

A VISIT TO TAISEKIJI, HEAD TEMPLE OF SOKA GAKKAI

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The week beginning June 12, 1960, promised cloudy skies with the advent of the rainy season. But, what was even more foreboding, a restlessness and throbbing resentment, carried through the arteries of the press to the nation—intensified by the scheduled visit of President Eisenhower—indicated that another kind of storm was in the offing.

It was no time to visit Mt. Fuji,^a but here I was, sprawled out over the narrow third class seat, and half-way across the aisle of the overnight "up-train" for Tokyo. Two hours before the train was due in Tokyo Station, with a small *detache* case of clothing in one hand, a heavy briefcase of books in the other, a cumbersome umbrella stuffed under an arm, and uncombed hair stuffed under a straw hat, I detrained at Fuji Station.

From here I was to make a couple of transfers before reaching my goal, but connections were good and I found myself at the main gate of Taiseikiji,^b the chief temple of the Nichiren Shō^c faith, before eight o'clock.

Already we had met six crowded buses on the way, but there seemed to be no end to the crowd of visitors. When I arrived there were some three or four hundred people waiting in line,

a. 富士 b. 大石寺 c. 日蓮正

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in groups, under banners that read "Osaka^a District," etc. There was a man at a microphone giving instructions so that the crowd could board the buses with a minimum of confusion.

Everywhere young men wearing red arm-bands were running about discharging some responsibility. Later in the day a group of young men—about 200 in all—were singing the Sōka Gakkai^b theme-song with gusto under the leadership of a young man who went through all the animations of a pep-squad leader. The expressions on some of the faces were as if their lives depended on this song and the way they sang it. Inside the main gate at the entrance of each of the twelve lodges which lined both sides of the path to the Worship Hall^c, two or more young men served as keeper-guides, each with a Sōka Gakkai badge in his lapel.

There were women with babies on their backs, bandaged and sickly people, old men and women. One woman was leading her blind husband—they stepped away from the crowd and she found a place for him to rest for a moment.

Everyone was orderly. There seemed to be no drinking or loud activity. Without exception everyone preparing to leave on the endless line of buses bowed first before the main gate. All showed deep respect for elders and those who were evidently teachers.

It was azalea time. Though earlier in the morning it had been almost cold. Now it was warming up and the clouds were lifting. Later in the day the top of Mt. Fuji, still snow-capped, was visible, floating on the clouds. Along the long path azalea hedges were dazzling in their brilliance. The wide stone walk

a. 大阪 b. 創価学会 c. 奉安殿

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was bordered on both sides by a small, artificial stream of water. Beyond this, symmetrically on each side, were stone walls which enclosed the twelve lodges.

Topping the stone walls were the azalea hedges, some hanging luxuriously down the sides, smaller plants gaining a toe-hold in crevices between the rocks of the wall. Purple azaleas made the red ones look orange.

There were pink azaleas and blue azaleas. And, in the distance, throughout and the surrounding temple enclosure, huge, majestic cryptomerias lent an atmosphere of age and stability.

Finally I was introduced to the head of the student department of the Soka Gakkai, Mr. Watanabe^a. When I had stepped through the main gate I had noticed a tremor of uneasiness run through the crowd. I was a foreign intruder—evidently an outsider. Suitcases, umbrella, and straw hat—and, in addition, a "high nose" and blue eyes. I was just as confused as they. I had written to the business office but had never received an answer. The temple was much larger than I had expected. In all this multitude of visitors I had no choice but to throw myself upon the mercy of the two men who came over to ask if I hadn't gotten off at the wrong bus stop or something. Eventually I made my purpose known and was guided to the temple headquarters of the Soka Gakkai. After about an hour a young, clean-cut fellow (about 24) came to the gate where I had been waiting and asked me to come inside. I was led to the central building of this group—actually a small temple with altar. Here I was served tea and exchanged the formalities of introduction with Shiroataka Watanabe,^a the head

a. 渡辺城亮

of the student department.

I told Watanabe frankly that I was a Christian and a missionary (something I hadn't mentioned to the various others who had questioned me), and that I had come to Taisekiji to get the answers to some of my questions. He was honest and frank. Why in the world had I come to the temple? Why hadn't I visited the headquarters of Sōka Gakkai in Tokyo where they were only too willing to answer any questions I had? I replied that I wasn't satisfied with some of the answers I had received from certain Sōka Gakkai members; I wanted to talk to the priests and religious scholars. These, I said, I expected to be able to find at the head temple.

Through Watanabe I gained entrance to the Great Lecture Hall^a and finally met Priest Jigaku Mizutani^b, the General Business Manager of Taisekiji. Mizutani and two other priests (one of whom was about 30 years old) met me in the conference room decorated in excellent modern taste, with foam-rubber upholstered chairs. We exchanged introductions and Mizutani informed me that he had been expecting me. We were served tea. The atmosphere was friendly, and after I had once more carefully stated the purpose of my visit, Mizutani informed me that they were ready to help me to understand their faith to the best of their ability.

I noticed that each of the priests had entered the room carrying a small, flat folder or book. I never managed to see what it contained. The priests were dressed in the plain white denim robes of their faith. The over-garment was of beautiful undyed silk.

^a. Dai Kōdō 大講堂 ^b. 水谷慈猷

I had three specific questions in mind and hoped that the conversation would proceed from there. The first question was :

1) Do you respect or worship Sakyamuni? The answer was "No." When I ventured to compare Sakyamuni with Dainichi^a and Amida^b I was told that he was of an entirely different nature. "Nichiren is held to be the one and only Buddha who has any relationship or saving power for us who live in the days of the Latter Law."

2) What is your attitude toward Toda^c? The answer was that he was considered to be the greatest among the laymen. Upon his death he was given the title-rank of "Chief of all the preachers of the Hoke-kyō."^d

3) What is your attitude toward "*The Theory of Value*?"^e The priests said that they do not usually study this book in the course of their preparation. It is recommended to the layman to read—especially to the scholastic minded—as a first step on the way to faith.

There are three ways of leading men: establishing the contact,^f by examples and illustrations^g, and the preaching of the *dharma* itself^h. Hence the priests recognize a gradual climbing of the ladder of faith. When questioned, however, they said that there are no ranks among those who have attained buddhahood.

In the course of the conversation the priests told me various details of religious services and activities of the Taisekiji. The ceremony for the accession of a new abbot upon the death of

a. 大日 b. 阿弥陀 c. 戸田 d. Hokke Koso Koto 法華講經講頭
e. Kachi-ron 價值論 f. innen setsu 因緣説 g. hiyu setsu 譬喻説
h. hossetsu 法説

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his predecessor^a was conducted on November 17, 1959, and Nittatsu Shōnin^b (age 58) became the 66th abbot in the direct succession from Nichiren. At this time the tooth of Nichiren with flesh^c growing on it—said now to have completed the circumference and thus ushered in the time of the dissemination of the doctrine—, and other treasures were shown to the believers.

Each year on April 7 there is a sort of house-cleaning service^d at which they display the *mandala*, called the *Shis'in go-honzon*,^e which Nichiren prepared especially for the Emperor and his family when they shall have been converted to the true faith.

The ceremony, which marks a new believer's entrance into the faith, is called the "reception of the precepts^f." This, I was informed, corresponds to Christian baptism. The *mandala* is received on top of the head, and a replica of the Great *Mandala* written by the hand of Nichiren is received and taken home to become the central object of worship of the believer's house.

The collection of the writings of Nichiren, Nikkō, etc., is considered as the Bible^g of this faith, and within these scriptures the five books of chief importance^h are the *Risshō Ankoku-ron*ⁱ, the *Kaimoku-shō*^j, the *Kanjin Honzon-shō*^k, the *Senji-shō*^l, and the *Hōon-shō*^m. These five are also referred to as the *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō*ⁿ. I expressed surprise that these

a. *Dai-gawari* 代替 b. 日達上人 c. *onikuge* お肉牙 d. *omushi-barai* お虫払
e. 紫宸御本尊 f. *gojukai* 御受戒 g. *gosho* 御書
h. *godaiibu* 五大部 i. 立正安国論 j. 開目抄 k. 観心本尊抄
l. 撰時抄 m. 報恩抄 n. 南無妙法蓮華經

should be equated with the Sacred Title^a which is the distinguishing mark of this faith. The answer was that it is this formula which contains the essence of all the writings and ministry of Nichiren, and it is this formula which contains the meaning of the *Hoke-kyō* which in turn contains all the meaning of all Buddhist sutras.

The conversation shifted then to the subject of the exclusiveness of Nichiren Shō faith, and I asked if the priest would help me to distinguish between it and the Nichiren Sect. One of the priests supplied me with this simple comparison. In the Nichiren Sect the Buddha is Sakyamuni, the *dharma* is the *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō* of the letter of the Hoke-kyō, and the priest is Nichiren. In Nichiren Shō Sect the Buddha is the Holy One, Nichiren, the *dharma* is the *Namu Myōhō-renge-kyō* of the Three Great Hidden Laws^b, and the priest is Nikkō^c. It was requested that if I ever wrote anything for publication on the Nichiren Shō faith to remember above all else that the faith centers in "The great true object of worship of the altar of the basic doctrine of the Great Holy One, Nichiren^d" — in other words, the treasured *mandala* kept at Taisekiji.

Before the conference ended I was able to ask a few incidental questions on obscure points which were not covered in the dictionaries, and also to make some miscellaneous queries. For example: What about the "merit of first belief"^e. The priests said that such merits are definitely recognized, but that these were small merits and that the great merit may not be

a. Daimoku 題目 b. Sandai Hihō 三大秘法 c. 日興 d. Nichiren Dai Shōnin no Honmon Kaidan no Dai Gohonzon 日蓮大聖人の本門戒壇の大御本尊 e. shoshin no kudoku 初信の功德

realized immediately. What about karma? Aren't there some karma effects that no amount of faith will erase? Yes, but the effects of karma may be minimized and weekend. Furthermore, there is hope for the final elimination of the effects of evil karma in future lives.

I was not able to stay in the lodgings of the temple because I was a non-believer. Mizutani was very helpful, however, and secured for me an upstairs room in an inn operated by a Sōka Gakkai member, just at the entrance of the temple grounds. From two walls of sliding glass panels I could look full face upon the main gate where everyone arrived and from which everyone boarded the buses. I could see their first and last acts of worship. *Nammyō-hō-rengē-kyō*, *Nammyō-hō-rengē-kyō*, *Nammyō-hō-rengē-kyō* ;* they intoned the chant three times in sonorous tones as they stood before the gate facing toward the Main Hall,^a the original worship hall. The chant was followed by a brief rubbing of the prayer beads between the palms of the hands, then a bow (sometimes twice).

From the window I watched the pilgrims as they lined up preparing to board the buses. Everyone seemed to be carrying a small bundle of green leaves. Later I discovered that these were leaves of the magnolia^b (the Chinese anise), which is the only "flower used to decorate the altar of this faith. Little stands temporarily erected around the temple outskirts sold them along with books and other supplies for study and worship.

The main gate had recently been painted a brilliant lacquer

a. *Miedō* 御影堂 b. *shikimi* 楸 -genus

* In chanting the Sacred Title the words *Namu Myōhō* becomes by elision *Nammyō-hō*. Ed.

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red. It appeared to be about eight stories in height. Measuring I could count 12 *ken*^a, which means that it is 72 feet wide. My host later verified my calculations and said that it is the second largest wooden temple gate in Japan.

The various groups under their banners, lined up in front of this gate waiting to board the buses, represented various districts throughout Japan. Each district is appointed a time to come during the visiting days—from Saturday to Monday. For example, the first week of each month is designated for the Kansai district, etc. Worshippers come in groups both for the sake of economy (it costs each member 250 yen for a night's lodging, including meals—though they bring their own rice), as well as for efficiency in handling them. The purpose of these visits to Taisekiji is to worship the Great *Mandala*, which is revealed to the believers at a special service of worship. During their two-day visit there are various discussion meetings, an evening lecture on the scriptures, held in the big auditorium, seating capacity 5,000. Some enjoy sight-seeing in the foothills of Mt. Fuji^b. And, of course, all pay their respects to Toda's grave.

The endless line of believers! Endless! Until 12:00 o'clock noon I hardly saw a break in it. After lunch, however, I noticed that the crowd seemed to be decreasing. According to my host they would all be gone by evening. By 1:00 p.m., sure enough, there was no one waiting before the main gate, and workmen and women were already beginning to sweep the walks and sprinkle water to settle the dust.

a. 間 b. 富士

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I took a walk up to the pagoda. Even before I had time to take in the exquisite beauty of the five-roof building itself, guarded on all sides by giant cryptomeria, the bushwarbler called from a pine thicket and I was entranced. Can the mocking bird back home sing like this? I thought. There at the pagoda was Toda's grave. The urn to hold burning incense had already cracked because of the heat of the many, constant prayer offerings, and a new open urn had been provided.

At 2:00 o'clock I was walking along the path, returning to my quarters, when I heard the chant of many voices, intoning the familiar "*Namyō-hō-rengē-kyō*" over again. A bell rang—a call to prayer. From the Guest Hall^a, priests began to descend and hastily form a line. One younger fellow was late. Later I learned that this was a special service in the Worship Hall where the *mandala* is kept, especially for the leaders of Sōka Gakkai who had remained after the main crowd returned.

Along the azalea-lined path there were entrances to guest houses with such names as Rentō-bō^b, Honjū-bō^c, etc. The ending *-bō* means "room" or "temple." In this case it refers to a lodging place within the temple precincts. There are six of these guest houses on each side of the walk, the largest one accomodating 450 guests. A priest is in charge of each and lives here with his wife and family. Mizutani, I learned, besides being business manager, is in charge of the Hyakkan-bō^d (No. 4).

Toward evening the gate turns back into a typical Japanese temple entrance. The luster fades, the loving hands rubbing

a. *kyakuden* 客殿 b. 蓮東坊 c. 本往房 d. 百觀坊

rosaries having returned to the cities. Now country children use the majestic structure as a back-stop for their soft-ball games, or hide the thimble up behind the sacred name plaque. A man and his wife going home from work cross the threshold without so much as a bow.

Supper time, and all is deserted. Mt. Fuji floats silently in a white mist.

On Monday evening after supper my host guided me through the temple grounds and showed me the various buildings. An old gate, the original one a led to the temple enclosure. The main gate visible from my window was built in 1713 under the auspices of Tennei'in^b, wife of the 6th Tokugawa *shogun*^c, Ienobu^d. Further along the path there was another, much smaller gate, called the *Nitenmon*^e, a truly lovely wooden structure. Passing through this gate we saw, on our left, a small building which houses a large drum, and opposite it on the right another which houses the temple bell. Immediately ahead, the goal to which the path leads, was the main hall which is now being painted and repaired. This hall was constructed in 1629 at the time of the 18th patriarch, Nissei^f, under the auspices of the wife of the Lord of Awa^g. From a glance I gained through the door and from pictures which have appeared in the organization's publications, the interior of this hall must be very much like that one described by Lloyd in *The Creed of Half Japan*^{*}:

a. *sōmon* 総門 b. 天英院 c. 將軍 d. 家宣 e. 二天門 f. 日精 g. 安房

* Arthur Lloyd, *The Creed of Half Japan*, (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1911) p. 295 Footnote.

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‘.....there is an absolute *stūpa* or tabernacle, such as we found in the ancient *chaityas* in India, and symbolical of the *stūpa* which descended from heaven in chap. xiv of the “Saddharma-pundarika.” In front of this tabernacle is the usual “table of prothesis” which is to be found in all Buddhist temples in Japan, and in front of that, again, what may be called the Choir, with the desks for the monks. Over this part, which comes about the middle of the building, is a baldacchino, or umbrella, from which hang strings of flowers in thin brass, the whole being intended to symbolize the “Pentecostal” shower of celestial flowers with which the action of the “Saddharma pundarika” commences.’

In the main hall the Great Holy One, Nichiren, is the object of worship, and it was here that the installation of the new abbot, St. Nittatsu, was announced to Nichiren last fall.

Returning in the direction of the main gate, after we had passed through the Nitenmon we took the path to the right which led through a large, new gate. This gate opened on a modern, ferro-concrete, six-story lecture hall, a very impressive building^a, which is a monument to the enthusiasm and administrative skill of the Sōka Gakkai movement. The building was dedicated on March 1, 1958, and a total number of 210,000 believers are reported to have made the pilgrimage to celebrate the event. Nearby a smaller, extremely modern concrete building^b, a recreation hall and resting place containing 1,000 mats*, was also contributed by the Sōka Gakkai. Now the Sōka Gakkai is raising funds for the rebuilding of the Guest Hall, a secondary worship hall for large groups, which was burned during the war through the carelessness of Japanese troops which were quartered here.

a. Dai Kōdō 大講堂 b. Dai Kejō 大化城

* One mat measures 3ft. by 6ft.

Behind the present temporary Guest Hall is located the Worship Hall where the "holy of holies," the sacred *mandala*, is kept. This concrete, fire-proof building in old Buddhist style of architecture was also built by the Sōka Gakkai.

In addition to these buildings there are the numerous residences (*bō*) where the priests live and where guests are entertained overnight. And beyond the graveyard, across a concrete bridge (also built by the Sōka Gakkai), up a long flight of granite steps, almost completely hidden from view in a grove of ancient cryptomeria, stands the truly beautiful five-roof pagoda, with the new tomb of Jōsei Toda^a (d. April 2, 1958) beside it. This pagoda was started in 1713 at the same time as the main gate, built through the initiative of Tennei'in, wife of Ienobu, but it was not finished until the time of the 31st patriarch, Nichi-in^b, through a gift of Katusumi Itakura^c, Lord of Kameyama^d Castle. The pagoda faces west, the direction of India, for, as my host explained, just as the moon rises in the west and proceeds to the east, so Buddhism originated in India and came to Japan; but the sun rises in the east and proceeds to the west—symbolic of the true faith which arises in Japan and proceeds to India and the west. All other buildings face south.

After I had returned to my room my host came in for a chat. He was eager to have me resolve all my questions and doubts and become a devout believer as he and his wife are. He told me about himself. For ten years he had served in the police department at Numazu.^e After this, he spent eight years in China directing the inspection of wool, hemp and cotton. After the war he returned to his native home at the entrance

a. 戸田城聖 b. 日岡 c. 板倉勝澄 d. 龜山 e. 沼津

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of Taiseikiji. He remembers the temple as it was in the days before its current face-lifting through the efforts of the Sōka Gakkai. But he himself is now a fervent Sōka Gakkai member. He told me of how he had been a classmate of the present abbot for eight years. Priests are sent to the temple at the age of eight and attend the public school nearby. My host is convinced that the Nichiren Shō faith is the one, true faith for the world. Over and over again he urged that no other faith would satisfy. Only his faith gives true happiness—the goal toward which all humanity is striving.

In four years you will not recognize Taiseikiji, he promised. In four years time ten percent of the Japanese adult population will have been won to the faith. Already there are missionaries in every country in the world, except France, England, and Russia. There are numerous American servicemen, who, with their Japanese wives, are spreading the faith on the American continent and Hawaii, he claimed. Speaking of Sōka Gakkai activities in the political world, especially in view of the growing intensity of the situation with respect to Eisenhower's proposed visit, he said with confidence that there would be no Sōka Gakkai participation in the strikes and demonstrations. We are, on the surface, neutral toward politics, he said, but underneath we are all for the government party and Kishi. Kishi's wife came to worship here, he boasted.

Together we looked at various books which I had brought with me. I explained how far I had advanced in my study and what the object of this research was. He shook his head when he realized that I was content with such a superficial investigation. You will never understand until you believe, he

repeated again and again. He went to his room to bring back his scriptures, and we read from it together. Several places he had marked—especially to help him win the non-believer. He was always kind and considerate, eager to try to see my point of view, but never yielding in his prime objective—to win me over.

The temple bell was ringing when I awoke the next morning at four thirty—a soft, sustained tone—as if at some great distance, unhurried—as if someone were standing beside it, meditating, and now and then was inspired to strike it a blow.

When I returned from my early morning walk my host was in his room reading aloud from the scriptures, in the familiar chant. Later in the day I returned to the inn and smelled incense as I climbed the stairs. This time the voice I heard was that of the wife. Was this her time of day to say prayers? Members are taught to pray twice a day—morning and evening. The morning prayers are called *goza*,^a and the evening prayers are called *sanza*.^b Performing these prayers is the first of the two obligations of a believer, and is called *gongyō*.^c The other obligation which every believer must assume is called *shakubuku*.^d

In the afternoon Priest Mizutani guided me through the new six-story ferro-concrete building, the Great Lecture Hall. It is of very modern design, equipped with self-operating elevators, conference rooms exquisitely furnished, small assembly rooms with mat floors, and a large auditorium (also with mat floor) which accomodates from four to five thousand worshippers. There is, in addition, an extensive roof garden (over the auditorium), and a classroom for priests who come in the summer

a. 五座 b. 三座 c. 勤行 d. 折伏

for training sessions.

The head abbot, Nittatsu Shōnin,^a is young—58 years of age. Mizutani explained that it was good that he was so young and strong since his duties are strenuous. He has official duties^b in the middle of the night. From 1:00 to 3:00 o'clock a.m. his duty was the "great peace to the people". Other duties concern the offices of respect that must be paid to the various worship objects in different buildings. Just going from one to the other is more than exercise. Priests live ordinary lives, no different from the laymen. They shave their heads and wear a special white garment, but otherwise they marry, take three meals a day, smoke, drink—anything, as long as it is not to excess. (On my first evening trip with my host we had engaged one priest in conversation who had evidently overstepped the line of moderacy with respect to drink.)

I noticed that very little mortar is used in the building structures. One priest whom we met explained that in this area of Japan the earth is not suitable for use as mortar because of lack of clay, and that building materials have traditionally been confined to wood with metal, or thatch roofs. This condition is certainly attested to in the surrounding farm dwellings. But it is also characteristic of the older buildings of the temple itself. Though lack of mortar makes the general appearance of the buildings somewhat more prosaic than those of Kyōto^c or Nara,^d nevertheless, the copper roofs of the main gate and the Nitenmon, and the main hall are works of fine craftsmanship.

The morning for my trip on to Tokyo came. I was to board

a. 日達上人 b. *otsutome* お勤め c. *tenka taihei* 天下太平 d. 京都 e. 奈良

the bus at 8:50. According to the train schedule, I should arrive in Tokyo at about 12:30 noon. My host and I went together to purchase a few books which I hadn't seen before. The wife was dressed in her best kimono—evidently she was going somewhere. I gathered, through overhearing the conversation, that she was going on a mission of conversion.

We boarded the same bus. It was difficult to talk for our bus took the bumpy, narrow short-cut to the Fujinomiya village, but I finally managed to ask her a leading question. I had to know the reason behind all this fervor for the faith. My question was, "Have you no children?" Then she told me about her daughter, who was a victim of spinal meningitis. Then everything was clear to me. This was the girl I had seen one day, squatting in a corner of the bathing room, brushing her hair without a mirror. She had looked at me out of the corner of her eye like a frightened wild animal. I had taken her for an idiot, but hadn't yet established her relation to the keeper of the inn. This also explained the queer, animal-like sounds from the altar room when the mother was praying. Had this girl been trying to pray too? Was she made to pray too? This was the burden that my host and his wife were learning to bear through the strength of their faith. Had they found the answer? Did they wait daily upon the miracle?

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