to believers, Nikken has opted to use the Gohonzon as a bargaining chip, as a trump card to lure believers into his fold. Out of this motivation, he

has refused to confer the Gohonzon upon members of the SGI. Under such circumstances, the Soka Gakkai has risen to its responsibility to provide the Gohonzon for those who sincerely seek it. If it failed to do so, it would be betraying the spirit of Nikko Shonin. The SGI's conferral of the Gohonzon is in exact accord with the Daishonin's original intent in inscribing the Dai-Gohonzon for all people.

NST allegation #9

{Gohonzon issued by the SGI are counterfeit because} they have not received the legitimate "Opening of the Eyes" ceremony. Authority over "Opening of the Eyes" of the Gohonzon rests with the High Priest.

These allegations by the Soka Gakkai are in direct conflict with the words of Nichiren Daishonin, recognized the "Opening of the Eyes" of an object of worship through the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren states:

The offering of the "Opening of the Eyes" for wooden or painted images can be performed using the Lotus Sutra only. ("Honzon MondoSho," [English:] "Questions and Answers on the Object of Worship," *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 366)

Additionally, he writes:

It is the power of the Lotus Sutra which makes it possible to infuse such wooden or painted images with the "life" or spiritual properties [of the Buddha]. (Shijo Kingo Shakabutsu Kuyo)

The Soka Gakkai is stating: "If one prays with faith, this is tantamount to having performed the Opening of the Eyes Ceremony for an object of worship." Carrying this argument to its logical conclusion would mean that as long as one prays with faith to any object -- even the object of worship of a heretical sect -- one would have performed the "Opening of the Eyes" and would thereby be able to activate the powers of the Buddha and the Law. Where in Nichiren Daishonin's Gosho is there such a teaching? The Soka Gakkai ought to present clear and detailed documentary evidence on this matter.

The 31st High Priest Nichiin Shonin explained the source of the Opening of the Eyes Ceremony in Nichiren Shoshu by stating:

Although a wooden or painted image originates from plants and trees, the "Opening of the Eyes" to infuse it with the supreme enlightenment of the actual living Buddha is performed by the ultimate transmitted secret principle of the most important matter [of the

Gohonzon]. This Transmission has been passed down for thirty-one generations, from Nichiren Shonin through Nichiin.

He clearly indicated that the “Opening of the Eyes” is something that is performed according to the authority of the High Priest (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 16- 17).

Rebuttal to allegation #9

(i) The significance of “eye-opening” lies in opening the “eyes of the Buddha” within us -- in other words, in recognizing and revealing the Buddha’s life from within. To this end, the Daishonin stresses faith in the Lotus Sutra, that is, the Gohonzon. The priesthood insists that the high priest must perform an eye-opening ceremony over the Gohonzon to empower it, and even over our prayer beads if we are to derive any benefit from using them. However, the eye-opening ceremony is nothing more than a formality passed down from provisional forms of Buddhism that has nothing to do with the original spirit of Buddhism.

In the above quotes from the Daishonin, he refers to the eye-opening ceremony applied to wooden and painted images. This indicates Buddhist statues and the like. He is not talking about the Gohonzon in these passages and nowhere in his writings spoke of an eye-opening ceremony being necessary to empower the Gohonzon. Most people

in the Daishonin’s day believed that such ceremonies gave power to statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and other Buddhist objects. In actuality, it had already become a popular source of income for priests, who collected offerings for performing such ceremonies.

In the passage from the Goshō “Shijo Kingo Shakubutsu Kuyo” (“Consecrating an Image of Shakyamuni Buddha Made by Shijo Kingo,” MW-6, 161) quoted by NST above, the Daishonin encourages Shijo Kingo, who has just offered him a statue of Shakyamuni Buddha. By saying that the eye-opening ceremony must be based on the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin is debunking the idea that formal eye-opening ceremonies by priests are necessary and stresses one’s faith in the Lotus Sutra, in other words, faith in the Gohonzon, to summoning forth the state of Buddhahood.

In another Goshō the Daishonin writes:

Once we chant Myoho-enge-kyo, with just a single sound we summon forth and manifest the Buddha nature of all Buddhas; all dharmas; all bodhisattvas; all shomon disciples; all the deities such as Bonten, Taishaku, King Emma; the sun, the moon the myriad stars, the heavenly gods and earthly deities, on down to hell-dwellers, hungry spirits, beasts, asuras, humans, gods and other living beings. This blessing is immeasurable and boundless.

When we revere Myoho-enge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of worship, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our

chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; this is what is meant by “Buddha.” (MW-6, 207)

All the phenomena the Daishonin mentions above are not “objects of worship.” Yet from his words we can see that our *ichinen* to call forth our own Buddhahood by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon simultaneously summons the protective functions of Buddha hood in our environment.

If the high priest alone can perform an “opening of the eyes” ceremony to empower the Gohonzon, then what does this ceremony consist of? What secret is the high priest privy to that we, as ordinary believers, are not?

In a manual of formalities performed by Nichiren Shoshu priests called *Essentials for Priests*, the procedure for conducting eye-opening ceremonies for prayer beads and other objects is described as follows: “Praying with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” In other words, the “opening of the eyes ceremony” consists of chanting daimoku with faith.

Is the daimoku chanted by a priest somehow more powerful than that which we chant, so that a priest’s daimoku, and not ours, is effective of , ‘opening the eyes’ of inanimate objects? In the Gosho, the Daishonin addresses the following question from a believer:

How great is the difference between the blessings received when a sage chants daimoku and the blessings received when we chant it?

To which the Daishonin responds:

To reply, one is in no way superior to the other. The gold that a fool possesses is no different from the gold that a wise man possesses; a fire made by a fool is the same as a fire made by a wise man.

However, there is a difference if one chants the daimoku while acting against the intent of this sutra. (MW-3,207)

Nowhere in the Gosho does Nichiren Daishonin indicate that a priest must perform an eye-opening ceremony in order to empower the Gohonzon, prayer beads, or anything else. He resolutely declares that our chanting daimoku with faith enables us to call forth the Buddha nature not only from ourselves but from all phenomena. He further indicates that when it comes to the power of one’s prayer while chanting daimoku, all people are equal, so long as they do not act against the intent of the sutra.

If we dare to briefly summarize the intent of the Lotus Sutra, is it not to enable all people, regardless of wealth, rank or status, to attain enlightenment equally? If this is the case, then so long as a priest acts in accord with the sutra’s intent, his daimoku is no different than that of an ordinary lay believer of sincere faith and practice. There is no reason to conclude, then, that the daimoku of ordinary believers is any less powerful in “opening the eyes” of the Gohonzon than that of a priest; In fact, it would be more important, since we are the ones who chant to our Gohonzon on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, in trying to assert the supremacy of priests over laity; in attempting to destroy the Soka Gakkai; in excommunicating some 10 million believers, and through

a long list of other serious transgressions, Nikken has acted against the intent of the Lotus Sutra perhaps more gravely than anyone person since the Daishonin's time, or perhaps in the entire history of Buddhism. What meaning could there be for such a person to performing an "eye-opening ceremony" even if it were mandatory?

The only way to "activate" the great beneficial power of the Gohonzon is through our strong faith. To those who have no faith, the Gohonzon is merely a paper scroll. To those who chant daimoku with sincere faith, however, the Gohonzon manifests itself as the embodiment of the Daishonin's life in accordance with the principle of the enlightenment of plants and trees.

In this regard, the Daishonin states:

It is the power of the Lotus Sutra that makes it possible to infuse such paintings and statues with a "soul" or spiritual property. This was the realization of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai. In the case of living beings, this doctrine is known as attaining Buddhahood in one's present form; in the case of painted and wooden images, it is known as the enlightenment of plants and trees. (MW-6, 162)

(ii) Immediately prior to the passage quoted by NST from the Goshō "Questions and Answers on the Object of Worship," the Daishonin states: "Nichiren, too, as did the Buddha and T'ien-t'ai, makes the Lotus Sutra the object of worship. This is because the Lotus Sutra is the father and mother of Shakyamuni and it is the eyes of all Buddhas....

The Buddha is that which is born, the Lotus Sutra is that which gives birth; the Buddha is the body, the Lotus Sutra is the soul" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 366).

We can read "the Lotus Sutra" in this passage to mean the Gohonzon of Nam-myōhō-enge-kyō. The Gohonzon itself is the "eye of all Buddhas" and our faith in it allows us to "open the eyes" of our Buddha wisdom. We need no intermediary to do this for us.

(iii) The Daishonin states: "Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, the 'eye' is the great mandala that was never before revealed [during the Former or Middle Day]. There is no 'eye' apart from this Gohonzon" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 841). The Gohonzon of Nam-myōhō-enge-kyō, in other words, is itself the eye of the Buddha. A special ceremony, therefore, is not necessary to validate or empower the Gohonzon.

(iv) The SGI never stated nor implied that believers can pray "with faith to any object -- even the object of worship of a heretical sect" and still "activate the powers of the Buddha and the Law." When we pray to the Gohonzon with faith, we can tap the powers of the Buddha and the Law embodied in the Gohonzon as the Daishonin indicates when he says, "The Gohonzon is found in faith alone" (MW-I, 213).

The Soka Gakkai has always maintained a strict attitude of faith and respect toward the Gohonzon both in spirit and in practice. The Nichiren Shōshū priesthood has, on many occasions, been lax in this area. Their acceptance of a Shinto talisman for worship by believers during the war is one example of this. In addition, enshrinement of Gohonzon together with erroneous Buddhist and non-Buddhist objects

of worship has been quite common among Hokkeko families who have had a close relationship with Taiseki-ji and other Nichiren Shoshu temples for many generations. Nichiren Shoshu priests have made no attempts to correct these practices among their parishioners. The priesthood's contention that the SGI is promoting faith in erroneous objects of worship is a purely wild fantasy.

(v) Nichiin's statement simply indicates that the Gohonzon of actual *ichinen sanzen*, which actualizes the principle of the enlightenment of trees and plants, had been passed down at Taiseki-ji. "The ultimate transmitted secret principle of the most important matter" is none other than the Gohonzon itself. It provides no basis for the assertion that the high priest must perform an eye-opening ceremony on the Gohonzon.

NST allegation #10

{Gohonzon issued by the SGI are counterfeit because} they are not issued by the head temple. No benefit can result from a counterfeit object of worship.

The important point here is that in Nichiren Shoshu, the High Priest, who alone inherits the lineage of the true Law, is fundamentally endowed with complete authority on matters concerning the Gohonzon. Any issuance of the Gohonzon must be approved by the High Priest of the time.

This issuance of counterfeit objects of worship by the Soka Gakkai has not been sanctioned by the High have these counterfeit objects of worship undergone of the Eyes Ceremony at the Head Temple. They are nothing more than fake objects of worship that legitimate Gohonzon of the Heritage of the Law.

It is absolutely impossible that such an object of worship -- an imitation in form only without any substance (i.e. lacking the Heritage of the Law)-- can bring about any benefits. Moreover, a person who worships such will create the cause to fall into the hell of incessant suffering (*NST News, Special Issue*, pp. 17-18).

Rebuttal to allegation #10

(i) As stated before, in the past, many Nichiren Shoshu branch temples reproduced Gohonzon transcribed by different high priests and issued them to their parishioners on their own accord, without the high priest's permission or eye-opening ceremony performed by him. In any case, the SGI has long been calling for Nikken's resignation from the office of high priest since he has consistently and blatantly betrayed the trust and responsibility associated with that office. A petition signed by 16 million people calling for his resignation was submitted to the head temple and utterly ignored without so much as a response. The members of the SGI do not wish to wait for Nikken's permission to practice their faith as they have a right to do.

Most of the assertions by NST have already been addressed in this article. We might reflect, however, on the promise of our damnation to the hell of incessant suffering at the end of the NST's statement above. Is this motivated by a sincere desire to save us? Or is it intended to threaten and frighten us?

If the priesthood under Nikken is so concerned that we avoid the torments of hell by praying to a Gohonzon they authorize as valid, then why did they refuse to confer Gohonzon to Soka Gakkai members? If they wish to make the point that Nikken's Gohonzon is so important to our salvation, then what was their motivation in denying it to us? Are we to believe that it was compassion as they claim?

In their accusations, threats and actions, they reveal themselves to be no different than religious despots throughout the ages who have threatened, terrorized and even brutalized innocent, ordinary people with their authority.

Nichiren Daishonin fought boldly and tenaciously, risking his life to challenge the arrogance of religious authority. We of the SGI will pray to summon the same kind of courage, so that we may continue his struggle today.

Answers to Commonly Asked Questions About the New Nichikan Gohonzon

Q: The Nichikan Gohonzon now being conferred by the SGI does not have some of the characters that appear on the Gohonzon transcribed by Nittatsu or Nikken. Why? Does it affect ones prayer or benefits from chanting?

A: The Daishonin's purpose in inscribing the Gohonzon was to allow all people, through the power of their faith and practice, to develop the indestructible core of Buddhahood within their lives. The essence of the Gohonzon is, therefore, the inscription that embodies the powers of the Buddha and the Law, or "Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, Nichiren" written boldly down the center of the scroll.

This inscription is the enlightened life of Nichiren Daishonin; this is the heart of the Gohonzon. All other names on the Gohonzon, which indicate the mutual possession of the ten worlds, are secondary.

We might think that all Gohonzon are identical. But to

the contrary, even Nichiren Daishonin did not always use the same names and figures when he inscribed various Gohonzon. For example, Devadatta only appears on about a third of the 120 extant Gohonzon the Daishonin inscribed from the time he was on Sado Island to just before his death in 1282.

The transient Bodhisattvas Fugen and Monju appear on only 65, and the Two Vehicles represented by Shariputra and Maudgalyayana are on only 63.

The characters that do not appear on the Nichikan Gohonzon include Devadatta, representing Hell; Ashura, representing Anger; and the Wheel-Turning Kings, representing Humanity. These characters are missing on about half of the Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin himself. After the Daishonin died, the successive high priests exercised their own judgment in deciding what names to include on the Gohonzon they transcribed.

The powers of faith and practice within each one of us are what tap the benefit of the Gohonzon and draw forth the power of the Buddha and the Law. As Nichiren Daishonin wrote in the oft-quoted passage, “The Gohonzon is found in faith alone” (MW-I, 213). It is interesting to note that the members who joined during the Soka Gakkai’s postwar reconstruction and laid the early foundation for the SGI practiced to a Gohonzon also transcribed by Nichikan.

Q: What is the relationship between the Dai-Gohonzon, the Gohonzon enshrined at a community center or culture center and the Gohonzon in our homes?

A: The Buddhist principle of disbursement (*bunshin santai*) describes how a source retains its uniformity even as it branches outward, just as river flowing from a lake to the ocean contains the same water as the source. Similarly, today the Dai-Gohonzon is the source for tapping into our inherent Buddha nature and attaining absolute happiness.

The Gohonzon enshrined at SGI facilities and those in private homes also contain this same source. All Gohonzon derive from the Dai-Gohonzon and all represent the same potential to create change in our lives, depending on our faith and practice.

Q: Why are there different sizes of Gohonzon? I have heard the terms joju, okatagi and omamori. What do they mean and do the different sizes have any significance in terms of the power to be derived from chanting to the different Gohonzon?

A: *Joju* (literally, “eternally dwelling”) Gohonzon are those transcribed with the recipient’s name in the margin.

Okatagi (literally, “woodblock”) is a term used to differentiate those Gohonzon manufactured via a printing process from those written by hand.

Originally, of course, Nichiren Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon by hand in sumi ink for each individual. Successive high priests have also transcribed the Gohonzon personally for each recipient. These personally inscribed Gohonzon are called *joju* Gohonzon. As more people began requesting the Gohonzon, eventually a woodblock printing process was employed. The woodblock was based on

a Gohonzon transcribed either by the current or a previous high priest. These Gohonzon are called *okatagi* Gohonzon.

Although produced today using advanced printing techniques that allow sharper, more precise reproduction, the Gohonzon most members receive when they begin practicing are still called *okatagi* Gohonzon.

There is also a smaller Gohonzon, about the size of a large pendant, called an *omamori* (literally, “protection”) Gohonzon. This Gohonzon is for use when traveling and is intended to encourage a person’s faith when he or she is away from the Gohonzon at home for an extended period.

Eventually, these smaller Gohonzon will be available to anyone who requests one through the SGI organization.

The size of the Gohonzon is unimportant. The various sizes generally correspond to the size of the room in which it is enshrined, thus making it easier for members to chant to it. No matter the size, it is our faith in the Gohonzon that determines the benefit we gain from our practice.

Q: Why have the side inscriptions been omitted on the Nichikan Gohonzon?

A: The original Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan contains the following side inscriptions: “The thirteenth day of the sixth month, the fifth year of Kyoho (1720)” and “Bestowed upon Daigyo Ajari Honsho-bo Nissho of Hon’nyo-zan Joen-ji temple of Kogusuri Village of Shimotsuke Province.” Nissho was then the chief priest of Joen-ji.

It is an old tradition that a transcribing high priest write the date of transcription and the name of a recipient on the Gohonzon. But side inscriptions such as recipient names have no bearing upon the doctrinal significance of the Gohonzon and thus are not regarded as essential elements. Nowhere in the Daishonin’s writings or transfer documents can we find a passage stating that the name of a recipient is necessary to signify the concept of the mutual possession of the ten worlds or as praise of the Gohonzon. Side inscriptions have nothing to do with the essential significance of the Gohonzon.

The 2nd high priest, Nikko Shonin, added the names of receiving priests or lay believers to some Gohonzon inscribed by Nichiren Daishonin. Regarding this, he states: “I have added the names of the recipients to extol them for the posterity.” The 59th high priest, Nichiko, comments as follows: “The side inscriptions of the names of recipients written on the object of worship are meant to praise their honorable names to the multitude of posterity as pioneers of kosen-rufu for their efforts to protect the Law” (*Fuji Nikko Shonin Shoden* [Detailed Biography of Nikko of the Fuji School]). In other words, the side inscriptions of recipients’ names were added to praise believers who remained steadfast in faith throughout their lives.

Since side inscriptions on the Gohonzon have no doctrinal significance, both the date of transcription and the name of the recipient on the Nichikan Gohonzon were not included in the reproduction. The Soka Gakkai never erased anything from an existing Gohonzon.

However, the priesthood has actually erased side inscriptions — ones that read “At the request of Daisaku Ikeda” — from the wooden Gohonzon enshrined at branch temples that were built and donated to the priesthood by the Soka Gakkai. That is an act that tramples on the noble spirit with which the previous high priest transcribed these Gohonzon.

Furthermore, some older and prestigious branch temples have many Gohonzon whose side inscriptions have been damaged or erased by accident or on purpose. According to the priesthood’s journal *Renge*, the catalog of treasures kept at Josen-ji in Tokyo records that the names of the recipients of three Gohonzon transcribed by Nikko Shonin -- dated respectively March 1, 1306, October 9, 1308, and October 13, 1314 -- were erased and missing. And the name of a recipient of a Gohonzon by the 9th high priest, Nichiu, -- dated December 29, 1473 -- was “cut off and missing.”

Also, some Gohonzon transcribed by Nichiren Shoshu high priests contain side inscriptions such as: “To extol the magnificence of the emperor and to conquer Russia” from the period of the Russo-Japan War; or “To commemorate the grand coronation of the emperor.”

At the Nishinoyama Hachiman Shinto shrine that stands in the vicinity of Taisei-ji, a wooden Gohonzon transcribed by the 51st high priest, Nichiei, with the side inscriptions: “The guardian god of the Hachiman shrine, November 28, 1984,” and “Bestowed upon the Shinto parish of Sakashita and Koyashiki villages in Fuji County,” is enshrined. It should be noted that Nichiei transcribed this Gohonzon for

the Shinto parish, not for the believers of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

In light of these historical records, can the priesthood still continue to assert that side inscriptions are an important, essential aspect of the Gohonzon?

When someone pointed out to Nikken that he forgot to write a part of the short inscription of praise on a Gohonzon he had transcribed, he responded, “As long as the recipient is unaware, pretend that you don’t know.” From Nikken’s statement, it becomes clear that he is not one who is qualified to discuss the merit of side inscriptions on the Gohonzon.

Q: What about the claim that the Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai are counterfeit because they are not made by priests?

A: The Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai are not the Soka Gakkai’s own invention. As already stated, in response to a proposal from Sendo Narita, chief priest of Joen-ji temple, the Soka Gakkai reproduced Nichikan’s Gohonzon and made it available to its membership. Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai are *okatagi* Gohonzon (i.e., Gohonzon reproduced through a printing process) based upon a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichikan in 1720.

Also, the term *priest* (Jpn. *so*) in Buddhism derives from the Sanskrit word *samgha*, which indicates not individual priests, but a congregation of believers, both lay and clergy. In the time of Shakyamuni, the Buddhist order was itself highly valued, and this gathering of believers was considered one of the three treasures to be respected in Buddhism.

In his “Twenty-six Admonitions,” Nikko Shonin, who is specifically regarded as the treasure of the priest in the Daishonin’s Buddhism, states: “Until kosen-rufu is achieved, propagate the Law to the full extent of your ability without begrudging your life” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1618). The Soka Gakkai has been dedicated to spreading the Daishonin’s Buddhism exactly in accord with the spirit expressed here. In this sense, the Soka Gakkai is qualified -- based on its significant role and function -- to be regarded as the treasure of priesthood in the Daishonin’s Buddhism at this time.

The Daishonin writes in “The True Object of Worship”:

Know this: in the time for *shakubuku* the Four Bodhisattvas appear as wise kings who rebuke and convert evil kings, and in the time for *shoju* they appear as priests to protect and spread true Buddhism. (MW-I, 80)

In “Kanjin no Honzon Sho Mondan” (Commentary on “The True Object of Worship”), High Priest Nichikan interprets “shakubuku by wise kings” to mean the kosen-rufu of substantiation, which he refers to as “the time in which kosen-rufu is achieved through positive relationships,” or a time when people can readily form a connection with Buddhism. He also comments that “priests to protect and spread true Buddhism” means shakubuku based upon the entity of the Law, that is, the Gohonzon, and that “priests” here refers to Nichiren Daishonin himself.

The Soka Gakkai has been creating this “time in which kosen-rufu is achieved through positive relationships”

through the efforts of many people practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism. The Soka Gakkai has been taking on the difficult task of spreading faith in the Gohonzon among the people to save them from the depths of suffering and unhappiness. The Soka Gakkai, therefore, should rightly be called a gathering of “wise kings,” of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, who received the Buddha’s decree to spread Buddhism.

Regarding the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who died a martyr to protect the Law, High Priest Nichiko expressed appreciation for his efforts, stating that he “surpassed ordinary priests.” Also the 65th high priest, Nichijun, gave his highest praise to President Makiguchi, saying, “Mr. Makiguchi, who was born an emissary of the Buddha, revealed his identity through the Lotus Sutra and lived up to it.” Regarding the second president, Josei Toda, Nichijun said, “In accord with the significance of the five and seven characters of Myoho-enge-kyo, President Toda called forth 750,000 people on this earth.” Furthermore, Nittatsu, the high priest previous to Nikken, recognized President Ikeda’s role as a leader of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, stating, “Following in the footsteps of the Four [leaders of the] Bodhisattvas of the Earth, President Ikeda is advancing kosen-rufu as a general of shakubuku.”

In light of the Daishonin’s teachings, the words of the successive high priests and, most of all, the actual proof seen today in the global spread of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai has never been merely a group of lay believers belonging to Nichiren Shoshu, but a Buddhist order directly connected to the Daishonin.

Q: Is the faith of new SGI members diminished since they no longer receive gojukai (i.e., a ritual to accept Buddhist precepts) from Nichiren Shoshu priests?

A: “Precepts” in Buddhism are guidelines for Buddhist practitioners aimed at enabling them to “stem wrongdoing and curtail evil.” “Bestowing the precepts” (Jpn. *jukai*) signifies a believer’s acceptance of the Buddhist precepts upon converting to Buddhism. From the perspective of the recipient, then, the term *jukai* of *gojukai* indicates “accepting the precepts.”

There is a well-known episode concerning acceptance of the Buddhist precepts involving Shakyamuni Buddha. When Shakyamuni first started to preach after having attained enlightenment, one priest among those who heard his sermon asked him to bestow the Buddhist precepts upon him, saying, “My teacher, let me be ordained under the World-Honored One and receive the precepts.” To this, Shakyamuni replied, “Come, you, priest. The Law has been preached well. So practice the Law to eradicate your suffering” (*Seikyo Shimbun*, February 7, 1992).

In other words, the spirit behind accepting the Buddhist precepts lies in a practitioner’s pledge to seek the Buddha’s teaching and carry out Buddhist practice; the spirit behind bestowing the Buddhist precepts lies in the Buddha’s compassion and his guidance in response to the practitioner’s seeking spirit. Accepting or bestowing the Buddhist precepts required no complex rituals or ornate temple halls.

In the Mahayana precepts for Bodhisattvas, the empha-

sis was shifted from simply stemming one’s own evil acts to a more active, positive attitude of striving to do good. In Mahayana Buddhism, a practitioner’s acceptance of the Buddhist precepts was also regarded not as a condition to enter the Buddhist order, but as a means for the practitioner to be directly connected to the Buddha. It is because Mahayana Buddhism placed greatest emphasis on a believer’s self-awareness as a Buddhist and his or her pledge to carry out the Buddhist practice.

Such emphasis is most clearly seen in one of the Bodhisattva precepts called “the acceptance of the precepts by pledging to oneself.” The Yoraku Hongo Sutra states: “After the Buddha’s passing, if there is no teacher of the Law within a distance of a thousand miles, practitioners should accept the precepts by pledging to themselves before the statues of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, with their palms pressed together in reverence.”

Put simply, what matters most is one’s pledge and resolve in accepting the precepts. Priests who bestow the precepts on practitioners serve merely as messengers to convey the Buddhist precepts or teachings on behalf of the Buddha. Priests of the Nikken sect, who are themselves bereft of the spirit contained in the Buddhist precepts, are not qualified to bestow the precepts upon anyone.

In “Teaching, Practice and Proof,” the Daishonin states:

The five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo, the heart of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, contain all the benefits amassed by the beneficial practices and

meritorious deeds of all the Buddhas throughout the past, present and future. Then, how can this phrase not include the benefits obtained by observing all of the Buddha's precepts? Once the practitioner embraces this perfectly-endowed mystic precept, he cannot break it, even if he should try. It is therefore called the precept of the diamond chalice (MW-4, 129).

Here the Daishonin teaches us that since the Mystic Law is endowed with "the benefits obtained by observing all of the Buddha's precepts," once we embrace it, our lives become like a diamond chalice, eternally indestructible. Commenting on this passage from "Teaching, Practice and Proof," Nichijun, the 65th high priest, states: "Once people embrace this mystic precept of Myoho-enge-kyo, their lives will be indestructible throughout past, present and future. In contrast, when people observe other precepts, their lives will be destroyed once they break the precepts."

In the Latter Day of the Law, there is no precept for us to accept other than the Mystic Law. To take faith in and embrace the Mystic Law is to accept the precepts. From the viewpoint of the essential meaning of the Buddhist precepts in the Daishonin's Buddhism, it becomes obvious that believers do not receive benefit simply by attending a ritual to accept the precepts. There is no record that the Daishonin conducted any ritual to bestow the precepts other than in one instance, when he conducted a ceremony for Sairen-bo who had once received the ritual as a student priest of the Tendai school.

The priesthood started to conduct the *gojukai* ceremony in 1937 in response to first President Makiguchi's suggestion. He proposed that new Gakkai members receive a ceremony to allow them to develop a clear awareness as practitioners of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Chairperson Satoru Izumi of the Soka Gakkai's Advisory Council, who began practicing under President Makiguchi, once said: "Back in 1952, a Gakkai member went to Fukushima Prefecture for an activity and brought one prospective new member to a temple there for the *gojukai* ceremony. But the priest was at a loss, not knowing the words to conduct the *gojukai* ceremony. So that Gakkai member had to teach the priest how to conduct the ceremony." This clearly attests to how the priesthood's tradition of the *gojukai* ceremony developed in response to the Gakkai's great efforts to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Also, although the priesthood claims the importance of a ritual to accept the precepts, Nikken himself has proven, through his lavish tastes and habits, to be a person who constantly breaks the precepts. As Nichiu states, "Those who break the precepts and lack wisdom should not remain in high status."

Q: Since the Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai are not mounted on a scroll, but part of the scroll itself, aren't they merely copies of the Gohonzon?

A: This is a claim the priesthood is making to attack the Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai for one-press produc-

tion, that is, for the portion that contains the inscriptions and the scroll around it being made together one whole sheet of paper. The essential element of the Gohonzon is the white portion with black lettering. The frame around it is merely an ornament. How the Gohonzon scroll is produced is of no consequence to the benefit we can receive from chanting to it.

As has been explained elsewhere in this pamphlet, the priesthood condemns the Gohonzon issued by the Soka Gakkai as being a “copy.” But the Gohonzon conferred by the priesthood are also “copies.” All Gohonzon conferred to new believers are reproduced by way of a printing press. Again, *okatagi* means “woodblock” and indicates Gohonzon reproduced through a printing process, [though actual woodblock prints stopped being produced decades ago].

All *okatagi* Gohonzon, whether produced by the head temple or the Gakkai, are copies. If all “copied” Gohonzon are counterfeit, then all *okatagi* Gohonzon, including ones based on Nikken’s transcription and printed and issued by Taisei-ji, must also be counterfeit.

The Soka Gakkai has been criticized for printing the main inscribed part of the Gohonzon on the same paper as the surrounding scroll. But until recently, the priesthood did not even bother to prepare the surrounding mount part. It was a matter left to each local temple or the individual recipient.

In the past, branch temples would buy unmounted Gohonzon, in quantities of 100 sheets per bundle, from Hodo-in temple where they were printed. Each branch temple would then send these sheets to a mounter to have them

mounted on scrolls. Believers in outlying areas sometimes received unmounted Gohonzon and had them mounted on the paper of their choice — with whatever material, color or quality that they pleased.

A Historical Perspective on the Transcription of the Gohonzon

Over the years, the priesthood has taught lay believers that only the successive high priests can transcribe and issue the Gohonzon because they alone have received “the heritage of the Law” from Nichiren Daishonin. Until relatively recently, the SGI has supported this idea exactly as it was explained.

A close examination of Nichiren Shoshu history, however, reveals that others besides the successive high priests have transcribed the Gohonzon and made it available for lay believers. This historical fact runs counter to the priesthood’s current assertion that only the person holding the position of high priest is qualified to transcribe and issue the Gohonzon.

In response to the SGI’s decision to issue the Gohonzon, the Nichiren Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs issued a statement dated September 7, 1993, that reads in part: “In Nichiren Shoshu, all Gohonzons have always been transcribed by the successive High Priests, to whom the heritage of the Buddhist Law has been transmitted. All Gohonzons have been endowed with the spiritual properties of the

Buddha by the High Priest...”

In “On the Formalities of True Buddhism,” Nichiu (1402- 1482), the ninth high priest, states:

Those at branch temples who have disciples and lay patrons may transcribe the *mamori* [Gohonzon]. However, they should not place their seals on it....Those at branch temples who have disciples and lay patrons may transcribe the mandala [i.e., the Gohonzon] yet may not place their seals on it (*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. I, p. 71).

In the past, as Nichiu states here, chief priests of branch temples transcribed and issued Gohonzon to believers. Because some branch temples were located far from the head temple and transportation was primitive, it seems that chief priests in distant areas were permitted to transcribe the Gohonzon. Records also show that chief priests of branch temples near the head temple transcribed the Gohonzon as well.

There is also a much more recent example of others besides high priests reproducing the Gohonzon. Myohon-ji in Hota, Chiba Prefecture, is an old, prestigious temple established in 1335 by Nichigo, a disciple of Nichimoku Shonin. At this temple is kept the *man’nen kugo* Gohonzon, which Nichiren Daishonin inscribed in December 1274. (*Man’nen kugo* means “that which protects and saves [all living beings] for all eternity.”)

Myohon-ji seceded from the Minobu sect and joined

Nichiren Shoshu in 1957. (The reversion of Myohon-ji to Nichiren Shoshu is detailed in *The Human Revolution*. See the *Seikyo Times*, February 1993.) This temple has reproduced the *man'nen kugo* Gohonzon both before and after it joined with Nichiren Shoshu. Its chief priest, Nichio Kamakura, is now a senior executive priest in the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood.

The priesthood currently asserts that authority regarding the Gohonzon rests solely with the high priest. It alleges that only the high priest can reproduce the Gohonzon for believers, because he alone can perform the “eye-opening” ceremony and thereby inject into the Gohonzon the “living essence” of the Daishonin’s enlightened life that only he possesses. However, not only is there no passage in the Goshu to support such esoteric rituals; the fact that chief priests at branch temples have transcribed the Gohonzon also completely contradicts this reasoning. These chief priests did not possess, by the priesthood’s definition, “the heritage of the Law” and thus the Daishonin’s “living essence.” Therefore, according to the priesthood’s own history, “the heritage of the Law that only the successive high priests inherit” is not an absolutely necessary condition for the reproduction of the Gohonzon.

Simply put, the successive high priests traditionally have been entrusted with the role of reproducing and issuing the Gohonzon for believers so that they can assist in the accomplishment of the Daishonin’s mandate -- kosen-rufu. Their transcription of the Gohonzon in no way indicates that they possess any special spiritual state that the rest of us do not. It is simply a part of their managerial responsibility as

high priest to support believers and advance kosen-rufu.

After Nichiren Daishonin died, only Nikko Shonin among the six senior priests understood the importance of the Gohonzon as the true object of worship. Other senior priests in the Daishonin’s order failed to recognize the Gohonzon as the object of worship and treated it disrespectfully.

For example, they would place Gohonzon behind statues of Shakyamuni or hang them casually in a corridor of a temple. They even sold Gohonzon for profit or buried them with dead bodies. Furthermore, they reproduced Gohonzon using woodblock techniques and distributed them among those who neither had solid faith nor any appreciation for the Gohonzon (*Goshu Zenshu*, p. 1606).

Under these circumstances, Nikko Shonin was compelled to discourage the reproduction of Gohonzon via woodblock printing. And he transcribed the Gohonzon by hand only for those who displayed strong faith (*Goshu Zenshu*, p. 1606 / *Detailed Accounts of Nikko Shonin* by Nichiko Hori, vol. 2, p. 227).

Nikko Shonin’s desire, however, was to make the Gohonzon as available as possible for those with seeking minds. He continued to transcribe the Gohonzon until the last moment of his life. A Gohonzon exists that Nikko Shonin transcribed shortly before his passing. The weak brush strokes attest to his waning physical strength.

According to Nichiko, the 59th high priest and renowned Buddhist scholar, during the time of Nichiei (1352-1419), the eighth high priest, the head temple began using woodblock printing to reproduce the Gohonzon (*Essential Writings of the*

Fuji School, vol. I, p. 113).

As mentioned before, during High Priest Nichiu's time, chief priests of branch temples were allowed to transcribe the Gohonzon. However, they were not allowed to place on them their own handwritten seals. The placement of a handwritten seal indicated that the transcriber of the Gohonzon was officially acknowledged. If any priest could officially transcribe the Gohonzon, it was likely to create confusion as the kind caused by the five senior priests during Nikko Shonin's time. To avoid such confusion, Nichiu adopted strict restrictions regarding the placement of transcribers' handwritten seals.

In other words, the use of wood blocks, the transcription of the Gohonzon by chief priests of branch temples, and the restrictions on the placement of transcribers' handwritten seals were all adopted to make the Gohonzon more readily available for believers while maintaining strict control of the Gohonzon's reproduction, thus avoiding confusion or disrespect toward the Gohonzon.

Commenting on Nichiu's "On the Formalities of True Buddhism," High Priest Nichiko states:

When this school's fortune gradually increases and people of different races overseas begin to invoke the Mystic Law, how can the high priest alone possibly manage the bestowal of the mandala? The situation might resurrect these articles [from "On the Formalities of True Buddhism" on the transcription of the Gohonzon by chief priests of branch temples]. Or

should we use woodblock printing as a supplement?

(*Essential Writings of the Fuji School*, vol. I, p. 113)

As High Priest Nichiko states, if the transcription or reproduction of the Gohonzon is done manually only by the high priest, the more kosen-rufu progresses, the less access believers will have to the Gohonzon. Therefore, Nichiko suggests that the method of reproducing the Gohonzon must be reconsidered so as to accord with the unfolding of kosen-rufu.

In fact, since the time of Nikko Shonin, the method of reproducing the Gohonzon has changed according to societal conditions, such as advancements in transportation, communication and printing technology -- and, more importantly -- the conditions and progress of the kosen-rufu movement.

It was not until recently that the high priest became the sole authority in the reproduction and issuance of the Gohonzon. During the tenure of Nittatsu, the 66th high priest (1959-1979), all branch temples began issuing replicas of the same Gohonzon transcribed by the high priest of the time. Until then, some branch temples issued Gohonzon transcribed by previous high priests.

In the process of reproducing and issuing the Gohonzon, however, it is important to always maintain a delicate balance between maximizing the availability of the Gohonzon for those with strong faith and seeking minds, and minimizing the danger of confusion and disrespect toward this precious object of worship, as Nikko Shonin instructed.

The reproduction and issuance of the Gohonzon must be handled strictly by the body of believers dedicated to kosen-rufu, based on the teachings of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin.

Regarding the Gohonzon, the Daishonin states:

Now, over two hundred years have passed since the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. How awesome that Nichiren was the first to inscribe this great mandala as the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra, when even such great masters as Nagarjuna, Vasubandhu, T'ien-t'ai and Miao-fo were unable to do so! (MW-1,211-12)

The Daishonin describes the Gohonzon as “the banner of propagation of the Lotus Sutra”; so responsibility for the Gohonzon should naturally rest with those of Nichiren Daishonin’s order who wholeheartedly promote kosen-rufu. Now that Nikken is using the Gohonzon as “a banner of authoritarianism,” a tool to manipulate believers, the SGI’s decision to make the Gohonzon available for members is particularly welcome and valid in light of the Daishonin’s teachings.

Suggested readings:

“On the Transmission of the Heritage of the Law” by Masahiro Kobayashi, *Seikyo Times*, December 1992.

“Refuting High Priest Nikken’s Distorted Views on the Heritage of the Law and the High Sanctuary” by the Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu, *Seikyo Times*, February 1993.

“Eye-opening ceremonies by Slandering Priests Are Meaningless” by Daisaku Ikeda, *Seikyo Times*, February 1993.

The Recent History of the Conferral of the Gohonzon

[1920s -early 1950s]

- Gohonzon were issued mainly by branch temples in Tokyo. Each branch temple on its own accord reproduced Gohonzon after one transcribed by a high priest with whom it had close relationship in the past and conferred them upon believers. For example, Myoko-ji (in Tokyo) reproduced and issued a Gohonzon transcribed by Nippu, the 55th high priest; Hodo-in, a Gohonzon transcribed by Nichio, the 56th high priest; and Jozai-ji (in Tokyo), a Gohonzon transcribed by Nissho, the 57th high priest.

- Branch temples outside the Tokyo area received okatagi Gohonzon (i.e., Gohonzon reproduced through a printing process) from large branch temples in Tokyo and issued them to believers. Some branch temples issued unmounted okatagi Gohonzon to believers. In these cases, believers had to bring Gohonzon to a professional mounted to have them mounted on a scroll for enshrinement.

[Mid-1950s -1960]

- Since the mid-1950s, branch temples started to issue okatagi Gohonzon based on one transcribed by Nichikan, the 26th high priest. During the tenure of Nichijun (1956-1959), the 65th high priest, most newly issued Gohonzon were the replicas of Nichikan's okatagi Gohonzon.

- Nichikan's okatagi Gohonzon were printed at Hodo-in in Tokyo. Branch temples that had business with mounters purchased unmounted okatagi Gohonzon from Hodo-in and had them mounted by their affiliated mounters. Branch temples without mounters had okatagi Gohonzon mounted at Hodo-in.

[Early to mid-1960s]

- Nichikan's okatagi Gohonzon were printed at Hodo-in and mounted at its affiliated mounter. The mounted okatagi Gohonzon were then delivered to branch temples.

[1966 -1979]

- Since 1966, Nittatsu's okatagi Gohonzon were printed at Hodo-in and mounted by its affiliated mounter. Then they were delivered directly from Hodo-in to each branch temple.

- Around 1973, Myohon-ji temple in Chiba Prefecture reproduced its man'nen kugo Gohonzon, which was inscribed by the Daishonin, in a reduced size and conferred them upon believers without Nittatsu's permission.

[1979 -present]

- Since Nikken became high priest in 1979, a section was created within the Administrative Office at Taiseki-ji to administer the reproduction and distribution of Gohonzon.

- Nikken's okatagi Gohonzon are printed at a printing company in Fujinomiya City near Taiseki-ji. They are brought back to Taiseki-ji where the printing quality is inspected and are then mounted at one of several mounters. After an inspection of the mounting quality, they are delivered from the Administrative Office to each branch temple that ordered them.

- It is clear from these facts that high priests have not performed "eye-opening" ceremonies upon all okatagi Gohonzon. According to the testimony of priests who have served at Taiseki-ji, Nikken rarely performs an eye-opening ceremony over okatagi Gohonzon destined for conferral upon believers. On the rare occasions that he has, he has instructed acolytes to bring only a few of the many boxes of Gohonzon allocated for shipment to be placed on the altar before the recitation of ushitora gongyo at the Grand Reception Hall. Outside of gongyo, no special ceremony is ever performed. If the priesthood, therefore, insists that Gohonzon not authorized by the high priest, not issued by the head temple or those not receiving the eye-opening ceremony are counterfeit, it would have to admit that it has been deceiving believers by distributing counterfeit objects of worship for centuries.