

A VISIT TO THE SOKA GAKKAI HEADQUARTERS*



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Walking in the rain I found the headquarters of Sōka Gakkai† a few steps from Shinanomachi Station on the Chūō Line. I had the card of the student department chief, Watanabe,^a to present, but even with this there was a considerable bustling to-and-fro and a brief wait at the entrance before I was ushered into the large reception room. The room was not especially impressive, with its old-fashioned overstuffed chairs, a huge painting of two tigers in Chinese style filling one wall, and on the other, large framed pictures of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi^b the founder, and Jōsei Toda,^c his successor, over the mantelpiece. Here I was introduced to Morita, whom Watanabe referred to as *sensei*^d (teacher). When he handed me his card I learned that he was Kazuya Morita,^e a trustee and assistant office-manager of the headquarters for the Sōka Gakkai.

I introduced myself as a Christian missionary engaged in research on the Sōka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shō faith. Though it was obvious that both men were busy and my visit had been unexpected, they treated me with utmost courtesy. And, in spite of the fact that I made my purpose clear—namely, that I was merely studying their faith for the purpose of information and had no intention of becoming a believer—they

a. 渡辺 b. 牧口常三郎 c. 戸田城聖 d. 先生 e. 森田一哉

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were very cooperative. It soon became apparent that this question-answer session was for them another opportunity for conversion, this time with a Christian missionary as the object of attack. These two were ready with all the answers; and there were times when it appeared that the young student chief had the technique down a bit better than his superior.

Morita was cool and calm to the end; at each turn in the argument he showed that he was following me and fully in sympathy with my point of view. Watanabe, the youth, however, whenever there was an opening, tried to clench the argument and press upon me the necessity of decision. Morita's technique is called by the Sōka Gakkai, the persuasion (*shōju*^a) method. Watanabe used the more familiar method of name-calling and browbeating (*shakubuku*^b)

Watanabe had on the tip of his tongue pet phrases in criticism of Christianity: "In Christianity you study forever but never reach the answer." "Christianity has only a small infinitesimal part of the great truth revealed by the Great Holy One (*Dai Shōnin-sama*^c), Nichiren." "Christianity is low-class religion" "Christianity is striving for the same goal of happiness as we are, but it ends in study—Christianity has no vehicle to take you to the goal." "We are happy; Christians are all mixed up." "Christianity divides man into spirit and body, but the Great Holy One revealed that the body and mind are one." "Christianity has only thought, no power; but the Nichiren Shō faith has valiant power."

Morita, slowly and deliberately, in mild and unhasty sentences, explained that he never spoke ill of Christianity, but that he

a. 摂受 b. 折伏 c. 大聖人様

was sorry that I could be content with such a partial religion, when Buddhism contains the ultimate truth.

Some of my questions and their answers paraphrased were as follows :

Q I have heard that there are three tenets of your faith, called the *flesh*,^a the *word*,^b and the *form*.^c Would you please explain these to me?

A Certainly. The *flesh* represents Nichiren, the Great Holy One, who is the Real Buddha.^d He is the Great Object of Worship.^e He existed before all buddhas and is the only power which has efficacy in the period of the Latter Law.* The *word* is the Lotus Sutra^f the only Buddhist sutra which has any relationship to us in the period of the Latter Law. The *form* is the wooden *mandala*,[†] written by Nichiren and

a. *niku* 肉 b. *kotoba* 言葉 c. *katachi* 形 d. *honbutsu* 本仏 e. *Dai Gohonzon-sama* 大御本尊様 f. *Hoke-kyō* 法華經

* Various Mahayana sutras divide Buddhist history differently in respect to the effectiveness of the Law (*dharma*). Among these the commonest division is five hundred years for the first, one thousand years for the second, and ten thousand for the third. Nichiren taught that the first, the period of the Upright or True Law (*Shōbō* 正法), began in 949 B.C., that is, the supposed date of Sakyamuni's death according to Chinese chronology; that the second, the period of the Image or Copied Law (*Zōbō* 像法), began a thousand years later, that is, at about the beginning of the Christian era or at the approximate beginning of Mahayana Buddhism; and that the third, the period of the Decadence or Destruction of the Law (*Mappō* 末法), which is said to last for ten thousand years or perhaps forever, began in 1052 A.D. Ed.

† A *mandala* (*Skt.*) or *mandara* (*Jap.*) is a diagrammatic representation of a Buddhist or Hindu conception of the cosmos. In some cases it is a picture of buddhas and bodhisattvas. In others these are represented symbolically, usually by Sanskrit letters. In the Nichiren *mandala* the names are written in Japanese with the Sacred Title of the Lotus Sutra, *Namu Myōhō-ryōge-kyō*, written down the center. The *mandala* of the Nichiren Shō faith, which is believed by its devotees to have been written on a wooden slab by Nichiren himself, is called *ita honzon*, that is, the wooden (*ita* 板) object of worship (*honzon* 本尊). Ed.

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enshrined, at Taisekiji.^a It is this wooden *maṅḡala* which contains the spirit of the Real Buddha, the Great Holy One. The wooden *mandala* contains the spirit of Nichiren.

Q Why is it so important to believe in Nichiren? Wouldn't someone else do as well?

A No one but Nichiren has the power to save in the present dispensation.

Q I can respect Nichiren. As a man he had courage and stood up for his convictions. But why do I have to depend on him or any man for my salvation?

A Nichiren is the Buddha.^b He has saving power, and he alone has saving power.

Q Didn't Nichiren study from Sakyamuni?

A Yes, but Sakyamuni's power is gone. Sakyamuni himself prophesied, in the Lotus Sutra, that he would have no power in the period of the Latter Law.

Q It is not so difficult to understand Nichiren's teachings—what he had to say about the truth, but why is it necessary to make Nichiren the object of belief?

A 'You're thinking as a Christian. You're concerned only with ideas. You think you can build your life on ideas. But you cannot receive happiness except through the Great Holy One, Nichiren.,

Q What relation has Nichiren to me, an American?

A True religion is universal; true religion knows no race or country boundaries.

Q Why should I turn from the religion of my parents and from the great Christian tradition of America?

a. 大石寺 b. Hotoke 仏

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A (Watanabe) Your parents and ancestors would want you to be happy, wouldn't they? If you gain the greatest happiness through worship of the *mandala* your ancestors will rejoice with you.

Q Why cannot I attain the same knowledge as Sakyamuni or Nichiren and earn my own salvation? Why do I have to depend on Nichiren's merit? Why cannot I acquire merit of my own?

A In you are latent the ten worlds, but unless there is a cause to awaken the Buddha world^a in you, you will never attain buddhahood.^b Nichiren is the secondary cause (*en*^c), you are the efficient cause (*in*^d). Only when you touch him in faith is the dependent origination established, and the buddha world awakend in you.*

Q What does all this have to do with the *mandala*?

A The *mandala* is the manifestation of the truth which saves.

Q Aren't you ascribing a great amount of power to a piece of paper?

A A bank draft is a piece of paper, but no one denies its power. You cannot experience any truth until it has a relation to you. The *mandala* is the way the truth is related to you. When Nichiren was about to die he left this so that we could attain this relation to him, because no longer could we have a direct relation to him. The *mandala* represents the Great Holy One, Nichiren.

Q But wouldn't just his words in the scriptures (*gosho*)^e be

a. *bukkai* 仏界 b. *jōbutsu* 成仏 c. 縁 d. 因 e. 御書

* This concept of dependent origination (*innen* 因縁) can be described as the relationship of the seed (*in*), the efficient cause, and the Sun (*en*), the secondary cause.

sufficient?

A They are nothing but an explanation of the *maṇḍala*.

Q If you say this, then doesn't this make all the scriptures, and all the writings of the revered leader Toda of no importance?

A Yes.

Q And you say this is scientific?

A This is truly scientific.

Q But you are asking me to accept the *maṇḍala* without its explanation.

A One doesn't understand a thing and then accept it. It is just the reverse. This is true of all science. Science explains what is already in existence. You don't study electricity before you turn on a light. You don't examine all that went into making a train before you board it. (Watanabe) Christians never get on the train. They spend all their time studying how it is made. Hence, they never reach the destination—happiness. We are *happy!*,

Q But the electric light was not simply explained by science after it already existed. Quite the reverse.

A That's why we believe in the Great Holy One, Nichiren—he made the light for us. We use it.

(Watanabe) Like the atomic bomb. Pha-a-a-ah! It burst and sent out its rays of destruction, The *maṇḍala* bursts around us and sends out its rays of light, and pha-a-a-ah! we are bathed in happiness!

Q It seems to me that the teachings of the Nichiren Shō faith are the same as those of Tendai.^a

^a. 天台

A They are. And this is the point at which many have been led astray. Tendai's teaching ended the dispensation of the Upright Law.*

Q Why doesn't study of Tendai have any benefit to us today?

A We are in the dispensation of the Latter Law, and the Great Holy One, Nichiren, is the True Object of Worship.

Q I have read *The Theory of Value*^a and Toda's explanation of how it is connected with the Nichiren Shō faith, but the connection seems weak and forced to me.

A That is because you are trusting to reason. You do not believe.

(Watanabe) Christianity is content with small benefits.

Q What about healing? Some believers promise healing, financial success and other temporal rewards.

A Doctors are necessary, but some are healed by belief in the Holy One, Nichiren. There are sicknesses that doctors cannot heal.

Q I understand that you promise a reward of "first belief,"^b —something received here and now as proof of the truth of your faith. I cannot accept this.

A You don't believe. If you taste the tea you will know its flavor.

(Watanabe) 'Christianity studies but never gets a drink of happiness. Without fail, one who believes will have proof in this world.'

You must not separate rewards of this flesh and spiritual rewards. They are all one.

Q Is there any objection to my studying your faith even though

a. *Kachi-ron* 価値論 b. *shoshin* 初信

* See footnote on p. 57.

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I don't believe or promise to believe?

A No objection, but no possible use whatsoever.

(Watanabe) If you only would believe; what a personal gain it would be to you yourself.

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Morita's conclusion: You have gone as far as study will take you. The step left for you to take now is belief. Only then will you have the answer you are seeking.

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