

THE FAITH OF SOKA GAKKAI

Takuya Kudō

Introduction by Mr. Yoshirō Tamura

In trying to secure some one to tell us about Sōka Gakkai,^a we discovered that members of Sōka Gakkai do not, as a matter of principle, talk about or give addresses concerning their faith. They are willing to preach or endeavor to convert, that is, *shakubuku*,^b you in order to make you a follower of their faith, but they are not interested in merely talking about their faith. This is the condition on which the Reverend Takuya Kudō,^c who is a member of Sōka Gakkai and a priest of the Nichiren Shō Sect, has consented to be here today. I am sure that under these circumstances you will get a very clear idea of what Sōka Gakkai stands for.

There are many things that I would like to say today, but the allotted time will permit me to discuss only a very few of them. At the outset, however, I would wish to make it clear that in speaking to you I do not represent the Sōka Gakkai or the Nichiren Shō Sect. On the contrary, I speak only as one who is a sincere follower of the Great Saint Nichiren (1222—1282).*

I am a believer of Sōka Gakkai and a priest of the Nichiren Shō Sect. Eight years ago, because of deep suffering, I thought

a. 創価学会 b. 折伏 c. 工藤卓也 d. 日蓮正宗

* In referring to Saint Nichiren 日蓮 the speaker always used the term, *Dai Shōnin-sama* 大聖人様 ed.

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that death was the only solution and so contemplated suicide. However, on the third day I experienced salvation and today I am filled with a very great joy because a follower of Sōka Gakkai converted me to his faith. I did not understand the theory but, as one who contemplated death, I underwent an unforgettable experience.

The Sōka Gakkai faith consists in earnestly believing and practicing the teaching of the Great Saint Nichiren. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary that all members of Sōka Gakkai clearly understand his teaching, the essence of which concerns the daily life—past, present, and future—of all human beings. This teaching gives absolute and complete happiness to all human beings.

Sometimes religion is regarded by some people as morals or as a kind of ethical training, spiritual entertainment, a tranquilizer, or even a hobby. In the case of the Great Saint Nichiren, however, this was not the case. He emphasized that religion should permeate one's daily life, that religion is life. He contended that not any of several, but only *one religion*, that is, *his own*, was true. He said that there was only one truth, and that all other religions caused unhappiness in the world.

Seven hundred years ago, when the Great Saint Nichiren lived, he attacked all the established religions, such as Zen,^a Shingon,^b and the sects that invoke the name of Amida,^c as injurious to the welfare of the nation. He said that Zen was a spiritual devil, Shingon a teaching that would destroy the nation, and that calling upon the name of Amida would bring

a. 禪 b. 真言 c. 阿彌陀

people to the bottomless hell. He said that the Ritsu^a Sect, was an enemy of the nation. All these evil religions, he said, were the cause of the misfortunes of Japan. This may give you an impression of being very one-sided; but such is not the case. It is in accord with reason. His faith is the very best. All others are error.

The Great Saint Nichiren used various yardsticks to prove that his teachings were true. For example, one yardstick is literary evidence (*monshō*)^b, another is theoretical evidence (*rishō*)^c, and a third is actual evidence (*genshō*)^d. Other kinds of yardsticks are the five categories (*gokō*)^e, the five-fold relations (*gojū-sōtai*)^f, and the four-fold selection and rejection (*shijū-kōhai*)^g. Using these yardsticks he established that his own faith was the best and that all others were inferior.

Most Buddhists in present day Japan have lost sight of these yardsticks. Some of them look at religious matters from an academic standpoint. Some deal with them from the standpoint of popular psychology. Moreover, they say that it is not necessary to attack other religions. They claim that each one may have its own truth, and that we should not attack others.

This attitude arises from ignorance. Sakyamuni Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, himself said that there was only one Buddha-vehicle by which the people could be saved. This is the attitude of the believers of Sōka Gakkai and Nichiren Shō Sect; and this is the reason why the Nichiren Shō Sect and Sōka Gakkai are so persistent in insisting that there is only one truth, and that their faith is the truth based on the words of Sakyamuni Buddha himself. This is the faith of the members

a. 律 b. 文証 c. 理証 d. 現証 e. 五綱 f. 五重相待 g. 四重與廢

of these organizations and the priests of the Nichiren Shō Sect believe that it is their duty to deepen this faith in the members.

The teaching of the Great Saint Nichiren is centered in the object of worship (*honzon*)^a which has wonderful power. The object of worship is the foundation of our faith. One of the Great Saint Nichiren's followers, Saint Nichikan^b (1765—1726) said that for all who worshipped this object, every wish would be fulfilled, all sins would be forgiven, every kind of happiness would be attained, and any knowledge that a follower might desire would be revealed. This object of worship gives such power and strength to the followers through the chanting of the Sacred Title, "Adoration to the Scripture of the Lotus of the Perfect Truth" (*Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*)^c.

The Great Saint Nichiren held that this object was to be worshipped not only in Japan but eventually throughout the world. In one of his writings he said that this object was destined to be worshipped in the entire world. Thus, the time will come when the entire world will join in the chanting *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*, and that time is indicated by the expression "proclamation and perpetuation" (*kōsen rufu*)^d.

Sōka Gakkai is an organization of laymen which belongs to the Nichiren Shō Sect and tries to uphold and practice the teaching of the Great Saint Nichiren. It aims to achieve the ideal of spreading his teaching throughout the world in order to promote the happiness of all mankind.

Thus far I have spoken only of my own experience, but I

a. 本尊 b. 日寛 c. 南無妙法蓮華經 d. 広宣流布

am only one priest. There are many followers who were once on the brink of death and were saved by the teaching of Sōka Gakkai. There are many people who have been declared by physicians to be hopeless cases, but have been saved by chanting *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*.

If I had not been so fortunate as to have had a friend who sought to convert me (*shakubuku*) I would have died long ago. Now that I have been saved, I am so grateful that I live on day by day with absolute confidence. I am full of zeal in order to share my experience with those who do not know this life.

The Great Saint Nichiren said that those people who do not believe in his teaching and do not believe in the Lotus Sutra* will lose their Buddha-nature forever. They will be reborn in hell when they die. I am convinced that this is true. Hell does not mean a separate or different physical existence. It means a state in which this physical body feels pain and is subject to suffering. In Christianity people speak of heaven and in Buddhism some sects speak of becoming Buddha or of rebirth in the land of bliss. This may be taken as a very representative expression for attaining absolute peace. We can prove this through the three evidences mentioned above, but now I shall try to prove it through actual evidence (*genshō*).

The Great Saint Nichiren on many occasions mentioned the beneficial effects of chanting *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*. Any faithful follower of his teaching, who chants this sacred formula sincerely at the time of death, will show signs of having been

* *Hoke-kyō* 法華經. This is a shortened form of *Myōhō-renge-kyō* 妙法蓮華經 (*Saddharma-puṇḍarīka-sūtra* Skt.).

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saved. For instance, if such a person has a very dark skin and a bad complexion, his skin will become white and beautiful. The weight of his body will become very light like cotton. The substance of his body will become very soft. But those who believe in evil religions will show an opposite condition. The color of the face will become dark and ugly, and the body will be very stiff. This is a phenomenon which medical science cannot satisfactorily explain.

I speak from my own experience. When a dead person shows a change of color and his body stiffens, he shows that he has suffered before death. This is concrete evidence that the faith, which such a person held during his lifetime, was evil and not the true religion. Contrariwise, when a person dies very peacefully and has an expression similar to that of a Buddhist statue, this shows that during his lifetime he must have held the true faith. I have seen hundreds of dead persons and there has not been a single exception to this rule. The greater my experience has been, the deeper my respect for the words of the Great Saint Nichiren has become.

The Great Saint Nichiren also said that if you want to understand the cause of something in the present you should look into the past. If you want to know what the outcome in the future will be, look at the present. Thus, the condition of a dying person is a good yardstick to his future life. That is, if a person dies very peacefully, then it is evident that he will enjoy a blissful life in the future world.

The Great Saint Nichiren covered everything even up to the moment of a person's death. There are many families whose ancestors or present members have not known the existence

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of this teaching. Some of them, when they die, reveal a very pitiable condition. But when a member of the family is converted to Sōka Gakkai, then within two or three hours the stiff body of a dead person becomes very soft.

I am speaking from personal experience. There are many cases of such changes occurring even when people have been dead a long time [*but before cremation Ed.*]. In view of the fact that such changes can be brought about in dead bodies, how much more remarkable phenomena can be brought about in the case of the living who are converted to the faith!

Now, returning to a more fundamental point, although Sakyamuni Buddha preached for many years and taught all kinds of doctrines, he nevertheless held that the Lotus Sutra was the highest scripture and that it revealed the highest truth. However, in Sōka Gakkai, Sakyamuni Buddha is not the object of worship. Sakyamuni Buddha is not the Buddha of this present age. Sakyamuni Buddha predicted that in the Latter Days,* after a lapse of 2,000 years, his teachings, even the Lotus Sutra, would lose their effectiveness, and that when that time came a *bodhisattva* by the name of Jōgyō^a would appear in a country to the east of India.

This eastern country can be none other than Japan, and this *bodhisattva* predicted by Sakyamuni Buddha can be none other than the Great Saint Nichiren. Therefore, Sōka Gakkai and the Nichiren Shō Sect regards Sakyamuni Buddha as the "trace Buddha" (*shaku-butsu*)^b and the Great Saint Nichiren as their real object of worship. Although *bodhi.sattva* means "a person

a. 上行 b. 蓮仏 * Mappō 末法,

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who is on the way to becoming a Buddha," the Great Saint Nichiren, who is Jōgyō Bosatsu,* that is, the savior of the Latter Days, is regarded in substance as the "original or true Buddha (*hon-butsumi*^a). This is the most fundamental point in our doctrine.

As you no doubt know, there are a great many religious groups in Japan whose followers chant the same formula as we do, so the question may arise in your mind as to which is the true sect. There are two yardsticks by which we can pass judgement on this matter. One is the difference in the object of worship. In other Nichiren sects the spirit of some animal, such as a snake or dragon, is revered as the object of worship. Another difference is in the treatment of Sakyamuni Buddha. Most of the other groups regard him as their real object of worship. Sōka Gakkai, however, considers the Great Saint Nichiren to be the real spiritual object of worship. Consequently, it can be concluded that the Nichiren Shō faith is a religion which gives the most truthful teaching and can secure happiness for all human beings.

It was seven hundred years ago that Saint Nichiren first chanted the sacred formula, *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*, so you may well ask, if this teaching is so truthful and can provide such happiness, why it did not spread more rapidly. But there are many factors involved here. Actually it could not spread quickly because the time had not come for it to do so. But now is the ideal time for spreading this teaching. This is symbolized in the expression "proclamation and perpetuation" (*kōsen rufu*)^b.

a. 本仏 b. 広宣流布 * Bosatsu 菩薩 is the Japanese for *bodhisattva* (Skt.)

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The Great Saint Nichiren admonished his followers to wait for the proper time; and that time has now come with the appearance of Sōka Gakkai in this present era. This was predicted by the Great Saint Nichiren and is evident in the phenomenal growth of the organization.

It was in 1937 that the first president, Tsunesaburō Makiguchi^a (1871—1944), established the "Value-Creation Education Institute" ("Sōka Kyōiku Gakkai")^b and began propagating his ideas. But in 1943, when it began to spread, the Japanese government, which spiritually has supported traditional Shinto, persecuted the group and Makiguchi and his associate, Mr. Jōsei Toda^c (1900—1958), were put in prison.

Unfortunately, Makiguchi died in prison. So at the end of hostilities, when Toda was released, he courageously undertook to propagate the teachings alone by appealing to the people to awaken spiritually after defeat and to follow the teaching of the Great Saint Nichiren.

Mr. Toda re-organized the members in 1946, and in 1951, when he was appointed the second president, he inaugurated a program of advance by means of forced conversion (*shakubuku*). When he assumed office Mr. Toda said that during his life-time he would win 750,000 households and give them spiritual salvation. This prediction was fulfilled in approximately seven years.

At present Sōka Gakkai adherents number about 1.5 million households. Of this total, some 50,000 are young people who have their own special division. These young people are engaged in studying Buddhist philosophy, Christianity, and

a. 牧口常三郎 b. 創価教育学会 c. 戸田城聖

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various social sciences as a means of spreading their faith throughout the world.

Mr. Toda died in April, 1958, and this year (1960) Mr. Daisaku Ikeda^a became the third president. Many people—non-believers—predicted that Sōka Gakkai would diminish in strength and die after the death of Mr. Toda. But this prediction has been proven false, because Sōka Gakkai is a faith founded on truth, on faith itself, and not on an individual. Emphasis is placed on the depth of the faith of each individual believer and not on the teacher-pupil, master-disciple relationship, or even a horizontal relationship between the members. The members are all controlled by one standard, the same faith. The depth of faith plays an important role in this organization. Not much importance is attached to individual personalities. The solidarity of the group is maintained and strengthened by making depth of faith central. As long as there is genuine faith Sōka Gakkai will live forever.

That this is actually the case can be shown by concrete evidence; the result of our conversion efforts, which have been fully published in the organ newspaper, *Seikyō Shimbun*.^a Since the installation of the third president last May, phenomenal growth has been achieved. In the month Mr. Ikeda assumed office and during June and July approximately 35,000 households were added each month. In August, however, 65,000 new households embraced the faith. This was the result of one month's effort, and is an unprecedented figure. Thus it can be seen that Sōka Gakkai is growing and the followers are spreading the teaching at the risk of their lives.

a. 池田大作 b. 聖教新聞

DISCUSSION

Q. In regard to the method of counting by households instead of individuals, does this mean that in each case all members of a family are believers?

A. Not all the members of each household are believers. In some cases the wife is a believer and the husband is opposed. However, the group counts all the members of each household as believers even though only one member is a real believer. There may be as many as 5 million individual believers. We do not know. The person who brings faith into the family may be the wife, husband, or even a child.

Q. Is a new believer responsible for converting the rest of the family?

A. It is not an obligation or responsibility in the strict sense of the term. The followers come to know that others are ignorant of the true religion and it follows that they will want to share their newly won happiness, their faith, with those who are ignorant. So efforts to convert develop naturally.

Q. What are your daily obligations? What are the moral teachings for everyday living?

A. A person who wishes to become a believer must go to a Nichiren Shō temple for a ceremony much as a Christian must accept baptism. He is then a member and receives a copy of the object of worship, the *honzon*, which he enshrines in the family altar. Morning and evening he chants the sacred formula before this altar and offers prayers for whatever he wishes for his daily life. That is the only change that oc-

curs.

Q. What is the object of worship, the *honzon*, like?

A. The object of worship is not a statue or image. It is made of paper, but what is written on it is not for publication.

Q. Do the members of Sōka Gakkai also belong to the Nichiren Shō Sect?

A. No, there are some members of Sōka Gakkai that are not members of the Nichiren Shō Sect and, since Nichiren Shō Sect is very old, there are some members of that faith that are not members of Sōka Gakkai, which is a new organization. However, many members of the sect are coming into Sōka Gakkai because they admire the deep faith and enthusiasm of the organization. In the near future Sōka Gakkai will publish a book in English which explains its true doctrines.

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