Chapter 11

Death and Dismemberment

Nichiren was recalled from exile in February 1274. The official document ordering his release was given to Nissho, his oldest disciple. Nissho gave it to his nephew Nichiro, who was eager to make the trip to Sado and bring the good news. Indeed, Nichiro pushed himself so hard to get there quickly that he almost failed to arrive at all. He reached the island safely, but then collapsed on the road, unable to proceed further.

Nichiren had a premonition that his disciple Nichiro was on the island but in some kind of trouble. He sent some men out looking for him, and sure enough, they found him not far away, stretched out on the road. They picked him up and carried him in for a joyful reunion.

The winds of change had been in the air for some time. The governor of Sado had arranged for a public debate between Nichiren and some local clergy. The governor, who listened attentively to the proceedings, was impressed by Nichiren's arguments. At the close of the debate, Nichiren turned to him and asked, 'Why haven't you taken your troops to Kamakura to aid the government?' The governor was puzzled by the question. Only later did he learn that Hojo had turned against Hojo in a bloody palace coup. He was able to align himself with the winning side, and was grateful to Nichiren for tipping him off. He ordered the exile moved into more comfortable quarters (*Shuju Ofurumai-gosho*).

Shortly before news of his pardon reached him, Nichiren was surprised to receive a gift from one of the Hojos. Hojo Yagenta sent him two Samurai swords; this was his way of asking Nichiren to pray for victory over the Mongols. Scholars have debated whether or not Yagenta became a convert, but at the very least he was an important friend in high places. No doubt he contributed to getting Nichiren pardoned.

Nichiren left Sado on 15 March 1274 accompanied by a military escort. They had a comfortable journey, arriving in Kamakura a week later. There he was met by a group of his followers, many of whom had been imprisoned during his exile. When he saw them, Nichiren dismounted and greeted each one personally. 'All of you must have persevered greatly. I am gratefully indebted to you,' he told them softly (Christensen 107).

On 8 April, he was summoned to the headquarters of the military government, where he was greeted by none other than Hei no Saemon, the man who had tried to execute him three years before. This time their interview was formal and polite, although still at cross-purposes. The military rulers were interested in the military situation, but Nichiren, as usual, was concerned with the religious situation.

The officials asked the prophet when they could expect the Mongol invasion. He replied within one hundred days. This, indeed, is exactly what happened.

Having failed to cut Nichiren off from the nation, the rulers now wanted to assimilate him somehow into the status quo. Therefore they offered to construct a temple for him, provided he would stop criticizing the other sects. He could continue to teach his own doctrines and join in the prayers for national deliverance. However, the security of a temple of his own with government sponsorship was not at all what he wanted. He still expected what he had preached from the beginning: the conversion of the nation to the Right Law.

It became obvious to Nichiren that his views and those of the public officials were still a long way apart. The conversion of Japan was not going to take place during his lifetime. No matter. It would happen eventually. The billions of Bodhisattvas from the Earth had only begun to appear; more would come afterwards. The Buddha's master plan for the salvation of all living beings would roll ahead irresistibly; it was just a matter of time.

One month after his appearance at court, Nichiren abruptly retired from Kamakura. His public life was over. Three times he had challenged the government; three times he had been rejected. He could do no more. He asked only for some isolated mountain retreat, where he could spend the rest of his days in meditation and strengthening the faith of his followers.

Hearing of his plans, Nambu Sanenaga (1222–97), the Lord of Hakiri and a devout believer in Nichiren, offered him land on his property on Mount Minobu. There he built for him a small hut (until his health began to fail a few years later, Nichiren refused to accept more adequate quarters), where the prophet was to spend the last nine years of his life. Nichiren was delighted. To him Minobu, far from the amenities of civilization and bitterly cold in winter, was a paradise.

'I received the One Great and Secret Truth from Buddha Shakyamuni on the Vulture Peak. I keep this truth in my heart. Therefore my heart

is the place where the Buddhas enter profound meditation. The Buddhas turn the wheel of the Dharma on my tongue, manifest themselves in my throat, and attain enlightenment in my mouth. Can this place (Minobu) possibly be inferior to the Pure Land of the Vulture Peak?' (*Nanjo hyoe shichiro dono gohenji*)

He continued to write letters to his followers and prepare mandalas for them. One of his letters, 'The Record of Minobu', is the most lyrical he ever wrote, describing the serenity he felt in his heart while living in loving harmony with the natural beauty of his surroundings. He received visitors during the summers, and even had the joy of seeing his old friend Abutsu-bo, who came all the way from Sado three times although he was now over 90 years old. Some of his younger disciples stayed with him constantly; the older ones were already setting up Nichiren centres of their own. However, they kept in close correspondence with their master. He advised them like a loving parent, telling Shijo Kingo to stay home and drink *sake* with his wife instead of going out and carousing with friends, and counselling another not to be so zealous in displaying his faith unless he come to tire of his own zeal. 'Leave things as they are. There will certainly come the time when at the discretion of God the Creator (Brahma) and God the Lord (Shakra) the entire nation will come to believe without fail. I am confident that on that day there will also be a great number of people who will say, "I have long believed," or "I, too, have believed."'[57]

There was no need to thunder warnings any more. Nichiren was sure of himself. His main concerns were for his followers and for his country.

The first Mongolian invasion came in the autumn of 1274, just as Nichiren had predicted. Nine hundred warships with 25,600 men sailed from Korea and crossed the straits separating the two countries. The impact of their initial thrust drove back the Japanese defenders. After ravaging the town of Hakozaki as a warning of their invincibility and burning the shrine of the war-god Hachiman, the Mongols re-embarked, probably intending to strike again further up the coast. But that night a violent storm arose and wrecked most of the ships. This was the famous *kamikaze*, the 'divine wind', which came to the rescue of the country in the hour of its greatest peril. The long-dreaded invasion was shattered in one night.

The victory confused Nichiren's followers. On the one hand, their master had successfully predicted the invasion. On the other hand, the gods (*kami*) had come to the rescue even though Nichiren had said they would not. Although the prophet kept insisting that the danger was not yet over, his followers found themselves discredited and subject to ridicule or even persecution.

Some wealthy men, such as Shijo Kingo, had their properties confiscated. Nichiren advised his friend not to be discouraged, but to continue serving his master loyally just as if he were still in favour. Shijo obeyed these instructions and waited faithfully on his lord, who wanted

nothing more to do with him. Finally he was able to demonstrate his true worth when the lord fell ill. It was Shijo, who was a physician as well as a warrior, who patiently nursed him back to health. The lord was so grateful that he restored Shijo's properties three-fold.

Less prominent followers were not always so fortunate. In 1279, 20 peasant believers were arrested on trumped-up charges and sent to Kamakura for trial. There they had to face the implacable Hei no Saemon, who ordered them put to the torture. When none would recant, he had three of them executed as a warning to other would-be Nichiren believers.

Nichiren was shocked to learn about this. He himself had suffered many persecutions and had faced death more than once — that he had expected. He had seen some of his followers die for the faith, and that was harder to accept, but they had been either monks or Samurai — men who knew how to give up their lives for a cause. Now simple peasants had taken up his banner, and they, too, were facing dire punishments.

It was clear that his career had turned another decisive corner. He was no longer alone, nor was he just the leader of a small band of close disciples. He had become the champion of potentially vast numbers of faithful followers. There were men and women out there who had never even seen him, but who believed in him because they had heard about him. Their welfare — the welfare of these total strangers — was now his responsibility. His message had caught fire, and people were willing to die for it.

In a brief but poignant epistle he says that just as Shakyamuni prepared the soil for 40 years before revealing his true intention in the Lotus Sutra, so it had been 27 years since he, a solitary monk without a single disciple, had first raised the cry of *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. He had predicted then that unknown multitudes would take up his cry; now the prediction had become reality (*Shonin Gonan Ji*).

In 1275 a Mongolian envoy and his party came to Kamakura to once more demand the surrender of Japan, but the Japanese were no longer afraid of the enemy. The Regent had the envoys taken to Tatsu-no-kuchi and put to death. There was an uneasy peace for a few years. Then in 1279 Kublai Khan, the Mongol emperor, finished off the South Sung Dynasty in China and turned his full attention to the conquest of Japan. Using Chinese and Korean technicians, he assembled a vast fleet of 3,500 warships. A second fleet of 900 ships set sail at about the same time, and the two armadas converged on Japan like giant pincers. Then it happened all over again. Once more the *kamikaze*, the 'divine wind', swept down from the north and capsized nearly all of both fleets. Over 112,000 men, about 80 per cent of the invaders, were drowned in what was perhaps the most extraordinary military débâcle of all time.

When the second invasion struck some of Nichiren's followers began to predict a Mongol victory, but Nichiren warned them sternly against

such unpatriotic outbursts. He referred to the enemy as 'little Mongolia' which dared to attack 'great Japan'. He found himself in very much the same position as the Prophet Jeremiah: predicting the defeat of his own country while hoping in his heart that this would never happen.

After the second victory he still thought that the danger had not yet passed. 'An autumn windstorm has destroyed the enemy's ships, and now the people boast of a great victory, as if the enemy commander had been captured. At the same time, the priests act as if it were all due to the efficacy of their rituals. Just ask them whether they took the head of the Mongol king. Whatever they may say, make no other reply than this' (Anesaki 127).

This response shows a certain pique; things had not worked out exactly as he expected. In fact, he was more correct than he may have realized: the country was headed for ruin. The government, convinced that it had been saved by the prayers of its loyal priests, began to spend lavishly on new temples and gorgeous public ceremonies. The great army, which had been mobilized for the emergency, had to be paid. The treasury was soon exhausted, and civil wars broke out. By 1333 the Hojos had fallen. Civil wars were to go on devastating the country for three centuries. The lonely prophet had been right, after all, about the terrible fate awaiting his beloved country.

Although Nichiren was spiritually happy on Mount Minobu, the dampness of the forest did not agree with him physically. 'Since I retired to this place,' he wrote near the end of his life, 'I have never been out of these mountains. During these eight years, illness and age have brought me severe suffering, and both body and mind seem to be crumbling into ruin. Especially since last spring, my illness has progressed, and from autumn to winter my weakness has increased day by day. For the past ten days, I have taken no food, and my suffering is aggravated by the severe cold in the midst of a huge snowfall. My body is like a piece of stone, and my chest is as cold as ice' (Anesaki 130).

During the last year of his life the old warrior of the spirit grew increasingly despondent. However, he continued to philosophize, finding the cause of both his misery and his happiness in the universal human state. 'All the sufferings that befall my fellow beings are, after all, my own sufferings' (Anesaki 117). Just as all living beings bear the Buddha-nature within them, so they also bear the seed of decay and death. He was no exception.

He felt that he was not fit for the ascetic life any more. 'I was not successful living in the forest without desiring the good things of life. Because I am human, I cannot bear extreme cold or heat. I don't have enough to eat. I am not equal (to the famous ascetics). Under such circumstances, my voice for reciting the Sutra won't hold out long. I can't even concentrate on faith' (*Hakumai Ippyo Gosho*, *Gosho*, 1596).

He was dying, 'falling apart like an old cart', as Shakyamuni had once said of himself. He faced his death realistically, pointing out the

inseparability of the spiritual and the material. In thanking a follower for a gift of food, he wrote, 'Man lives on food, which is his treasure. But life, itself, is the most valuable of all treasures. All the treasures of the universe cannot equal a single human life . . . Yet without food, there is no life' (*ibid.*). Anything which sustains life is sacred. He was grateful for every grain of rice he ever received.

As the end drew near, he recalled how Shakyamuni had left the Vulture Peak to travel to Kusinagara, where he preached his final sermon, the Nirvana Sutra. Now the time had come for him, too, to leave his sacred mountain. He set out for a medicinal hot spring, but at Ikegami, near modern Tokyo, he lodged at the house of a friend. He was too tired to travel further. His last letter was, naturally, a thank-you letter. He addressed it to Lord Hakiri of Minobu, who had offered him the hospitality of his land for the past eight years and had recently built a temple for him there. This was Kuon-ji ('Eternity Temple'), which became the most sacred place in Nichiren Buddhism. Nichiren thanked him especially for the fine horse which he had lent him for his journey. Would it be possible, he asked, for the horse to remain here with its keeper? The two were so fond of each other that it would be cruel to separate them. This was his last request — and it was for the happiness of a horse!

After that he was too weak to write any more. For nearly a month he lay near death as his disciples gathered about him to hear his last words. He named six of them the Senior Disciples and nucleus of his new order. By choosing six, he established the independence of his movement. All these men were properly ordained Tendai monks, as was he himself, but no longer would they resort to Tendai for future ordinations. Six was the traditional number of monks necessary for a proper ordination: three to perform the ceremony with the candidate and three to act as witnesses. The Nichiren Order was now to select and ordain candidates of its own. Needless to say, the Tendai Sect, which had government authority behind it, bitterly resented this schism from its ranks, and did its utmost to have Nichiren's followers treated as outlaws in the years to come.

Nichiren died on 13 October 1282, at the home of Ikegami Munenaka. He was only 60, but worn out after years of hardships. He left no successor, although he did assign a 13-year-old boy, Nichizo, with the responsibility of converting the imperial family in Kyoto. The choice, as we shall see, was a good one (Christensen 116).

The immediate task of 'sowing the seed of Buddhahood' was entrusted to the six Senior Disciples and their followers. These men had served the master faithfully for many years. The oldest of them, Nissho, had known Nichiren since they were students together at Mount Hiei. The second, Nichiro, a nephew of Nissho, had been with him since he was a boy and had shared many of his adventures. All six had proved their worth over the years. Now they solemnly cremated Nichiren's

body at Ikegami (where the Grand Head Temple Hommon-ji stands today) and then bore the ashes back to Minobu, as he had requested. 'No matter where I die,' he had said in his last letter, 'please build my grave on Mount Minobu, because that is where I spent nine years reciting the Lotus Sutra to my heart's content. My heart lives forever on Mount Minobu' (*Hakii-dono Gosho, Shingyo Hikkei*, 105).

What should they do next? They had conflicting obligations: to tend the master's grave in the wilds of Minobu, and to go out into the world and sow the seeds of Buddhahood in men's minds. It was impossible to do both at the same time. They decided to return to their respective fields of labour, and rotate between them the job of caring for the master's grave on Mount Minobu. Each would return for one month a year, and six junior disciples would do the job on the odd months. Once a year, in October, they would all meet at Minobu for Nichiren's memorial service.

Needless to say, this complicated plan could not be implemented. As soon as the disciples left the isolation of Mount Minobu for Kamakura and elsewhere, they found themselves embroiled in the same old problems. Nichiren's religion still had no official right to exist, and the government treated its leaders as schismatic Tendai priests. Under such circumstances the disciples found it impossible to abandon their flocks for one month every year and a second month in October. Only one of them, Nikko, the third Senior Disciple, who was a native of the Minobu area, found it convenient to remain in the mountains even when he was not scheduled for duty there. Soon he settled in permanently.

Why had Nichiren left the succession to six disciples rather than to only one of them? He made this appointment on 8 October, less than a week before he died. He must have known the Buddhist traditions whereby lines of succession had supposedly been passed down from master to disciple throughout history, but he also knew that such lines of transmission were of little value. The Tendai transmission, according to him, had been betrayed within a generation of Saicho's death. His real model, however, was not Saicho but Shakyamuni, who had passed on his transmission to the four Great Bodhisattvas and to myriads of Bodhisattvas from under the Earth, not to any single successor. 'I wish to give the wisdom of the Buddha, the wisdom of the Tathagata, the wisdom of the Self-Existing One to all living beings,' Shakyamuni had said in the *Lotus* chapter entitled 'Transmission' (Chap. 22). Nichiren desired the same, and chose six as a working number for future ordinations. The number six also had a mystical connotation for him; it means 'perfect', he had said in *Kaimoku Sho*. The transmission of the Dharma would pass not to any one teacher, but to all who kept the Sacred Title.

He had devoted his life to expounding the truth (Dharma). Since his Dharma was so simple, there should be no question about what it was,

nor could there be any distinction between superior and inferior disciples, even between male and female. 'Those who spread the five characters of *Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* should not be divided into men and women,' he said. 'Unless they be reincarnations of the Bodhisattvas from under the Earth, they cannot chant the Sacred Title. At first, only I, Nichiren, chanted, 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo,' but little by little I was followed by two, three, and then hundreds, one after the other. This will continue happening in the future. Isn't this the real meaning of *from under the earth*?' (*Shoho Jisso Sho*, MW 1:93).

Nichiren also had a practical reason for choosing the six: each of them could minister to a specific geographical area where he was already established. The first two Elders, Nissho and his nephew Nichiro, would continue to work in the capital of Kamakura. Nikko, the third Elder, was responsible for the provinces of Suruga, Kai, and Izu, where he already had built up a personal following. Niko had a temple and influential friends in Kazusa. Nitcho was in Shimosa with his stepfather Toki Jonin, the most important of Nichiren's lay disciples. And finally Nichiji, the youngest of the six, was the son of a wealthy landowner in Suruga. Between them, the six were strategically located where they could evangelize north-eastern Japan in the area around modern Tokyo.

Minobu, the founder's temple, fell within the territory alloted to Nikko. But Minobu was holy to all the Disciples, not just Nikko, so they arranged to supervise it jointly in rotation. Some younger disciples were also included in the rotation. But this complicated scheme ran counter to the more natural way of just letting Nikko, who lived nearby, take care of everything.

Missionary efforts further afield would have to be left to younger disciples. Nichiren had already begun their training on Minobu. Among them were Nichizo, who would become the most important missionary in the next generation; Nichimoku, who would be the right-hand man to Nikko; and Nichizon, who would found the sect now known as Nichiren Honshu.

The original geographical distribution of the six did not stand the test of time. Nikko, as we shall see, ran afoul of the landlord at Minobu and had to leave. Niko had to move from his original area in order to replace him. He did so reluctantly and continued to make regular trips back to his old temple in Kazusa. Nitcho could not get along with his stepfather Toki Jonin, so he abandoned the area assigned to him and joined Nikko. Finally Nichiji, although comfortably situated under the sponsorship of his wealthy father, became so restless that he left home and embarked on missionary journeys that would take him to the northernmost island in Japan and finally to foreign shores.

These factors and others made it impossible for the followers of Nichiren to remain one united Sangha. Each of the six and some other original disciples had disciples of their own. Each became the nucleus

of a separate school of Nichiren Buddhism. Sometimes disciples from these schools set forth on missionary journeys that ended in the foundation of still more schools. Sometimes these schools were able to merge in due course; at other times the separate lines hardened into distinct denominations.

The Buddhist Sangha is not the same as the Christian church, even though both words mean, 'assembly'. All Christians belong to the church; only monks belong to the Sangha. Conze calls the monks, 'the Buddhist elite. They are the only Buddhists in the proper sense of the word' (*Buddhism* 53). The layman believes in the Sangha as an article of faith as he believes in the Buddha and the Dharma. One becomes a Buddhist (in the broad sense of the word) by 'taking refuge' in the Three Treasures: Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

We have seen how Mahayana attempted to break down the qualitative distinction between monks and laity. When the *Dharma Flower* speaks of 'the Buddha and his Great Assembly', it means the Buddha surrounded by all living things, not just monks. Nichiren depicts this in his Great Mandala.

The success of the Mahayana in breaking down the distinction between monks and laity was only partial. Dengyo Daishi and Kobo Daishi introduced sectarian monasticism. Laymen, who supported these monasteries, could then be considered as belonging to the Tendai or Shingon Sect, although many of them were probably not aware of it. Lord Hakiri considered himself a devoted follower of Nichiren, gave him land, and even built a temple for him, but he saw nothing wrong with donating lumber for a Nembutsu temple or worshipping at a Shinto shrine. A layman was expected to support the Sangha, say his prayers, lead a moral life, and leave the fine points of theology to the monks.

With the Kamakura reformation, these old attitudes gradually changed. A layman could practise Buddhism as well as a monk could, and the laity became deeply involved in their respective sects. The role of the monks changed from being 'the only real Buddhists' to teachers and ceremonial leaders. The laity, who learned from them, owed them spiritual as well as material support. An outstanding teacher would accumulate a devoted following, which gave its loyalty to him and to his temple, and not to any other. A host of sub-sects arose, not only in Nichiren Buddhism, but in all Japanese Buddhism.

What is remarkable in Nichiren Buddhism is not that there were so many sub-sects, but that there were not more. There are several reasons for this. First, there is the democratic nature of the faith. Teachers are important, but they are not of cardinal importance as they are in esotericism or Zen; they have no esoteric wisdom to pass on to select disciples. The Nichiren believer who chants the Daimoku is the equal to his teacher, and faces the Gohonzon without any intermediary.

The Nichiren sect insists on this point. 'There is no difference in the

Odaimoku recited by people of different social status, social honor, social wealth, age, or sex. The *Odaimoku* recited by our Founder (Nichiren) is the same as the *Odaimoku* recited by us with our hearts' (*Shingyo Hikkei* 28). The individual practitioner is expected to emulate Nichiren, not bow before him.

Secondly, the very spirit of loyalty which had been directed by the believers to the different disciples of Nichiren led to their subsequent loyalty to the temples which carried on the disciples' teachings. During the medieval period there grew up a system of head temples, which had been founded by great missionaries, and subordinate temples which owed them strict obedience. This way the number of schisms was kept down to a reasonable amount.

Thirdly, among the followers of Nichiren there is common love for the sacred mountain of Minobu, where 'Nichiren's heart resides forever'. The great majority of Nichiren believers have always maintained a special feeling about Minobu and a desire to maintain friendly connections with its clergy. But it was at Minobu that the first and deepest schism took place.

In 1281, a year before Nichiren's death, Lord Nambu Sanenaga of Hakiri had finally prevailed upon the old teacher to permit his humble hermitage to be converted into a more spacious temple. This temple was named Kuon-ji by Nichiren (*Kuon*, a key word in Nichiren's interpretation of the Sutra, means 'eternal', and *ji* means 'temple'.) It is the only temple that was founded by Nichiren himself, and it was here that he asked to be buried. It was natural that most Nichiren Buddhists should look upon it as their spiritual centre, and upon the Chief Abbot of Kuon-ji as the symbolic leader of the sect.

At first there was no Chief Abbot. The six Senior Disciples continued to regard Nichiren as their master and his personal temple as their spiritual centre, which is why they agreed to rotate their duties there. But as things turned out, only one of them, Nikko, could remain there for any length of time, while the others would come whenever they could. As time passed, Nikko began to think of himself as the priest-in-charge at Minobu, which for all practical purposes, he was.

Byakuren Ajari Nikko, the third of the six Senior Disciples, had been devoted to Nichiren since he was 14 years old. He was a Tendai novice when he met the master for the first time at the temple of Jisso-ji. Nichiren had gone there to gather material for his *Rissho Ankoku Ron* ('Establish the Right Law and Save Our Country'), and Nikko was tremendously impressed by his breadth of scholarship. When Nichiren left for Kamakura, young Nikko came running up behind him and begged to be allowed to follow him. From that day on he served the master faithfully.

In time Nikko became a successful teacher and missionary in his own right. He had relatives in the area around Minobu, and he was able to make a number of converts there. In fact, of the 12 minor priests who

were also serving at Kuon-ji, nine of them were his direct disciples. Thus Nikko was building up for himself a power base at Minobu, where he was looked on more and more as 'the' disciple of Nichiren, the one who had been most loyal to him in life and continued to be so in death.

In 1285 the government ordered all Buddhist temples to pray publicly for the salvation of the country from the Mongols and for the prosperity of the Hojo regime. Nikko, far away in his mountain retreat, ignored the order, but the other Disciples, most of whom were stationed in Kamakura and the vicinity, decided to comply. When Nikko heard of this, he accused them of disloyalty to the memory of Nichiren. He did, however, express sympathy for their predicament and gratitude that the government had left him in peace.

At about the same time Lord Nambu of Hakiri, the landowner at Minobu, built a home shrine for himself and installed in it a statue of the Buddha Shakyamuni. When Nikko saw the image, he could not suppress his indignation. Where were the accompanying images of the Four Great Bodhisattvas? Did Nambu not realize that unless the figure of Shakyamuni was escorted by the Four Great Bodhisattvas, it was a figure of the historical Buddha rather than the eternal Buddha Shakyamuni? No, Nambu had not realized it, and he was embarrassed (and probably somewhat annoyed) to have his error pointed out to him. He also did not want to go to the expense of paying for four additional statues.

Another of the six Senior Disciples, Sado Ajari Niko, who had recently arrived at Minobu, had a solution: all that was necessary to convert the figure of the historical Buddha into one of the eternal Buddha was to place a copy of the Lotus Sutra in front of it. It was as simple as that. Nambu was delighted with this way out of his dilemma, and promptly had it done. Needless to say, Sado Ajari Niko went up in his estimation while the stubborn Nikko went down.

The friction between Nambu and Nikko was aggravated further when Nambu visited the Mishima Shinto Shrine to pray, just as his ancestors had done for generations. Again Nikko berated him. It was wrong, he said, for a Nichiren Buddhist to pray anywhere except in a Nichiren temple. All the gods had left Japan and would not return until the entire nation was converted to the *Dharma Flower*. To pray at a Shinto shrine was meaningless. Again Sado Ajari Niko disagreed. The gods had sworn to protect any believer in the Lotus of the Wonderful Dharma; he could pray anywhere he liked. After all, Nichiren himself had done so. What mattered was his own faith, not the official designation of the shrine.

The final argument came when Nambu donated some lumber to be used in the construction of a Nembutsu pagoda. When Nikko accused him for the third time, Nambu apologized, saying he thought he was performing an act of charity. He had neglected to ask what the lumber was to be used for.

Nambu still respected Nikko as a priest, but obviously did not like him as a person. He would be happier if Nikko would move out and preach his fiery intolerance elsewhere. As for Nikko, he felt more and more uncomfortable and unwanted at Minobu. Finally, in 1289, he left accompanied by his nine disciples. Sado Ajari Niko remained at Minobu where he was recognized by the other disciples as the first permanent Chief Abbot of Kuon-ji and successor to Nichiren.

'I have left the forest of Mount Minobu,' Nikko wrote to a friend. 'How regretfully and unwillingly I depart defies description. However, I have resolved, wherever I may go, to establish the foundations for the true teachings of the Daishonin (Nichiren), faithfully following his will. Although all the other disciples of the Daishonin have acted against his teachings. I shall never forget his will' (*Seikyo Times*, September 1971, 59).

He travelled first to the home of his mother at Kawai in the neighbouring province of Suruga. Two years later a young nobleman named Nanjo Tokimitsu, who had long been a devout Nichiren Buddhist, offered to build Nikko a temple at Oishi-ga-hara. It was named Taiseki-ji ('Great Rock Temple'). A year later, in 1291, Nikko moved to a new hermitage two miles away at Kitayama, where Nanjo, Ishikawa Yoshitada, and others built him a residence. In 1298 he remodelled it into a temple called Hommon-ji ('Temple of the Original Gate'). He remained there until his death 35 years later at the ripe old age of 87.

Nikko never publicly stated why he left his first temple of Taiseki-ji after only a year, though it was probably because he had already had troubles with one landlord and did not want to be dependent on another. Hommon-ji, his new temple, was under joint sponsorship and not the property of one wealthy landowner; there he could enjoy the measure of independence he had always sought, and there he settled down to propound his own brand of Nichiren Buddhism, spiritually independent from Mount Minobu and financially independent from either Hakiri or Nanjo.

After he had left Minobu, Nikko began to accuse the other Senior Disciples of abandoning Nichiren and reverting to Tendai. There was some truth to the accusation. Nissho, the oldest disciple, was living in Kamakura, where he was under constant harassment from government authorities. To defend himself, he stated publicly that he was a lawful Tendai priest, which, of course, technically he was (as was Nikko). To Nissho, if he had to say this in order to get a licence to preach, it was worth the price. To Nikko, on the other hand, it was a betrayal of Nichiren.

When news of his accusation reached Kamakura, the Disciples were distressed. They sent Nichiro to Kitayama to attempt a reconciliation. Nichiro tried in vain to reach a compromise with his intransigent friend, but his efforts were fruitless. From this time on (1299), the break was

complete, and Nikko had nothing more to do with his former colleagues. He and his followers founded a separate branch of Nichiren Buddhism, which came to be called the Fuji Branch (*Fuji Monryu*) after the location of its first temples at the foot of Mount Fuji, the *Komon-ha* after its founder (the *Ko* standing for Nikko), or simply the Nikko Branch.

It would not be accurate, on the other hand, to speak of a Nikko school at this point. Nikko's doctrines seem to have been the same as those being taught by the other Disciples. His quarrel with them was personal. He resented being forced to leave Mount Minobu and replaced there by his junior, Sado Ajari Niko. Also he felt that the others were not strict enough in rejecting non-Nichiren teachings and practices., Beyond that there was little difference, so little that in time some of his spiritual descendants were able to merge peacefully with the main body of Nichiren Buddhism at Mount Minobu. Others set up their own schools of interpretation. One line of transmission, however, (at Taiseki-ji) became radically different from anything else in Nichiren Buddhism.

After Nikko's death his followers split into eight sub-sects. There was no single spiritual centre like Mount Minobu about which they could gather, so the first quarrel among them was whether or not Nikko had intended to set up a new *kaidan* at Mount Fuji — and if so, where? As long as Nikko was alive he had directed his movement from Hommon-ji at Kitayama (Omosu), where he had spent the last 42 years of his life. This temple naturally considered itself the rightful heir to the leadership of the Nikko branch, but its claim was rejected by Taiseki-ji, the first temple he had built, and by the Nanjo family who had paid for it. Most of the branch members were accustomed to looking to Hommon-ji for leadership, however, and continued to do so. The claim of Taiseki-ji was further weakened when Nichigo, one of the most dynamic leaders of the branch but not a member of the Nanjo clan, claimed he had been willed the temple by the second high priest. The Nanjos objected and drove him from the premises. Nichigo went to Awa Province, where he built a temple of his own, naming it Myohon-ji, and founded his own sub-sect. From there he and his successors continued to press their claim.

In the seventeenth century most of the Nikko branch temples were able to come to an agreement among themselves, but Taiseki-ji remained aloof. By then it had developed distinctive doctrinal characteristics which set it apart from the others. Late in the nineteenth century Hommon-ji, Taiseki-ji, and other Nikko branch temples attempted to merge, calling themselves the Hommon Sect. Leadership was rotated among the several head temples. The merger was short-lived, however, and by 1900 Taiseki-ji had withdrawn, naming itself the Fuji branch. In 1913, the Fuji branch renamed itself Nichiren Shoshu ('Orthodox Nichiren Sect'), stressing its distinction from any other branch of Nichiren Buddhism.

Hommon-ji, on the other hand, still saw itself as the true transmitter of Nikko's teachings. Since these teachings were basically the same as those being taught by the majority of Nichiren Buddhists, it merged with the Nichiren sect of Minobu in 1941 after some prodding from the government, which was having problems controlling the independent-minded Nichirenites. In this way, Nikko's long self-imposed exile from Mount Minobu was brought to a happy conclusion, and the most intransigent of Nichiren's six Senior Disciples was symbolically returned to the fold.

Chapter 12

Nichiren Shu: the Nichiren Order

When Nikko departed from Mount Minobu to establish his own branch sect, the other Senior Disciples do not seem to have been too concerned. They probably considered the whole incident nothing more than a personal falling-out between Nikko and Lord Nambu Hakiri. Eleven years passed before they made any effort to patch things up with their dissident brother, and that was only after they learned that Nikko had been criticizing them.

Why the long delay? Because their late master had put so much stress on unity, they were unwilling to believe that a breach had occurred so soon. It was unthinkable! If Nikko had a grievance, he could have come to them and discussed the matter. At a time when the other Disciples were suffering from official abuse at Kamakura or setting off on long missionary journeys, Nikko did not stir from his comfortable quarters at Omosu. He could have made the annual trip to Minobu to pay his respects at the founder's grave, since he lived closer by than any of them except for Sado Ajari Niko, who by then had settled down as the permanent chief abbot of Kuon-ji temple. He did not do that, either. Obviously Nikko did not want to see his old friends any more. According to Buddhist protocol, he should have taken any grievance to the oldest Disciple, Nissho. He made no effort to do so. Instead it was Nissho who sent his nephew Nichiro, the second in seniority, to Nikko in Omosu in a vain attempt to settle the differences.

Ben Ajari Nissho (1236–1323), the oldest of the six Senior Disciples, was a gentle man who would have preferred a life of scholarship to vigorous missionary activity. He had known Nichiren since their student days on Mount Hiei, and he was the first ordained monk to be converted. Although he was senior to Nichiren at Mount Hiei, he became his disciple back in the early days of street preaching in

Kamakura (1253). After Nichiren's death the Hojo Regency regarded Nissho as the leader of the despised Nichiren movement, and subjected him to continual abuse. He responded in the style of Never-Despising Bodhisattva (Fukyo), who used to bow to his persecutors, saying, 'I cannot despise you, for you will all become Buddhas.' For this reason he was nick-named Fukyo-in, 'Never-Despising'.

On the third anniversary of Nichiren's death (1284: third anniversary by Buddhist liturgical reckoning), Nissho presented the Kamakura dictatorship with a revised copy of Nichiren's 'Establish the Right Law and Save Our Country'. In the original version, which had earned Nichiren banishment to the Izu Peninsula, the author had criticized only the Nembutsu sects. Nissho's revised version attacked Tendai and Shingon esotericism as well, and its presentation provoked a storm which almost cost him his life. An angry mob gathered outside his house and threatened to burn it to the ground. He pacified the mob by saying that Nichiren had been a loyal Tendai priest, who only wanted to reform the Tendai sect.

Nissho seems to have clung to the hope that one day Tendai would accept Nichiren as its greatest champion. He personified the conservative wing of Nichiren Buddhism, deeply rooted in the Tendai philosophy taught on Mount Hiei. His school of thought, known as the Hama school after its original location in Hamado, Kamakura, maintained friendly ties with Mount Hiei for a long time, and in future years many of its clergy went there to study and even to receive ordination. His spirit of syncretism is found today in modern movements such as Kodo Kyodan and Rissho Kosei-kai.

Daikoku Ajari Nichiro (1243–1320), the second of the six, was a nephew of Nissho. He is called 'the beloved disciple', and there are many stories of his devotion to Nichiren. When the founder was shipped off on his first exile, the young Nichiro dashed into the water and attempted to hold back the boat. A soldier beat his hands with an oar, breaking one hand, and leaving him semi-crippled for life. At the time of the second exile Nichiro was thrown into a dungeon at Kamakura. Nichiren praised him for his courage, and wrote to encourage him. 'I, Nichiren, am leaving tomorrow for the Province of Sado. It is cold tonight. You, confined to the dungeon, must really be suffering from the cold. I do feel sorry for you. You are reading the Lotus Sutra with both your mind and body. Therefore you will be able to save not only your parents and relatives, but also all other living beings . . . Nothing will happen to you. When you are released, come and see me as soon as you can. I shall be delighted to see you again' (*Tsuchiro-gosho, Showa-teihon*, 509).

But Nichiro could not wait for a legal release. He became so popular with the jailer that the latter agreed to cover up for him while Nichiro travelled to Sado to see his master. He made the journey, but when Nichiren learned of the circumstances, he ordered his beloved disciple

to return to prison rather than risk the life of the good-hearted jailer. Nichiro reluctantly did so. When at last the order came through releasing Nichiren and all his disciples, Nichiro wanted to be the one to carry the good news to Sado. This second journey almost cost him his life. He collapsed just short of his goal and might have frozen to death had he not been found lying in the snow. His trip to Sado was depicted by the artist Ando Hiroshige in one of his masterpieces, 'Nichiro in the snow on Sado'.[58]

In 1260 a poor Samurai named Hiki Yoshimoto donated part of his residence at Hikigayatsu, Kamakura, to the disciples for use as a lecture hall. When Nichiren returned from Sado in 1274 he decided to remodel it into a temple called Myohon-ji, and put Nichiro in charge there. Later he sent Nichiro to Ikegami under similar circumstances, to establish what was eventually to become Hommon-ji, one of the Head Temples (*Reiseki*) of the Nichiren Order and today the administrative headquarters. Nichiren died there in 1282.[59]

Nichiro was an active missionary, and trained numerous disciples, who spread the faith in every direction. He personally prepared young Nichizo (Ryuge) for the task Nichiren had assigned him: to convert the royal family at Kyoto. Eight of his other disciples became famous in their own right. Some of them founded branches of their own and began to expound the *Shoretsu* theory, which we shall discuss below. He seems to have encouraged his disciples to develop their own personalities, and made no effort to mould them into carbon copies of himself. During the last two years of his long and fruitful life, he retired to Ikegami to die where his master had. Nichiro's school was known originally as the Hikigayatsu School, after its original centre in Kamakura, and later as the Ikegami School. Ikegami is on the outskirts of Tokyo, and when the political power eventually shifted from Kamakura to Tokyo, Hommon-ji at Ikegami became the most important Nichiren temple in the country.

The third disciple in order of seniority was Nikko, already mentioned. Then came his rival at Minobu, Sado Ajari Niko. Like the first two Senior Disciples, he was a native of Nichiren's home area of Chiba. He had been a monk since the age of nine and a disciple of Nichiren since he was 12. He was with Nichiren when their party was attacked by soldiers of Lord Tojo Kagenobu in the pine forest. After fleeing the area, they found shelter with a friendly provincial lord, Saito.

When Nichiren arrived in the vicinity, a retainer of Saito named Sumisa had a dream in which the Bodhisattva Kannon appeared to him and announced the arrival of the saviour of the world. He immediately sought out Nichiren and brought him to the home of his liege lord Saito. Saito, in turn, was impressed by Nichiren, and offered to build him a temple. Nichiren accepted the offer, but as it was his custom in those days to keep moving from one place to another, he soon departed, leaving Niko behind to take charge of it.

The temple was named Sogen-ji, and it became Niko's permanent assignment. So it was that when Nichiren was condemned to death, and Nichiro and others were thrown into prison, Niko was safe in his little country temple. When he learned what had happened, however, he rushed to join his master in exile on Sado Island. This is why he was known later as the Sado Master (Sado Ajari).

When Nichiren went to Minobu, Niko returned to Sogen-ji to continue his work there. He never forgot his first temple, and even after he had become chief abbot at Mount Minobu, he made frequent trips back to Sogen-ji. Today Sogen-ji is called the 'Eastern Mount Minobu', because the services at the two temples, while differing in details from those at other Nichiren temples, are the same in both places. Sogen-ji, which is built in an Indian style and is a short distance from Tokyo, is now a popular tourist attraction. Niko lies buried there, not at Minobu, with which his name is always associated. There is also a permanently sealed cave on the premises, which is said to contain some original writings of Nichiren, but since no one is permitted to break the seal, we will never know.[60] Niko's branch is known as the Minobu school.

Iyo Ajari Nitcho (1252–1317), the fifth Senior Disciple, was the son of Lord Iyo in Shizuoka Prefecture. He was ordained, however, at Guho-ji in Chiba. In 1274 the temple converted to Nichiren, who put Nitcho in charge. There he remained until 1302, when he had a disagreement with his adoptive father, Toki Jonin. He left abruptly, returning home to Iyo to hold memorial services for his natural father. He joined Nikko at Omosu, which was not far away, and stayed with him until his death 16 years later.

Renge Ajari Nichiji (1250–?1305) was the most energetic missionary of the six. For centuries much of his life has been shrouded in mystery, and only in recent times did it begin to come to light. He was born the second son of a Hojo Samurai, the lord of a village named Matsuno. He entered the Tendai noviciate as a boy, studying at Jisso-ji, the same temple where his older schoolmate Nikko had met Nichiren. The chief priest was sympathetic towards Nichiren, and made no objection when Nikko left to become a disciple. A few years later he too converted, taking the name Nichigen and bringing the temple with him. Nichiji and his whole family became Nichiren Buddhists at about this time.

Nichiji began his career the easy way, as priest-in-charge of a temple built for him by his wealthy family. However, he was the son of a Samurai and had the Samurai spirit, constantly setting himself challenges to overcome. He was a skilled calligrapher and artist, and when the founder died, he promised to complete a statue of him within seven years. He did so, and the image can be seen today at Ikegami Hommon-ji in Tokyo.

On the thirteenth anniversary of Nichiren's death he went to Mount Minobu for the memorial service, and made a new vow before the founder's tomb. He would carry the faith to distant lands where it was

still unknown. In 1295 he turned over his temple to his leading disciple and set forth on his journeys. He walked all the way to the far north of Honshu, the main island of Japan, and lived for a while at the home of a fisherman. Then he crossed over to the northernmost island of Hokkaido, where Buddhism had hardly penetrated. He preached for a while to the Ainu tribesmen, and then set sail for Siberia in 1298. At this point he disappeared from history.

Only in this century was his trail uncovered. In 1936 a Japanese tourist in Manchuria purchased a silver-coated incense case from a Chinese antique shop. Three poems in Chinese characters were inscribed on the case. All of them spoke of homesickness. To his surprise, the buyer saw that one of them mentioned 'my teacher Nichiren Shonin'. An investigation was begun. The incense case, it was found, had been stolen from a Chinese Buddhist temple in Hsuan-hua near the Sino-Mongolian border about 600 kilometres north-west of Peking. The temple, called Li-hua, had been founded by a Japanese priest, who had toured northern China and Mongolia in the fourteenth century. Li-hua means a mandarin orange — the family crest of Nichiren. The inscription read:

> It is not clear whether awake or asleep, real or imaginary,
> I just dreamed a scene of coming back to my home at Matsuno,
> Joining the retinue of my teacher Nichiren Shonin.
> In the dream I had on my sick bed, I returned to the old days twenty years ago;
> I was bathed in tears as I remembered my parents and my brothers.

Nichiji had been found at last. Many Japanese monks had gone to China to study; he is the first one ever to go abroad as a missionary. 'The sun of Buddhism,' Nichiren had said, 'is rising in the east and will shine over the west.' Nichiji, unique in Japanese Buddhism until the twentieth century, had put this maxim into practice, carrying the word from the East to the West. Today he is revered as the patron saint of Nichiren Buddhist foreign missions.

Before leaving this first generation of Nichiren's immediate disciples, there is one other who should be mentioned. He was not a priest, but a layman — Toki Jonin. Toki had been a rock of refuge for Nichiren almost since the beginning. He had opened his home in Shimosa Province for the protection of persecuted believers, and had converted it into an important Nichiren centre. He was a devout man, a *nyudo* (a layman who had taken religious vows but had not abandoned his family obligations). The Hojo regency distrusted him, and once had him, Shijo Kingo, and Ota Jomyo — the three most prominent lay

believers in the area — brought in for questioning.

Because he was exceptionally learned, Toki received some of Nichiren's most important epistles. He treasured these letters, and made it a point to preserve them. Later he made an effort to collect copies of all of the founder's writings, carefully cataloguing them for future generations. In his will he specified that these documents were never to be removed from the archives of his family temple, and there they have remained to this day (*Nichiren Shu News*, No. 30).

Three temples in the area became the nucleus of what was later called the Nakayama school. They were Mama Guho-ji, a former Tendai temple which Nichiren put under the direction of the Senior Disciple Nitcho; Nakayama Hommyo-ji, formerly the residence of Ota Jomyo; and Wakamiya Hokke-ji, the family temple of Toki Jonin. Ota Jomyo's son Nikko (not the same as the Senior Disciple Nikko) served as chief priest of the latter two temples, which eventually merged into one entity called Hokekyo-ji, which has been one of the most important Nichiren centres ever since.

The natural leader of the group was Toki Jonin. After Nichiren's death, Toki decided to ordain himself as a monk, taking the name Nichijo. Few people had enjoyed Nichiren's confidence as much as he, and to none had Nichiren entrusted more important documents. Had he already been a monk prior to Nichiren's death, he certainly would have been appointed one of the six Senior Disciples, perhaps even the leader. Since Nichiren could no longer ordain him personally, Toki Jonin decided to ordain himself.

Such a procedure was not unprecedented, but hitherto had been resorted to only in dire emergencies, when no members of the Sangha were available to perform the ceremony. The appendix to the Lotus Sutra, the 'Sutra of Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue', describes how a self-ordination can be performed. After strenuous spiritual preparation the candidate takes the monastic vows before the invisible but omnipresent Buddha. 'Sakyamuni Buddha! Be now pleased to be my preceptor! Manjusri! Be pleased to be my teacher! Maitreya in the world to come! Be pleased to bestow on me the Law! Buddhas in all directions! Be pleased to bear witness to me! Bodhisattvas of great virtue! Be pleased to be my friends! I now, by means of the profound and mysterious meaning of the Great-vehicle sutras, take refuge in the Buddha, take refuge in the Law, and take refuge in the Sangha' (*Threefold Lotus Sutra* 367–8).

Toki's step-son Nitcho, a properly ordained Tendai monk, must have been shocked that Toki would resort to a self-ordination when he, one of the six Senior Disciples, was available to administer the oaths. On the other hand, Toki, raised in the strict Confucian ethic that a father (or stepfather) is always superior to a son, could not possibly lower himself to be ordained by his stepson. Relying on the special relation he had with Nichiren, he turned directly to the Buddha. This is probably the

reason for the break between Toki Jonin and Nitcho.

The Nakayama school, which began as a self-consecrated body of well-to-do laymen, turned out to be one of the most aggressive and successful branches of Nichiren Buddhism. During the medieval period it was scorned by the other branches as unauthorized by Nichiren, but it made up in zeal and scholarship for what it lacked in legitimacy. It developed an esoteric tradition of its own, which today continues to cast its spell far beyond the borders of its own school. Nichiren priests, who seek special spiritual insights, resort to Nakayama for special training. There they undergo a strenuous 100-day programme designed to open their inner eye. The successful candidates emerge exhausted but radiant, and are greeted by crowds of well-wishers seeking their blessings. The graduates, who form a special class of iluminati, are authorized to perform rites of healing and spiritual succour. Laymen and laywomen also resort to Nakayama when they seek mystical illumination.

With the passing of the first generation of Nichiren's followers, the movement was flourishing but still small. There were five separate adminstrative bodies:

1. The Minobu school of Niko.
2. The Fuji school of Nikko.
3. The Hama school of Nissho.
4. The Ikegami school of Nichiro.
5. The Nakayama school of Toki Jonin (Nichijo).

There were also some independent temples founded by other direct disciples of Nichiren.

It could still not be called a major religious movement, each of the five centres being dependent on the benevolence of local feudal lords who wanted to dicate policy. The temples tended to be clan temples for the Samurai families who paid for them. Minobu was controlled by Lord Hakiri, who ousted Nikko and replaced him with Niko. The Fuji school was sub-divided between the Nanjo family (Taiseki-ji) and the Ishikawa family (Hommon-ji). The Nakayama School was dominated by the Chiba clan. The Ikegami, Kano, and other families were influential in the Ikegami School. Lacking state support, early Nichiren Buddhism was dependent entirely on the few feudal families who were willing to sponsor it for reasons of their own. All of this was changed dramatically by the efforts of one man, Ryuge-in Nichizo.

Ryuge was six years old when he first met Nichiren, and he served him as a page boy for the next seven years. When he was 13 he was summoned by the dying Nichiren, who took his hands in both of his, looked him straight in the eye, and made him promise that one day he would go to Kyoto and convert the Imperial Family.

Ryuge never forgot that solemn moment. He trained for his assign-

ment like an athlete, spiritually under the tutorage of Nichiro and physically by hours of exercise on the beach. To gain skill of hand and mind he copied the entire Sutra in letters half the size of a grain of rice. This extraordinary book, only 4 cm wide and 158 cm long, is preserved today at Myoken-ji in Kyoto. By the time he was 27 Ryuge felt ready to go, but only after he had retired for 100 days of yet more rigorous self-discipline.

He arrived in Kyoto for the first time in 1294 and began to preach on the street outside the palace walls. Three times he was expelled from the city, and three times he returned. In 1307 he was sentenced to three years of exile in Toda Province on the Island of Shikoku. Always he came back, and gradually he began to make progress. In 1321 he was allowed to settle in Kyoto and build Myoken-ji outside the palace moat.

The political situation was changing. The Hojos were losing their grip, and the Imperial Family was eager to get back into power. Most of the Buddhist clergy still trembled before Hojo authority, but not Ryuge. When the Emperor Godaigo, himself a victim of Hojo power and an exile in the Sea of Japan, requested the clergy to pray for his eventual victory and return from exile, none did so except Ryuge. In 1333 the Hojo Regency fell, the Emperor returned, and Ryuge, the thrice-rejected, found himself a hero. It had taken him 40 years, but he had succeeded. In gratitude, the Emperor ordered Myoken-ji designated an Imperial Temple for the royal family.

In 1340 Ryuge-in Nichizo died in Kyoto at the age of 74, just 58 years after the death of Nichiren. He was succeeded by Daikaku Myojitsu, an aristocratic scion of a prominent family at court. Daikaku had been converted by Ryuge at the age of 17, had shared in his trials, and now shared in his triumph. Partly because of his high social position and partly because of his own missionary zeal, he was able to carry the cause further yet.

In 1358 after a prolonged period of drought, he was asked to pray for rain. Daikaku did so, and Kyoto was deluged with rain for the next 24 hours. In gratitude, the Emperor Gokogen officially gave Nichiro and Ryuge Nichizo the title of Bodhisattva, and named Nichiren, Great Bodhisattva. Daikaku also did not go without honours. He was designated Chief Abbot of the Nichiren sect. He was the first Nichiren priest given a high rank by Imperial command.

Once Ryuge Nichizo had paved the way, other Nichiren preachers began to arrive in the capital, where they generally found a warm welcome. Since they came from no single centre, they set up a number of head temples to form new branches under their temples at the capital. No sooner had the Hojos fallen than the Nikko branch sent a delegation of three evangelists. One died *en route*, one returned home, but the third, Nichizon, stayed to found his own branch under its own head temple. Toki Jonin's group was also soon well represented in town, where it established its own head temple, Honkoku-ji.

By 1400 Nichiren temples had sprung up all over Kyoto, outnumbering all other sects except Zen, which was favoured by the military shoguns. The head temples established subordinate temples, which owed them strict obedience. Sometimes doctrinal differences within a group caused a break-away and the establishment of a new head temple. The various sub-sects were administratively independent, but met together in council to solve common problems (Itohisa, *Osaki Gakuho*, No. 140).

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries Nichiren Buddhism spread not only in the capital but throughout the country. It ceased to be the religion of a few big landowners, and extended its membership among all classes of society: court aristocrats, Samurai, merchants, and peasants. It was propagated by zealous missionaries, who were frequently willing to risk their lives for the cause: to establish the Pure Land of the Buddha on this earth. As its influence in the capital increased, that of the Tendai sect declined. And as the Tendai sect declined, it began to resort to force to hang on to its ancient privileges.

Nichiren Buddhism might have eventually dominated the capital and the surrounding country were it not that the political situation was still inimical. The Hojo regents were gone, and once more the Emperor ruled from his ancient capital of Kyoto. The Imperial House and Nichiren Buddhism were natural allies, sharing a dream for a united Japan. But, alas! it remained a dream. Real power belonged not to the Emperor, but to new shoguns, the Ashikaga (1333–1568), who established their residence in the Muromachi district of Kyoto. For this reason the troubled period which followed the Kamakura period is called the Ashikaga or Muromachi period.

It was a time of near anarchy. The Shoguns were strong enough to control the Emperor, but not strong enough to dominate the country or, at times, even to defend the capital city. Like most Samurai, the Ashikagas preferred the austere Zen imported from China. Indeed, Zen monks with connections in China played an important role in international trade, and the Ashikagas were quick to benefit from it. Nichiren Buddhism, on the other hand, had nothing to offer them except possible national union under the Emperor, which they certainly did not want. They preferred to control the Emperor, themselves.

Dale Saunders writes in *Buddhism in Japan* (238):

> The Ashikaga period was one of great disturbance and at the same time of remarkable artistic production. In a period when war and rebellion were the order of the day, land and wealth were for those who could hold them. Hence it is from this time that the rise of masculine prerogative dates and, in contrast to Fujiwara times, the subordination of women.

Public order and morality sank to such a low point that even some of the great Buddhist monasteries, traditional centres of pacificism, became fortresses complete with soldier-monks. Mount Hiei, so close to the capital, became especially powerful and troublesome. The armed Tendai monks at Mount Hiei grew increasingly jealous and resentful of Nichiren Buddhism, which they regarded as a schism from their own authority. They did not hesitate to come storming into town and burn down any Nichiren temple which dared to defy them. In 1536 Tendai soldier-monks, with reinforcements from Shin Shu, Shingon, and other armed temples, burned all 21 Nichiren head temples in the city. This rampage was accompanied by great slaughter, for by then the majority of the citizens of the capital were Nichiren Buddhists, who had been looking forward to the end of the old social order and the establishment of the Buddha-land in this *Saha*-world.

The Shoguns, who permitted such outrages, used the Tendai soldier-monks to their own purposes — to help keep the Nichiren Buddhists in line. The result is that while Nichiren Buddhism came to enjoy great prestige, it never knew safety. This is illustrated by the careers of two men of the times.

Gatsumyo (1386–1440) was the son of a prime minister, which made him just the kind of Nichiren leader whom the Tendai monks did not want to have around. He was a successor to Ryuge Nichizo at Myoken-ji. The Tendai soldier-monks had already destroyed this temple once, in 1387; it was rebuilt in 1398. With the election of Gatsumyo as chief abbot in 1413, the Tendai solider-monks stormed into town again and burned the great temple to the ground. Gatsumyo had to flee for his life. He went out into the country and became a wandering missionary for eight years until influential friends in Kyoto could assure him that it was safe to return. Some wealthy merchants in Kyoto and Osaka promised to pay for a new temple. In 1421 Gatsumyo came back and supervised the erection of a new temple, where he spent the rest of his life under the ever-watchful eye of Mount Hiei.

Even more extraordinary is the story of Nisshin Nabekamuri, the 'pot-wearer' (1407–88). A representative of Toki Jonin's Nakayama School, he arrived in Kyoto at the age of 22, and promptly set to work writing a thesis in imitation of Nichiren's, which he called, 'Establish the Right Law and Rule the Country'. When he finished it he presented it to Shogun Ashikaga Yoshinori, which was a mistake. The Shogun had once been an ordained monk on Mount Hiei, and had inherited a bitter hatred for Nichiren Buddhism. He decided to break Nisshin for his impertinence. The young priest was arrested and tortured. Nisshin was not tortured only once, but daily for two years. The Shogun took a perverse delight in watching the sufferings of the priest; he supervised the daily tortures by fire, rack, sword, and whatever else he could think of. Nothing would make Nisshin stop chanting, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. Finally the Shogun ordered that a metal pot be jammed over his head

to keep him quiet, but from underneath the pot could still be heard, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*! *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*!

Nisshin's ordeal might have continued indefinitely had not the cruel Shogun been assassinated one day while watching a theatrical performance. Nisshin was released, and the pot was removed from his head. He rebuilt his temple, which had been destroyed, took up his drum, and went back to the street corners to chant, *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*! *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*! Never one to avoid a challenge, he is said to have triumphed in 60 religious debates in the course of his 65-year career.

Debates took place among the Nichiren believers, too. There were two tendencies constantly at odds. One was conservative, seeking alliances with the court or Samurai nobility; the other was aggressive, pressing for a pure form of Nichiren Buddhism at any cost. This sometimes set juniors against their seniors and resulted in the formation of new sects. During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries a number of them appeared, and most of them exist to this day. All of them emphasized the uniqueness of Nichiren Buddhism and the necessity for aggressive propagation. They include the Manifest Dharma-Flower sect (*Kempon Hokke-shu*), founded by Nichiju in 1384; Dharma-Flower sect, Jin branch (*Hokke-shu Jin Monryu*), founded by Nichijin in 1406; Dharma-Flower sect, Original branch (*Hokke-shu Hon Monryu*), founded by Nichiryu in 1423; and Dharma-Flower sect, Shin branch (*Hokke-shu Shin Monryu*), founded by Nisshin in 1488.

Of course, all of these bodies consider themselves orthodox, and none called itself a 'sect' until modern times. Previously they were known as 'branches' of the same faith. However, after the Meiji Restoration, the Imperial Japanese government found it easier to deal with centrally organized religious bodies than with independent 'branches'. They were ordered to unite for administrative purposes. The great majority gathered around Minobu to form the 'Nichiren sect' (*Nichiren-shu*). The former Nikko branch became the Hommon Shu, while the other branches took on various new names. In 1940 the government decreed that all religious organizations with less than 50 established places of worship must either shut up shop or join a larger body. Hommon Shu merged with the Nichiren Sect the following year. Taiseki-ji was excepted, however, for it had already withdrawn from Hommon Shu (1900) and named itself Nichiren Shoshu (1912). At the end of World War II and the promulgation of religious freedom, the various sub-sects reorganized once more and gave themselves new names.[61]

Nichiren laity as well as clergy sometimes had to put their lives on the line. In 1435, after a noisy public debate between two Nichiren priests and a Tendai priest, the military governor of Kamakura ordered all 16 Nichiren temples in the city to be destroyed, all Samurai members to have their properties confiscated, and all commoners to cease

chanting the Sacred Title under pain of death. When dozens and then hundreds of chanting people began to present themselves at the palace for voluntary execution, he was so impressed by their courage that he rescinded his order, promising to build them a new hall instead. They were the kind of people he wanted on his side.

Nichiren priests were constantly demanding public debates, but the results were not always what they might have desired. In 1579 over a hundred representatives of Nichiren Buddhism gathered at the castle of the powerful feudal lord Oda Nobunaga to debate with proponents of the Pure Land (*Jodo*) sect. The cards were stacked against them, however, for Nobunaga was himself a member of the *Jodo* sect, which until his time had enjoyed no social prestige. Presiding at the debate was the chief abbot of an important Zen temple. When the presiding judge ruled in favour of the Pure Land disputants, Nobunaga had the three leading Nichiren priests taken out and executed.

Oda Nobunaga, the warlord who finally began to bring the divided country under one iron fist, took even worse vengeance on the warrior monks of Mount Hiei. He utterly destroyed the venerable monastic centre and killed every monk, whether he bore arms or not. To counter the political power of the large Buddhist sects he encouraged the expansion of the newly introduced Christianity as well as his own hitherto insignificant sect of *Jodo*. Tendai, Jodo Shinshu, and Nichiren Buddhism all felt his wrath. Esotericism fell victim to his successor, Hideyoshi. By 1600 the independent power of the great Buddhist establishments was broken. Tokugawa Ieyasu, the successor to Hideyoshi, completed bringing them all into line and making them departments of the state.

The Nichiren Buddhists were the last to give up. In 1608 a large group of them under Jorakuin Nikkyo, chief priest of Myoman-ji in Kyoto, gathered at the Tokugawa castle in Edo (Tokyo) for a debate with Jodo Shinshu leaders. The night before the scheduled event Nikkyo and his party were attacked and beaten by unknown assailants. The next day they did poorly in the debate. Tokugawa Ieyasu ordered their noses and ears cut off, and all dissemination of Nichiren Buddhism to cease at once. Nichion, chief priest at Kuon-ji, Mount Minobu, resolutely refused to obey the order. Ieyasu, who was not a man to be trifled with, ordered him to be arrested and put to death by crucifixion.

At this point a remarkable woman entered the story and saved the day. She was Lady Oman-no-Kata, one of Ieyasu's concubines and the mother of two of his sons. She came from a large family of Nichiren Buddhists; in fact, her father, an aristocrat who found himself on the losing side in the civil wars, had retired from the world to become a Nichiren priest. Lady Oman had had to live by her wits since she was 14.

When she heard what was about to happen to Nichion, she prepared to commit suicide. She allowed her two little boys, aged six and seven, to watch her preparations, and then sent them to their father with a

message: at the moment Nichion was crucified, she would take her own life. Ieyasu was so moved by the tears of his two sons and the determination of his mistress that he countermanded his order, and Nichion was spared.

Although Nichion was freed from prison, he did not want to return to Mount Minobu, where he might still be prevented from spreading the gospel of Nichiren. Instead he built himself a small hut by the Fuji River, and took up his preaching from there. When Lady Oman heard of this she began what was to become a lifelong career of Nichiren philanthropy. She built Nichion a fine temple to replace his hut, and continued building temples and endowing Nichiren causes until the day she died 44 years later. She was Nichiren Buddhism's greatest benefactor.

She is remembered today primarily as the lady who broke the sexual barrier. Nichiren had said that the liberation of women was the primary doctrine of the *Dharma Flower*, which Lady Oman knew perfectly well, but the status of women had changed for the worse since Nichiren's days. Once when she was visiting Mount Minobu, she expressed the desire to climb the neighbouring Mount Shichimen, but was told that no woman was permitted to climb the sacred mountain. Lady Oman was not to be put off so easily, and asked permission to visit the waterfall at the foot of the mountain. This was granted, but once she arrived at the waterfall, she bathed herself there according to the traditional purification ritual. Then up the mountain she went — the first woman ever to do so. This was the first of her three ascents. She climbed the mountain the last time when she was 74 years old.

Today the climb up Mount Shichimen is a popular expedition for plilgrims of both sexes, who wind up and down the footpaths as they chant the Sacred Title to the beat of hand-drums. They are dressed in sandals, white trousers, and white kimono-like shirts inscribed, 'Namu Myoho Renge Kyo'. Those not beating drums carry staffs. At the foot of the ascent by the waterfall is a statue of Lady Oman dressed in the same costume (*Minobusan Kuon-ji*, 23).

Nichiren Buddhism no longer faced persecution, but instead had to deal with just the opposite danger: a life of ease and acceptance. This was exactly the offer which had been made to the founder when he was recalled from his exile on Sado, but now it came from wealthy patrons closely tied to the all-powerful Tokugawa regime. Every Nichiren Buddhist knew how the founder had responded when tempted with the same sort of compromise: he had withdrawn to Mount Minobu, and had neither received support from nor given support to non-believers, no matter how exalted their rank. This came to be called the principle of *Fujufuse*, 'not-receive-not-give'. What it really involved was freedom from government control.

Most Nichiren Buddhists believed in this principle. Troubles came, however, when the government commanded interdenominational

prayer services. Nichiren priests would beg to be excused on the grounds that such services were forbidden by their religion. The relatively weak Ashikaga Shogunate had always acceeded to the request. The oldest extant document of the government's approving such an appeal is dated 1492, and it mentions that the Nichiren Buddhists were excused 'according to precedents'. In other words, this had been going on a long time by then. The same appeal was granted in 1571, 1572, 1577, and 1589.

In 1595, however, the victorious Hideyoshi made it plain that he would make no exceptions; he expected to bring the great religious orders to heel, and that meant all of them. The Nichiren clergy of Kyoto met to discuss the situation, and decided to obey the government order. Only one chief priest, objected — Kyoei Nichio. On the day of the ceremony he arose before dawn, retired to the country, and went into seclusion.

Hideyoshi died in 1598, and was succeeded by the even more powerful Tokugawa Ieyasu. In 1600 he sentenced Kyoei Nichio to exile on Tsushima Island. Nichiren Buddhists, who were well aware of the harsh measures being taken against them everywhere (mutilations and executions were not uncommon), tended to sympathize with Kyoei Nichio. In 1612, thanks to the influence of important people at the Shogunate, they were able to get him pardoned. Nichio returned to Kyoto and engaged in spirited debates with his brethren who had given in. He was the man of the hour, and the *Fujufuse* movement spread rapidly, much to the embarrassment of the accommodating head temples.

In 1623 the government legalized *Fujufuse*, and it seemed that the battle had been won. By the middle of the seventeenth century at least half the Nichiren temples supported the principle.

However, by then there were many important personages, such as Lady Oman and her relatives, sponsoring the bigger and wealthier temples. It was people like them, not outsiders, who brought the movement down. In 1665 the government, as part of its plan to control all religious properties, declared that temples which possessed government-granted land must report it to the Shogunate. Accommodating clergy saw this as an opportunity to get rid of the troublesome *Fujufuse* members. They convinced the government to word the decree so that it specified that the government had granted these lands 'for worship'. In other words, the *Fujufuse* priests would have to admit that they had accepted what they could not accept: government support.

Christianity had been forbidden in 1638, and Buddhism was now the state religion. Every citizen had to be able to prove that he belonged to some Buddhist temple. The priests, on their part, were authorized to grant certificates of membership, which meant in effect certificates of citizenship. *Fujufuse* priests were now forbidden to grant certificates. This meant that their parishioners became outlaws; they were beyond

the protection of the law and had no rights to either property or life.

The *Fujufuse* believers were treated with the same severity as the Christians had been a few years earlier: they were hunted down and wiped out. They survived, however, just as Christians did, by going 'underground'. They would register at a government-approved temple, but secretly maintain their cherished faith from generation to generation, generally being careful to marry within their own group.

The last great hero of the movement was Nichiko, who was hounded from place to place until he was hidden by a sympathetic baron. There he wrote volumes of commentaries on Nichiren and the Sutra. When he had completed them, he went out into the world again to face his opponents in open debates. He died in 1698 at the age of 73, and his body was exposed to the elements as if he were a common criminal. *Fujufuse* seemed to be over. It was not dead, however, and in 1876, nearly two centuries after the death of Nichiko and the fall of the Tokugawa Shogunate in 1868, the 'Nichiren Shu: Fujufuse Branch' came out of hiding and was formally granted the right to exist.

The *Fujufuse* controversy of the seventeenth century was a great tragedy for Nichiren Buddhism; it pit brother against brother, and resulted in victory for those who would support the status quo. Nichiren Buddhism settled down into the same dull complacency which gripped the whole of Japanese Buddhism during the two and a half centuries of Tokugawa rule. It was jolted awake only by the opening of Japan by Commodore Perry, the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate, and the Meiji Restoration, all of which took place in rapid succession. In 1868 Buddhism was rudely disestablished and replaced by State Shinto. Buddhism, which had dozed for two and a half centuries under the shade of the Shogunate, was suddenly the symbol of everything that was old-fashioned and backward. It was the object of scorn and even violence. Japan rushed to catch up with the West. Buddhism had to adapt to the new world or perish.

Shinto became the state religion in 1870, and anti-Buddhist violence peaked around 1871. Then Japanese Buddhism caught its breath and began to get back on its feet. In 1889 a new constitution was promulgated guaranteeing a limited freedom of religion. 'Japanese subjects shall, within limits not prejudicial to peace and order, and not antagonistic to their duties as subjects, enjoy freedom of religious beliefs' (Article 28). State Shinto remained the officially established religion, however, and all others had to say prayers for its divine head, the Emperor. However, the worst crisis had passed, although the challenges of accommodation to a totalitarian state and adaption to the modern world were barely beginning.

Today the term *Nichiren-shu* (Nichiren Sect or Order) means the federation of four of the original five schools and parts of the fifth — one major branch of the Fuji School of Nikko being excluded. The reform movements from the medieval period, generally calling them-

selves, 'Hokke' ('Dharma Flower'), are also excluded, as are some smaller groups, most of which arose after the Second World War. Nichiren Shu makes the greatly exaggerated claim of 'over five million members' (*The Nichiren Shu* 9), maintains all the historic temples associated with the life of the founder, has over 5,300 temples and churches (about 70 per cent of all Nichiren temples), including 15 in America, and over 8,000 clergy. Its spiritual centre is Kuon-ji on Mount Minobu; the administrative centre is at Ikegami Hommon-ji, Tokyo. It also manages Rissho University in Tokyo, the world centre for Nichiren Buddhist scholarship. Its branch in the United States and Canada is called the Nichiren Buddhist Order of America.

Nichiren Shu could be said to represent a centrist position in Nichiren Buddhism. It accepts the whole of the *Dharma Flower* and all the teachings of Nichiren. It is a consensus of the various schools developed by Nissho, Nichiro, Toki Jonin, Nichizo, and even some of the disciples of Nikko. It is liberal in that it gives its various branches considerable autonomy, and encourages open scholarship. Not until 1972 did it attempt to create any kind of liturgical uniformity (*Shingyo Hikkei*, iii).

To its left are some syncretistic groups who look upon Nichiren as an exemplar of the spirit of the *Dharma Flower* rather than as their founder and teacher. To its right are purist sects who maintain that they alone have correctly understood the master. Of these, by far the most important is the 'Orthodox Nichiren Sect' founded by Nikko at Taiseki-ji: Nichiren Shoshu.

Chapter 13

Nichiren Shoshu

Nichiren Shoshu can trace its origins back to the first split among Nichiren's Disciples, the departure of Nikko from Mount Minobu in 1289, and the beginning of his temple at Taiseki-ji two years later. Money and land for the temple were donated by Nanjo Tokimitsu, who had been a supporter of Nichiren since youth. Nikko remained there only about a year, however, and then moved two miles away to the village of Omosu. In 1298 he remodelled his hermitage into a temple, which he called (Kitayama) Hommon-ji.[62] This second temple was paid for by several wealthy laymen, but the principal donors, the Ishikawa family, eventually became dominant there and made it their clan temple. Nikko made the Kitayama Hommon-ji the centre of his teaching activities, and there he remained until his death 35 years later.

In 1302 he was joined by Nitcho, the fifth Senior Disciple, who had had a falling-out with his stepfather, Toki Jonin, and had left the temple to which Nichiren had assigned him. Nitcho was the only one of the six who had no success as a missionary. His presence at Omosu, however, meant that two of the six were now together, giving additional ammunition to the Nikko Branch's claim to orthodoxy.

When Nikko died in 1333 at the age of 88, he left six main disciples at Taiseki-ji and six at Hommon-ji, following the example of his master Nichiren. But if Nichiren's transmission to six disciples had caused problems. Nikko's transmission to two sets of six caused even more. Both groups claimed that their temple was the head temple of the Nikko Branch — Taiseki-ji because it had been founded first and Hommon-ji because it had been Nikko's own headquarters. The rivalry degenerated into dynastic squabbles when the landowners began to exercise their authority as chiefs of their respective clans. It was they who chose the chief abbots and dictated temple policies.

Nikko left Nichimoku (1260–1333) in charge at Taiseki-ji when he moved to Hommon-ji. Nichimoku was a nephew of Nanjo Tokimitsu; he survived Nikko by only a few months. The Nanjos then installed another member of their family, Nichido (1283–1341), as chief abbot.

When he learned of the fall of the Hojos in 1333, Nichimoku decided to go to Kyoto to remonstrate with the Emperor. He departed accompanied by two more of Nikko's disciples, Nichigo (1272–1353) and Nichizon (1265–1345). However, he died on the way, and the two disciples completed his mission for him. Nichizon remained in Kyoto, building a temple called Jogyo-in. Nichigo returned to Taiseki-ji with the ashes of Nichimoku, but soon found himself in conflict with the Nanjos. They forced him to leave, but for 70 years his followers continued to press their claim for Taiseki-ji. Nichigo founded a temple of his own in opposition to Taiseki-ji. Nichizon in Kyoto sympathized with him, with the result that the disciples at Taiseki-ji were split three ways. Today the succession at Taiseki-ji is called Nichiren Shoshu, the 'Orthodox Sect of Nichiren'.

The same sort of thing happened at Hommon-ji, where Nikko had left his disciple Nichidai in charge. The influential Ishikawa family preferred Nichimyo, however, and had Nichidai expelled. Nichidai (1294–1394) founded his own temple in Nishiyama, not far away, and gave it the same name, Hommon-ji. The Nikko branch was now split five ways, and these divisions weakened the school as an effective missionary force.

These sub-sects, cut off from the sacred Mount Minobu, from the principal temples in Kyoto, and from each other, were hard-pressed to establish their titles to orthodoxy. The distinctive feature of the Fuji school is its claim that the only true line of descent from Nichiren is via Nikko, the chosen heir. In 1488, two centuries after the death of Nichiren, Nikkyo, a priest at Taiseki-ji, claimed to have discovered two documents written by Nichiren, passing on full authority to Nikko alone (Murano, 'Sokagakkai'). The original documents have disappeared, but 'true copies' are preserved at Taiseki-ji. Other Nichiren bodies ignore them as forgeries.

The first of these documents, called the 'Document for Entrusting the Dharma which Nichiren Propagated throughout His Life', is said to have been written by Nichiren on Mount Minobu in September 1282, a month before his death. It reads, 'I transfer all my Buddhism to Byakuren Ajari Nikko. He should therefore be the great leader for the propagation of true Buddhism. When the sovereign establishes this religion, he should erect the Kaidan of Hommon-ji at the foot of Mount Fuji. All we have to do is await the time. This will be the Ordination Platform of the Original Gate (*Hommon no Kaidan*).'

Needless to say, this document played especially into the hands of the Hommon-ji party since that temple is specifically named, but it says nothing about Taiseki-ji. Since it was written in Chinese, the key phrase could also be interpreted as, 'At Hommon-ji of Mount Fuji the Kaidan

ought to be established,' thus making it more specific yet. In any case, its propagation did nothing to settle the dispute between the two temples.

The second document, called 'Document for Entrusting Mount Minobu', is supposed to have been written by Nichiren on the day he died. It reads, 'I transfer the fifty-year teachings of Shakyamuni to Byakuren Ajari Nikko. He is to be the Chief Abbot of Kuon-ji on Mount Minobu. If anyone, clergy or layman, opposes this, he is no disciple of mine.'

The two documents are contradictory. The second says that all authority is to go to Nikko, who is appointed High Priest at Kuon-ji, Mount Minobu, whereas the first says that the official High Sanctuary (*Kaidan*) is not Mount Minobu, but Hommon-ji at the foot of Mount Fuji. In any case these documents convinced few people, and Nichiren Shoshu, which published them, remained a minor sect right up to the end of World War II, when it had less than 3 per cent of the Nichiren faithful. Its sudden rise to prominence since then has been owing to other causes.

Besides claiming the legitimate succession, Nichiren Shoshu puts forth a claim unique to itself. In 1273 Nichiren had created the Great Mandala (*Omandara*) after describing it in his essay, *Kanjin Honzon Sho*. The Great Mandala, the *Gohonzon*, is one of the Three Great Secret Dharmas and is vital to Nichiren's system. He had sent copies of this mandala to various disciples, and is thought to have inscribed about 130 of them, 125 of which are still extant. His disciples continued the tradition of copying Nichiren's mandalas and giving them to the faithful. Today few Nichiren homes are without one.

Nichiren Shoshu, however, claims that it alone possesses a super-*Gohonzon*, called *Dai-Gohonzon*, which is the one true *Gohonzon*. Furthermore, it is said to be the very embodiment of the life of Nichiren himself — his physical presence, 'the entity of the Person and the Law' (Nichiren Shoshu *Dictionary* 141). It is said that although Nichiren inscribed many *Gohonzons* for different individuals, he inscribed only one 'for all mankind'. He is said to have done this on 12 October 1279, although there is no mention of it in any of Nichiren's extant letters.[63] The Dai-Gohonzon was inscribed on a wooden plank and presented to Nikko, who took it with him from Minobu to Taiseki-ji and then left it behind when he moved to Kitayama Hommon-ji a year later.

This Dai-Gohonzon is the heart of the Nichiren Shoshu religion; it is described as the 'reality' of the god worshipped by Christians, Jews, and Moslems. 'Atheists as well as Christians and Mohammedans can neither hear nor see what they believe to exist,' says Nichiren Shoshu apologist Einosuke Akiya. 'This very "reality" is the *Gohonzon* we, Nichiren Shoshu believers, worship. God is, so to speak, a faint shadow on the frosted glass. I think Christians are anxious to grasp the concrete image of God, but actually they cannot. Their God is embodied in the

Gohonzon. If they believe in the *Gohonzon*, they will find in the *Gohonzon* what they call God. Likewise, Mohammedans can find Allah in the *Gohonzon*' (*Guide to Buddhism* 72–3).

Thus Taiseki-ji has become a very special place. Not only is it the first temple founded by Nikko, the only legitimate successor to Nichiren, but it contains the very 'embodiment' of Nichiren himself. And Nichiren, as we shall see below, is none other than the Eternal Buddha.

Herein lies the basic difference between Nichiren Shoshu and other Nichiren sects. Nichiren Shu, for example, uses the term *Gohonzon* (most sacred source) to mean the transmission of the Dharma from the Original Buddha Shakyamuni to ourselves as Original Disciples, as this is described in the Ceremony in Space and depicted in the Great Mandala.[64] To Nichiren Shoshu, on the other hand, *Gohonzon* means the Mandala itself — not just any mandala, but the one which is inscribed on a plank and enshrined at Taiseki-ji: the Dai-Gonhonzon.[65]

In none of Nichiren's writings does he mention this. Scriptural proof for this doctrine is said to be found in his words, 'I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in *sumi* (ink), so that you may believe with your whole heart' (*Kyo'o-dono Gohenji*). Therefore the ink of the Dai-Gohonzon is the life of Nichiren; and since Nichiren is the Original Buddha, so the Dai-Gonhonzon is the life of the Eternal Original Buddha.

The words, 'I have inscribed my life in *sumi*,' were written in 1273, six years before the supposed inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon. They are taken from a letter to an anxious parent, explaining the meaning of a mandala which Nichiren had sent for her sick child. It was a very personal letter expressing Nichiren's anxiety for the child, and it said nothing about a super-mandala 'for all mankind'.

Non-believers say that first historical reference to the existence of a Dai-Gohonzon was made by Nichiu (1409–82), the ninth High Priest of Taiseki-ji.[66] Nichiu devoted his life to forwarding the claim that his temple was the true mother temple of the Nikko branch. He was a member of the Nanjo family, as were most of the early high priests. All of them were proud of the fact that it had been their ancestor, Nanjo Tokimitsu, who had welcomed Nikko after his departure from Mount Minobu, and at his own expense had built him a temple. But the line of transmission from Nikko was not clear; there were conflicting claimants at Kitayama Hommon-ji, Kyoto Jogyo-in, Nishiyama Hommon-ji, and even at Taiseki-ji. The Nanjo family had managed to keep control of its temple, but not of the others. Taiseki-ji was only one of the head temples of the Fuji branch, which represented a minority in the Nichiren movement as a whole.

Nichiu strove to alter this situation. Before his time the most celebrated relic at Taiseki-ji had been the Ozagawari Gohonzon, which had been inscribed by Nikko on the day the temple was completed, and presented personally by him to his disciple Nichimoku. Nichiu, however, proclaimed that the temple possessed an even greater treasure,

one that could be rivalled by no other. It had the Dai-Gohonzon, which Nichiren himself had inscribed, not for Nichimoku or any other individual, but 'for all mankind'.

Nichiu travelled about the countryside spreading the word and collecting funds for his little country temple. By the time of his death in 1482 he had firmly established Taiseki-ji as the centre of the small but prosperous organization which eventually became Nichiren Shoshu. Today, on the grounds of the temple which he saved from obscurity, there stands the largest temple in all Japan — indeed, one of the largest in the world.

The doctrinal exclusiveness of Nichiren Shoshu was codified by the twenty-sixth High Priest, Nichikan (1665–1726). He maintained that Nichiren, not Shakyamuni, is the Eternal Buddha. Every time Nichiren had mentioned the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni, he really meant himself, and he alone is to be worshipped in the Age of Degeneracy. The *Dharma Flower* of Shakyamuni is 'repudiated' and replaced by the writings of Nichiren, although the Sutra may be 'borrowed from' to illustrate his teachings (Toda, *Lecture on the Sutra* 18).

'The Gohonzon we worship,' says Josei Toda, the outstanding modern exponent of Nichiren Shoshu, 'is the entity of the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the Person of Nichiren Daishonin . . . Shakyamuni Buddha is not the entity of the Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, but the one who attained enlightenment by practicing the law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, itself, and therefore is the original Buddha who leads all other Buddhas to enlightenment. Hence we call Nichiren Diashonin the True Buddha and Shakyamuni and all the other Buddhas simply the buddha' (*Lecture*, 57).

Nichiren Shoshu theologians say that when others speak of 'the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni', they are really using poetic licence. A literal translation of the title of the *Dharma Flower*, Chapter 16, is not, 'The Eternal Life of the Tathagata', but, 'The Duration of the Tathagata's Life'. The word, 'eternal' does not appear. And in the course of the chapter the Buddha never places his enlightenment beyond the boundaries of time and space. It took place, he says, an unimaginably long time ago, but it had a beginning. Before his enlightenment he practised the Bodhisattva Way.

Shakyamuni, they say, attained enlightenment ages ago (*kuon jitsujo*) but not in 'time without beginning' (*kuon ganjo*). There is a difference between immortality and eternity: immortality has a beginning but no end, whereas eternity has neither a beginning nor an end; it is beyond time and space. The *Dharma Flower* speaks of vast stretches of time. It may imply eternity, but it does not state it in so many words.

To Nichiren Shu, on the other hand, the Original Buddha Shakyamuni and Original Enlightenment are one and the same. There can be no Enlightenment without the One who is enlightened, and vice

versa. To Nichiren Shoshu, there is a difference. True Enlightenment is beyond time and space; it exists prior to the historical or even the prehistorical Shakyamuni. Shakyamuni attained enlightenment because it already exists, and his enlightened life is the *result* of this pre-existent transcendence. He is 'the Buddha of True Effect'. The true cause, 'the Law of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo', is revealed by Nichiren, 'the Buddha of the True Cause'.[67]

The Nichiren Shoshu argument is reinforced by Nichiren's Great Mandala, the Gohonzon. There Shakyamuni Buddha is given the place of honour at the right hand of the Dharma, which is written in large letters: NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO. It is the Dharma that dominates the chart, not Shakyamuni.

Shakyamuni is enlightened by this Dharma; Nichiren is identified with it. This identity of Nichiren with the absolute can best be seen in the 'Mandala on the Plank' (*Ita-mandara*), the Dai-Gohonzon venerated by Nichiren Shoshu. Like other Nichiren mandalas, it has the words, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* hanging suspended down the centre. Other details are similar to or identical with those found on other mandalas. At the bottom is Nichiren's signature. Normally he would leave some space between the last letter of the *Odaimoku* (*kyo*) and his name, but if there was no room at the bottom, the two might be squeezed together. In the Dai-Gohonzon at Taiseki-ji, the two are so close that they look like one continuous set of nine Chinese characters: *Na-mu-myo-ho-ren-ge-kyo-nichi-ren*. Here Nichiren (the Person) and the *Odaimoku* (the Law) are one.

Nichiren had insisted on the primacy of the Dharma, the truth. Quoting the Mahaparinirvana Sutra, he says, 'The Dharma is the teacher of the Buddhas. Therefore the Buddhas honor the Dharma and make offerings to it. Because the Dharma is eternal, the Buddhas are eternal.' And in his own words, 'The Title of the *Dharma Flower* is the Sacred Source of Buddha Shakyamuni, Many Treasures Buddha, and all the Buddhas of the worlds of the ten directions. As did the Buddha and Tendai Daishi (Chih-i), so do I also worship the *Dharma Flower*. The *Dharma Flower* is the parents of Buddha Shakyamuni and the eyes of all the Buddhas. All the Buddhas, including Shakyamuni and Maha-Vairocana, were born from the *Dharma Flower*' (*Honzon Mondo Sho, Showa-teihon*, 1573).

Nikkyo Niwano, founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, feels that Nichiren's Great Mandala does not adequately represent the union of the Person (the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni) and the Law, and so he has replaced it with a statue containing a copy of the Sutra. This may or may not be in accord with Nichiren's true intention. Traditional Nichiren Buddhists continue to prefer the Mandala to statues. In Nichiren Shoshu, the Mandala is obligatory.

However, the Great Mandala has one serious disadvantage: the humid Japanese climate. Mandalas are drawn on perishable paper. If

a temple was fortunate enough to have one of the original ones drawn by Nichiren, or by one of his famous disciples, it was more likely put away for safe keeping than exposed to the elements. On display was a copy or a statue of Nichiren, Shakyamuni, or some guardian deity. The fact that the Dai-Gohonzon was not displayed until the time of Nichiu does not necessarily mean that it had not existed previously; it may have been preserved in some safe place. (Critics of the Dai-Gohonzon's authenticity usually point instead to the fact that the plank on which it was written was planed by a planer, not an adze; the planer did not exist in Nichiren's time.)

In modern Japan various arrangements of the Gohonzon can be seen among the various Nichiren sects. One popular version shows statues of Shakyamuni Buddha and Many-Treasures Buddha seated side by side as described in the Lotus Sutra; between them are the words, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* written on a small pagoda ('This tower,' Nichiren told Abutsu-bo, 'is yourself.'). Sometimes the Mandala is shown with a statue of Shakyamuni seated in front of it and perhaps a figure of Nichiren before them both, signifying the Dharma, the embodiment of the Dharma, and the expounder of the Dharma in this Age of Degeneration. A popular arrangement places a statue of Nichiren before a copy of the Mandala. It is easy for the believers to feel that they are worshipping Nichiren, whom they can see before them, rather than the Dharma, which is depicted only as the background. Nichiren believers, like many other Japanese Buddhists, often ended up worshipping the founder of their sect rather than his teachings. Even in Nichiren Shoshu temples there were varieties of honzons until fairly recently. Only modern photographic techniques and the zeal of Sokagakkai members caused statues to be replaced by copies of the Dai-Gohonzon of Taiseki-ji, which alone is considered proper today.

Nichiren Shoshu has taken the Three Great Secret Dharmas and given them special meanings. *Hommon-no-Honzon* refers not only to the Ground of Being, but especially to its manifestation in the Dai-Gohonzon at Taiseki-ji. *Hommon-no-Daimoku* does not mean what the words say; it is the primary 'vibration' of the Cosmos.[68] *Hommon-no-Kaidan* means not only the place where the devotee practises, but especially the temple of Taiseki-ji. Nichiren is identified with all three. He is physically present in the *Daimoku* written on the *Gohonzon* at the *Kaidan* at Taiseki-ji.

We have here the seeds of a dynamic religion in which the absolute penetrates the physical. It bears some striking similarities to Roman Catholicism. Just as Christ is 'True God of True God . . . through whom all things were made' (Nicene Creed), so Nichiren Daishonin is the True Buddha who manifests the transcendent. And just as Christ is physically present in the bread and the wine, so Nichiren is physically present in the Dai-Gohonzon. Catholicism has its earthly centre at the Vatican; Nichiren Shoshu has its own at Taiseki-ji. (The High Priest at Taiseki-ji

is not graced with infallibility, however, although the words of the Patriarch Nichikan are beyond dispute.) Catholicism has its one successor to Christ, St Peter and his successors at Rome; Nichiren Shoshu has its one successor to Nichiren, Nikko and his successors at Taiseki-ji. Catholicism had its spurious 'Donation of Constantine'; Nichiren Shoshu had its 'Transfer Documents'.

Christianity gives much more importance to the words of Christ (the New Testament) than to the Holy Scripture which he so often quoted (the Old Testament). Likewise, Nichiren Shoshu considers the *Dharma Flower* as preliminary to the writings of Nichiren (*Gosho*). Just as Christians borrow from the Psalms, reading into them references to Christ, so Nichiren Shoshu devotees borrow from the Sutra, claiming that its words are cryptic allusions to Nichiren. Christianity fulfils and then rejects Judaism; Nichiren Shoshu fulfils and then rejects Buddhism.

However, Nichiren Shoshu did not develop in a vacuum. Like other Nichiren bodies, it was also a product of its times. During the Muromachi period and beyond there were intellectual cross-currents within Buddhism. There was an ardent dispute about the relationship between the Imprinted Gate and the Original Gate. This was an internal debate among Nichiren Buddhists, but its outcome was important; it would determine the relationship of Nichiren Buddhism to other sects, especially Tendai. A second controversy concerned the very essence of the religious life. What is it? Can it actually accomplish anything? Is it worth all the trouble? These questions concerned everyone.

The first dispute began among certain students of Nikko and Nichiro, and eventually became a bone of contention among all Nichiren philosophers. Nichiren had taught that the Original Gate, the second half of the Sutra, is more important than the Imprinted Gate, the first half. That much was obvious, and the six Senior Disciples accepted it. But the next generation of students wanted to know more: what did this mean, exactly? Did it mean that the Imprinted Gate should now be discarded entirely? If so, why had Nichiren read and quoted from the whole Sutra, and not just the second half? How could you teach the Three Thousand Categories of Existence if you eliminated Chapter II, where the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds is taught? Or perhaps the whole of Tendai philosophy should be discarded? There were many related questions, which called forth many responses.

The answers soon broke down into two general positions. The majority supported a view known as *Itchi*, which means 'unity' or 'harmony'. This maintains that although the second half is more important than the first half, they still form one Sutra. The first half is an imprint of the second half, as its name implies. There is harmony between the two halves as, indeed, there is harmony between all the teachings of Shakyamuni, which find their fulfilment in the *Dharma Flower*. This is the position taken by Nichiren Shu and even its outlawed

minority, the *Fujufuse* Branch.

Others, however, disagree. They take a position called *Shoretsu*, which is a contraction of two words meaning, 'superior/inferior'. To them the Original Gate displaces not only the Imprinted Gate but all historical Buddhism in the modern age. This, they believe, was the teaching of Nichiren, but they do not always agree with each other on the definition of the term 'Original Gate'. Is it the second half of the Sutra as taught by Chih-i? Does it consist only of the Eight Key Chapters, as Nichiren seemed to imply sometimes? Is it found in Chapter 16 alone, 'The Duration of the Life of the Tathagata'? Or does it have some deeper esoteric meaning?

However, all the *Shoretsu* exponents agree on one general principle. With the teachings of Nichiren, we have stepped out of historical Buddhism into something completely new. The Buddha expounded the Original Gate not for his famous disciples or even for the gods who had gathered on the Vulture Peak. This Original Teaching (*Honge*) was entrusted to the Bodhisattvas from 'under the earth'. These Bodhisattvas were not 'Buddhists'; they were entirely unknown to anyone in the assembly, even to Maitreya, the future Buddha. Who were they then? They were Everyman.

Nichiren had taught that there is a proper time for planting and a time for reaping. Buddhism was the soil into which the Dharma seed had been planted, and now the seed had flowered. The promised Dharma Flower (*Hokke*) had bloomed. It is not the culmination of Buddhism; it appears in Buddhist soil but transcends it. It is the fundamental reality, antecedent to any philosophy or religion. It is the timeless, universal, innermost reality now opening for all to see.

Because *Shoretsu* has no Buddhist orthodoxy on which it can build, it is more individualist than the 'unity' branch. With the exception of Nichiren Shoshu, *Shoretsu* sects are not built around a sacred temple. Introspection and doctrinal correctness are more important than ecclesiastical authority. Often calling themselves the Dharma Flower sect (*Hokke-shu*), the same name by which Nichiren identified himself, they see nothing wrong with being divided into various independent branches. What matters is the individual who emulates the dynamic spirit of Nichiren, not submission to an outside ecclesiastical authority. Each *Shoretsu* branch was founded by a colourful non-conformist.

The *Itchi-shoretsu* controversy was of no interest to outsiders, but it kept Nichiren theologians on their toes and forced them to define their positions with more clarity. It did result in the formation of new sub-sects, but these gave impetus to missionary enterprises which expanded Nichiren Buddhism and helped spread it throughout the country.

A far more serious threat to Nichiren Buddhism — to the whole of Japanese Buddhism, in fact — came in a teaching called Original Enlightenment (*Hongaku*). The idea originated in China, and the term

was taken from a translation in 550 of a book written in India, *The Awakening of Faith in Mahayana*. Both Saicho (Tendai) and Kukai (esotericism) are credited with bringing the doctrine to Japan. Speaking for Kukai, Yoshito Hakeda writes (6–7):

> Kukai was the first in Japan to hold that man is originally enlightened (*hongaku*). His insistence that one can attain enlightenment here and now was grounded on this belief, a belief derived from the simple insight that unless a man is enlightened from the very beginning he has no way to reach enlightenment. Kukai could not have been innocent enough to hold such an optimistic view without being aware of the darker aspect of man's mind. He was not a born optimist; in fact, it was only in his forties that he started to advocate this idea. He exhorted his followers to be aware of the bondage of evil karma but encouraged them to perceive the originally enlightened nature of man through the veils of evil karma. He believed that evil karma could be wiped away but not man's originally enlightened nature. 'If one has faith and practices, then, whether one is male or female, or of high or low birth, one will qualify as having a great capacity.' The thought of original enlightenment appealed to the basically optimistic Shinto mentality of the Japanese. The Esoteric Buddhism of Kukai, though incomparably more complex and sophisticated than Shinto, had many elements compatible with the latter. A few of these were the idea of the oneness of man and nature, a belief in the magical efficacy of the word (mantra in the former, *Kotodama* in the latter), and the concept of a ritually consecrated realm. It was only natural that as time went by Esoteric Buddhism should come into close association with Shinto.

There is a difference between Original Enlightenment as taught in India and China, and as it developed in Japan, where it encountered 'the basically optimistic Shinto mentality of the Japanese'. In its pure form Original Enlightenment may be the highest reaches of Buddhist thought. The idea is that all the contradictions and conflicts of the world as we know it are transcended by Emptiness. Subject and object, male and female, mind and body, life and death, good and evil, and other polarities are not opposed to each other, but mutually dependent. Take away one, and you lose the other. In the Vimalakirti Sutra this idea of interdependence is expressed as non-duality (Japanese, *funi*). Non-duality refers to the absolute, not to the everyday world, which is clearly full of dualities and contradictions.

In Japan, however, Tendai thinkers pushed the idea further. They affirmed the *absolute nature of the contradictions*. The everyday world *is* the absolute; it is not-two.

Yoshiro Tamura, in his study entitled 'Interaction between Japanese Culture and Buddhism: the Thought of Original Enlightenment', points out that a very thin dividing line has been crossed here. From maintaining the tension between the absolute and the relative as not-two, we have crossed over to the affirmation of the relative itself as the not-two (*Osaki Gakuho*, No. 138 (1985) 2).

This is the Japanese version of Original Enlightenment. It spread gradually, almost as if its proponents were not fully aware of what they were implying. The idea of Original Enlightenment was already developing at the time of the Kamakura reformers, and it became pervasive after them. It is found everywhere, especially in Tendai, Shingon, Nichiren, Kegon and Zen. It is forcefully repudiated only by the Pure Land schools, who reject this world entirely, putting all their hope in the world to come. But even there, it sometimes sneaked in by the back door, for we are saved naturally by Amida without any contrivance on our part.

The logic of Original Enlightenment is that since we are already enlightened, we do not have to do anything about it. We are already Buddhas just as we are. It follows that any religious practice — any morality, for that matter — will only confuse the matter. We must 'do our own thing' because 'our own thing' is the Buddha nature operating within us.

The vocabulary of Original Enlightenment produced grandiose slogans: 'I am Buddha'; 'illusions are enlightenment'; 'this world is the Buddha-land'; 'the three bodies of Buddha are one'; 'one is three'; 'earthly desires are enlightenment'; 'body and mind are one'; 'the sufferings of life and death are nirvana'. In his authenticated writings Nichiren rarely used such terms, and when he did, he carefully explained their meaning.

> Earthly desires are enlightenment and . . . the sufferings of life and death are nirvana. When one chants Namu Myoho Renge Kyo even during sexual union of man and woman, then earthly desires are enlightenment and the sufferings of life and death are nirvana. *Sufferings are nirvana only when one realizes that the entity of human life throughout its cycle of birth and death is neither born nor destroyed.*
>
> (MW 2:229)

Nichiren's explanation is orthodox Mahayana. Reality viewed from wisdom is nirvana and enlightenment (*bodai*); reality viewed from illusion is passion and suffering. In either case, reality is reality. Many Tendai, Shingon, and Pure Land teachers of the times crossed a subtle line here with their careless use of dramatic slogans, but Nichiren held to that line. A highly moral man, he objected to the amorality latent in Original Enlightenment. He saw it clearly in the iconoclasm of Zen,

which he described as 'inspired by devils'.

After his death, however, there appeared collections of his unauthenticated 'oral teachings', which were loaded with the vocabulary of Original Enlightenment. A well-meaning author compiled a book to bring Nichiren up-to-date by recasting his teachings in the then-popular slogans of Original Enlightenment. He called it *Ongi Kuden* ('Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings [attributed to Nichiren]'). Appearing at the height of the Original Enlightenment craze, it is saturated with its phraseology. Here is its exegesis of a line from Chapter 16 of the Lotus Sutra:

> 'Since I truly became Buddha (there have passed) infinite, boundless . . .' (*Ga jitsu jobutsu irai muryo muhen*): *Ga jitsu* ('I truly') means Buddha's attaining enlightenment in *kuon*, the infinite past. However, the true meaning is that *Ga* ('I') is indicative of all living things in the universe or each of the Ten Worlds, and that *Jitsu* ('truly') is defined as Buddha of *Musa Sanjin* (natural Three Bodies) . . . The person who realizes this is named Buddha. *I* (literally, 'already') means the past and *rai* (literally, 'to come') the future. *Irai* includes the present in it. Buddha has attained the enlightenment of *Ga jitsu*, and His past and future are of uncountable and unfathomable length . . . *Kuon* means having neither beginning nor end, being just as man is, and being natural. It has neither beginning nor end because *Musa Sanjin* is not created in its original form. It is just as man is because it is not adorned by the 32 wonderful physical features and 80 favorable characters [of a Buddha]. It is natural because the Buddha of *Honnu Joju* ('unchanging inherently existing') is natural. *Kuon* is Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. *Kuon Jitsujo* — really enlightened, enlightened as *Musa* ('not being produced by conditions').
>
> (*Ongi Kuden*, quoted by Ikeda, *Science and Religion* 200)

All the main ideas of Original Enlightenment are here: 'just as man is'; 'not produced by conditions'; 'not adorned with any special characteristics'; 'inherently existing'; 'all living things are originally enlightened'. The only important idea which is missing is 'earthly desires are enlightenment', but that appears elsewhere in the same text: 'Burn the firewood of earthly desires and reveal the fire of enlightened wisdom' (*Ongi Kuden*, quoted by Kirimura, *Outline of Buddhism* 172).

Ongi Kuden, which may have been written at Taiseki-ji in the first place, became prominent in the theology of Nichiren Shoshu. It was widely believed to contain the authentic verbal teachings of Nichiren as recorded by Nikko. Ironically, one forgery provoked another one. The rival 'Unity' branch produced its own 'oral transmission' called

Onko-kikigaki, and claimed that it had been put into writing by Niko of Mount Minobu. Its real purpose seems to have been to counteract the influence of *Ongi Kuden*. Only in recent times have both works come to be regarded as pious forgeries (Murano 1982).

The Nichiren Shoshu doctrine that Nichiren himself is the Original Buddha follows logically from Original Enlightenment. Nichiren is originally enlightened to the true Dharma. 'Original' here does not mean first at a point in time, but eternal — timeless. We are all originally enlightened, and Nichiren reveals what this means. When we practise what he practised (as when Shakyamuni practises what he practised) we uncover our originally enlightened nature.

Nichiren is said to have realized his own Original Enlightenment at the moment the executioner raised the sword above his head on the beach at Tatsunokuchi. From that moment on Nichiren's teachings are the infallible words of the Originally Enlightened Buddha.

In Original Enlightenment thought, any study of scriptures is a waste of time. We can see how it influenced *Shoretsu* thinkers, who sliced the scriptural bases thinner and thinner. Its most insidious influence, however, was on Japanese society as a whole. Once it left the quiet halls of academia for the anarchic world outside, it led quickly to hedonism, to the justification of self-indulgence. If everyone is originally enlightened just as he is, then religion and morality go out the window. In Tendai and Shingon, where it had begun, it turned monks into soldiers; other religious establishments soon followed suit. In the outside world it justified sensuality, vulgarity, and cruelty. It helped to remove Buddhism from its traditional role of moral arbiter, and allowed neo-Confucianism to pour into the vacuum. Society had to have moral rules in order to survive, and if Buddhism could no longer supply them, Confucianism would have to do the job.

It took a while for Buddhist leaders to realize that they had created a 'Frankenstein's monster'. For a long time any document written in the vocabulary of Original Enlightenment was sure to get a hearing. The end justified the means, and as a result, forgeries abounded. Today that same vocabulary gives the forgeries away as period pieces. The fascination for the slogans of Original Enlightenment eventually passed, and Japanese Buddhism returned to its proper bases, but by then the damage had been done.

The slogans of Original Enlightenment can still be discerned in the terminologies of Nichiren liturgies of many schools, Nichiren Shoshu among them. Scholars can spot them and put them into context, but the uninitiated can as easily fall under their spell today as they did five centuries ago.

Chapter 14

Sokagakkai: the Creation of Values

It is only since the Second World War that Nichiren Shoshu has been transformed from a minor sect into the largest religious body in Japan. This remarkable achievement was initiated by two school teachers. The first of them, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi[69] (1871–1944), was a grammar school principal who came to Tokyo from Hokkaido. He wrote some books, one on geography and four volumes on pedagogy, which sold well enough to encourage him to try becoming a full-time author and publisher. But Imperial Japan of the 1930s wanted only conformity in education, not individual 'value creation', which Makiguchi advocated. Value was to be determined by the state, not created from within the individual. The educational bureaucracy obstructed Makiguchi's career at every step.

In 1928 Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Shoshu at the instigation of a fellow principal. Two years later he published the first volume of his theories on education and named as publisher *Soka Kyoiku Gakkai* (Value-Creating Educational Society). Although this book says nothing about religion and the actual society of that name was not begun until 1937, Sokagakkai today formally dates its inception from this first appearance of its title in 1930.

At the time Makiguchi joined Nichiren Shoshu the sect had 75 temples as compared with 4,962 in the other Nichiren groups (mostly Nichiren Shu), and 85,541 adherents as compared with 3,393,051 among the others (Murata, *Japan's New Buddhism* 71). Makiguchi was able to do little to change the situation. The first general meeting of his society consisted of about 60 people, many of them fellow-educators. By November 1941, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor, there were 400. Total readership may have reached a thousand. However, once the country was engaged in a desperate war, all such independent little

societies were expected to contribute to the war effort or disappear. By 1943 Soka Kyoiku Gakkai was snuffed out of existence.

Part of the governments's plan for national unity was religious unity. Small sects were ordered to merge with larger ones, which could be controlled more easily. The writings of Nichiren had already fallen foul of the censors, and 'offensive passages' had been deleted (Ienaga, *The Pacific War*, 105). Now the independent-minded Nichiren groups had to be brought into line. They were instructed to affiliate either with the 'Unity' branch (*Itchi-ha*) headed by Mount Minobu or with the loosely federated 'Superior/Inferior' branch (*Shoretsu-ha*). The tiny Nichiren Shoshu, with less than 2 per cent of the temples, stood proudly aloof from either branch. It now had to find some justification for its continued separate existence or face possible closure.

A leading priest of the sect, Jimon Ogasawara, published a journal in which he advocated a solution. The Original Buddha was not Shakyamuni but Myoho Renge Kyo, 'a manifestation of the god Ame-no-minakanushi-no-kami', mythical ancestor of the Emperor. Thus Nichiren Shoshu did not worship the foreign deity, Shakyamuni Buddha, but the Emperor of Japan. What could be more patriotic? There was certainly no harm in obeying the government's decree to enshrine tablets of the Grand Shrine of Ise, the symbol of Japanese national unity. Nichiren himself had worshipped there after completing his studies (Fujii, *Nichiren Shonin Eden*, 28).

The High Priest at Taseki-ji and his assembled clergy were willing to accept this stratagem, but Makiguchi resolutely refused. He was summoned to Taiseki-ji and ordered to obey; still he refused. A few weeks later he and 20 leaders of his organization were arrested. Within a few days all recanted except two: Makiguchi and his faithful friend Josei Toda. They were incarcerated for the duration of the war. Makiguchi died in prison in 1944.

Toda had also been a school teacher on Hokkaido. One day he opened his classroom door, stared silently at his students for a moment, then turned and walked away, never to return. He arrived penniless in Tokyo in 1920 and presented himself to his fellow-countryman, Makiguchi, seeking employment. Makiguchi hired him, and Toda remained grateful and loyal to his dying day. When Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Shoshu, Toda followed him.

Toda was a good businessman, able to make education profitable, and within a few years he could leave the classroom and devote himself to different ventures. By 1943 he controlled 17 enterprises, which included publishing, tutoring, life-insurance, stockbroking, and money-lending. He is said to have been worth about a million and a half dollars (Murata, 87, 90). He was the main financial support for Makiguchi's educational society.

Until his imprisonment Toda had been more of a follower than a leader in matters of religion. Once he had suffered a number of

personal tragedies which had set him looking for metaphysical consolation. Between 1923 and 1925 his infant daughter died, then his wife. Finally he himself fell ill with tuberculosis from which he never fully recovered. For consolation he turned to Christianity and then to Pure Land Buddhism only to give them up later as 'not logically convincing' (Murata 87–8). He followed Makiguchi into Nichiren Shoshu, but devoted most of his energies to business, letting Makiguchi handle the deeper philosophical questions.

In prison, however, Toda was thrown back upon his own inner resources. There was nothing left for him to do but practise the religion Makiguchi had taught him. He began to read the *Dharma Flower* and the writings of Nichiren in earnest, and also to chant the Sacred Title, hour after hour, day after day. To him religion was like business: you made investments and reaped profits. Therefore he kept a careful count of the number of his recitations. 'When my chanting of the Daimoku (Sacred Title) was about to reach the two million point,' he explained later, 'I happened to have a very mysterious experience, and there emerged a world in front of me, which I had never imagined before' (Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, IV.22).

As described by Daisaku Ikeda, who later succeeded him as president of Sokagakkai, Toda 'suddenly . . . found himself in the midst of the air, before he knew it, in the huge crowd of people (at the Ceremony in Space), as many as the sands of sixty thousand Ganges, worshipping the brilliant golden statue of the Dai-Gohonzon. It was neither a dream nor an illusion, and seemed as if it lasted only a few seconds, or a few minutes, or again as long as several hours. It was a reality which he experienced for the first time. As this supreme jubilation filled his body, he cried to himself that the testimonial had no falsity and that he actually existed there. At that moment, he suddenly came to himself, seated in the narrow prison cell in the morning sunshine' (14).

Toda's unexpected discovery of himself participating in the Ceremony in Space has been shared by others.[70] It is, indeed, an overwhelming experience, difficult to put into words, and the laconic description given above hardly does it justice. We suspect that Toda, like others who have experienced this, was as much humbled as exalted by what had transpired, and was reluctant to speak about it to anyone. Details may have been added by Ikeda's imagination. Part of the description rings true (as the huge crowd of people — we would say, beings), but it is not clear what he means by the 'brilliant golden statue of the Dai-Gohonzon'. Golden, yes; but statue . . .? The assembly in space does not venerate a statue.

A complete description of the Ceremony in Space is given in the *Flower Dharma*, Chapters 11–22. A more laconic description is found in the Closing Sutra, *Meditation on the Bodhisattva Universal Virtue*:

'At what place may I practice the law of repentance?' 'Thereupon

> the voice in the sky will speak thus, saying: "Shakyamuni Buddha is called Vairocana Who Pervades All Places, and his dwelling place is called Eternally Tranquil Light, the place which is composed of permanency-paramita, and stabilized by self-paramita, the place where purity-paramita extinguishes the aspect of existence, where bliss-paramita does not abide in the aspect of one's body and mind, and where the aspects of all the laws cannot be seen as either existing or nonexisting, the place of tranquil emancipation or prajna-paramita . . . these forms are based on permanent law"'.
>
> (*The Threefold Lotus Sutra* 362–3).

A theological explanation is given by Shimizu, who names it 'The Great Mandala-Secret Platform of the Great Meeting in the Air of the Original Gate' (*Hommon koku dai-e no daimandara mitsudan*) (see Chapter Ten). Neither of these accounts mentions a 'golden statue'.

When Toda was released from prison at the end of the war, he reorganized Makiguchi's shattered organization, dropped the word 'Educational' from its title (making it *Soka Gakkai*), and named himself its president. His primary aim, however, was to pick up his life where he had left it two years before and reconstruct his commercial empire. Religion was left to the evening hours, when he would deliver lectures to small groups of people. Again he opened a correspondence school, but this time without success. Ventures in publishing and money-lending also failed, and by 1950 he was bankrupt.

It was only then that he decided that he had had his priorities wrong, putting business before faith. He made a pilgrimage to Taiseki-ji, which he found virtually deserted and in a deplorably run-down condition. He apologized to the Dai-Gohonzon, and vowed to devote all his efforts to propagating the teachings of Nichiren Shoshu, and to emphasize the *Ongi Kuden* instead of Chih-i's philosophy (Ikeda, *Human Revolution*, IV, 249–56).

Toda now turned his practical money-making sense to his religion. 'If one measures the power of the Gohonzon in terms of money,' he told his listeners, 'the Gohonzon has the mystic power to present you with billions of dollars . . . Suppose you are poor. The cause of your poverty was laid in some past existence. You have not the cause for becoming rich. If you think you are destined to be poor and cannot change this, you are influenced by ideas of the pre-*Lotus* teachings. There is a prevailing idea that one's destiny is uncontrollable and one should (wait and) ascend to heaven after death.

'This is no joking matter. How can you ascend to heaven when you are afflicted with various sufferings in this world?

'However, the secret of the Buddha is so wonderful that without having the cause for becoming rich, you can realize your desire for obtaining wealth by worshipping the Gohonzon. The power of the

Daimoku enables you to have the cause of becoming a millionaire even though you had not made such a cause in your past existence . . . Then you will gain enough money even if you do not seek money greedily. This is the mystic power of the Gohonzon' (Toda, *Lecture on the Sutra*, 93).

Toda's gospel of health, wealth, and happiness struck a responsive audience in drab post-war Tokyo. The whole purpose of life, he said, is to be happy. Happiness, like the flavouring in soup, consists in the right mixtures of sweet and sour. Too much sour makes the soup inedible; it is time to pour in the sweet (137).

Toda would drive his point home with passionate sincerity. 'If you do as I tell you, and if things don't work out as you want by the time I come to (this town) next (year), then you may come up here and beat me and kick me as much as you want. This is a promise' (Murata 110, slightly altered).

It was easy for his dispirited audience, discouraged by defeat in war, grinding poverty, and the collapse of traditional values, to respond hopefully to such a message. Although he had a stock answer for all problems ('Chant Daimoku and convert others'), Toda liked to treat his audience as individuals. After an animated speech or lecture, he would open the floor to questions and answers. He would reason with the philosophically inclined, encourage the down-hearted, sympathize with the bereaved, but sternly rebuke the scoffers or recalcitrant.

Toda was not only a good teacher but a skilled businessman who knew how to organize his subordinates so that they would work as a team. His Sokagakkai became a tightly knit society in which everyone had his place on the table of organization. Each member was expected to bring in new members by *shakubuku*, aggressive proselytizing. This, was one of his two basic obligations, the other being to chant morning and evening services (*Gongyo*) with lots of Daimoku. The more converts he brought in, the more material and spiritual benefits he could expect, and the higher he would rise on the table of organization.

In May 1951 Toda was officially inaugurated president of Sokagakkai, which then had about 1,500 members. As he took his oath of office, he promised to convert 750,000 families. 'If I do not achieve this by the time of my death, don't hold funeral services for me, but throw my ashes into the sea off Shinagawa' (Murata 94).

The inspired members eagerly set out to do *shakubuku*. This often meant virtual intimidation of the prospective convert and gained for Sokagakkai as many enemies as friends. Many Japanese objected to being accosted on the streets, at their places of business, or in their homes by zealous missionaries who refused to relent until they had achieved their aim.

Although all critics of Sokagakkai express aversion for *shakubuku*, the method is not very different from that used in the West by Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, 'Born-again' Christians, 'Moonies', and

others. Most modern Japanese sects practise aggressive proselytizing, but not as successfully as Sokagakkai. Reiyukai and Rissho Kosei-kai do *michibiki*, 'guiding others along the way'; P.L. Kyodan has *shinge*, 'sharing our blessings'; Tenrikyo 'pours perfume' (*nioigake*). But none of these has the fiery intensity of *shakubuku*.

Shakubuku is aggressive, but it is not 'forced conversion', as some have said. When Charlemagne told the Saxons to be baptized or die, that was forced conversion. Sokagakkai members are said to warn potential converts of dire consequences if they fail to join up, but they do not have the power of life or death. They leave that up to the Gohonzon, who apparently can be as vengeful as Jehovah when spurned.[71]

The Sokagakkai tactics may have offended many, but they did not fail to get results. From 1951 to 1957 the organization doubled or tripled its membership every year. When Toda died in 1958 there was no need to cast his ashes into the sea. He had gone beyond his goal of converting 750,000 families.

Only a year after Toda's inauguration, however, the society's zeal almost brought it to an ignominious end. In April 1952 Taiseki-ji and other Nichiren temples throughout the land were celebrating the 700th anniversary of the founder's first proclamation of the Daimoku, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. Believers from around the country came to their head temples for special festivities. At Taiseki-ji four gala days were planned. The first two were to be managed by the sect's official laymen's association, called Hokkeko, the last two days were for Sokagakkai. Toda planned a show of force. The Hokkeko was bringing 2,500 members, and he would muster 4,000 from his one-year-old society. He also saw an opportunity to avenge his two years of imprisonment during the war: he had learned that the leader of the compromising party, the priest Jimon Ogasawara, was going to be present.[72] There could be no better time for a showdown.

Before leaving for the head temple Toda organized his younger members like shock troops. He instructed them to search discreetly for the offending priest, and then be ready for action once they found him. They were to challenge him to debate his views right then and there. Forty-seven leaders of the Youth Division, one of whom was Daisaku Ikeda, worked out a systematic plan to locate Ogasawara and bring him to judgement. On arriving at Taiseki-ji, they fanned out and carefully combed the temple grounds. Nevertheless, they might have missed him entirely had not a young lady from Hokkeko inadvertently tipped them off by innocently remarking that she had seen the famous Reverend Ogasawara at one of the priests' lodging houses. Instantly, the Youth Division members sent one of their number to advise Toda while the rest of them converged on the house. They barged straight in, and found the 69-year-old theologian clad in his priestly garments and talking cheerfully to several other clergymen.

The young men immediately challenged him to debate his views.

The old priest tried to put them off, saying that the hour was late, and he was tired after his long journey to the temple, but Sokagakkai members kept pouring into the room and demanding that Ogasawara retract his views and take the blame for the imprisonment and death of Makiguchi. The old man, now thoroughly annoyed, told them to go away and leave him alone. The lady from Hokkeko, embarrassed by the results of her innocent introduction, slipped away without a word. Three other priests, who had been chatting with Ogasawara, sat in shocked silence, unable to believe they were hearing such abuse heaped on so venerable a divine.

'Take off his robe!' someone shouted. 'Take off his robe and take him to the grave of Makiguchi!'

Four men picked up the squirming priest. They were just about to carry him out when Toda appeared in the doorway.

'Stop!'

What happened next is not clear. According to Ikeda, Toda reasoned calmly with Ogasawara, demanding an apology, while the old man 'drooled at the mouth' and 'howled like a rabid dog'. But Murata claims that Toda told him in an interview that he struck the priest 'twice' (96). In any case, Ogasawara would not be intimidated, and would admit to nothing.

Seeing that he was getting nowhere, Toda finally strode out, leaving the old priest to the mercies of his tormentors. 'If you so stubbornly refuse to apologize, whatever may happen to you is no longer my concern. Whatever the Youth Division members may do to you, I will not take the responsibility.'

As soon as their leader had left, the young men once more hoisted the priest up onto their shoulders. By then they had torn off his priestly robe and stripped him down to his underclothes. They carried him out into the temple grounds, shouting through megaphones, 'This is Jimon Ogasawara, a parasite in the lion's body, gnawing at Nichiren Shoshu . . . This is the villanous monk, the actual murderer of Mr. Makiguchi!' They tagged him with a placard reading, 'Racoon Monk', and bore him to the grave of Makiguchi. There the thoroughly shaken old man was forced to sign a prepared apology and repudiation of his theological opinions.

By then a large crowd had gathered at the scene. Chief Director Izumida of Sokagakkai took charge. The scene in the cemetery was lit eerily by lights from exploding fireworks celebrating the festival. Ogasawara tried to joke about the incongruity of it all, but this only enraged his captors all the more.

Some local firemen serving as temple guards, thinking that the priest was about to be lynched, finally managed to break through the mob. However, when it turned out that the firechief was Izumida's brother-in-law, the matter was settled amicably. Ogasawara was released, and the crowd dispersed.

Toda's victory almost proved his undoing. Nearly all the clergy and laity of Nichiren Shoshu were shocked by this violence, and the press picked up the story and reported it sensationally. The High Priest sent a stern reprimand to Toda, demanding that he apologize.

The great strength of Sokagakkai lies in its affiliation with Nichiren Shoshu. Of all the new Japanese religions that came into prominence after the war, Sokagakkai is the only one associated with a historical Japanese sect. It alone is both ancient and modern; it can appeal both to Japanese pride in a heroic past and to hopes for a better future. If this affiliation had been broken at this early stage, neither Sokagakkai nor Nichiren Shoshu would have grown into the powerful force they were soon to become.

When Toda realized that nearly all of Nichiren Shoshu was arrayed against him, he backed down, humbly apologized to the High Priest, and vowed to atone by converting the entire nation. Meanwhile he offered to raise funds for repairs on the pagoda at the Head Temple. His offer was accepted. Nevertheless, it was six months before the crisis finally passed, and smouldering resentments remained for years. Members of Sokagakkai went from temple to temple trying to convince their priests of the justice of their cause, but they often received a cool reception. Ogasawara, realizing that he had the support of the majority, brought legal charges against the leaders of Sokagakkai. Both Toda and Izumida had to appear before the civil authorities and were detained overnight.

High Priest Nissho saw that his sect was risking not only very bad publicity but a serious schism within its ranks. Toda, after all, had shown repentence while Ogasawara had acted on his own. He therefore ordered Ogasawara, as a priest under his jurisdiction, to withdraw his civil suit. At this point, Ogasawara overstepped his bounds. He filed suit against the High Priest.

Opinion within the sect now swung quickly to Toda's favour, and Ogasawara's supporters melted away. Eventually it was he who had to beg forgiveness for his 'indiscretion in having had the unfortunate conflict with Sokagakkai'. Toda had won. For the next two decades there was to be no real challenge to the dominant position of Sokagakkai within Nichiren Shoshu.

One of Toda's most important contributions to his sect was the publication of its version of Nichiren's collected writings. Throughout all these centuries Nichiren Shoshu, while insisting that it was the only orthodox transmitter of Nichiren's Buddhism, had not had a sacred scripture of its own. All the major editions of Nichiren's writings had been produced outside the sect. Collections of Nichiren's writings had been made since a year after his death, but they were often incomplete or not scholarly enough to separate the genuine from the spurious. In the early 1950s Rissho University was hard at work producing a definitive collection. Now known as the Showa Standard Edition, it was

published by Mount Minobu in 1952 in four volumes with a detailed topical index. It is a scholarly work, which carefully distinguishes between the entries on the basis of their authenticity.

Nichiren Shoshu was displeased with this project, which would classify some of its own documents, such as the 'Transfer Documents' and the 'Record of Orally Transmitted Teachings' (*Ongi Kuden*), as spurious. Toda came to the rescue and offered to pay for the publication of an official Nichiren Shoshu version. The work was done by members of the Study Department of Sokagakkai under the supervision of an 84-year-old retired High Priest, Nichiko Hori. Under Toda's prodding, a 2,000 page volume, entitled 'New Edition of the Complete Writings of Nichiren the Great Saint' (*Shimpen Nichiren Daishonin Gosho Zenshu*), was compiled and printed in only one year (1951), beating the Showa Edition to the press (Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, V, 499–500). Since its appearance, the *Gosho*, as it is generally called for short, has become the sacred scripture of Nichiren Shoshu, replacing the *Dharma Flower* in importance.

Armed with their new bible and well drilled in the art of *shakubuku*, Toda's bodhisattvas marched forth to convert the nation. Their methods won them as many enemies as converts. 'In practice, *shakubuku* often amounted to violent, forceful harassment of individuals by Soka Gakkai members,' says Jerrold Schecter in *The New Face of Buddha*. 'Relays of the Soka Gakkai members would maintain a schedule of chanting the *Daimoku* for a full week, twenty-four hours a day, in a prospective recruit's home and literally wear him out. Membership requires that the new members discard all other objects of religious worship, and often the Soka Gakkai members would destroy the family altars of prospective converts . . . Those who have been exposed to *shakubuku* or to the intolerance of the Soka Gakkai members who have already found the true religion, find that they are often the object of verbal abuse, threats and dire warnings of disaster if they resist conversion' (261–2).

But shock tactics are not the only reason for Toda's success. He was an experienced businessman who once before had amassed a considerable fortune; he was now marketing a sure-fire product. He knew that what people want most in the world is not 'truth', but health, wealth, and happiness. This is what he offered them, and at a very nominal cost; he called it the 'happiness machine'.

> How can we live happily in this world and enjoy life? If anyone says he enjoys life without being rich and even when he is sick, he is a liar. We've got to have money and physical vigor, and underneath all we need life force. This we cannot get by theorizing or mere efforts as such. You can't get it until you worship the Gohonzon. It may be irreverent to use this figure of speech, but a Gohonzon is a machine that makes you happy.

> How to use this machine? You conduct five sittings of prayer in the morning and three sittings in the evening and *shakubuku* ten people. Let's make money and build health and enjoy life to our hearts' content before we die!
>
> (Murata 108)

If a company were to manufacture a 'happiness machine', he said, it could merchandize it for at least one hundred thousand yen, and make a fortune. If a hospital could give happiness injections, people would be lined up for blocks every morning waiting their shot. Well, the 'happiness machine' does, indeed, exist. It was made by Nichiren Daishonin here in Japan 700 years ago. And instead of standing in line for hours outside a hospital every morning, waiting in the rain or the hot sun, anyone can get his daily injection of health and happiness in the privacy and comfort of his own home by chanting the Sacred Formula before his copy of the Gohonzon.

However, the disciple is not to expect 'pennies from heaven'. The Gohonzon — the 'happiness machine' — will supply the energy. It is up to each individual to put this energy to work.

> Some believers may say, 'As I believe in the Gohonzon, my business will prosper even without my effort.' Nothing is as unreasonable as this! . . . They are so idle as to try to earn money without working for it. 'Then it is not absolute benefit, is it?' Some may say this, but it is far from true. To earn money without working is like roasting a chicken without adjusting the oven's temperature. Even if you put the chicken in the oven, it cannot be cooked without lighting the fire however hard you may chant Daimoku to the Gohonzon. However earnestly you practice *Shakubuku*, you will suffer punishment if you neglect your work. A passage from the *Gosho* reads, 'Make your best service in your occupation; that is the practice of the *Hokekyo*.' Working even equals belief in the Gohonzon.
>
> (Toda, 110)

Happiness is sure to come to the sincere believer, but he should not expect it immediately.

> Some people often say, 'Why can't I enter into the supreme state of happiness?' when they have been believers in the Gohonzon for only a year or two. They need not be so hasty. If one is destined to die at the age of 60, I think he can feel satisfied if he can fully enjoy a happy life for five years after the age of fifty-five. Is it not satisfactory to live happily day after day for five full years without any anxiety? However, I hear some people say, 'Although I have been practicing this religion for years, I am still

> unable to reach the destination of happiness.' Unless they experience the sorrows of life, they cannot realize its joys. I do not mean that they should endure a poor life, but they must fight against their evil destiny until they can see the evidence of happiness . . . I know very well that there is no believer who is assiduous in this faith but who failed to build a happy life.
>
> (Toda, 147–8)

Toda died suddenly at the age of 58. If success was his criterion for happiness, then his 'last five years' were certainly good years. He attained his goal of a membership of 750,000 families by 1957; the following year he completed the construction of a one-million-dollar Grand Lecture Hall at Taiseki-ji. Two hundred thousand members gathered for the celebration. Toda invited the Prime Minister, whose presence would have signified that Sokagakkai had finally been recognized as an important factor in Japanese national life. The Prime Minister declined the first invitation but accepted a second one two weeks later. However, although six thousand young people were lined up to welcome him, he failed to appear. Instead he sent a former cabinet member, his wife, daughter, and son-in-law to represent him.

Toda became ill during the festivities that he was supervising and had to be rushed to the hospital in Tokyo. He died the next day of causes which have never been made public. A year before he had complained of liver trouble, but later announced that he was 'completely cured'. Diabetes plagued him all his life, and he also suffered from troubles with his pancreas and his left eye. His 'happiness machine' had not relieved him from chronic ill health. However, like Nichiren, he was never overcome by despondency, believing that the next life would be better. 'Are you tired of life? . . . I recommend that you accumulate good fortune in this life so that in the next existence of life, you can be born into a family possessing five Cadillacs. For that purpose, you should believe in the Gohonzon. All human life is eternal. This is the secret of the Buddha. Whether or not you may believe it, it is the truth of the universe. You cannot help it. Let us devote ourselves to the practice of Buddhism and enjoy good fortune in the next life!' (Toda, 100).

Two hundred and fifty thousand people came to his funeral. Among them was the Prime Minister.

Chapter 15

From Backwater Sect to World Religion

At Toda's death, he was succeeded by his closest disciple, Daisaku Ikeda, who had been chief of staff of the Youth Division. Ikeda, who was only 32, was made General Director in June 1958 and installed as president two years later. At the time, Nichiren Shoshu-Sokagakkai claimed a membership of around one million families. Ten years later this figure had shot up to nearly seven million. Sokagakkai had become the most powerful religious force in the country and the largest lay religious organization in the world.

Who is this man Ikeda who has accomplished such wonders? To his millions of followers he is the perfect man: generous, upright, patient, vigorous, contemplative, and wise. Sokagakkai publications always feature several pages of photographs of the great leader in a variety of situations: Ikeda addressing a huge assembly; Ikeda wading in the sea, trousers rolled up to his knees; Ikeda slicing a water melon; Ikeda comforting an American teenager, who sobs with emotion at being in his presence. The people around him in the photograph are rarely identified; he is the only one who matters, unless the other person happens to be the High Priest or a celebrity. Directors of Sokagakkai, smiling cheerfully behind their leader, remain anonymous.

When he speaks in public, often addressing a huge but orderly audience of thousands, the local, national, or international leaders sit in rows beside and behind him, carefully placed in order of seniority. They sit poised on the edges of their chairs, leaning forward as if about to spring into action, eyes riveted on the President throughout the entire hour or hour-and-a-half speech. If the President is wearing a jacket, they wear jackets; if the President is in shirt-sleeves, they are in shirt-sleeves. Often the entire audience will sit leaning forward in the same uncomfortable posture, all dressed identically.

President Ikeda likes his followers to participate in his decisions 'democratically'. He will frequently pause after announcing some new course of action, and ask, 'Do you agree?' Thunderous applause indicates consent; not to agree would be unthinkable.

Like Makiguchi and Toda, President Ikeda was born in a poor family and knew poverty throughout his early life. He did manage to complete high school, but it was not until after he became president of Sokagakkai that he submitted a thesis and was awarded a diploma from Fuji Junior College. He is an avid reader, and is largely self-taught. At the age of 19 he attended a lecture by Josei Toda. One week later he converted to Nichiren Shoshu, and soon became Toda's devoted assistant, both in business and in the fledgling Sokagakkai.

His first years with Toda were hard ones, for Toda's business ventures were failing, and the employees never knew when they might be laid off. Ikeda's health was poor and his life threadbare, but he served Toda faithfully, and had explicit faith in the power of the Gohonzon to improve their lot. By the time Toda's fortunes finally emerged into the sunlight, Ikeda had been moulded into his most capable and dedicated disciple.

Ikeda is every inch the child and product of Sokagakkai. Reporters, who may not really grasp the religious significance of Nichiren Shoshu, sometimes wonder how this man, who seems so ordinary, can merit such blind devotion from so many millions of people. Jerrold Schecter, observing him through the eyes of an American reporter, said that 'Ikeda is best in small groups, advocating the happiness that joining Sokagakkai can bring. He is a fiery debater, and is a great spellbinder for the crowd. He is a short man with a large nose and cold eyes. He remains aloof and rather superior in personal contact, and it is difficult to speak with him in anything but his own terms of Nichiren Buddhism . . . His writings, as translated into English, are rambling — long on theory and short on specifics' (*The New Face of Buddha* 263).

In a slashing attack called *I Denounce Sokagakkai*, Dr Hirotatsu Fujiwara expresses alarm at the 'deification' of Ikeda, which he compares to the deification of the Japanese Emperor before World War II.

> From the standpoint of appearance, Ikeda seems to have developed a career of an unimaginably audacious man. But his writings, inspite of a wordy style, lack content. There are doubts as to whether he has superior intelligence, and his statements are very abstract and vague. When compared with other fascist leaders, he is not nearly as charming as was Hitler or Mussolini. About the best that can be said for him is that he is the type who would make good as a television personality. Ordinarily speaking, he would be estimated as a man of the bank branch manager capacity, but the problem is, that as he has these ordinary abilities, he is the head of a group of fanatics. (141)

The charge of fascism is especially repugnant to Ikeda. Speaking to the general meeting of the Students Division in 1965, he said:

> One of the oft-repeated criticisms is that the Sokagakkai is a fascist organization. They fear the well disciplined and united Sokagakkai — a discipline which no other organization has ever achieved. . . .
>
> Fascism has four main characteristics. First, it is a dictatorship built on violence; second, it supports exclusive capitalism; third, it denies both parliamentarian democracy and man's basic rights; and fourth, it does not admit the equality of men. However, none of these characteristics are applicable to Sokagakkai. . . .
>
> First, as to dictatorship through violence, how could violence save more than five million families? There is no other organization like the Sokagakkai in which members enjoy peace and harmony, while creating value in society. . . .
>
> As for dictatorship, again the Sokagakkai does not qualify, because we have the definite law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, whereas dictatorship has no basic law, philosophy, or ideology. . . .
>
> Second, fascism supports capitalism exclusively. When has the Sokagakkai stood by the capitalists? On the contrary, capitalists have ridiculed the Sokagakkai, saying that it is an organization of the poor. However, they are now surprised to find that many Sokagakkai members work actively in almost every company in the nation. It is unreasonable to say that the Sokagakkai, which has never received any contribution from non-believers in its past 700 years, conspires with the covetous capitalists interested only in collecting money.
>
> Third, as to the denial of parliamentary democracy and men's rights, the truth is just the opposite. Enlightenment in Buddhism can be translated as establishment of a truly independent self, since the purpose of faith lies in obtaining absolutely free circumstances. Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy fully expounds the basic rights of man, which you as believers acquire in your daily lives.
>
> In reference to the denial of parliamentarianism by dictatorship, I want to say this: Why then did the Sokagakkai send in earnest twenty representatives to the House of Councillors unless the Sokagakkai abided by parliamentarianism? I wish to declare that the Sokagakkai is the best example of law-abiding democracy in parliament.
>
> The fourth is no exception. Buddhism respects the equality of man in the exact sense of the term. All are equal before the Daishonin, be they company presidents, ex-nobles, maid-servants, students or statesmen. . . .

> It is true that the Sokagakkai is well organized, but if as such our society is branded as fascist, the Nichibo volley-ball team . . . may be called fascist, and the Yomiuri Giants, one of Japan's leading professional baseball teams, may also be called fascist. This is too foolish even to consider. (*Lectures on Buddhism*, 4:322–5)

In spite of the vicious attacks sometimes launched upon him by outsiders, President Ikeda never replies in kind, but retains his composure and tries to reason with his detractors. He has little formal education but is widely read. Occasionally his writings contain factual errors, but he is sincerely dedicated to the ideals of Nichiren Shoshu. If idolization has been heaped upon him by his devoted followers, it seems to affect him no more than criticism.

'Enlightenment in Buddhism,' he says, 'can be translated as establishment of a truly independent self, since the purpose of faith lies in obtaining absolutely free circumstances.' No Nichiren Buddhist will dispute that. Nichiren lived under a military dictatorship, and he had no use for it, believing that it would impose exterior criteria preventing people from living according to natural law. The *Dharma Flower* is the ultimate teaching of the Buddha because it opens the individual to his own inner potential. This is the essence of *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo.*

Nichiren Shoshu sees itself as the vanguard of a new world view encompassing both man and nature. 'What most concerns me here,' said Ikeda in this respect, 'is the European-led conception of human being as against nature, and its headlong direction in placing humanity above nature. It is the stalemate arrived at by this notion that I simply must point out. For the human is but a part of nature' (*Seikyo Times*, March 1970, 39). Ikeda is convinced that modern science, modern political aspirations, and the age-old religious questions of mankind all find their solution only in Nichiren Shoshu. In his book *Science and Religion*, which is surprisingly erudite for an author who never got past a junior college education, he develops the theme that Buddhism in general and Nichiren Shoshu in particular stand in complete harmony with the discoveries of modern science (vii).

> The argument between religion and science has been repeated over and over, but in such cases, 'religion' meant mainly Christianity. Therefore, the contradiction between science and religion was merely that between science and Christianity, thus proving the inferiority of Christian theology . . . Science and religion are fittingly compatible. As a matter of fact, science is learning which takes natural phenomena as the subject of study, and pursues the law of causality. On the other hand, Buddhism is the philosophy which makes life the object of study and clarifies the inner law of cause and effect. In methodological terms, the former is analytical and inductive, and the latter is synthetic and

deductive. However, the two cannot be incompatible in the final analysis.

In politics, Ikeda came to feel the same way. If it could convert one-third of the nation and win the good will of a second third, then Nichiren Shoshu would dominate Japan. With 15,000,000 members, Sokagakkai was well on its way towards this goal. 'Government aims at realizing the happiness of the individual through rectification of the order and systems of society, while Buddhism attempts to bring true happiness to the individual by removing the causes of unhappiness found in his own life. Therefore it is possible to build a supreme cultural state and an ideal society by merging government and Buddhist philosophy' (Murata 169).

In 1961 Ikeda stated firmly that 'we are not a political party. Therefore we will not get into the House of Representatives.' Three years later, however, he had changed his mind. Sokagakkai officially launched the *Komeito*, 'The Clean Government Party'. In 1965 it ran 14 candidates for the House, and all of them won. With every election thereafter, *Komeito* grew in strength. In the 1975 elections it was the third largest party, winning 95 seats in the House, more than the Communist or the once-powerful Democratic Socialist Party. But it was still a long way from the one-third that Ikeda had been aiming for; that would require over 156 seats. However, it was enough to cause its votes to be courted by the two larger parties in the House.

As Sokagakkai gained in political punch, opposition grew proportionately. Many citizens, who might once have looked on Sokagakkai as just an off-beat religious sect, now began to be alarmed. Most Japanese are nominal Buddhists, belonging to many different sects and head temples. These sects may differ on many details, but on one thing they are agreed: Nichiren Shoshu is heretical — even 'non-Buddhist', in that it replaces the Buddha with Nichiren. Japanese, like Americans, are accustomed to religious pluralism, and the exclusiveness of Nichiren Shoshu rubbed them the wrong way. A socialist writer, Hirotatsu Fujiwara, managed to bring the issue to a boil in 1969 with the publication of his book, *I Denounce Sokagakkai*.

There had been many hostile press reports on Sokagakkai, and one more book would not have had such an impact had not word got around that the Clean Government Party and Sokagakkai were trying to prevent its publication. Einosuke Akiya, a General Director of Sokagakkai, and Yukimasa Fujiwara, a Komeito Metropolitan Assemblyman, visited the author in his home and tried to persuade him not to publish his book. They claimed later that their visit was 'friendly', but Fujiwara cried, 'Foul!' According to him, book distributors, advertisers, and he himself were threatened with reprisals if they so much as mentioned the existence of such a book. Soon the story was in all the papers, and the book, needless to say, became a best-seller.

The book was a broadside against Ikeda, Sokagakkai, and Komeito, all of which the author labelled as 'fascist'. He showed little understanding of Buddhism and considered that the merits or demerits of a religious sect were of minor importance. What did matter, according to him, was the fanaticism of the Sokagakkai adherents, the absolute power of Ikeda over the organization, and the potential danger of such a man and such a group gaining control of the nation. The 'suppression' issue, with its threat to freedom of speech, played right into his hands. The final edition of his book contained an appendix with a day-by-day account of all the events surrounding its publication.

Newspapers gave the 'suppression' story a lot of coverage. When the Diet (Japanese Congress) reconvened in February 1970, members of opposition parties — Socialists, Communists, and Social Democrats — brought the matter onto the floor of the House, demanding a full investigation. They claimed that the constitutional provision of separation of church and state was in jeopardy, and demanded that Ikeda be brought before an investigating committee. Prime Minister Sato who, according to Fujiwara, had once expressed admiration for 'such a brave book', was now non-committal. Perhaps he felt that opposition parties were trying to involve his administration in the affair (Fujiwara, 258, 282, 283).

Nevertheless, Sokagakkai was increasingly embarrassed by the vehemence of these attacks. Ikeda found himself forced to make a choice between politics and religion. He opted for the latter.

In May 1970, at the annual general meeting of Sokagakkai, Ikeda made an open apology: 'I wish to apologize frankly to all concerned and to the people. There was no intent to interfere with freedom of speech, but nonetheless (some) activities were interpreted as interference. It made the persons concerned feel they were being pressured.'

He went on to state that from now on the administration of Sokagakkai and Komeito would be clearly separated; Sokagakkai would continue to give its support to Komeito, but individual members could vote for the party of their choice. Emma Layman points out that in the next elections they did just that, and Komeito lost a number of seats to the Socialists (*Buddhism in America*, 124). Nevertheless, it has continued to be the nation's third largest political party.

Ikeda also backed off on two other controversial issues. The Sokagakkai methods of violent conversion (*shakubuku*) had been much criticized. Such methods, he said, would no longer be used. Finally, he denied that Nichiren Shoshu wished to build a National Kaidan by government decree. Nichiren Shoshu would build its own Kaidan, and Sokagakkai would pay for it. (Fujiwara, 287).

The head temple of Nichiren Shoshu, Taiseki-ji, is 700 years old, founded by Nikko in 1290 after he left Mount Minobu. However, he did not stay there very long. By 1298 he had established a new temple two

miles away called Hommon-ji, from which he directed his branch sect for the next 35 years until his death at the age of 87. The two temples have disputed the title of Head Temple ever since, and also disagreed on theology. Taiseki-ji came to maintain that the Three Treasures of Buddhism — Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha — mean that Nichiren is the Original Buddha, Daimoku is the Dharma, and Nikko the Sangha. Hommon-ji maintained that Shakyamuni is the Original Buddha, Daimoku is the Dharma, and Nichiren heads the Sangha. As this is the same position as that held by Nichiren Shu at Mount Minobu, it was able to amalgamate peacefully with the latter in 1941. Taiseki-ji resisted amalgamation and remained independent.

For seven centuries Taiseki-ji was not a great centre for pilgrimages like Mount Minobu, Ikegami Hommon-ji, and other places associated with the life of Nichiren. Nichiren himself had never been there, and even Nikko had lived there for only a year or two. His tomb is at Hommon-ji, where he died. Taiseki-ji did not have any impressive buildings or works of art other than the massive main gate built by Nikkan in 1717. Before the war it had 259 acres of arable land; after the war its holdings were reduced to 42 acres. When Toda visited there after his release from prison, he found the Head Temple neglected and run-down, and vowed to do something about it.

Taiseki-ji had one thing possessed by nobody else: the very 'embodiment' of Nichiren himself, in the Mandala on the Plank (*Ita-mandara*), the Dai-Gohonzon. This is the heart, soul, and 'embodiment' of the Nichiren Shoshu faith.

'The cardinal point of faith,' said Toda, 'lies first and foremost in pilgrimage (to Taiseki-ji). No one can develop true faith unless and until he faces and worships the Dai-Gohonzon directly' (*Seikyo Times*, August 1971, 37). Both he and Ikeda made the embellishment of the Head Temple a matter of high priority.

Sokagakkai has transformed Taiseki-ji from a sleepy country temple complex into one of the biggest and busiest religious centres in the world. By the 1970s it was welcoming over 3,500,000 pilgrims a year — more than Lourdes in France (*Seikyo Times*, March 1972, 20). To accommodate these ever-increasing crowds, Sokagakkai launched an ambitious building programme. It raised a larger sanctuary for the Dai-Gohonzon (1955), a Grand Lecture Hall (1958), lodgings for pilgrims, and various other buildings, but the greatest of all was yet to come. In 1972 President Ikeda officially inaugurated a mammoth new Grand Main Temple, the Sho-Hondo. This, he boasted, is 'the paramount of religious architecture in the world . . . In size, the Sho-Hondo surpasses even the renowned St. Peter's in the Vatican' (*Seikyo Times*, December 1972, 11, 12).

This huge edifice was paid for by eight million contributors with money raised during a four-day drive in 1965. They are said to have donated 35,500 million yen in those four days — a truly remarkable

fund-raising achievement. In a long speech at the completion ceremony, Ikeda sounded like the Emperor Justinian who 'surpassed Solomon' in creating the greatest religious edifice in the world.

> Thus completed, the great building lies in all its splendor, immaculately white and brilliant in the brightness of the sun, a magnificent sight in central Japan. It soars towards the sky which is permeated with the immortal life of the universe, and rivals the sacred peak of Fuji in dignity. To the south, it commands the cobalt blue of the pacific, the unbounded expanse of water which reminds one of the infinite wisdom of Buddha. Its figure is graceful, its appearance spectacular, perfectly blending with the perpetuity of the surrounding landscape. Where can a match be found for this edifice, either in solemnity or in grandeur?
>
> (*Seikyo Times*, December 1972, 11)

According to High Priest Nittatsu Hosoi, 'Now that the supreme object of worship (Dai-Gohonzon) in true Buddhism is placed in its rightful seat, everlasting peace and prosperity will undoubtedly prevail. This place is none other than the Pure Land and the land of eternal enlightenment.'

> When once one comes and visits this sanctuary for worship, he will immediately be able to expiate his sins from the infinite past and transform his earthly desires into enlightenment, his karma-bound life into an unrestricted one, and his sufferings into happiness. In so doing, he discovers the true law of the lotus within himself and becomes the Buddha of the 'Infinite Life' Chapter of the true teachings, the Enlightened One endowed with unrestricted freedom and the three noble attributes. At that moment, his action and influence, his life and environment, his body and mind, his entity and functions — all of these become those of the Buddha. All this is attributed solely to the limitless mystic power of the Dai-Gohonzon.
>
> (*ibid.* 7)

Peace and prosperity over all the earth was Nichiren's dream. Now at last, says Nichiren Shoshu, this dream is being fulfilled. The third of the Founder's Three Great Secret Dharmas, the sacred ground where the benefits of the *Dharma Flower* are to be realized, the *Hommon-no-kaidan*, is a reality. Everlasting peace and universal enlightenment are now assured because this building has been erected in Fujinomiya, Japan.

It is clear from the above statements that in Nichiren Shoshu the *Hommon-no-kaidan* is viewed as the physical structure which houses the physical Gohonzon. Now that this structure has been immensely

enlarged, so the benefits of the Gohonzon are proportionately increased. This again is the reverse of the teachings in Nichiren Shu. According to the official handbook of the latter, *Shingyo Hikkei*. 'To uphold the Lotus Sutra is to observe the commandments (*kai*), and the place where we uphold the Lotus Sutra will become the Sacred Platform (*kaidan*). When all people uphold the Lotus Sutra, however, there will be a Sacred Platform where qualified discipline masters may give Buddhist commandments in order to perpetuate the true Dharma. Aiming at such a goal, for us to firmly uphold the Lotus Sutra, which is difficult to do, is a step towards the establishment of the true Sacred Platform of Hommon. In other words, we reach the state in which all people live in peace. Therefore it could be said that the ultimate Sacred Platform of Hommon is for all people to uphold the Lotus Sutra' (112).

The Nichiren Shu interpretation is spiritual: each of us builds his own *kaidan*; as the faith expands, *kaidan* expands until finally it will embrace all people. Then a building may be constructed to symbolize its reality. In Nichiren Shoshu, the interpretation is physical: the ultimate *kaidan* is already built, and all mankind will now resort to it.

Unfortunately, the euphoria at the completion of the Sho-Hondo gradually subsided as a more mundane consideration began to assert itself: who was the real owner of the Sho-Hondo? Originally, Soka-gakkai had been a laymen's auxiliary of Nichiren Shoshu and its Head Temple of Taiseki-ji. When Toda had overstepped his authority by allowing a venerable clergyman to be man-handled by Sokagakkai members, he atoned by apologizing and making generous contributions. But Ikeda did not consider the glorious Sho-Hondo to be a donation, as it had been paid for entirely by Sokagakkai members. It belonged to them, not to the clergy of Nichiren Shoshu.

During the 1970s the alliance between High Priest Nittatsu Hosoi with his hierarchical clerical organization and President Ikeda with his hierarchical secular society began to show signs of strain. The largest religious edifice in the world was not big enough for both of them. By the end of the decade the High Priest and the President were no longer on speaking terms, and the question of legal ownership had gone into the courts. In an effort to defuse the situation, Ikeda resigned as president of Sokagakkai in 1979, naming himself president of a new organization, Soka Gakkai International.

He need not have bothered. The courts ruled that Sokagakkai, which had paid all the bills, was the legal owner of its own property, the Sho-Hondo. High Priest Nittatsu Hosoi would have exclusive rights to the temple only on one day every month. He was forced to resign his position at Nichiren Shoshu, and Sokagakkai was able to hand-pick his successor. In defiance, Nittatsu founded a new organization claiming to represent traditional Nichiren Shoshu. It was called Nichiren Shoshu Yoshinkai, and it appealed to those temples, priests, and laymen who had never felt at ease with the flamboyant leadership of Sokagakkai,

but its following was small. Although some members of Sokagakkai joined the new organization, and others dropped out altogether, most preferred Ikeda to the dour High Priest.

In spite of the crises at the beginning and end of the decade, Sokagakkai continued to advance during the 1970s and on into the 1980s. It built the biggest temple that Japan had ever seen, and consolidated its position of leadership within Nichiren Shoshu. While Nichiren Shu suffered the pangs of student unrest at its Rissho University, Sokagakkai retained the loyalty of its youth and built them a new ultra-modern institution named Soka University. The Nichiren Shu monopoly on higher education had been broken. Sokagakkai expanded abroad as well; its foreign missions became so prosperous that they had to be reconstituted into a new society, Sokagakkai International. It published a number of scholarly books in English, including four volumes of *The Major Works of Nichiren Daishonin* and an excellent *Dictionary of Buddhist Terms and Concepts*. Its political party, Komeito, while not yet able to win a national election, continued to do well. By the end of the 1980s Sokagakkai, having overcome one obstacle after another, and having attained the status of the largest sect in Japan and largest lay organization in the world, was confidently rolling along towards the happy day of *Kosen-rufu*: worldwide peace and happiness.

Chapter 16

Have a Gohonzon: Nichiren Shoshu in America

'Would you like to attend a Buddhist meeting?'

The speakers are two young women in their early twenties. One of them is Japanese, the other Caucasian. They are standing on a street not far from the campus of an American university, stopping any pedestrian who seems to have no place to go in particular.

'A Buddhist meeting? Where?'

'Right inside. It starts in ten minutes.'

'Well, why not?' It might be interesting. Buddhist meeting? It sounds exotic, something you don't run into every day.

The prospective convert is ushered into a small room nearly empty of furniture. There are 10 or 20 people seated on the floor, mostly as young as himself. Before entering, he is asked to take off his shoes and leave them by the door. He does so, wondering if he will ever see them again. Then he takes his place somewhat uncomfortably in the back of the room along with others who have wandered in to find out what this is all about. Those in front, however, are different. They are neatly if casually dressed, and chatter with each other in a friendly manner. They wave for him to sit up closer, but he prefers to remain in the rear where he can make a discreet exit if necessary. At the front of the room he sees a large black and gold, box-like structure with artificial metallic flowers on either side. The smell of incense hangs in the air.

In a little while another man enters quietly; he is a little older than the rest and is apparently the local leader. He kneels down in front of the black box and opens the door, revealing a scroll with Chinese letters. All conversation stops. The leader sits back on his feet in the Japanese style. Most of his followers do the same, although a few, who find this method of sitting uncomfortable, sit sprawled. The leader strikes a bell three times and leads the others in chanting something

in a foreign language (*Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo*). Then suddenly all are busily reciting from little blue books in rapid and rhythmic Sino-Japanese: *Myo ho ren ge kyo ho ben pon dai ni ni ji se son ju san mai an jo ni ki* . . . It goes on and on. One of the young women who met him outside on the street has sat down beside him and is showing him the English transliteration of the words, urging him to join in. He mutters a few sounds, but soon loses his place. The rest go charging ahead: *Sho i sha ga Butsu zo shin gon hyaku sen man noku mu shu sho butsu* . . .

Finally they reach the end. The bell rings; all chant slowly, *Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo*, three times, and then fall silent. Next, to the horror of the visitor, they turn back to page one of their little books and begin all over again. Soon he is wondering why he came and whether he should get up and leave. Just when he thinks that he cannot take one more minute of this nonsense, they all put down their books and begin to chant repeatedly, *Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo*. The chanting drones on and on, gradually getting faster. Some people rub beads together as they chant, making an eerie rattling sound. The whole performance has a rather hypnotic effect, and our visitor finds that he is joining in the chant in spite of himself. But when he is beginning to think that the chanting will continue all night, it stops abruptly at the sound of the ringing of the bell.

So far, everything has seemed like some curious Oriental rite — interesting, but hardly worth writing home about. Now the mood changes. The leader gets to his feet with a big smile.

'Good evening!' The words are English and the face is American, but the intonation is distinctly Japanese.

'Good evening!' answer back his happy disciples.

'Welcome to the Main Street Group of Nichiren Shoshu! We have a lot to talk about tonight. But first, how about warming up with a song led by the YMD?'

There are cheers and applause as a young man leaps to his feet. Waving his arms vigorously, he leads a song to the tune of, 'I've been working on the railroad'.

> I've been doing Shakubuku,
> All the live long day.
> I've been chanting Daimoku
> To get me on my way.
> The eyes of the world are upon me,
> And I shall never stray.
> Can't you hear the members calling,
> And happiness on your way.

There are more cheers and applause. Then a young woman jumps up, a representative of the 'YWD'. Eyes sparkling with excitement, she

directs with arms waving and hips snapping. This time the song is set to a well known Jewish melody:

Have a Go-hon-zon,
Have a Go-hon-zon,
Have a Go-hon-zon,
Chant for a while.

When day is dawning,
Gon-gyo each morning
Keeps you from yawning
And makes you smile.

You'll find that you will be
Full of vitality
Watching your benefits
Grow in a pile.

And do Sha-ku-bu-ku!

You will find your days run smoother,
Even if you've been a loser
Your surroundings may be loony;
Just remember Esho Funi.

Turn it on! Karma's gone!
And be happy evermore!

Is this Buddhism? Next, various members get to their feet to give testimonies about the many good things they have received because of chanting to the Gohonzon. Each testimony is greeted with enthusiastic applause. Here is one example:

'I was out on the West Coast and I had to get back East, but I had no car. I had $600.00. I decided to chant for a $600 car, a Chevrolet, ten years old, and coloured blue. I went to this meeting out in L.A., and, man, we really chanted up a storm!

'There was this guy chanting next to me. When we stopped to rest, I asked him what he was chanting for. "I want someone to buy my car," he said. "How much are you asking for it?" "Six hundred." "What kind of car is it?" "It's a Chevvy, ten years old." "What colour is it?" "Blue." "Sold!"'

The meeting erupts in wild cheers. 'I'm telling you, man, this Gohonzon is fantastic! Ask for anything — anything — and if you chant hard enough, you get it!'

By now the visitor is either incredulous or beginning to get interested. Questions are invited from the floor. Most of them are obvious:

'What is Gohonzon? . . . Kosen rufu . . . Why does the chant work? . . . Are there any rules to be followed? (None. Just chant.) . . . Will it work even if I don't believe in it?' (Yes.)

The answers are friendly but brief. There is no getting side-tracked into any kind of deep philosophical discussion — that can come later. 'Buddhism is not theory, but practice. It will work for anybody, whether you believe in it or not. Just try it! Try chanting for 30 days, and if your life has not changed for the better in that time, I'll let you beat me over the head right here in front of everybody!'

Some of the guests are non-committal, but others are willing to give it a try. They are greeted with a warm hand-shake from the leader and happy applause from all the members. When it is clear that all have joined who are going to for that evening, the leader calls for a final round of chanting *Daimoku*. The newcomer is shown how to hold the prayer beads and how to pronounce the wonderful words.

The meeting finally breaks up into little groups of happy conversationalists. The newcomer asks more questions, but the members are eager to encourage him to start practising. The chances are that at least one of them comes from a background similar to his, or once had similar problems. Now, thanks to the Gohonzon, things have changed.

The leader will probably not join in these informal chats; he has more serious matters to take care of. Taking aside two or three of his more faithful members, he begins to go over with them plans for the next District or General Chapter meeting. Being a *hancho* (Group Chief) takes up all his free time. He has been doing a good job, however, and may soon be promoted to *shikibucho*, District Chief.

Of course there will be a follow-up on our convert. He will be visited in his home and helped to set up his own 'little black box' for enshrining his personal copy of the Gohonzon. At first he may be satisfied with a simple shrine (*butsudan*) for his Gohonzon, or even none at all. But eventually, if he stays in the movement, he will want a more elaborate one, imported from Japan complete with incense burner, bell, candlesticks, artificial metallic flowers, and other paraphernalia. This is his *kaidan*, the centre of his life. He will be taught how to recite *Gongyo* (portions of the Lotus Sutra in Chinese), which he will be expected to do every morning and evening. At first this will be a painful process for him, and he may struggle with the strange Chinese words for as long as an hour and a half at each sitting. But if he tries hard and comes to meetings often enough, he will be able to practise with the others, gradually improving until he is able to zip through it in 30 minutes.

During the 1960s and 1970s Nichiren Shoshu made joining and receiving a Gohonzon as simple as merely asking for it. We will never know how many 'converts' entered just out of curiosity, received a Gohonzon, and then forgot all about it. Japanese members, who look on the Gohonzon as the symbol of their own life (so that should it be torn or damaged, the same fate would befall the owner), were shocked to

enter homes of supposed members in America and find Gohonzons used as wall decorations or lying forgotten in a drawer. New regulations came into effect requiring converts to attend at least three meetings before receiving a Gohonzon, have the consent of their families, and be approved by a senior leader (Layman, *Buddhism in America* 133–4).

A particular obstacle to conversion was (and still is) the opposition of a young convert's parents and family. There were tales of youngsters hiding in closets to chant softly. Of course, no Gohonzon could be enshrined under such circumstances. Nichiren Shoshu, therefore, tried to get young converts to bring their parents to the meetings, confident that the parents would be impressed by the cheerful atmosphere and the change in their child's behaviour.

The following, from a young convert in Malibu, California, is a typical testimonial:

> I attended my first discussion meeting in November, 1967. At that time, I was really unhappy. I was a very confused young man of 18. From the time I was fifteen years old, I had been taking drugs to escape from my problems. My 17th and 18th years were the worst. I began to inject drugs and became dependent on them. I became very skinny and turned yellow all over. My mind was really confused and paranoid.
>
> I had a persecution complex and thought people were conspiring against me and making jokes about me. I did many things to cover up for my insecurities. I became known among my friends as the boy who took the most drugs. This I really bragged of.
>
> Just prior to attending a discussion meeting, I was seeing two doctors, one a psychiatrist and the other a drug specialist. I was going to a clinic for drug addicts, struggling to find happiness.
>
> When I attended my first discussion meeting, the person who brought me to the meeting encouraged me from every angle to chant *Daimoku*. After chanting *Daimoku* for half an hour, I felt really good. I was extremely impressed by the testimonials and I really felt I belonged there. I raised my hand to receive a Gohonzon at the end of the meeting.
>
> I started to practice very sincerely from that night. My life began changing immediately. I overcame all my physical problems and this really surprised me. Within the next few weeks, I overcame many of my weak natures, and my life changed greatly. I cut my long hair, got a job, and re-enrolled in school. I started to love and understand my family.
>
> It has now been over two years since I joined, and the change has been great. I am happy at home, on my job, and in school. I never run from them like I used to. I am determined to reach

> these goals. In only a year, I completely changed my life. Each day I go through more changes. I know that by chanting many *Daimoku* I can become closer to President Ikeda and really become a leader in the society of the future.
>
> (*Seikyo Times*, June 1970, 72).

The most striking feature of converts to Nichiren Shoshu is not that they become more 'religious' or even that they are happier than before; this is characteristic of converts to any faith. What is special about them is that they become more energetic; a new vitality permeates their activities. They chant vigorously, sing vigorously, walk vigorously (or even run instead of walk), and work vigorously. They expect to be successful at whatever they do, and generally they are. Words like *life-force, determination* and *attack*! lace their vocabularies. People who once drifted aimlessly through life now feel the need to go somewhere and be somebody. By making a positive contribution to society, they believe they are hastening the day of *Kosen-rufu*, world peace and happiness.

Once he has been practising for a while, the newcomer will be expected to begin regular study of Nichiren Shoshu doctrines and philosophy. He has an ample collection of books and magazines to help him. Written examinations are held at regular intervals. Candidates can move up the academic ladder to Assistant Lecturer, Lecturer, Associate Assistant Professor, Assistant Professor, and Associate Professor. Except in the highest degrees, no originality or special research is required to pass these examinations. All the answers are given in the publications of the society, and every effort is made to get the candidate to learn them and pass to the next level. The more advanced degrees require essays on some phase of Nichiren Shoshu. Candidates are expected to be well versed on the life and writings of Nichiren, though study of the *Dharma Flower* is not stressed.

Beginning in 1968, the Nichiren Shoshu Academy (as Nichiren Shoshu of America called itself), extended its academic outreach to outsiders by inaugurating a series of highly successful seminars at major campuses across the country. 'Professor' George Williams (who had changed his name from Masayasu Sadanaga), director of NSA, gave a series of entertaining and thought-provoking lectures at such far-flung colleges as the University of California, UCLA, Boston University, Memphis State, U.S. Air Force Academy, University of Nebraska, Pennsylvania, Princeton, Cornell, Rice, Harvard, Maryland, Amhurst, York University of Toronto, and many more. By 1971 he had given 70 seminars on 40 college campuses (*NSA Seminary Report, 1968, 1971* 71–3).

According to the report.

> In an informal way, Professor Williams explains the Philosophy of

> Happiness, relating Buddhist terms directly to (the student's) own daily life. 'Hell is how you feel when you get all D's, and heaven is when you get all A's,' he tells them. 'Heaven and hell are not waiting for you when you die, but rather are conditions in your life right now. So why don't you work hard to change your life of hell into heaven?' Then he gives them the key to this happy life — Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo — and all the students have the experience of chanting, themselves. Accustomed to large impersonal lectures, the students are at first startled by this new type of learning experience.
>
> (i–ii)

The report contains interesting statistics of NSA. It claimed 200,000 members in 1970, with individuals in every state in the Union. Membership more than doubled in the years 1968–70. Thirty-five per cent of the members were between 21 and 30 years of age, with only 9 per cent over 51. Fifty-nine per cent were female, and most members were single. Twenty-seven per cent listed their occupation as housewife, 19 per cent as student, 10 per cent professional, and 4 per cent executive. Religious family backgrounds were equally divided between Catholic and Protestant (30 per cent each); minorities gave their backgrounds as Jewish (6 per cent) and atheist (5 per cent). Of the former Protestants, 40 per cent were Baptists and 19 per cent Methodists. In 1960, 96 per cent of the members were Orientals. Ten years later the Orientals were in the minority: 30 per cent; 41 per cent were Caucasian, 13 per cent Latin American, 12 per cent Afro-American, and 4 per cent 'other' (95–106).

By the end of the 1970s, however, there had been some changes. First of all, the total number of members had declined after reaching a peak of 237,500 claimed in 1976. There were many reasons for the decline, not the least of which was the changing mood of the times. The college students of 1980 differed from those of 1970; they were more interested in careers than in 'cults'. The Vietnam war was over, and students were less eager to drop out of society. The Jonestown massacre in South America had given a bad name to all religious cults. NSA discovered that easy converts were not dependable; too many Gohonzons were ending up in desk drawers.

According to Yoko Parks in an article appearing in 1980 entitled, 'Nichiren Shoshu Academy in America: Changes during the 1970s', the hard-core members were probably about 20 per cent of the total; it was considered more important to build on them than on the fringe members. They were now older, better educated, and of a higher income level than when they had first joined 10 or 15 years before. They were less interested in group activities and more concerned with personal development. They were disillusioned with easy-come-easy-go converts. Obeying orders from Japan, they toned down efforts to

shakubuku everyone in sight. Finally, the schism in Japan between the Sokagakkai and the High Priest had wide repercussions (*Journal of Nichiren Buddhism*, Winter 1980, 25 ff). Nevertheless, it is evident that by the mid-1980s NSA had recovered from its setbacks of the previous decade and was expanding once more. Recent NSA conventions have been more spectacular than ever.

An important part of NSA activities is song and dance. Musical productions come under the supervision of a special department called *Minon*. It is not necessary to be a member of NSA to participate in *Minon* productions, but the performance is always tied in with some NSA activity. There are many professional entertainers in NSA as well as talented amateurs. Add all this natural talent to the special Nichiren Shoshu ingredient of enthusiasm, and the public is guaranteed first-rate entertainment, be it a rock concert, a parade, or an opera.

After observing the NSA general meeting in Akron, Ohio, in 1973, the manager of the Akron Civic Center reported:

> The first thing I was impressed with was the detail of the organization. They came in almost every day — not just one guy or two guys, but every day it was different people. Each had their own area of responsibility. After a while, I said, 'This thing is going to be the most fantastically organized thing I ever saw,' because everybody was taking care of all those little details down to the last inch. You know, measuring the place, taking photographs, getting drawings of the building, which they reproduced. That impressed me. I thought, 'The organization is really on the ball as far as attention to detail.' Today when I arrived . . . people were all over the place, here, there, everywhere, just hussling and bustling. But the thing that caught my eye right away was that they knew what they were doing.
>
> So that impressed me, and, of course, I think there is no one who couldn't help but be impressed by the show. Like Bill the engineer and Mike and I were laughing, saying we were glad it was dark because we were standing there with tears coming out of our eyes, and we weren't even members of the group! But you just got to be impressed by one thing — with the performances the people put on and the band. I mean, a thousand people strong filled the balcony; I mean, it's just an experience; you have to see it to believe it. It's like you can't describe it to someone. I could never describe to my board what happened today because they just wouldn't be able to conceive of anything like it. You just have to see it to believe it . . . Another very impressive thing was the end. They sang one of the songs of the organization, I guess, and they linked arms and then swayed back and forth, and every other row was leaning a different way . . . Golly, I wish I had a movie of the thing![73]

A number of entertainers have been attracted to Nichiren Shoshu. Among them are jazz saxaphonist Wayne Shorter, jazz pianist Herbie Hancock, actor Sal Mineo, actor John Astin, actor Beau Bridges, popular TV comedienne Roseanne Barr, and rock superstar Tina Turner. In her autobiography, *I, Tina*, she attributes the happy turn in her fortunes to the day she first chanted, *Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo* (173–4). She has been an enthusiastic member of Nichiren Shoshu ever since.

The innovative jazz musician Robin Eubanks, leading proponent of M-BASE (computer and electronic music), had stopped composing altogether to listen to sounds like waves at the seashore. From there he moved to the sound of *Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo*, and it soon became the main source of inspiration for his 'hyperspace' jazz (*Smithsonian* August 1989, 194).

Nichiren Shoshu also appeals to professional athletes. 'This religion is simply a must for sportsmen,' said Los Angeles outfielder Willie Davis to *Time* magazine. 'I was never a great home-run hitter. I hit only ten home-runs in the 1971 season. Last year I suddenly ended up hitting 19 because I chanted my prayers every morning and every night before every game.' When asked why his batting average had dropped from .309 to .289, he replied, 'I didn't pray hard enough' (II/5/73).

If *Nam' Myoho Renge Kyo* is not yet a household word in America, it is not entirely unknown. It has been heard in movie and TV productions. In a TV crime thriller we saw recently, a young woman expecting to be murdered began to chant fervently. Sure enough, she was rescued at the last minute.

Another prominent feature of Nichiren Shoshu International (of which NSA is a part) is pilgrimages to Taiseki-ji. Every member hopes to participate in at least one *tozan* to Japan and pray directly to the Dai-Gohonzon. Flights of eager pilgrims wing their way to Japan from around the world throughout the year, and up to a thousand will attend the Summer Training Courses. They return home even more imbued with 'the Gakkai spirit'.

President Ikeda first came to America on 2 October 1960. He announced 'modestly' that his arrival would become more important in American history than the landing of Columbus. At that time the membership in America consisted of a few hundred Japanese and a handful of American ex-servicemen married to Japanese brides, but organization got under way immediately. Leaders were assigned and mission territories were staked out. One year later 61 American members made the first group pilgrimage to Taiseki-ji. After two years membership had grown to 3,500 families.

In 1963 Ikeda returned to America and revamped the organization. He appointed 32-year-old Masayasu Sadanaga as General Chapter Chief, which proved to be a good choice, although by no means a blind one. He had known the young man and his family back in Japan.

Sadanaga had come to America in 1957 to study at UCLA. Within five days of his arrival, he was shocked to learn of the death of his father. The first letter of condolence (and encouragement) he received was from Daisaku Ikeda.

The first year was not easy. He struggled to learn English so as to improve his low grades, and worked from midnight until 8.00 a.m. as a janitor and dishwasher. 'He screamed *Daimoku* to the Gohonzon, saying, "I've got to win!"' reports the *Seikyo Times*. Eventually his grades improved enough to earn him a scholarship. He completed his studies at the University of Maryland, where he earned an M.A. in Political Science, and then returned to California to greet Ikeda.

At first he was unhappy when President Ikeda assigned him permanently to the United States, since he had hoped to return home to Japan, but he adapted quickly. 'I decided to become a good communicator,' he said. 'I even changed my name to an American name (George Williams). I feel like an American. This is my home. The U.S. has a great heritage which has been forgotten by many. I want to help Americans remember that heritage and make it even greater in the future' (*Seikyo Times*, March 1972, 30–31).

Mr Sadanaga/Williams is a very good 'communicator' indeed. The *Princeton Notice* commented that 'he has the ability to drop a pipe line to people listening and turn them right on to his level' (29 October 1969). His talks are flavoured with humour and sparkle with vitality. He is at his best with small groups where his personal magnetism fills the room.

Nichiren Shoshu of America, like its counterparts in over a hundred countries around the world, is a part of Soka Gakkai International and directly under President Ikeda.[74] It is organized along lines similar to Sokagakkai in Japan, although it is no longer a part of it. The General Director has his headquarters in Santa Monica, California, where he is assisted by executive directors, each of whom is responsible for a 'territory'. Territories are divided into 'areas', each with its own office and director. Further subdivisions are called communities, chapters, districts, and groups or cells (*han*). As the organization expands or as turnovers occur, there are plenty of opportunities for potential leaders to rise up the ladder. There are also peer structures for men (Men's Division and Young Men's Division) and women (WD and YWD), each of which has its own table of organization.

While the Japanese Sokagakkai is very nationalistic, Soka Gakkai International is truly what its name implies. Every subordinate foreign group is encouraged to develop along local patriotic lines. In America patriotism was forced down the throats of members from the 'hippie generation', many of whom had been attracted to NSA precisely because of its foreign flavour. The 1960s, says one NSA leader, was 'a time when we could get many young people to join just because we were non-Americans, unorthodox, and very different.' Nevertheless,

orders came from Japan to display the Stars and Stripes, use patriotic slogans, and revitalize the 'spirit of '76'. Members were urged to participate in uniformed parades and cultural festivities. In 1976 NSA celebrated the bicentennial with three elaborate conventions, one in Boston, one in Philadelphia, and one in New York. The focus was on the American flag and all that it stands for.

Charles Prebish points out in *American Buddhism* that alone among Buddhist groups in America, NSA has acquired an indigenous flavour (81).

> Nichiren Shoshu offers a sacred center that is overwhelmingly American. I say this not only because the American flag flies over all Nichiren Shoshu buildings in the country, but rather because the leaders and members of the organization seem to offer this not *merely* as a perfunctory gesture of respect, but with a real understanding of what the American flag symbolizes. In understanding the advantages of having established a sacred center that is in America and of America, Nichiren Shoshu is able to tap into the creative power inherent in that center.

Since 1976 NSA has turned its attention from quantity to quality. Ten years later the average member was older, better educated, more affluent, and less anxious to dress up in a Revolutionary War uniform and march on a hot fourth of July. The patriotic undertones were not abandoned — if anything, they increased. But there were fewer group activities (once a week instead of several times a week), less street corner evangelism, and more emphasis on individual practice and study. The split between Ikeda and the High Priest had a sobering effect for a while, but the crisis passed. Some members dropped out, others began to explore other Nichiren sects as alternatives. Those who remained demanded more say in how their organization was run (it was, after all, now supposed to epitomize American democracy, and not be directed solely from the top), and they were less willing to be spoon-fed doctrines from Japan. They wanted to be able to think for themselves. In 1979 the annual examinations based on rote learning were abolished (Parks 29–34).

Nevertheless, there is still one aspect of NSA life where democracy does not apply: no opposition is tolerated. Nichiren Shoshu has been more successful censuring criticism in the United States than in Japan. When it tried to prevent the publication in Japan of Fujiwara's book, *I Denounce Sokagakkai*, it was firmly rebuffed. In the United States, on the other hand, it has been able to silence voices speaking from a non-Shoshu perspective. In 1980 the University of Hawaii Press published *Nichiren: Selected Writings* by Laurel R. Rodd, with a cover illustration of a copy of the Dai-Gohonzon. To Nichiren Shoshu, the Dai-Gohonzon is sacred and does not belong on a book cover, so NSA threatened legal

action for 'violation of copyright'. Rather than enter costly litigation, the University withdrew the book from circulation, destroyed the offending book jacket, and kept the work available only in costly photocopies.

NSA may not be as vociferous as it was a decade or two ago, but it is more democratic and more solidly entrenched. An increasingly large proportion of the members are the grown-up children of the original converts. The old fire has not gone, but it has been redirected from overseas to the USA. Emphasis is placed on the work ethic, and members are urged to 'become leaders in society'.

'This country,' says General Director Williams, 'is of the people, by the people, and for the people. But if it is of lousy people, by lousy people, and for lousy people, it is a lousy country.' It is the mission of the 'human revolution' to transform it into a country of happy people, by happy people, and for happy people. Then America will be what it was meant to be: the land of the free and the home of the brave.

Chapter 17

Reiyukai: the Spiritual Friendship Society

'Looking for the spirit of Buddha? Find it in beautiful Japan . . . Your cost: only $400.00.'

With these words printed on an attractive, full-colour brochure, Reiyukai introduced itself to America in 1972. Tickets sold out quickly, and a few weeks later, 140 Americans flew across the Pacific for a first-class tour of central Japan. When they returned home, a handful of them had signed up as charter members of Reiyukai America. Most were uncommitted, but none were unimpressed by the quality of their accommodation and the hospitality of their hosts. As a travel bargain the 'First Inner Trip' had few equals, but as a religion Reiyukai remained a puzzle to most of the tourists. Few had any prior knowledge of Buddhism and even fewer could grasp what Reiyukai was trying to communicate.

Other 'Inner Trips' followed annually for several years. The price went up and the quality of accommodations went down, but the warm hospitality of the Japanese hosts remained constant. It was probably this, more than the lectures, which accounted for the slow but steady increase in foreign members. Reiyukai, they were told, meant 'Spiritual Friendship Society', and the spirit of friendship was obvious.

Reiyukai was formally incorporated in 1930, the same year that Makiguchi began what was to become Sokagakkai. Reiyukai is the older of the two, for it grew out of teachings which had been propounded by its founder since 1919. After 1930 it grew rapidly until World War II, when its centre of operations at Tokyo suffered severely from the bombings. By the mid-1950s its rate of growth had levelled off. Membership stood at between two and three million, and has remained fairly constant ever since. Sokagakkai, on the other hand, kept climbing, and now claims over 16,000,000 members.

The differences are more than just numerical. Sokagakkai is built on the philosophy of Nichiren Shoshu, whereas Reiyukai has its roots in not one but several subsoils. It is not affiliated with any Nichiren sect, calling itself '*Dharma Flower* Oriented' (*Hoke-kyo Kei*) rather than 'Nichiren Oriented'. Nichiren is only one of its sources.

The founder, Kakutaro Kubo (1892–1944), was the orphaned son of a fish merchant from Kominato, the birthplace of Nichiren. Helen Hardacre points out that Kubo saw an esoteric significance in this. He was the Nichiren of the Taisho Era (1912–26) (1984, 10). While only a boy of 13, he moved to Tokyo to work as a carpenter and attend technical schools. He did well at his craft, and by 1914 he was supervising construction projects for the Imperial Household Agency. It was there that he caught the eye of Count Sengoku (1872–1935), a prominent bureaucrat who in 1920 was elected to the House of Peers. The count took a liking to the young man and arranged for him to marry the only daughter of the widow of one of his retainers and to adopt her family name of Kubo. Thus the orphaned son of a village fishmonger found himself installed in a respectable family of ancient lineage. The marriage seems to have brought no material benefits, however, for Reiyukai publications stress the poverty of the founders. Nor did Kubo's wife play any part in the organization; even the raising of her child was taken over by her sister-in-law, Kimi Kotani.

Both Count Sengoku and the widowed Mrs Kubo were devout Nichiren Buddhists, and they arranged for Kubo to be trained by a teacher from *Nichirenshugi* ('Nichirenism'), a nationalist movement led by Chigaku Tanaka. Kubo had no interest in the political aspects of Nichirenism, but he liked its appeal to traditional values of loyalty and filial piety. As the adopted son of the Kubo family, it became his duty to supervise the memorial services for the family's ancestors, and this he did diligently.

Around 1919, Kubo's brother introduced him to the writings of one Mugaku Nishida, and Kubo immediately found them congenial. Nishida said:

> The living individual is the body left behind by the ancestors in this world, so we should treat our ancestors as if they were our own bodies . . . In our hearts we have the seed of buddhahood, which also remains in the ancestors' souls, so we must protect it for our own salvation. The salvation of the ancestors is our own salvation, and our salvation is the ancestors' salvation.
>
> (Hardacre, 14)

Our own life is intimately related to those of our ancestors; to care for one is to care for the other. The important point is that we must do this ourselves, and not expect some priest to do it for us. Nishida worked out specific methods for doing this, and Kubo adopted them *in toto*.

They include chanting the sutra oneself instead of paying a priest to do it, keeping the family death register in the home rather than in a temple, and giving posthumous names not only to one's direct ancestors, but also to relatives, friends, aborted or deceased children, and even pets. This also could be done without recourse to the clergy (T. Kubo, *Development of Japanese Lay Buddhism* 17).

The *Dharma Flower* mentions 'repaying debts of gratitude', although this is not one of its principal themes. Nichiren, however, considered it important and often said so. One of his major writings is entitled 'Repaying Debts of Gratitude' (*Ho-on Jo*). In his introduction to this work, editor Taikyo Yajima says that 'Nichiren believed that attainment of Buddhahood was not a step in which individuals reached an ideal state, but was the only way to perform the recompense of indebtedness to all living beings. The Saint came to believe this as he saw that worldly and spiritual ideas are ultimately one and the same. In other words, the Saint realized that complete attainment of Buddhahood meant complete recompense of indebtedness to all living beings, and that they are merely two sides of a coin. This is clearly stated in the closing part of this essay' (xi–xiii).

Buddhahood is not individual but universal. Since all living beings are interconnected, if one person attains Buddhahood, he enables others to do the same. Nichiren 'vowed to . . . attain Buddhahood so that I could save the people from whom I had received favors' (*Sado Gokanki Sho*, *Showa-teihon*, 570).

Nichiren praised Toki Jonin for bringing his mother's ashes to Minobu for burial. 'All of your body — your head, hands, legs, and mouth — are all inherited from your parents. This kinship between your parents and you is like the relationship between seed and fruit. Therefore, as your mother is saved, you also are saved by the teachings of the *Dharma Flower*' (*Bo Jikyo Ji*). And to Nichiro in prison, he wrote, 'You have read and practiced the *Dharma Flower* with your heart and action, which will save your parents, brothers, sisters, relatives, ancestors, and everyone around you' (*Tsuchi-ro Gosho*, *Showa-teihon*, 509).

In the *Kaimoku Sho* he wrote: 'To be filial (*ko*) means to be high (*ko*); heaven is high but not at all higher than being filial. To be filial (*ko*) also means to be deep (*ko*); the earth is deep but is not any deeper than being filial . . . Disciples of the Buddha should not fail to feel grateful for the four favors received from parents, all people, the ruler, and Buddhism. Show gratitude to them.'

Kubo accepted Nichiren's reasoning but, following Nishida, he narrowed the focus from gratitude to all living things to gratitude to one's own parents and ancestors. This, he felt, would give people a personal motivation to achieve Buddhahood.

Kubo went on a spiritual retreat to Nakayama Hokekyo-ji, a temple which had been founded by Nichiren's lay disciple Toki Jonin and which had always emphasized direct spiritual insights. There he met a

spiritualist named Chise Wakatsuki (1884–1971), and in 1919 the two of them decided to found a lay group 'Friends of the Spirits' (*Rei no Tomo Kai*). The organization failed to prosper and was dissolved a few years later. Nevertheless, Reiyukai officially dates itself from this time (*Reiyukai Today*).

In 1924 they tried again, changing the name to Reiyukai (which is written with the same Chinese characters). This time the organization caught on, although a split developed between the two leaders. The original group headed by Wakatsuki retained the name Reiyukai until 1936, then changed it to Reihokai, and in 1939 to Hochikai, by which designation it is known today. Meanwhile, Kubo, his brother, and his sister-in-law founded a second branch in the Akasaka Ward of Tokyo around 1927, which the Reiyukai of today descends from. Finally, a third branch was founded the same year in Fukushima City by Kubo's friend Sadao Bekki (1897–1965). It soon broke away and is known today as Nihon Keishin Suso Jishudan (T. Kubo, *Development*, 18).

Since the collapse of the Tokugawa Shogunate and the restoration of the monarchy in 1868, Buddhism had been rudely shunted aside as a relic from the past. The nation rushed to catch up with the West philosophically, industrially, and militarily. While learning everything they could from the West, the national leaders tried to rally the people around the 'Japanese National Principles' (*Nippon Kokutai*), a 'catch-all' term for whatever was considered unique in Japanese spirituality. Buddhism, which had been imported from China and Korea, was excluded as a degenerate foreign interloper, and for a few years in the 1870s it was proscribed by law. Many Buddhist temples were closed and sacred images smashed. The persecution peaked in 1871, but the Buddhist sects never regained their former prestige.

Nichiren Buddhism survived the onslaught better than most other sects. One reason for this was the identification of Nichiren as a national hero, the epitome of a brave and patriotic Japanese. Also Nichirenism was the only form of Buddhism exclusively Japanese in origin. It could be made to fit in harmoniously with the new nationalism being sponsored by the government, and some Nichiren Buddhists did their utmost to exploit this possibility.

Chigaku Tanaka (1861–1939), a brilliant writer and lecturer, had left the priesthood of Nichiren Shu to found a lay organization advocating vigorous *shakubuku*, not only in Japan but throughout the world. It was Japan's 'manifest destiny' to 'embody' the *Dharma Flower* and spread it everywhere — by force if necessary. The one all-embracing truth is embodied in the *Dharma Flower*, which in turn is embodied in the nation of Japan under its one Emperor. In the words of Tanaka's son, Kishio Satomi, 'The *Hokekyo* must have a state like Japan in order to validate its pregnant value, and Japan should have the *Hokekyo* for the sake of the realization of her national ideal' (*Japanese Civilization*, 27).

To distinguish his nationalistic philosophical interpretation of Nichiren from traditional Nichiren Buddhism, Tanaka invented a new term, *Nichirenshugi*, which could be translated as 'Nichirenism'. It includes traditional sectarian Nichiren Buddhism but claims to transcend sectarian differences and to be applicable universally (Satomi, 11).

> Religion should redeem the body as well (as the soul) . . . Actual life is religion and religion is actual. The depravity of all religions from olden times to the present day has its root in the fallacy of a vague dualism of actual life and religion . . . . Religion must be woven into actual life, otherwise it would appear to be of no avail . . . Religion has the State and the world at large as well as the individual as objects of its salvation. But the unit of salvation is the State.
>
> (8)

Nichirenism, however, did not deify the State as such, although the State can be the 'unit of salvation' when it is moral.

> We must bring about in the near future an international constitution so that the State and the world may be judged. It is illogical that a State should punish an individual man or woman for a theft or other crime of which the State, itself, is guilty on a much larger scale. It is out of all reason to ascribe equity to national greediness. Therefore the State must undergo a moral reconstruction. So we must strive to bring about a reconstruction of the world, its countries, and individuals. We offer Nichirenism and the Japanese National Principles (*Nippon kokutai*) as the means to be considered by the nations.
>
> (10)

Yukichi Masuko, a qualified teacher of Nichirenism, was Kubo's teacher until the latter joined up with the spiritualist Wakatsuki and began to practise spiritual healing. Such practices had nothing to do with patriotic Nichirenism, so Masuko renounced his former pupil (Hardacre, 17).

Thus the philosophical foundations of Reiyukai, rarely articulated but always implicit, include Nichirenism as taught to Kubo by Masuko, Count Sengoku, and Madam Kubo. Among its features are the pre-eminence of the *Dharma Flower*, the unity of self and society and the importance of teaching others, the unity of the generations and the significance of chanting the Sutra and the Sacred Title for one's parents, facing the Absolute directly without any intermediary, the imperative to convert our world into the Pure Land of the Buddha, and the vision of Japan as the *kaidan* for the world. Even though Reiyukai rarely

quotes Nichiren, the official prayer book, *The Blue Sutra*, rightfully calls him 'the Eminent Founder' (*Hokekyoguzo-daidoshi-shinnokoso-Nichiren-Daibosatsu*). The central practices of ancestor worship, however, are lifted bodily from Nishida. Finally, the strong shamanistic element of spiritual healing comes from Wakatsuki and indirectly from Hokekyo-ji, Nakayama, the temple where she and Kubo were studying when they met.

While Kubo did not espouse a 'Lotus imperialism', his patriotism was no less intense than Tanaka's. 'Loyalty and filial piety are the basis of a truly Japanese humanity; they are the Japanese way . . . Japanese Buddhism is actually Buddhism for the protection of the state. Buddhism in our country exists for the purpose of promoting loyalty and filial piety, and for protecting the nation.'[75] These words, written in a Reiyukai publication, faithfully reflect the thoughts of Tanaka.

Kubo became a soapbox orator in Hibaya Park, calling for a return to traditional family values. The abstract 'Japanese National Principles' basic to *Nichirenshugi* became concrete to Kubo. These principles could be maintained by propping up the family and revering one's ancestors. To do this it was necessary to take Buddhism out of the temples and into the home. Nominal Buddhists must become practising Bodhisattvas, leading others long the same way which they themselves were going. In other words, they must convince others to undertake these same practices.

For the first few years Kubo made few converts. He, his older brother Yasukichi Kotani, and a few other friends seem to have been the only practitioners. When Yasukichi fell ill, Kubo insisted that his wife Kimi practise according to his instructions. Kimi did so, Yasukichi recovered, and Kimi became a true believer. With the conversion of this humble housemaid with a fifth-grade education, Reiyukai began to expand rapidly. Kimi was burning to tell others about her new faith. Night and day she wandered about the slums of the Arakawa Ward, Tokyo, making converts among itinerant labourers and ragpickers — the poorest of the poor (Hardacre, 26).

She not only preached to these people but ministered to them in every sense of the word. She would collect cabbages and greens that had fallen from produce trucks and bring them to her miserable flock. She brought them clothes to wear and soap to wash with. She gave them self-respect and a sense of purpose. She taught them elementary sanitation, cured them of their diseases, and earned for herself the reputation of a faith healer. In three months she converted an entire neighbourhood of ragpickers (*ibid.*).

This was the real beginning of Reiyukai. It soon moved up the social ladder to include small shopkeepers and tradesmen. Kimi's husband died in 1929, allowing her to give all her time to proselytizing. Reiyukai was officially incorporated the next year. Baron Taketoshi Nagayama (1871–1938), a member of the House of Peers, was named President —

a titular post which gave the organization both respectability and protection from interference from the police. Kubo was Chairman of the Board of Directors, and Kimi Kotani was named Honorary President (Kubo, *Development of Japanese Lay Buddhism*, 20).

Kakutaro Kubo died in 1944 at the age of 52. Kimi Kotani took over the leadership of the movement and the upbringing of his young son, Tsugunari, whom she was determined to mould into a worthy leader for the future.

Kimi Kotani (1901–71) was a very different type of leader from the friendly Kakutaro Kubo. What she lacked in tact (and she seems to have had very little of it) she made up for in energy and single-minded dedication to her cause. She wanted her followers to be as self-reliant as she was, but at the same time she would tolerate no contradiction. People either worshipped her or hated her; she offered no middle road. 'The severity of her scoldings,' says her nephew and step-son Tsugunari Kubo, 'was surpassed by few. It was by such harsh scoldings that I was trained.'

> Once when I was in the fifth grade of elementary school, I happened to be late returning home from school. I arrived five minutes late. My aunt would never overlook my tardiness. On this occasion, I was made to sit on the ground before her to be reprimanded. The words came in rapid succession as if fired by a machine gun.
>
> This kind of thing happened repeatedly. I cannot begin to remember how often. My aunt never failed to focus her remarks on my daily *konjo* (character). Whenever I was due punishment, I was made acutely aware of the *konjo*, that is to say, what attitude I should take toward my life and how it should appear in my daily conduct.
>
> As usual, the scolding did not stop with this. Her final words were, 'Even though I forgive you, the Spiritual World will not.' With these words she withdrew and climbed the stairs to the room where our family altar was kept, and recited the Sutra. All of a sudden, I was alone without the comfort of being able to apologize. The only sound was the voice of my aunt upstairs reciting the Sutra. The attention that had been paid to my aunt came undone after that usual parting thrust: 'Even if I forgive you, the Spiritual World will not.' These words echoed over and over in my mind.
>
> Whenever I was scolded by her in this way, it was the Spiritual World that I had to face instead of my aunt, who was a real living being. In other words, she required me to face a moral code which only I, myself, could interpret and practice in my life.
>
> (*BW* February 1975, 4–5)

This was the kind of strict standard which Kimi Kotani set down for herself, her nephew and ward, the leaders of Reiyukai, and all the members. We may fool others or even fool ourselves, but we cannot deceive the spiritual world. Like the Buddha, she taught, 'Make yourself a light. Rely upon yourself; do not depend upon anyone else' (*Mahaparinibbana Sutta*).

She herself had had to rely upon her own inner resources since childhood. Born into the family of a poverty-stricken farmer, she lost her father when she was four. Her mother remarried, but was widowed again in 1914. One of Kimi's most vivid childhood memories was of being turned away from a party at the home of a relative; she was so shabby that it was believed she would bring the house bad luck. At the age of 17 she went to Tokyo to work as a housemaid. She married, but was soon widowed. In 1925 she married again, this time to Yasukichi Kotani, an older brother of Kakutaro Kubo.

Her husband's chronic illness sapped their resources. They spent every penny on medicines, and even sold the household furniture. Finally, with her husband hovering on the verge of death, her brother-in-law laid all the blame on her. She had been neglecting their ancestors. He instructed her to recite the Sutra, chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, and go to her home town to collect the names of her ancestors. In desperation, she did as he said. Within a few days, her husband was up and around again. This remarkable recovery astonished her and won her over completely to the teachings of Kubo. From that time on she devoted all of her life to the propagation of Reiyukai.

The imperious leadership of Kimi Kotani was a mixed blessing. New members kept coming in, but old members, especially leaders, often clashed with her and broke away to found splinter groups. Kubo's son Tsugunari says (20–1):

> In the sixty-seven years of Reiyukai history, nearly thirty groups have split off and become independent organizations. As of December 31, 1984, the total membership of the Reiyukai and Reiyukai-derived groups numbered over twelve million; the Reiyukai itself had 3,000,000. Over the years, the teachings of the Reiyukai-derived organizations have not changed fundamentally from those of the Reiyukai. Some of the larger groups include Kodo Kyodan, Shishinkai and Rissho Koseikai (which, with a membership of around 6,013,401, has become twice the size of the Reiyukai), all three of which split off in the late thirties, and Bussho Gonenkai and Myochikai, which separated from the Reiyukai in 1950 and 1951 respectively. (*Development*).[76]

These splits were due at least in part to the peculiar Reiyukai system of organization, in which a member is more obligated to the 'parent'

who converts him than to the central headquarters. However, a considerable portion of the blame must go to Kimi Kotani's short temper. The present leader, Tsugunari Kubo, readily admits this in an article appearing in the Reiyukai International magazine, *Circle* (Spring 1979, 5):

> No other society has formed as many separate sects as Reiyukai. Some people put the reason for this on my aunt's personality. Looking at the situation from the inside, I think this may be true. My aunt didn't care about appearances, so when she got angry she showed it. She never compromised. Therefore, no matter who they were, people couldn't help but feel naked in my aunt's presence.

However, he accepts this philosophically.

> The Reiyukai teaches us not to rely on any one thing in particular, but to pray to our ancestors who are in the Spiritual World. Because of this, anyone can split from the Reiyukai at any time . . . Those who meet must eventually part; human bonds are impermanent. Not only do we separate from each other physically, but our hearts also part.
>
> (*ibid.*)

Kimi Kotani came to be known far beyond the circle of her immediate disciples. For her, the principal task of a Buddhist was to perform acts of mercy and compassion. Every member of Reiyukai was expected to help the poor, the sick, the orphans, the elderly, and the homeless. Groups of volunteers would arrive suddenly at a hospital or an old people's home and busily set to work sweeping, scrubbing, replacing old bed clothes with new ones, and distributing sweets, pocket money, and good cheer. Reiyukai ran no charitable institutions of its own, but contributed liberally wherever it saw a need.

> It has donated to the inmates of the national rehabilitation centers pianos, musical instruments, athletic goods, TV sets, records, motion picture cameras and projectors, flower hothouses, special promenades, cages of small birds, small workshop equipment . . . small cottages to hold tea ceremonies or cooking classes for blind female trainees, poultry farming equipment for blind male trainees, etc.
>
> (*Reiyukai and Social Services*, 24)

As Reiyukai became more widely known, it began to receive criticism as well as praise. The post-war Japanese press loved to dig up scandals about the 'new religions'. In 1950 an original work in Nichiren's own

hand disappeared from Kuon-ji on Mount Minobu and reappeared mysteriously at Reiyukai headquarters. Reiyukai 'in-fighting' seems to have been the cause. In 1953 Reiyukai was accused of embezzling funds destined for the Red Cross, and Kotani and two leaders were arrested. The other two confessed, and Mrs Kotani was released. Both incidents were bad publicity for Reiyukai, and caused many leaders and members to withdraw from the society. The years of steady growth came to an end. Those leaders who remained in the organization were the most devotedly loyal to Mrs Kotani. She emerged from the crises as absolute ruler.[77]

By the late 1950s Kimi Kotani felt that she was ready to fulfil the dream of Nichiren and build 'the *kaidan* of this century'. Years before, Kakutaro Kubo had spoken of the importance of establishing 'a single holy Buddhist temple in this land'. Unlike other temples, which were run by professional priests, this one would be run by and for the people. It would be dedicated to Maitreya (Japanese, *Miroku*), the Buddha of the future, whose name means 'friendliness'.[78]

Mrs Kotani chose an isolated site on Mount Togasayama on the Izu Peninsula, a difficult spot on which to raise the 'Kaidan for the twentieth century'. Roads had to be built up the mountain, wells had to be sunk for water, and 2.5 million square metres of land had to be cleared. The construction was begun in 1960 and completed in 1964 — not, it was said, without a little miraculous help from the Bodhisattva Maitreya. First he arranged for much needed water to come pouring forth from the site where his statue was to be placed. Later, when workers could not fit the huge statue into its base, he shook the earth, and the image slid neatly into its designated place (DW special edition 1975, 10–19).

Mirokusan, as it is called, is certainly one of the most spectacular religious structures in Japan. Although not as large or as innovative as the Sho-Hondo of Sokagakkai, it fits harmoniously into the mountainside and commands a magnificent view of the sea and the islands beyond. The main building is in the classical style of the Asuka era (552–645), similar to the oldest Japanese Buddhist temples. It is crowned by a graceful, three-storied pagoda, which houses the image of Maitreya Bodhisattva (*Miroku* in Japanese), the future Buddha. The image is flanked by two angels suspended from the ceiling as if in flight. When seen at night lit by spotlights, they seem to be descending to earth to bring humanity new life and hope. Below the Prayer Hall, down a wide staircase flanked by Japanese lanterns, is a retreat house capable of holding 1,200 visitors. Here also are the refectories and recreational facilities. This is the spiritual heart of Reiyukai. Here some 50,000 young people come each year for spiritual guidance and a chance to make new friends and enjoy some dancing and singing. Reiyukai, like other derivatives of Nichiren, is basically a happy religion that encourages youthful enthusiasm and high spirits.

Kimi Kotani died in 1971 at the age of 71. Shortly before her death

she instructed that another great building project should take place, in the heart of Tokyo. Instead of a place of retreat like Mirokusan, it would be where the Buddha could come into direct contact with the public. It was to be called the *Shakaden*, the House of Shakyamuni. Perhaps unwittingly, she was placing a heavy financial burden on the shoulders of her followers. Reiyukai does not accept donations, so every penny for the *Shakaden* would have to be paid by membership dues alone. This great structure, with a seating capacity of 8,000, plus a nursery, television studio, library, and art gallery, was completed in 1975 under the direction of Mrs Kotani's successor, Tsugunari Kubo. Three hundred thousand members, including representatives from 30 countries, attended the opening ceremonies over a 62-day period. The exact cost was not made public, but it must have put considerable strain on the resources of the organization, tied in as it is by the rule against accepting donations (BW VIII, 1975, No. 9; IX, 1976, No. 1).

Mrs Kotani was succeeded by her nephew and ward, Tsugunari Kubo, son of the founder. She had trained him for the post since his childhood. She had also ensured that he got a good academic training, especially in Buddhism. He majored in Indian Philosophy at Tokyo University, Japan's most prestigious university, and earned a Ph.D. in Buddhism from the Nichiren Buddhist Rissho University. One of his professors, Senchu Murano, recalls him with affection: 'Unlike so many people associated with the "new religions"', he says, 'Kubo is a real scholar — more, he is a profound thinker.'

Tsugunari Kubo is married to Katsuko, who is the author of several best-selling books. Her books are devoted mainly to the application of Buddhism in the home, a major concern of Reiyukai. They have four children. Kubo has travelled widely promoting Reiyukai, and speaks good English.

Assisting Dr Kubo in the direction of Reiyukai are directors and about 400 salaried staff members. The individual members belong to semi-independent branches, of which there are about 2,500, each with 500 or more members. At the head of each branch is a *shibucho* (branch director), who is respected by the members as their 'parent (*oya*) in the Dharma'. Frequently the branch directors are a husband-and-wife team. Each member becomes the 'parent' of anyone he or she converts; this parent–child relationship is basic in Reiyukai. A member automatically belongs to the branch of his 'parent', and not necessarily to the one which meets down the street. Sometimes American members are puzzled to discover that they belong, not to the Los Angeles headquarters, but to some branch in distant Japan. 'If you are not sure which branch you are part of,' says a Reiyukai publication, 'please call the office and we will help you' (BW IX, 1979, No. 4, 18).

Converting another to Reiyukai is called *michibiki*; it is explained by Tsugunari Kubo as person-to-person contact, 'like one alcoholic curing himself by helping another alcoholic' (BW VIII No. 5, 3, 4). Unlike

Nichiren Shoshu-Sokagakkai, Reiyukai does not require a member to give up his ancestral religion. By the same token, members can feel free to visit and pray in any temple, church or synagogue. Japanese members enjoy making pilgrimages to famous Nichiren temples, and if they enter a non-Buddhist place of worship, they behave decorously, praying fervently for the ancestors of all who are gathered there.

Each member sets up a small altar in his own home. Instead of an object of worship (*honzon*), it has a tablet with Chinese characters giving a posthumous name for his family and that of his spouse or, if he is single, for the families of both his parents. This is called the *Sokaimyo*. It is described as 'not an object of worhsip, but rather a focusing point for your personal Buddhist practice.' The enshrining of a *kaimyo* is an ancient Japanese custom. On a scroll or board is written the posthumous name of a parent or relative. The *Sokaimyo* differs in that it gives a name to the entire family.

The following Chinese characters are inscribed on the *Sokaimyo*: *truth, birth, house, Dharma, way, compassion, goodness, transfer,* [names] *families, virtue,* and *enlightenment*. This is interpreted to mean: 'May the *truth live* in this *house* in accordance with the *Law* so that we may follow the *way* of mercy, *compassion*, and *goodness*. Let our *virtue* be *transferred* to our *ancestors* of the [named] *families*. Please inspire our *hearts*, minds, and souls to *enlightenment*' (*Reiyukai: People Promoting Friendship and Awareness*, 14).

In front of the *Sokaimyo*, the member places an open book called *Kakocho* (death register), which has a page for every day of the month. On each page is written the name and posthumous name of the ancestor, relative, or friend, who died on that particular day. The altar is usually decorated with glasses of fresh water, flowers, a small bell on a cushion, an incense burner, and a candle. The devotee may sit on the floor or on a chair, whichever he prefers. He holds beads (*juzu*), and wears a special sash over one shoulder inscribed with *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo* on the outside and his own name on the inside.

As his minimal practice the member is expected to treat his home altar with respect, change the water daily, and fold his hands and recite *Daimoku* three times every morning and again every evening. But more likely, he will do the complete service, which consists of an invocation to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas (including Nichiren), prayers for the enlightenment of his ancestors, and a recitation of passages from the Threefold Lotus Sutra. His prayer book is called *The Blue Sutra*, and its recitation takes about 30 minutes; it is written in the vernacular. For foreign members there are translations in English, Spanish, French, Italian, and other languages. A 'culturally adapted' version was published in 1988 for English speakers.

Through this daily practice the member is brought into communion with the 'spiritual world'. Some members claim that sometimes when they are reciting, the water in the glass begins to bubble; this is viewed

as a sign that the 'spiritual world' is responding. For the more advanced practitioner there is *O-kuji* (mystic power). *O-kuji* is considered too dangerous for the average member, however, and it is never described in print. It may be taught only by a 'parent' to his spiritual child on a one-to-one basis.

Exactly what the 'spiritual world' consists of is never spelled out. The individual is taught only how to contact it; the rest is up to him. Reiyukai leans over backwards not to be doctrinaire. 'Reiyukai has no doctrine,' says Tsugunari Kubo. 'It is not something intellectual, but such as you should feel with your body . . . It should be fresh at all times' (BW IV, No. 7, 11).

This lack of doctrines is an obstacle to proselytizing, and a prospective convert may find that he knows almost nothing about Reiyukai even after a weekend of intense activities at Mirokusan. He learns that it has something to do with veneration of ancestors, which is done by reading passages from the *Dharma Flower* — passages which say nothing about ancestors, and the meaning of which is not explained to him. He is expected to join on the basis of 'friendship' alone — friendship with the spirits and friendship with his peers. An English member writes:

> My initial experience of the Sutra and its recitation was one of total incomprehension — I could see no point in it. What kept me going to the meetings was the discussions which followed the Sutra. I still don't get any more from the Sutra than I do from other texts of various philosophical/religious origins, but what remains is the contact with the people within Reiyukai.
>
> (*The Reiyukai Movement* 35)

According to Reiyukai our self-development begins when we see ourselves as the centre of a cross. Horizontally we interrelate with our peers; vertically we interrelate with our ancestors in the past and our descendants in the future. We accomplish the former by forming friendships and particularly by introducing others to Reiyukai by the 'Bodhisattva practice' of *michibiki*, guiding others along the way. We accomplish the latter by praying for our ancestors and changing inherited evil karma to good karma for the future.

Shintaro Ishihara — author of *The Japan that Can Say No*, member of the Japanese House of Representatives, and one of Reiyukai's most distinguished members — explains:

> It is necessary to feel ourselves not merely as isolated individuals, but as part of the stream of life flowing on from the first germ to the unknown future. It is also necessary that we should care not only for our parents and grandparents, but for our ancestors who died before we were born, and by doing so,

> we can easily feel some mysterious power with regard to our existence, and we are sure to have a deep emotion stimulating our religious mind.
>
> (*BW* August 1971, 8.)

'Those who do not look upon themselves as a link connecting the past with the future,' said Daniel Webster, 'do not perform their duty in the world.' This is Reiyukai's sentiment, exactly. If everyone acquired a sense of reverence at being in this world at all, this world would become Buddha's World, 'the place where every personality, keeping in harmonious relations and being required to show a certain delicacy and reverence for another personality, ought to shine reciprocally in sympathizing with other good personalities, as Plato suggests in his dialogue' (*Ishihara, BW* IV, No. 7, 11).

Reiyukai has no *Honzon* or Object of Worship. Like primitive Buddhism, it neither affirms nor denies the existence of God, and thus claims to be not a religion, but 'interreligious'. The 'spiritual world', which is mentioned so often, is left undefined. Dr Kubo says that it is the 'sum of all invisible or super-human factors, such as one's own unconscious self, our ancestors which we are a part of, the eternal Buddha, etc.' (*BW* IX, No. 2, 4). Nor is it clear to whom or to what we are to direct our prayer. According to Joe Walters, Manager of Reiyukai America Association,

> Our prayer, which in reality is a sincere wish from the bottom of our heart, is not directed towards any particular deity, but is given freely for the ears of whomever or whatever is in the unseen world, the spiritual world, and may have the power to help us fulfill that wish. In this way, we can all harmoniously wish for and strive for world peace together.
>
> (*BW* IX, No. 3, 14)

Thus Reiyukai remains intentionally undogmatic. The Japanese, who generally look upon religion more as an attitude of reverence than as specific beliefs, can appreciate this. Kimi Kotani's book, *Sounds of Heaven*, sold over a million copies. But Westerners, who expect their religious practices to be based on logical theories, often find such a lack of concrete doctrine an obstacle to appreciating Reiyukai. Missionary progress in the Western world has been slow despite large expenditures of money and effort. Americans and Europeans have joined the dogmatic Nichiren Shoshu in far greater numbers than they have Reiyukai, the Spiritual Friendship Society. If Reiyukai really believes what it says, that 'all the people of the world will become members of Reiyukai' (BW October 1970, 15), then there is still a long way to go.

It was the younger Kubo who decided to extend Reiyukai internationally. In 1972 he sponsored the first 'Inner Trip' for foreigners to

come to Japan and see Reiyukai for themselves. The number of American converts did not match the efforts and expense of the Japanese members, but it was a beginning, and gradually Reiyukai extended its outreach further afield. By the mid-1980s it had opened missions in Taiwan, the Philippines, Nepal, Thailand, India, England (Liverpool and Norwich), France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, Peru, Paraguay, Canada, Mexico, and the USA.

Reiyukai's open-mindedness combined with a focus on self-expression and heart-to-heart contact appeal to many young people throughout the world. Its present leader, Tsugunari Kubo, personifies these qualities. He assumed his office at the age of 34, and has enjoyed the unqualified backing of the younger members. According to statistics compiled by Helen Hardacre, however, young members under the age of 30 are a vocal minority of only 11 per cent. Most senior directors and branch directors, as well as over 50 per cent of the total membership, are over 50 years old. Foreign visitors on 'Inner Trips' did not see much of them because few speak English. However, whenever Dr Kubo presided at a meeting, the senior leaders lined up behind him in orderly rows, adding solemnity to the occasion by their silent presence. Foreign guests were not aware of the generation gap between younger members, who are enthusiastic followers of Dr Kubo, and the older members, who revere their branch leaders and the memory of Mrs Kotani (T. Kubo, *Development*, 25).

Self-expression is encouraged in Reiyukai, but only within certain limits; it must not rock the boat. Over the years numerous talented potential leaders have resigned after clashing with the well entrenched hierarchy at the top. Spiritual children are expected to be obedient to their spiritual parents. Loyalty is more highly prized than originality, and the senior directors of today are those who remained loyal to Kimi Kotani during her sometimes stormy career. The vertical relationship of all members to their 'parents' and the branch leader gives the latter considerable autonomous authority. Dr Kubo does not enjoy the control over his organization which Ikeda does over Sokagakkai or Niwano over Rissho Kosei-kai. Reiyukai is a fertile breeding ground for new cults. If it had been able to hold on to all the good minds and enthusiastic workers who have passed through its ranks, it would be four times the size that it is today.

Reiyukai attempts to tread a narrow path. On the one hand, it encourages self-discovery and self-expression; on the other hand, it insists that all members are equal. The only seniority is the 'parent-child' relationship between the proselytizer and his convert, not that of teacher and student or rich and poor. This is why it encourages few study classes and will accept no donations. Each member pays identical dues regardless of his ability to pay more. Once he enters Reiyukai, his wealth or education make no difference. If he converts somebody else, he too becomes an *oya*, a spiritual parent. If he and his spiritual

offspring make enough additional members, he may become a branch leader; otherwise, he remains at the bottom of the pyramid, no matter who he is.

Reiyukai objects to the term 'conversion', pointing out that new members are not required to give up their old religion. But whether we call it 'conversion' or 'guidance', *michibiki* establishes a permanent bond between the one who leads another into the fold and the one who is led. This strict parent–child relationship has weakened Reiyukai's overseas missionary efforts. Offices have been opened in many countries, but the branch leaders and their co-workers owe their allegiance to mother branches back in Japan, not necessarily to the mission.

Reiyukai America opened its first office in Los Angeles in 1973. In 1977 it bought its own building on Sunset Boulevard, and two years later raised another building, which it named 'Friendship House'. Other offices were opened in Canada and Mexico. All directors have been appointed in Japan, and there has been a fast turnover. Reiyukai America, in accordance with the parent–child relationship, remains dependent on Tokyo. Unlike Nichiren Shoshu, it has not succeeded in forming an 'American sacred centre' (to use the expression of Charles Prebish), nor is it likely to do so without altering its vertical system of membership.

The real 'spark plug' of Reiyukai America was not so much the official leadership as Mrs Gloria Crable of San Diego, who describes herself as a 'Presbyterian Buddhist'. The daughter of a Japanese diplomat and married to a retired American businessman, she is well travelled, a skilled concert pianist, and a survivor of the Hiroshima atomic bomb explosion. She is also an energetic speaker and proponent of Reiyukai, to which she credits her recovery from atomic radiation. Mrs Crable possesses unusual spiritual talents, and she sometimes makes predictions which astonish her many friends. Her optimism and enthusiasm are infectious. She more than anyone has been the 'Kimi Kotani of America'. However, these very abilities brought her into conflict with the bureaucracy of the head office, and in 1980 she resigned. Reiyukai America had lost its most dynamic and popular exponent.

The breach was eventually healed, but not before drastic measures had been taken. The director in America was returned to Japan and replaced by young Kenichi Negishi, who was chosen not because of his seniority but because of his friendship with many American members. For once the seniority system was successfully bypassed (*Inner Trip Friends*, July 1983). This was only a temporary expedient, however, for a few years later he was replaced by a senior officer.

Reiyukai has made a major effort to expand globally. Each of its foreign missions is staffed by a salaried director and assistants; most expenses are paid from Japan. In 1987 the foreign membership was

estimated at 60,000 scattered across the globe (T. Kubo, *The Reiyukai Movement*, 33). Although this is not a large number, it probably means more foreign members than any Buddhist group in the world except Sokagakkai.

Reiyukai's central practice of ancestor veneration remains puzzling to most Europeans and Americans, especially when this is accomplished by reading passages from the *Dharma Flower*, which never mention ancestors. In recent years the new leader, Dr Tsugunari Kubo, has placed much more emphasis on 'self-development' than on traditional ancestor worship. The logo now has a more pragmatic ring to it. In the 1970s it was, 'Inner Trip: A Journey into your Heart'. For the success-oriented 1980s it had become 'Reiyukai: the Business of Dynamic Tranquility . . . A Non-profit Enterprise Paying Dividends in Personal Growth'.

Reiyukai, which boasts that it is more open than similar organizations, has changed with the times. But changes always cause tensions, and the danger of another major schism still lurks beneath the surface. Nevertheless, although the younger Kubo has instituted more changes than his aunt ever did, he has managed so far to retain the loyalty of his co-believers and avoid serious break-offs. As Reiyukai pursues its new course, it may yet experience a new period of growth.

Chapter 18

Rissho Kosei-kai: Buddhism Applied

'It was because of the guidance of my teacher, Sukenobu Arai, that I became fond of the Sutra, threw myself into it, and made it a part of me. Until then I had gone from one religion to another; each had the power to save, but they were like coarse nets through which many fish could slip. The more I read the Lotus Sutra, the more I realized that its truth was infinite in scope, infinite in precision, infinite in power to save. The Lotus Sutra, I saw, is a finely woven net through which no captive can slip. The ecstacy of discovering this made me want to shout and sing and dance for joy' (*Dharma World*, December 1980, 4).

These are the words of Nikkyo Niwano, founder and president of Rissho Kosei-kai. No Buddhist leader in the world has become more widely known or showered with more honours than him. Although he possesses only a primary school education from a village school in northern Japan, he has been invited to chair international conferences in Asia, Europe, and America. He has met numerous world leaders and heads of state, accepted honorary degrees from Japanese and foreign institutions of higher learning, and was invited to Windsor Castle by the Duke of Edinburgh to receive the Templeton Foundation Prize for Progress in Religion. He was the only official Buddhist representative at the Vatican Council, and was invited to Iran to hear the Ayatollah Khomeini's interpretation of the American hostage crisis. Whether standing on a podium before a crowd of thousands or seated and chatting informally over a cup of tea with a single guest, he is always the same — smiling, friendly, and intently interested in every word that is spoken.

Nikkyo Niwano was born in 1906, the second son of a large family in a mountain village of Niigata. The village then consisted of 42 families, but has since shrunk to 26. His family were farmers, who

managed to eke out an adequate living from the rugged terrain. Life was not easy, and there were endless chores which had to be done around the farm, but there was always enough to eat. The house was warm during the snow-bound winters, and there was enough money for small luxuries at festival times. It was a happy household where three generations lived under the same roof, and every member of the family contributed to the common good.

Because of his physical height and genial disposition, he was looked up to by his peers as a natural leader. He accepted this role with the same equanimity with which he has always accepted everything in life. He never felt pressured to prove himself in a fight unless it was to protect some smaller boy from being bullied. Later he said that he had had only two fights in his entire life, and they were after reaching young adulthood. He dispatched both opponents by means of judo, and looked back on these encounters with some relish. He was a peace-maker, but he knew that he could take care of himself if he ever had to (*DW* February 1978). The reasons he was a man of peace, he said later, were firstly because he was raised in the country, secondly because he came from a happy family, and thirdly because the Lotus Sutra saves everybody. (*DW* May 1975, 30)

During his childhood, however, he knew nothing about the Lotus Sutra. His family belonged to the Soto Zen sect, and religious observations meant simply being helpful to neighbours and bowing respectfully to wayside shrines. In the first of his two autobiographies, *Travel to Infinity*, he claims that he never failed to do either. (20)

Although his formal education stopped after primary school (farm boys were expected to work after that), he was an avid reader, especially of European novels and Chinese classics. He worked for a while as a road labourer, and then received permission from his father to go out into the world to seek his fortune. He set out determined to work harder than anyone else, to do any job no matter how distasteful, and never to compete with his fellow-workers for favours from the boss. He arrived in Tokyo on 23 August 1923, full of hopes. It was just four days before the terrible Kanto Earthquake.

Before ten days had passed he was home again, having survived one of the most terrible earthquakes of modern times. Around 143,000 people were dead, and all of Yokohama and half of Tokyo were in ruins. Niwano escaped unscathed, but his place of employment was gutted. So, too, it seemed, were all his youthful dreams.

Before long he was back, however, working at seasonal jobs in Tokyo and then home on the farm.

> Friends of mine who were working in Tokyo visited me sometimes. They were paid 30 yen to 40 yen a month, while I received only 15 yen. But those who got a higher salary only exchanged their labor for pay. Therefore, they remained

> employees forever. I was paid only 15 yen, but as the master treated me as an intimate consultant, I could learn in a short time the secrets of management even though it was only a small business. This was really useful when I became independent later. The value was incomparable to the difference between 15 yen and 40 yen.
>
> (54)

In 1926 he was drafted, and for the next three years he served as a gunner's mate in the navy. As usual, he adapted easily to his new environment. To qualify as a gunner he had to improve his skills in mathematics, a subject for which he always had a special fondness. All his life he valued precision and order, and the navy also taught him stage presence. He became leader of the ship's entertainment committee and would amuse the crews with performances of folk songs and dances.

On the imperial flagship *Haruna*, one of his officers was young Prince Takamatsu. Thirty years later, when they met under very different circumstances, the Prince immediately recognized 'Niwano, Seaman First-class'. Even as an ordinary seaman he was not the kind of person whom one forgets easily.

After his discharge in 1929 he went into business for himself, first as a pickles vendor and later as a milkman. He married a girl from his home district and seemed to have settled down to the life of a small entrepreneur, when the sudden illness of his infant daughter drove him to religion. Someone told him about a type of esoteric Buddhism called *Tengu-fudo*, which could cure sicknesses, and soon he was deeply involved in it. When his daughter recovered mysteriously, he wanted to know why. The cult required rigorous self-discipline and the learning of secret formulas (mantras). He threw himself into the practices with such zeal that he became the assistant master, and found that he could cure people of their diseases and problems.

> I did not know the reason why. I had no confidence at all that I had such an ability. I had no abnormal experiences like the others who in trances saw divine figures or heard divine voices. When I considered myself from every angle, I was quite an ordinary man. I was nothing but an ordinary pickles dealer. Nevertheless, I could cause mysterious things to happen, one after the other.
>
> (86–8)

Mysterious apparitions and heavenly voices were too unreliable for his taste. He wanted something more exact, something which would work under any circumstances, so he turned from *Tengu-fudo* to onomancy: a type of fortune-telling based on a person's name. This too seemed to

work in many cases, but not all the time.

When his second daughter became seriously ill and was diagnosed as having Japanese sleeping sickness, he turned to Reiyukai. As soon as he enshrined his ancestors and began to chant the Sutra as instructed in Reiyukai, his daughter quickly recovered. Again he wanted to know why, and this led him to study the book he had been reciting from, the Lotus Sutra. Fortunately for him, his branch leader was one of the few real scholars in Reiyukai, Sukenobu Arai. He was someone whom even Kimi Kotani respected and called *sensei* (teacher). In Niwano's second autobiography, *Lifetime Beginner*, he says:

> The *rokuyo* system and name interpretation were interesting but not entirely effective in relieving suffering. At best they were effective — though not always completely — in eighty-five percent of all instances. In other words, fifteen percent of the suffering people remained unaided by them. Nor had the Shugen-do system proved perfectly effective. Some people were not cured by it. Some were cured physically while their deep suffering and spiritual wounds went unattended. Furthermore, I was never convinced about spiritual powers that could not be understood by the person exerting them. In my own vague way, I constantly sought a rule that would save everyone, a rule that was not mysterious, but was convincingly based on reason and was clearly regulated and systematic.
>
> Listening to the lectures on the Lotus Sutra, I realized that I had found what I had been looking for. The Lotus Sutra was the perfect net in which to save everyone in the world. Physically and spiritually it could help both the individual and all of society. I was profoundly shaken by what I had learned. The impression made on me was of astonishing, vibrant freshness. It has remained fresh for over forty years. During that time, I have not missed reading the Lotus Sutra a single day. And the text has lost none of its subtlety, none of its ability to reverberate in my heart and sink deeply into my spirit. On the contrary, the more I read the sutra, the more impressive and profound it seems. Is there another teaching with this power? Is there another book that can be read with amazement and growing emotional impact every day for forty years?
>
> (76–7)

He gave up his pickles business and opened a milk shop in order to have more time to evangelize for Reiyukai. After completing his milk deliveries (or even while making them), he would make his rounds as a missionary. One of his early converts was a sickly housewife, Mrs Myoko Naganuma, who was 17 years older than he. Under the inspiration of her new faith, Mrs Myoko, as she was affectionately

called, rose from her sickbed to become a zealous missionary, sometimes converting as many as 50 people in one day. She became Niwano's closest collaborator, and the two could often be seen as he carried her on his bicycle through the streets of Tokyo to visit a prospect. They made an excellent team. He was the enthusiastic organizer and theoretician, while she was the charismatic mystic who could empathize with others, especially with women.

Niwano and Mrs Myoko remained ardent members of Reiyukai for about three years; all their spare time was devoted to their new religion. When they were not evangelizing from house to house, they were sitting with rapt attention at the feet of their teacher Arai, studying the Lotus Sutra. After the other students had gone home for the night, Niwano would remain alone with his teacher engaged in animated conversation. 'He was burningly eager to teach the Sutra,' says Niwano. 'I was burningly eager to be taught. We agreed with each other like lovers; we attracted each other like the north and south poles of two magnets.' (79)

Meanwhile Niwano's business began to suffer from neglect. Worse, his domestic relations underwent a severe strain, which was to last for 20 years. His wife did not accept his total dedication to outside interests and his lack of attention to their everyday needs. Her disapproval was so obvious that some of Niwano's flock suggested that he separate from her or divorce her. Once his wife even swore out a warrant for his arrest. Finally, 'in response to a divine revelation', Niwano separated from his family for 10 years to devote himself exclusively to religion. Gradually, and only after much talk of divorce, his wife came to accept her subordinate role. The marriage survived. (139–45) His partner Mrs Myoko had similar domestic problems. Her husband finally tired of her full-time religious interest, and divorced her. He remarried, but he and his new wife remained active members of Rissho Kosei-kai. (90)

It was inevitable that Niwano should finally break with Reiyukai. He was not the type to knuckle under to the imperious leadership of Kimi Kotani. Moreover, the more he studied the Lotus Sutra, the more he distanced himself from the primary interest of Reiyukai, the veneration of ancestors. To Reiyukai the Sutra was a tool, a means to make 'heart-to-heart contact' with the spiritual world. To Niwano the Sutra was the end, the container of all wisdom and spiritual power. The two approaches could not be reconciled, and the break came after a stormy meeting at Reiyukai headquarters in 1938.

Reiyukai had experienced a number of schisms. Two branch leaders had recently been fired, and Mrs Kotani was anxious to get everything back on track. A meeting of all leaders was called, and everyone was invited to speak his mind, but the meeting did not go as planned. The discussion grew more animated. Mrs Kotani listened with growing impatience, and suddenly stood up.

'What the hell is all this about?' she shouted. 'You are supposed to be

believers, but you act as if you were big shots. If anyone has a gripe, speak up!'

Silence fell on the hall. Mrs Kotani went on, giving vent to her pent-up feelings. Study groups, she said, were a waste of time. All that was necessary was discipline and unity of purpose. 'Lectures on the Lotus Sutra are out of date. Anyone who tries anything like that around here must be inspired by the devil.'

Professor Arai, deeply offended, stood up and walked out. Niwano remained to the end, but was engulfed in gloom. By the time the meeting was over, he knew that he and Reiyukai had come to a parting of the ways. It was time to gather his friends into a new organization of their own (87).

Niwano and Mrs Myoko at first tried to enlist the aid of their teacher, Sukenobu Arai. The teacher listened sympathetically, but said that he was too old to help found a new organization and was unwilling to break his personal friendship with Kakutaro Kubo. Disappointed but not discouraged, the two zealots gathered about 30 followers to set up a new society, which they named *Rissho Kosei-kai* (usually called *Kosei-kai* for short). They had few resources, and they used a small room over Niwano's milk shop as their headquarters. They had only some books, scrolls, beads, and other paraphernalia that they had been using in Reiyukai. Who could have imagined that within 35 years, the membership would have grown from 30 to four million, outstripping the parent organization and attaining world-wide status?

The name Rissho Kosei-kai defies a simple translation. *Rissho* is part of the title of a well known treatise by Nichiren, *Rissho ankoku-ron*, meaning 'Establish the Right Dharma'. Nichiren himself bears the honorary title *Rissho Daishi*, 'Great Teacher Establishing the Right Dharma'. *Ko*, according to an explanation for English-speaking members, 'means the pious intercourse of many people and the harmony of believers, that is, "many in body but one in mind" (another expression of Nichiren's). *Sei* expresses the idea of the completion of personality and the attainment of buddhahood . . . The last character, *Kai*, means "society", and when at the end of the name, the preceding characters give the purpose of the society' (*For Our New Members*, 14).

The society has evolved through many stages reflecting the spiritual growth of its co-founder, Nikkyo Niwano. During its early years it was dominated by the charismatic personality of Mrs Myoko, especially her 'revelations' and powers of faith healing. According to Niwano:

> The overwhelming majority of our new members were people who were seriously ill, who had mentally retarded relatives, or who for economic reasons could not call on the services of doctors. In the eyes of the general public, we were no more than a milkman and a vendor of sweet potatoes (Mrs. Myoko) conducting some mysterious religious rites in an upstairs room

over a milk shop. Obviously, only desperate people at their wits' end came to us.

(*Lifetime Beginner*, 95)

Some of Mrs Myoko's 'revelations' imposed severe discipline on members and leaders alike. There were group pilgrimages to the Nichiren Head Temple at Mount Minobu, which were undertaken only after rigorous fasting and spiritual preparations. One revelation instructed Niwano to send his wife and children to the country for a ten-year separation. This happened during wartime, when it seemed sensible to get them away from Tokyo air raids, but the separation continued many years after the danger had passed. Niwano found it especially difficult to go home for special occasions such as funerals, see his family there, but not be permitted to speak to any of them. He wore the robes and followed the discipline of a Buddhist monk, although he belonged to no order. After ten years the family was reunited, 'but not as husband and wife or father and children'. He lived on one floor, his family on another, and they rarely spoke to each other. This went on for three more years until finally the gods and Mrs Myoko decided that he had become spiritually mature and his wife sufficiently submissive.

Niwano was an avid reader. A special revelation, however, decreed that for seven years he should read only the Lotus Sutra, so he thoroughly immersed himself in the book. Finally, shortly after the end of the war, he was given permission to include in his reading the writings of Nichiren. He devoured them with the eagerness of a hungry man who opens a door to see a table richly laden.

This led to the second stage in Kosei-kai's evolution, an attempt to link it to Nichiren Shu. Niwano visited the Head Temple at Mount Minobu in 1948, but no one paid any attention to him. He was, after all, no more than a 'faith-healing milkman'. The following year, however, he was able to meet with the secretary general and propose a merger: Kosei-kai would be a missionary arm of Nichiren Shu just as Sokagakkai was to Nichiren Shoshu. An agreement was reached whereby Nichiren Shu, on its part would set up the principles of 'unification of doctrine, the main object of worship, and the dissemination policy' (*Travel to Infinity*, 124).

For about a year (1949–50) Rissho Kosei-kai was a lay auxiliary of Nichiren Shu. Niwano, however, did not approach the ancient sect with the humility of Josei Toda at Nichiren Shoshu, but with the zeal of a new convert, 'more Catholic than the Pope'. He considered himself an equal partner able to make his own terms, and had no patience with the liberal policies of the Head Temple, which permitted considerable latitude in faith and practice among subordinate temples and organizations. Although it was to take him 30 years to decide on his own 'object of worship', he laid down terms that the ancient denomination

must unify those of its 5,000 temples within one year. When this did not happen, he broke off the relationship. He and Mrs Myoko met again with the secretary general of the 'sleeping religious organization' and agreed to a separation.[79]

Since that time, Kosei-kai has moved steadily away from Nichiren Buddhism to become a denomination of its own, complete with its own object of worship, special teachings, and ordained ministry. In the official prayer book published in 1968, and again in the revised editions of 1974 and 1979, Nichiren was still named 'Patriarch' (*Koso*, the title used in Tendai for Saicho and in Shingon for Kukai) and 'Great Bodhisattva' (*Kyoden*, 1979). But in the 1987 English edition his name does not appear.

In *Honzon* (1968) Niwano explains his frequent changes in the society's Object of Veneration as a gradual fulfilment of the true intention of Nichiren. The Great Mandala was replaced by a statue of the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni because that, he says, was what Nichiren really wanted but could not realize during his lifetime (61–7).

As Rissho Kosei-kai loosened its ties with Nichiren Shu it established new ones with Tendai, with which it has much in common (DW December 1975, 3). It reads the Lotus Sutra in the spirit of Tendai, as a book of rules for life, rather than in the way of Nichiren, as a 'means of grace'. Nichiren used to say that Tendai put the emphasis on the Imprinted Gate (practices), while he put it on the Original Gate (faith). Rissho Kosei-kai does the same. By 1987 Tendai was speaking of having 'ties' with Kosei-kai, although these ties were more spiritual than formal (*DW* September/October 1987, 4).

However, the roots in Nichiren Buddhism are too deep to be eradicated easily. Parts of the daily service are taken from Nichiren Shu. *O-eshiki*, the festival commemorating the death of Nichiren on 23 October, is still Kosei-kai's largest public event. Members still climb Mount Shichimen on pilgrimages. Even the logo of the society is the mandarin orange, the crest of Nichiren.

Kosei-kai grew slowly but steadily during the war. Niwano was called up again for military service, but was soon released. The organization bought a house of its own, which it quickly outgrew, and then put up its own building. The work was done almost entirely by voluntary labour. The building was not bombed during the war, which was regarded as proof of divine protection. (The Nichiren Shu Head Temple at Ikegami, on the other hand, was almost totally destroyed during an air raid and had to be rebuilt after the war.) Considered even more miraculous was the safe return of all of the members who went into military service. The last to return was Motoyuki Naganuma, a nephew of Mrs Myoko. He reappeared in 1946, almost a year after the war ended, thus making the count complete. (*Lifetime*, 136 ff)

After the war and after the break from Nichiren Shu, Kosei-kai grew rapidly like the other Nichiren movements, Sokagakkai and Reiyukai.

The three shared much in common: they chanted selected portions of the Lotus Sutra, used the Sacred Title (*Daimoku*), venerated the memory of Nichiren, proselytized vigorously, and promised quick relief from the most widespread problems in post-war Japan: illness and poverty. All were directed by charismatic leaders. Outsiders often confused them, and a cynical press sometimes tarred them all with the same brush.

However, there were basic differences between them. Sokagakkai was an auxiliary of Nichiren Shoshu, the most dogmatic of all Nichiren sects. It was a unique blend of the old and the new, coming complete with venerable temples and gorgeously arrayed priests combined with modern marching bands and baton-twirling drum majorettes. Reiyukai was independent of any particular sect, and combined traditional ancestor veneration with modern pep rallies. Rissho Kosei-kai much resembled it at first, but gradually developed specific doctrines of its own. It, too, was skilled at organizing mass meetings and parades, although not on as large a scale as Sokagakkai.

At first Kosei-kai, like its parent Reiyukai, had no Object of Worship (*Honzon*), but by its third year of independence it had adopted one. This was simply the Sacred Title, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, inscribed on a flag. In its eighth year this was changed to the Great Mandala of Nichiren. It was changed again in the eleventh year, twenty-first year, twenty-seventh year, and finally in the thirty-first year. By this time it had become a statue of the Original Buddha Shakyamuni, who was called 'Great Beneficient Teacher and Lord Shakyamuni, the Eternal Buddha' (*Kuon-jitsujo Daion Kyoshu Shakamuni-seson*). Photographic copies of this statue, which shows a standing figure of the Buddha surrounded by a flaming halo containing the Four Great Bodhisattvas and the Stupa of Many Treasures Buddha (*Taho-to*), were then ordered installed in the homes of all members (*Honzon*, 77 ff).

The main focus of Rissho Kosei-kai is not on its frequently altered version of the Supreme Being, but on what it calls *hoza*, which has been rendered into English as 'Dharma Circle'. The term is taken from Reiyukai, but in practice it is very different. In Reiyukai a *hoza* is a meeting of a group of members to chant the Sutra and put on some sort of programme, including personal testimonies designed to encourage newcomers to join the group (DW IX, No. 3, 15).

In Kosei-kai a *hoza* is much more specific. Members and guests sit in a circle of 10 or 20 people, and are encouraged to open up and discuss their deepest personal problems. The *hoza* leader, who must have some skills as an amateur psychologist as well as a good understanding of fundamental Buddhism, then attempts to apply Buddhist principles to solve these problems. Other persons present in the circle can contribute their own opinions. 'It is necessary to confess errors and repent shortcomings, for only by doing so can members receive proper guidance and be freed from self-incrimination' (DW March 1979, 21).

The advice given by the *hoza* leader is not a generalization such as might be heard in Sokagakkai ('You must chant more Daimoku'), but is geared to the specific individual and his problem. Buddhism teaches that every phenomenon results from prior causes. The leader tries to discern 'what errors of thought, words, or deeds this person has committed to have fallen into such a state'. He does this by applying the principles of what Kosei-kai calls fundamental Buddhism, which are found in the first half of the Lotus Sutra: the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, the Six Perfections (*Paramitas*), the Twelve-fold Chain of Dependent Origination, and the Ten Factors of Existence. If sickness, accidents, or bad relationships at home can be seen as opportunities instead of curses, they become *O-satori*, an awakening to instructions from the Buddha.

By participating in *hoza* a member learns to apply Buddhism to every aspect of his life. He is encouraged to 'walk the Bodhisattva way' of helpfulness to others. *Hoza* takes him 'from the mundane to the sublime'. It is 'a way for ordinary people to see the Dharma in ordinary events' (*Kosei Times* March 1975, 2).

The Great Central Hall of Rissho Kosei-kai, which at the time of its completion was the largest religious structure in Asia, is always bustling with people. Ten thousand a day attend worship services, and 25,000 participate in *hoza*, instruction classes, and other activities.

Like other Japanese 'new religions', Rissho Kosei-kai excels in organizing mass meetings and festivals. At the annual *O-eshiki* festival commemorating the death of Nichiren as many as 4,000 colourfully attired members will parade before an audience of up to 180,000 (DW December 1978, 8). Total membership had passed the six million mark by the mid-1980s, and new branch churches, called 'training halls', were rising at the rate of ten a year.

The individual member has to perform private as well as social devotional practices. Every morning and evening he is expected to sit before his family altar and recite the daily service. His altar features a *Sokaimyo* for commemorating his ancestors, just like in Reiyukai. In addition it will have a picture or statue of the Original Buddha Shakyamuni. The *Sokaimyo* is identical to that of Reiyukai, from whom it was taken, although the interpretation of the Chinese characters is slightly different. It refers to 'the Dharma as taught by President Nikkyo Niwano and Vice-President Mrs Myoko Naganuma' (*Rissho Kosei-kai: For Our New Members*, 22–3).

Another feature borrowed directly from Reiyukai is the *Kakocho*, the Death Register, which is kept open on the altar. Except that it is smaller in size, it is identical to the *Kakocho* of Reiyukai.

The daily devotional service is borrowed from Reiyukai and remains about 75 per cent identical. Both have prayers for one's ancestors at the beginning and end, though there are some new elements in Kosei-kai. These include Taking Refuge in the Three Treasures (Buddha, Dharma,

and Sangha), which is common to most Buddhists, and the Verses on Opening the Sutra (*Kaikyoge*), which were composed by Udana Nichiki (1800–59) for use in Nichiren Shu. Some of the Reiyukai invocations to the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are missing, showing the different emphasis. Reiyukai seeks contact with the 'spiritual world', and so names a long list of its denizens, whereas Kosei-kai seeks harmony with the Law (Dharma) and so concentrates on the meaning of the words being recited. The service is chanted in the vernacular, although the traditional Sino-Japanese reading (*Shindoku*) may be used optionally. The members also chant the Sacred Title, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. Niwano insists that this must be done only with sincerity and understanding.

> When we recite the Title of the Lotus Sutra, it seems well enough in theory to recite it only once if we do so with complete sincerity. But in reality, if we do not repeat the Title from three to ten times, the idea of taking refuge in the Buddha does not penetrate completely. Nevertheless, although repetition is very important, if we recite it a thousand or ten thousand times, unless we are superhuman we will become bored or our minds will wander, and we will find ourselves merely mouthing the Title without understanding it. This results in the defect of formalism, the lazy belief that merely by reciting the Title we can be saved. We must realize that real Buddhist practice has three requisites: (1) a good practice, (2) wholehearted conduct, and (3) constant repetition.
>
> (*Buddhism for Today*, 91)

Chanting the Sutra or the Sacred Title is used to achieve concentration:

> How does the ordinary person achieve concentration? My answer is, through action. Instead of sitting and saying nothing, chant the Lotus Sutra or invoke its name (*Daimoku*), or do anything, but put everything you have into the action. Presently you will find that you have reached the state of concentration and selflessness.
>
> (*DW* March 1979, 6)

Thus chanting with total concentration is equivalent to sitting in silent Zen meditation. In a conversation with Niwano, the Zen abbot of Eihei-ji confirms this:

> There is Zen in all religions. To sit in meditation, to recite invocations to the Buddha, to recite invocations to the Lotus Sutra — all are Zen. Zen is concentration. It involves becoming totally absorbed. If one does anything with an attitude of detachment from the self, one can find peace of mind.
>
> (*DW* March 1979, 6)

According to an official Kosei-kai guidebook:

> There are many people in Rissho Kosei-kai who have become happy after joining it. This is because while they are chanting the Sutra for only 30 minutes in the morning and evening, their mind is calm and their way of thinking approaches the words of the Sutra. The words of the Sutra are all benevolent. Therefore, when the mind is calmed and in a stage free from worldly thoughts, each passage in the Sutra impresses them with a very grateful sentiment.
>
> (*Rissho Kosei-kai*, 62)

This emphasis on what Nichiren would call *kanjin* (observation of the mind) reflects the philosophy of President Niwano. Before the death of Mrs Myoko in 1957 more importance was given to 'getting in touch with' (*musubi*) spiritual powers, not unlike what we have seen in Reiyukai. Mrs Myoko herself was a charismatic spiritual leader believed to possess uncanny psychic powers, and Kosei-kai came close to becoming her 'personality cult'. For many years even Niwano was guided by her 'revelations', although he later played this down.

> Although I abided by some of the divine revelations, I paid no attention to any that deviated from the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. I would not countenance those sudden flashes of enlightenment that founders of religious organizations are sometimes said to experience. The Lotus Sutra was always the central element (for me). Spiritual powers were recognized only when they assisted in the understanding of the Sutra or served to enhance its importance. The Buddha's Law came first; I would not accept divine revelations that departed from the Law.
>
> For this reason, I had several disputes with the deities. Sometimes at meetings of the senior leaders of Kosei-kai, Myoko Sensei would experience visitations. If I was convinced that they were in keeping with the Sutra, I explained them to others. But if they were unreasonable and unconvincing, I refused to comment. The deities were often enraged and scolded me: 'Niwano, if you do not do as I say, I will bring physical harm to you.' Still I would not give in, but replied, 'Do as you like. Take my life. I have devoted it to my task already.'
>
> Judging from my continued good health to this day, I must have been right. No, it was the Law that was absolutely right.
>
> (*Lifetime Beginner*, 134–5)[80]

A few years before Mrs Myoko's death Niwano was demoted to a secondary position. Mrs Myoko, 11 general directors, and 125 chapter heads prepared a document for Niwano's signature. It stipulated that

henceforth he should do nothing without the agreement of Mrs Myoko; Niwano's wife would not interfere in Kosei-kai affairs; and no non-member could participate in Kosei-kai business without the unanimous approval of all the chapter heads. Niwano signed, but the matter did not end there. It was then proposed that Mrs Myoko should be officially recognized as the founder of the society. This Niwano refused to do. He had converted her (to Reiyukai), and not vice versa. Seeing that they could not convince him to step down to the number two spot, his opponents decided to set up a new organization under the direction of Mrs Myoko. They bought a villa to house the new society.

At this juncture Mrs Myoko's health began to deteriorate, and the schism lost its impetus. During her protracted final illness, Niwano waited on her like a son. All their differences were patched up, and by the time she died they were once more the closest of friends.

The death of Mrs Myoko left Niwano in indisputable control of the society. He promptly launched it on a new course, away from dependence on spiritual voices and towards reliance on the Dharma alone. The society entered a period of spectacular growth, spreading out from Tokyo to the rest of the country and finally even abroad. It began publishing literature in English and other foreign languages. These included general books on the teachings of Rissho Kosei-kai, three translations of the Lotus Sutra,[81] three commentaries on the Sutra by Niwano,[82] two autobiographies of Niwano,[83] and other shorter works by him. Scholarly works by other authors have also been published in English.[84] The monthly magazine *Dharma World* has a worldwide circulation, and features articles by representatives of all the major religions.[85]

Internationalism and inter-religious cooperation have become salient features of Rissho Kosei-kai. Niwano has travelled widely and participated in or headed various organizations promoting world peace. Speaking at St Patrick's Cathedral in New York in 1979 he said, 'If one pursues one's own religion to its depths, one is led, not to self-righteousness, but to an understanding that enables one to grasp the fundamental truth of other religions' (*DW* October 1979, 4).

> Buddhism is not opposed to Christianity, Islam, and other teachings of great sages such as Confucius, Mencius, and Lao-tzu. We understand that such saints and sages are the appearances of the Buddha in other forms and that their teachings are the manifestations of the Buddha's teachings in other forms . . . So long as the Buddha is the great truth and the great life of the universe, there can be no truth that is not included in the Buddha, and no Law other than that of the Buddha. Accordingly, a narrow-minded Buddhist who indiscriminately criticizes other religions and thinks, for example, that Buddhism is the true religion while Christianity is not, cannot claim to be a true

> Buddhist . . . A right teaching is right regardless of who preaches it. Truth is truth regardless of who proclaims it.
>
> (*Buddhism for Today*, 228–9)

Because Rissho Kosei-kai purports not to be a new religion but a reformation and updating of a very old one, it has enjoyed spectacular success among nominal Buddhists who are no longer inspired by 'temple religion' with its incomprehensible rituals. It has made Buddhism come alive for millions of Japanese both at home and abroad. On the other hand, because it is so tolerant and even supportive of other faiths, its foreign missions to non-Buddhists have not made similar progress. Successful missionaries, whether Christian or Buddhist, show no mercy on rival faiths and do not hesitate to smash 'heathen' idols and hack down sacred oak trees. Kosei-kai prefers persuasion by example (*shoju*) to that by direct confrontation (*shakubuku*). As a result it has made many friends abroad, especially among Unitarian-Universalists and other religious liberals, but few converts. There are branch churches in America, but their membership consists mostly of ethnic Japanese.[86] Kosei-kai publications give more attention to international inter-religious conferences than to foreign missions.

As early as 1960 President Niwano's oldest son, Nichiko, was named President-designate, thus ensuring that the leadership would remain in the family. However, as the founding president remained active throughout the 1960s, 1970s and into the 1980s, Nichiko has remained in a subordinate position. Although he resembles his father physically, Nichiko is in many ways his father's opposite. His father is an extrovert — outgoing, warm, innovative, curious, and at ease in front of large crowds or total strangers. Nichiko is an introvert — private, cautious, and modest. He used to dread public speaking so much that he would become ill before going on stage.

As a child, Nichiko hardly knew his father. In his autobiography, *My Father, My Teacher*, he describes how he and the other children were raised by their mother in the country. To them their father was distant and awe-inspiring. The older children were aware of their mother's loneliness and resented their father's preoccupations away from home. When finally all of them moved in with him in Tokyo, they were instructed never to call him 'Father', but 'President-teacher' (*Kaicho Sensei*).

The boy took no interest in school, and often skipped classes. Even a reprimand from his father would have been welcome, but when he misbehaved, his father scolded his mother instead of him. If he fought with his younger brother, it was the brother who got spanked, not he. Such neglect made him resentful (55, 63, 66).

College was a disaster. He missed classes and spent days wandering around the streets of Tokyo looking into shop windows. He had no interest in religion, but when his father suggested that he transfer to

Rissho University (the Nichiren Shu univeristy), he readily agreed, happy to see that his father was interested in him at all. However, he made few friends there, and was soon cutting classes again. He enjoyed the lectures of one professor, and attended his classes 'with fair faithfulness', but it took him nine years to get through college and another three years to earn a Master's degree, all because of poor attendance (66, 71–4).

On the day his father informed him he had been named President-designate of Rissho Kosei-kai, he reacted by buying a train ticket to the most distant point in Japan, hoping to vanish off the map. But as he sat brooding and gazing out the train window, he began to realize that he could not escape his destiny. When he arrived at the end of the line, he bought a return ticket and boarded the next train for home. There, to his disappointment, he was greeted as if nothing had happened. No one had missed him.

But his father had missed him, and a few days later, he had a serious talk with his son — perhaps the first such talk they had ever had.

> A while after my flight to Kyushu, Father said to me in a very serious voice, 'People's real capabilities, which lie deeply concealed, are all more or less the same. Success in work depends more on effort than on innate ability.' . . . Then he said something else that touched me: 'I didn't choose to become president. It was just the natural flow of things. I went along with the flow and accepted the decision of the others. I am able to work hard and do my best because of the tremendous support the leaders and other members give me.'
>
> Then I saw what I had to do. I must not try to run counter to the natural current of things. The time had come for me to open my eyes to the great harmony of the world and to my own part in it.
>
> (77–8)

Although this event marked a turning point in the life of Nichiko, it was still many years before he felt at ease in his new position. He dreaded public speaking, and would often become ill before a scheduled speech (92). But by facing his fears, he gradually overcame them. He also developed a more scholarly interest in Buddhism, and by the mid-1980s he could comment that he preferred 'to read the Buddhist scriptures in their original Chinese versions instead of in the annotated, modern-language translations . . . because a careful reading of the old text enables me to plumb the deep meanings that can be contained in only one or two [Chinese] characters' (DW June 1984, 37–8).

Nichiko has gained experience by heading various departments within the society, including the seminary and the missionary department. He has travelled a great deal, sometimes in the company of his father and sometimes as the head of a delegation. His itinerary has

included China, India, Ceylon, the Vatican, and the United States, although travel does not interest him particularly. In Washington he met President and Mrs Carter, but 'was not especially thrilled at the meeting . . . I was happy to be back in Japan' (*My Father, My teacher*, 136).

He idolizes his father, but from a distance. The two have never been close.

> The ten years of separation, the years of living like strangers though under the same roof, and then the decision that I must inherit his position in the organization, still exert an influence on relations between Father and me. I have never entrusted my whole naked self to him, and he has always maintained reserve in connection with me. Even when we are watching the same television program, he looks at a set in one room and I a set in another. Mother and my wife ask why we do not use the same TV; but I object, and Father never suggests that we watch together. He believes in letting things take their natural course and never imposes his own will. I, too, believe in letting things go their natural ways. But whereas he is positive in his approach, I am negative.
>
> (127)

Nichiko's wife describes him as cautious, so cautious that 'he will not cross a stone bridge without tapping it beforehand to find out whether it is solid' (8). It seems logical that under his future leadership Rissho Kosei-kai will tap bridges before crossing them. The foundations have been laid and the course has been set; what has worked in the past should continue to work in the future.

President Niwano sometimes laments that the old fire which animated the early members seems to have died down. Rissho Kosei-kai is no longer a movement, but an institution. The milkman who once carried Mrs Myoko on his bicycle through the back streets of Tokyo to visit a prospective convert now rides in a limousine to greet foreign churchmen and statesmen. Rissho Kosei-kai has shifted its aim from the homes of its members, where lives are transformed, to international conference rooms, where resolutions are passed.

It may yet happen that Nichiko, who so hates ostentation and diplomacy, will quietly bring Rissho-Kosei-kai back where it started, and allow the burning embers to flare up from within. Kosei-kai has millions of well informed and enthusiastic members to draw on; it must find ways to let them be heard. It has already started in the right direction by abandoning the parent–child structure inherited from Reiyukai and replacing it with geographical branches. It has laid down solid foundations for future growth, and attained respectability. Now it must rejuvenate.

Chapter 19

Other Nichiren Groups Abroad

When a religion is alive and growing, it spawns sects and spin-off movements. Small doctrinal differences are vigorously debated among capable leaders and a concerned laity. Because the religion is seen as a source of power, that power must be correctly harnessed and directed. Doctrinal accuracy is vital, and misunderstandings are dangerous. On the other hand, when a religion is decaying, sectarianism loses its impetus and is replaced by yearnings for harmony, conformity, and strength in numbers. Burning issues from the past become orthodox traditions in the present — 'acceptable differences of opinion', which can be overlooked for the sake of peace. The white-hot volcanic eruptions of yesterday are the lifeless subsoil of today.

Nichiren Buddhism was conceived in the furnace of controversy. For three centuries it expanded vigorously, spawning new sub-sects as it did so. It replaced Tendai and Shingon esotericism as the favoured religion of the aristocracy at Kyoto and established new centres in the provinces. Tendai and Shingon, which had depended on the aristocracy for financial support, were reduced to the futile counter-measures of sending armed monks into the capital from time to time to burn Nichiren temples.

Nichiren Buddhism was not the only growing faith at the time; the other Kamakura sects of Zen and Pure Land were formidable rivals. Unlike the complex older sects, the new ones were simple enough to appeal to the masses and uncouth feudal barons. It was no longer sufficient, as the early missionaries had thought, just to win over the court at Kyoto. Real political power was divided among various warlords, and there was no way to predict which of them — if any — would finally emerge victorious.

Nichiren Buddhism found strong support among the rising middle

class of merchants and craftsmen, who longed for peace and stability in the Buddha's earthly kingdom. They formed a literate class that could appreciate theological debates and support dissident priests founding new sub-sects. Such debates, however, were of little interest to the down-trodden peasants, who hoped for rebirth in Amida's Pure Land after death, or to warriors, who could identify better with wordless Zen and the 'honour' code of Bushido. In the late sixteenth century three warlords, Nobunaga, Hideyoshi, and Tokugawa Ieyasu, tightened their grip on the country and broke the political power of all religious sects.

Nobunaga openly encouraged the spread of Christianity to check the secular power of Buddhism; he almost destroyed Tendai, and massacred 3,000 monks on Mount Hiei. Hideyoshi continued his policy and broke the power of Shingon and Jodo Shinshu. Once he had beaten the Buddhists, he turned on the Christians. Ieyasu finished off the Christians and locked in the beaten Buddhists. Nichiren Buddhists were the last to hold out, but gradually they too succumbed to the lure of patronage instead of persecution.

During the long Tokugawa dictatorship (1600–1868) Buddhism was the official state religion. Every citizen was registered at some Buddhist temple, but was forbiden to change his religion. Proselytizing, so basic to Nichiren, was now forbidden by law. Buddhism basked comfortably under official patronage, and innovations came to a halt. Non-conformists such as the *Fujufuse* zealots were treated as non-persons and forced underground.

After the Meiji Restoration and the disestablishment of Buddhism, some Nichiren Buddhists, instead of despairing, saw new opportunities to convert the nation. For the first time in centuries proselytizing was again legal. However, the military imperialists, who were now the real powers behind the throne, wanted conformity and national unity. New religious movements (and suddenly there were many) were watched warily by the police, and if they were too independent were closed down. This pressure reached its climax during World War II. All Nichiren sects were ordered to unite under the nominal leadership of Mount Minobu. Doctrinal differences were overlooked by the conforming majority, but still vigorously maintained by dissidents.

At the end of the war total freedom of religion was instituted for the first time in Japanese history. Many of the old temple religions, deprived of their vast landholdings, suffered from the change, but new religions exploded into life. Nichiren sectarian movements, which already had a head-start from before the war, took the lead. Today some of the old temple sects are prospering, though others are not. But Nichiren Buddhism as a whole lends itself to lay participation, and it was laymen who took up the cry for building Buddha's world of peace and prosperity.

Hommon Butsuryu-shu

Hommon Butsuryu-shu takes sectarian differences seriously. Although it was founded as recently as the nineteenth century, it considers itself 'the sect that perfectly and thoroughly observes the teachings of Buddha and those of Nichiren Shonin (Sashida, *Guide to a New Believer*, 3). It has now opened a branch of 'the genuine Buddhist faith' in Honolulu. The name could be translated as 'The Fundamental Buddha Sect of the Original Gate'. Its origins go back to Nichiren via Keirin-bo Nichiryu (1384–1464), who was one of the greatest exponents of Nichiren Buddhism during its heroic age.

Nichiryu founded many temples, especially in western Japan, and is said to have written about 300 books. He was the son of a feudal lord from a province facing the Sea of Japan, and he inherited his father's militant spirit. As the oldest son and heir, he was destined to succeed to his father's fief, but at the impressionable age of 12 he was so inspired by the spirit of Nichiren that he asked and received his father's permission to enter the religious life.

His scholarly abilities impressed his teachers, and after only two years they encouraged him to leave the provinces and continue his studies in Kyoto. There he took up residence in the famous temple of Myohon-ji, which had been founded by the indomitable Ryuge-in Nichizo. But by then, life at the temple was very different. Nichiren Buddhism had become popular among the royal aristocracy of Kyoto, and Nichiryu found the temple full of idle courtiers, whose primary concerns were glamorous rituals and generous support from the imperial treasury.

Nichiryu saw that the chief abbot Nissai was under considerable pressure to conform to the status quo. Nissai resisted, winning the approval of his young student and others who believed that the Dharma must rule the state, not vice versa. When Nissai died in 1405 the conflict came to a head. He was succeeded by Gatsumyo, a scion of one of the best families in the capital and leader of the reactionary party. Nichiryu was outspoken in his opposition to this appointment and challenged Gatsumyo to a public debate. The debate aroused much interest in the capital. Gatsumyo, of course, was supported by the Court, which had appointed him, while Nichiryu was considered an upstart from the provinces. However, in spite of pressure on the judges from the Crown, the debate ended in a resounding victory for Nichiryu. But his triumph was short-lived. Nichiryu and his supporters were ordered out of the temple. They moved to another Nichiren temple, Myoren-ji, where they continued their agitation for an independent Nichiren Buddhism.

Six nobles, friends of Gatsumyo, decided to kill the rustic troublemaker. With drawn swords, they burst into the room where Nichiryu was chanting the Sutra before the Gohonzon. There they froze, each waiting for another to strike the first blow.

Nichiryu turned and faced them. 'Who are you?' he shouted. 'Who gave you permission to defile this sacred place?' The six Samurai, astonished at such courage, quickly lost their resolve. One by one they dropped to their knees, begged forgiveness, and asked to become Nichiryu's followers. This famous incident marked the beginning of Nichiryu's branch of Nichiren Buddhism.

Nichiryu, like most Nichiren dissidents, emphasized the *Shoretsu* teaching of the superiority of the Original Gate over the Imprinted Gate. *Shoretsu* proponents did not totally reject the first half of the Sutra, the Imprinted Gate, as Nichiren had sternly forbidden such extremes (MW 3:297). However, they insisted that the Original Gate is radically distinct from all previous Buddhist teachings, including the Tendai theoretical teachings. Their opponents from the majority Harmonious School (*Itchi*) claimed that the Imprinted Gate is indispensable for understanding the Original Gate, and therefore it cannot be said which of the two is superior or inferior. Nichiren may have taken the *Shoretsu* position — at any rate, many of his disciples thought he had — but he had not fully clarified this point, and so left the door open for future debates.

Nichiryu believed in the superiority of the Original Gate, which he defined as not the whole of the second half of the Sutra, but only what Nichiren had called 'the eight core chapters' (15–22). Therefore his branch is called the Eight Chapters Branch (*Happon-ha*).

Even from a purely literary point of view it is obvious that the Eight Chapters form a unit distinct from the chapters which follow, each of which reads like an independent composition. The Eight Chapters begin with the appearance of the Bodhisattvas from the Earth and end with their dismissal with instructions to propagate the Buddha's teachings. Nichiren described his Great Mandala as a graphic depiction of 'the eight vital chapters' (*MW*, 1:67, 1:211). Thus Nichiryu's followers venerate the Great Mandala-Gohonzon and reject all other Buddhist images. (An image of Nichiren, however, is placed in front of the Gohonzon.) They also stress vigorous *shakubuku* (missionary activity).

Hommon Butsuryu-shu began in the nineteenth century as a lay society within the Eight Chapters branch. It was really the first important modern Nichiren movement, antedating Tanaka's Kokuchukai and the more recent Reiyukai, Sokagakkai, and Rissho Kosei-kai. It was founded in 1857 by an Eight Chapters priest, Nagamatsu Nissen, and before its separation into an independent sect was called Hommon Butsuryu-ko.

The founder had been converted as an adult. He entered seminary full of enthusiasm, but was disappointed to find that his younger classmates had little interest in the distinctive teachings of the Eight Chapters Branch. They ignored the needs of the laity and were concerned mostly with carving out lucrative careers for themselves at wealthy temples. Nissen dropped out of the 'temple race', and together

with some fellow-believers, both clerical and lay, he organized a lay society. He felt that the clergy were stuffy, mercenary, and over-scholarly, whereas true religion should be joyful and lively. He introduced songs, poetry, and group activities. His society was so successful that eventually the sect's leaders reluctantly had to instal him as chief priest of one of their largest temples.

He could not be lured back completely into the fold, however, and continued to follow an increasingly independent course. He translated the scriptures into the vernacular, organized study groups, and invited the direct participation of the laity in activities which had previously been reserved for the clergy. At the age of 55 he married, further distancing himself from the celibate clergy. He insisted that there are no qualitative differences between clergy and laity or between men and women. In his society the only distinctions between members were based on superior understanding of doctrine, and those who excelled were given honorary titles. This policy did not always go down well with 'male-chauvinist' members, but Nissen insisted, even threatening to resign if women were not treated as equals to men.

After Nissen's death the society carried on into the twentieth century. It was still nominally a part of the Eight Chapters Branch but completely self-governing. It assumed control of Nissen's temple of Yusei-ji and built other centres of its own, and the growth was steady although not spectacular. After World War II it finally declared total independence, changing its name from *ko* (society) to *shu* (sect). Its rate of growth increased, and it now has over half a million members and about 300 temples and study centres.

Hommon Butsuryu-shu now trains clergy of its own, but it still emphasises lay participation, doctrinal understanding, vigorous chanting of the Sacred Title, *shakubuku*, and the worldly benefits which can be gained by practising its teachings. Members follow the 'Bodhisattva way' (*Bosatsugyo*), 'helping others at the cost of our own life', and emphasize an attitude of grateful thanks for all benefits received from heaven and earth. It is still new in America, operating exclusively within the Japanese–American community, but we can expect to hear much more from it in the future.

Buddhist School of America

Nichijo Shaka is the most colourful and controversial Nichiren leader in America. In spite of his Japanese name, he is a Caucasian American from San Francisco. Born John D. Provoo in 1917, he was introduced to Oriental philosophy by his mother, who was an early Montessori advocate. She later converted to Buddhism under the guidance of her son. Provoo was so impressed by Buddhism that in 1940 he accepted the Precepts (formally converted) under the Rev. Shobo Aoyagi of the Sacramento Nichiren Buddhist Church. Never one to do things by

halves, he went to Japan to study for the priesthood at Mount Minobu. He had been there seven months when his studies were cut short by a call from his draft board back in California (*Young East*, Autumn 1965, 13).

The draft board ignored his claim to be a theological student and assigned him to the army, which soon shipped him back to the Orient, this time to the Philippines. When the Japanese invaded the Philippines in 1941, Provoo suddenly found himself in the thick of desperate fighting. However, with the fall of the American fortress of Corregidor, he was taken prisoner.

Provoo was one of the few American prisoners who could speak Japanese. Moreover, he had a lively interest in Buddhism and Japanese culture. The Japanese found him a willing spokesman for the prisoners — perhaps too willing. Within two days of his capture, he was thought to have made accusations against an American lieutenant which led to the latter's execution. As the weary years passed, many American prisoners, who were living under appalling conditions, came to resent Provoo's behaviour and favoured treatment from their Japanese captors. They believed that his cooperation with the enemy had passed over to collaboration. 'The consensus among the men on Corregidor,' says Lt. Gen. John Wright, a former fellow-prisoner, 'was that Provoo was a traitor, a turncoat, a self-centered individual not to be trusted.'

When the war ended, Provoo was at first overlooked in the flush of victory, but his fellow-prisoners of war had not forgotten him. Eventually some of them managed to get him charged with collaboration with the enemy — treason — and brought to trial. Throughout the trial Provoo steadfastly maintained his innocence, but former prisoners lined up against him. Among them was no less a personage than General Wainwright, the highest ranking American prisoner of war. Provoo was found guilty and condemned to a federal prison. His lawyers, however, had not yet given up, and carried his case to the Supreme Court of the United States. There he was declared innocent on a technicality: the statute of limitations had expired. Provoo's conviction was reversed, and he was set free.

In 1965 a large Japanese delegation came to the United States to participate in the 12th Congress of the World Association of World Federalists. The delegation was headed by Archbishop Nichijo Fujii, the highest ranking abbot of Nichiren Shu. After the close of the congress some of the delegates, including Archbishop Fujii and Professor Senchu Murano, made a tour of the United States to meet American Buddhists. In New York City Professor Murano was approached by John Provoo, who asked to be introduced to the Archbishop. The two got on well. Provoo became the personal disciple of the Archbishop, who took him back to Japan to continue his studies at Mount Minobu.

Provoo concluded his studies satisfactorily. He was ordained a priest, and in 1968 the Archbishop gave him the right to train and ordain

future American aspirants. Provoo changed his name to Nichijo Shaka — Nichijo in honour of the Archbishop and Shaka for Shakyamuni Buddha. By 1981, when he came to the 'Big Island' of Hawaii, he had trained and ordained 17 priests, of whom many were women. (*The Honolulu Advertiser*, 30 August 1981)

Nichijo Shaka never attempted to start a mass movement. His aim was to establish an American training centre for serious students who would then bring orthodox Nichiren Buddhism back to their home towns. Because he wanted his centre to be purely American, he refused to accept official support for it as a Nichiren Shu foreign mission. He lived simply as a Buddhist monk, and it was not until Dr Richard E. Peterson of the University of Hawaii gave him the use of three acres on the 'Big Island' that he was able to build a permanent centre.

Like Nichiren, who was finally granted land on Minobu only to find his health deteriorating, Nichijo Shaka found himself in the same predicament. He founded the 'Buddhist School of America: Perfect Law of the Lotus Teaching' when he was too ill to supervise it properly. Therefore he ordained the Rev. Nichizo Finney as his successor, and took him to Minobu to complete his training. (*History of Nichiren Buddhism in Hawaii*, 34, in Japanese)

Nichjo Shaka's career is drawing to its close. The success or failure of his efforts now rests with those he trained, and their impact remains to be seen.

Great Sangha of Nichihonzan Myohoji

The most extraordinary of the modern Nichiren missionaries was the late Nichidatsu Fujii, also known as Guruji. He died in 1985, just short of his 100th birthday, after a lifetime of 'beating the drum for the Dharma'. He, too, made no attempt to found a mass movement, but today his devoted followers, few in numbers but valiant in spirit, can be found on every continent.

In the course of his long and colourful career, Guruji's position underwent a 180-degree turn from ardent nationalist and collaborator with Japanese military expansion to radical pacifist and anti-war activist. He was ordained a priest in 1903 at a temple that traced its lineage back to Toki Jonin. Wishing to get a thorough understanding of all types of Japanese Buddhism, he spent the next 10 years studying the teachings of one sect after another: Nichiren, Tendai, Jodo, Hosso, Shingon, and Zen. Although he never deserted his own sect and always considered it the culmination of the whole of Buddhism, he also developed a deep appreciation for other forms of spirituality. When he was 25 he volunteered for one-year military service in the army, after which he returned to his studies. At the age of 28 he had a dream which told him that after his thirty-third birthday he was to practise not only for himself but for others (*Shujo-kyoke*). When he approached that age

he began to undertake severe ascetic training. Finally, in the tradition of Toki Jonin, he ordained himself to his great task to spread the gospel of Nichiren and save the world.

In those days many Nichiren Buddhists were inspired by the fiery teachings of Tanaka, who maintained not only the supremacy of Nichiren Buddhism but also the obligation of the Emperor to sponsor its propagation: 'Japan has the mission to propagate the law of the Lotus Sutra and thereby redeem the world' (Satomi, 1923, 111). When Nichidatsu reached the destined age of 33 he decided to awaken the Emperor to his heaven-given mandate. He sat down before the Royal Palace, picked up his drum, and began to beat it to the chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. Of course, the police soon removed him, but Tanaka's philosophy was not without sympathizers in the imperial government. They had noticed that Western imperialism generally sent in the missionaries first, the merchants second, and finally the army. Why should Japan not do the same thing? Instead of throwing Nichidatsu into jail, it might be better to harness his zeal and use it for their own purposes.

The Japanese authorities had been setting up National Shinto shrines in China and Korea to mark their conquests in those countries, but the locals resented them and refused to worship there. On the other hand, many Chinese and Koreans were devout Buddhists, and Japanese Buddhism might just be the missing link to join their hearts to those of their new masters.

Nichidatsu was easily persuaded that he could serve both his Emperor and the Dharma if he carried the Dharma westward to Manchuria in the footsteps of the first great Nichiren foreign missionary, Renge Ajari Nichiji. This would seem to fulfil the prophecy of Nichiren in *Kangyo-Hachiman-sho*: 'The moon rises in the west and travels eastward, signifying the spread of the Dharma of the Buddha of *Gasshi* (the country of the moon: India) to the east. The sun rises in the east and travels westward, signifying the spread of the Buddhism of Japan to the west.'

Accordingly Nichidatsu organized a group of fellow-zealots to carry the Dharma to foreign shores. They donned yellow robes like the monks of southern Buddhism rather than the traditional robes of Japanese monks, thus emphasizing their pan-Buddhist internationalism, and departed for Manchuria. There they gave themselves the name of Nippon-zan Myohoji Dai-sanga ('Japan-Mountain Wonderful Dharma-Temple Great Sangha'). The name was a curious mixture of internationalism ('Great Sangha'), Nichiren Buddhism ('Myohoji') and Japanese nationalism ('Nippon-zan'). Later, when the organization had become pacifist, the pronunciation was generally given a more Nichiren-like flavour: 'Nichihonzan'.

The Japanese Imperial Government adopted the new organization, transported the monks to China, and gave them military ranks after the

model of Imperial Russia. In the 1920s they were considered important participants in Japan's expansion into China. In fact, when one of the monks was assassinated by a Chinese nationalist in 1931, the Japanese government used the incident as an excuse to punish China. The assassin's shot was really an opening gun of World War II. Nichidatsu, who had the innocent heart of a child, was probably unaware that he was being used as a pawn in international politics. His only desire was to spread the Dharma and, like most Japanese, especially those influenced by Tanaka, he had implicit faith in the noble intentions of the Emperor. What was good for Japan was good for the Dharma, and what was good for the Dharma was good for the world.

His first monastery was built at Tai Lien, Manchuria, in 1918, and it was there that the missionary society was formally inaugurated. The monasteries, which were always quite small, were called simply *dojos* ('places where Buddhism is practised and enlightenment is attained').

Life for the monks was rigorous. They may have held the ranks of military officers, but they considered themselves soldiers of the spirit, locked in deadly combat with the forces of evil. They lived in poverty, suffering from the cold winters, sparse provisions, and silent hostility from the natives. Nichidatsu's father died in northern Korea in 1919, so his mother joined him in Manchuria, where she took monastic vows and shared the hardships (Fujii, *Buddhism for World Peace* 102). Fujii deeply venerated his mother, and after her death in 1930 usually launched important projects on her death-day, 25 February.

The great Kanto earthquake of 1923, which had such an impact on Kubo of Reiyukai and Niwano of Rissho Kosei-kai, marked a turning-point in the career of Nichidatsu Fujii as well. He had been planning to carry his mission into Soviet Russia, and had taken the Siberian Railway as far as Harbin, when he heard the dreadful news. Immediately he changed his plans and hurried home (103). As a good Nichiren Buddhist, he was convinced that this terrible catastrophe was the result of the sins of Japan. To the consternation of the government which had been sponsoring him, he began to call for national repentance: Japan was guilty of exchanging Eastern spirituality for Western materialism. He now established his mission in his native country, and soon found himself harrassed by the secret police (103).

The death of his beloved mother in 1930 also marked another turning-point. It freed him to undertake what had always been his supreme ambition: to fulfil the prophecy of Nichiren and carry the Dharma from East to West, further than China — to India itself. The government no longer supported him or wanted him back in China, but it would not object — in fact, it would be pleased — if he went to India as a private citizen. He took the ashes of his mother to Minobu for interment, and there made a solemn vow:

May the Buddha have pity and let my vow be accomplished, the

great vow which is far beyond my capacity. I desire to take the initiative in realizing the auspicious omen of the Buddhism of Japan returning to the Western Heaven, India, as it is prophesied. I desire to regenerated the spiritual civilization of Asia, the Orient, and subdue the sixty-two kinds of people with false views. I desire to deliver equally all humanity from the murderous civilization of the European and United States *asuras* (fighting spirits), the inferno of confusion consolidated with strife. Follow me, one after another, to beat the *dokku* (drum) at the Himalayas, and let the rain of the Dharma pour into the stream of the Ganga!

If this Dharma does not return to the Western Heaven, the prophecy of our great master (Nichiren) shall become a falsehood.

If this Dharma does not return to the Western Heaven, our bodhisattva-way will not be completed.

If this Dharma does not return to the Western Heaven, sentient beings of this world of ours will eternally be unable to escape from the prison of fire, strife, and bloodshed.

(38–9)

Although the Imperial Japanese government was already casting covetous eyes towards India, it no longer trusted Nichidatsu to further its purposes, and this time offered him no assistance. He arrived in Calcutta in 1931 with little more than his drum and a few Japanese trinkets, and set off at once to visit Indian Buddhist holy places. The sight of their ruined and abandoned condition filled him with sorrow, and he resolved to do something about it. Meanwhile he settled on the premises of a crematory at Bombay, where he practised rigid asceticism, surviving on scraps of food which were tossed his way. Day and night he beat his drum to the chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. People regarded him as some sort of foreign fakir.

Then he met Gandhi, and once more his life turned a corner. Their first meeting lasted only 15 minutes, but Nichidatsu was so overcome with emotion at being in the presence of Gandhi that he could only stand with his hands pressed reverently together while tears of joy poured down his face. His translator, one of his monks, had to do all the talking. At first, Gandhi was somewhat suspicious of these two representatives of 'Japanese imperialism', but soon Nichidatsu's sincerity began to impress him. He invited him to stay on at the ashram so that they could speak further. Nichidatsu accepted gladly.

It is thanks to Gandhi that Nichidatsu became completely dedicated to the cause of non-violence, or as he put it, the Buddhist precept of non-killing. In Gandhi he saw the personification of his idea: the spirituality of the East overcoming the materialism of the West. Gandhi saw in Nichidatsu a kindred soul, and it was he who gave him the Indian

name of Guruji. When one day Gandhi picked up Guruji's drum and began to beat it in time to the chant, Nichidatsu was overjoyed.

> When Gandhi-ji beat the Dharma-drum of *Na mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, and when the Japanese disciples of the Buddha lived with him in his ashram, the independence of India was assured in the near future. Ah! Indeed, today we were able to fulfill the momentous mission of Japan borne by our great master and founder Nichiren at the Age of *Mappo* (Decline of the Dharma) in the Western Heaven! Whatever slander and calumny I must bear, who can negate the fact that I have been able to fulfill (my) mission? . . . I have beaten the drum . . . seeking for this single man. He was the person I had long been looking for. He, who had considered even the sweets, beautiful fan, and cotton goods from Japan [which Nichidatsu had brought as gifts] as enemies of India, needless to mention the policies of the Japanese government, has today immediately accepted without doubt, the traditional Japanese instrument handed down from the ages of the gods, the sound of the Dharma-drum of *Na mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo*, which is the prayer for *Rissho-ankoku*, as a peerless friend to his religious life . . . The profound sound of a single Japanese round drum beaten by Gandhi-ji, who is bursting into laughter, was the war drum of India's independence movement . . . We were drawn into the laughter of Gandhi-ji and laughed rejoicingly together. It was like a dream.
>
> (62–3)

When Gandhi departed on his mission to the Untouchables, he took the drum with him. Is it only coincidental that the Untouchables later began to convert by the millions to Buddhism?

Guruji spent many years wandering about India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) beating his drum. He began to attract attention as a friend of Gandhi and a holy man in his own right. In 1935 he opened a *dojo* in Calcutta, and the following year he started the restoration of Rajgir, the Vulture Peak where the Buddha had preached the *Dharma Flower.* The project was not to be completed, however, until 1969, after World War II and the independence of India. His movement continued without him in China and Japan, but the outbreak of the war brought further expansion to a halt. During the war Guruji devoted himself to fasting and praying for peace.

He was 60 years old when the atomic bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. By the following year he was launched on the final and most active period of his life, the quest for world peace. The invention and use of the atomic bomb convinced him that Western civilization, which he equated with materialism, could bring the world to destruction. He would resist it everywhere by erecting 'peace

pagodas', which would stand like beacons reminding people of the primacy of the spiritual over the material. These peace pagodas, generally built in the traditional bell-shaped style of Indian stupas, were to be strictly non-sectarian; they were for all mankind.

Nichihonzan Myohoji has become famous for its construction of peace pagodas. As of this writing, more than 50 of them have been built, mostly in Japan, but also in Sri Lanka, India, and even London. All were built free of charge by the monks and volunteers from various world peace movements. Whenever possible, Guruji would supervise each one personally. The dedication of a peace pagoda was often accompanied by much ceremony and publicity, sometimes involving heads of state. The inauguration of one at the model village of Milton Keynes, UK, was attended by Her Majesty the Queen.

During the last 20 years of his life Guruji was loaded with honours, especially from India and Sri Lanka. In 1979, when he was 95 years old, he was given the Jawaharlal Nehru Award for International Understanding. Crowds turned out to see him wherever he went. He made no effort to convert them, particularly if they were already Buddhists as in Sri Lanka, but would beam with happiness if anyone would pick up a drum and begin to chant *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*.

He was not always well received. In Nepal, where he planned to erect a peace pagoda at Lumbini (Shakyamuni's birthplace), he attracted large crowds of eager volunteers and well-wishers. But the project ran foul of local politics, and the construction was destroyed by government order (*Rissho Ankoku*, 45). It took the efforts of the United Nations to get a monument finally raised there.

Guruji made it easy for people to become one of his monks or nuns. Celibacy was not required (*World Peace*, 227), and there were few rules. He believed that once the Dharma seed is planted in someone's heart, it will bring forth fruit by itself; sincerity is the one requisite. However, when 'hippies' began to be attracted to his order, he forbade the use of drugs (243).

The monks and nuns were also forbidden to solicit funds even for good causes. 'The propagation of the truth of the Lotus Sutra is incompatible with the collection of donations. We should carefully keep ourselves from collecting wealth under the pretext of the construction of Peace Pagodas or Monasteries. The realization of Buddhahood and world peace can be obtained only through our strenuous work based on persistent faith, and never through receiving donations' (*Ju Ryo Hon*).

His theology, built firmly on the teachings of Nichiren, was simple. 'To actually carry out religious teachings is called *shugyo* (religious practice). It must be one which is the simplest and can be the most easily performed. That is, to place one's hands together, worshipping through the body, chanting *Na mu Myo Ho Ren Ge Kyo* through the mouth, and cherishing respect [for all living beings] in the mind and

heart (like the Bodhisattva Never-Despise). Spiritual salvation, the fervent desire of the World Honored One, Shakyamuni Buddha, will be fulfilled by such minute actions by us. When religious and spiritual teachings towards the heaven and earth, the universe, are applied to the social life of man, and when everyone respects and venerates each other, how can there be room for war to break out? The fundamental cause of war, nuclear warfare, is nothing more than a calamity incurred by the non-religious faithless civilization of science, which neither respects nor pays veneration towards others' (*World Peace*, 262).

He was an outspoken critic of American foreign policy. In 1968 he came to New York to participate in the anti-Vietnam War movement. Ten years later, when he was 94, he returned to deliver to Kurt Waldheim, Secretary General of the United Nations, 20 million signatures calling for the liquidation of atomic weapons. He supported the 'Longest Walk' of the American Indian Movement, although by then he was too old to participate in the walk personally. Many of his monks did, however, and he met them in Washington, D.C., where he founded a *dojo*. Other American *dojos* were established on the West Coast.

Nichidatsu Fujii Guruji never intended his Nipponzan Myohoji to be a sect. He considered that Nichiren Buddhism transcends all sectarianism, and he always remained spiritually if not administratively loyal to Mount Minobu. Not long before his death he said:

> It appears that what I have been devoting my life to, the Righteous Dharma, is now going to be spread throughout the world. I am fully confident about it.
>
> There is no other way out today if humanity wishes to survive. And this is the only reason for which Nichiren Bodhisattva appeared on this earth at the beginning of the Era of Decay.
>
> Seven hundred years after his demise, I repeated his action, coming into the world for the sole purpose of saving humanity from the danger of total annihilation by propagating ODAIMOKU (NAMU MYOHO RENGE KYO) throughout the world.
>
> This single word, the RIGHTEOUS AND ALL EMBRACING DHARMA, can alone be the last refuge for all humanity in the future.
>
> The Saddharma Pundarika (Lotus) Sutra says, 'I leave this powerful medicine for you at this place.' and this is the wholesome means of salvation of the compassionate Tathagata.
>
> Then, 'Take it! Do not be afraid that you will not be cured.'
>
> You shall be cured!
>
> You shall be cured without fail!
>
> NA MU MYO HO REN GE KYO.
>
> (*Ju-Ryoh-Hon*)

Chapter 20

'To Save All the People of the World'

'All that we are,' says an early Buddhist sutra, 'is the result of what we have thought; it is founded on our thoughts; it is made up of our thoughts. If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him, as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage' (*Dhammapada*).

This basic idea is found in all schools of Buddhism: we are responsible for our own destiny. Nichiren, however, extends it further: destiny is not only individual, it is collective. We suffer as individuals because suffering is universal. The remedy is not escape from this world; this is impossible, as we are part and parcel of the world. The remedy is to remove *collective* suffering: 'Establish the Right Law and save the country.'

> It is for the purpose of attaining Buddhahood by the teaching of the Buddha that one renounces his family and becomes a monk. I also became a monk for the same purpose. Now I see that no Shinto or Buddhist god can do anything to avert these calamities. Judging from this, I cannot believe that I shall be able to be reborn in a Buddha-world and attain Buddhahood in my future life. This may come from my ignorance. Looking up to heaven, I lamented bitterly, and lying with my face to the ground, I pondered the reasons for such calamities.
>
> I racked my poor brain and read sutras to find out why these things happened. At last I have reached the following conclusion. The government and people of this country are standing against the Right Law. They believe wrong teachings. Therefore, the gods have deserted this country and the saints have left us. *Maras* and devils have come instead. That is why the calamities

> have taken place. I should say this. The cause of [dreadful] calamities is [itself] dreadful.
>
> (*Rissho Ankoku Ron*)

The cause of so many calamities is wrong thinking, but especially the most prevalent wrong thinking. He identified this as the Pure Land Buddhism advocated by Honen. It was sweeping the country at the same time that the country was sinking into misery, and this could not be a coincidence. 'If a man speaks or acts with an evil thought, pain follows him as the wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the carriage.' To eradicate the pain, one must eliminate the cause — wrong thought.

Nichiren attacked Honen's doctrine from every angle. It is basically selfish because it seeks individual escape, and selfishness is the root cause of all sufferings. It is one-sided, closing the door on all other teachings of the Buddha. It is novel and unorthodox. It is other-worldly, turning people's attention from this world to a paradise beyond the grave. It is inconsistent, claiming that it can save even evil men, while its own sutra, *Muryoju-kyo*, bars from Amida's paradise 'those beings who have committed the five deadly sins, and who have spoken evil of the good Law'. And finally, it fails to acknowledge the supremacy of the *Dharma Flower*. At its best the Pure Land doctrine is a temporary teaching capable of helping ignorant and uneducated people along the way; at its worst, by becoming exclusive and shutting out all other teaching (as advocated by Honen), it is a source of infinite miseries.

Later Nichiren extended his criticisms to include any system short of the all-inclusive *Dharma Flower*. Religions distinguish between insiders and outsiders, the saved and the damned. According to the *Dharma Flower* there are no outsiders. Sectarianism, the attempt to separate 'us' from 'them', is wrong from the outset.

Since all beings exist within the one Buddha-nature, there would seem to be no reason to evangelize or propagate the right Dharma. Everyone is enlightened already, no matter who or what he is, but 'Original Enlightenment' is a perversion of what the *Dharma Flower* teaches. *There is no individual enlightenment*; enlightenment is universal.[87] The Sacred Source is itself enlightenment and 'the parent of all the Buddhas'. The Mahayana Sutras constantly tell us that we cannot 'grasp' enlightenment. We can receive it, we can participate in it, but we cannot possess it.

This is the significance of the Sacred Formula, *Odaimoku*. Nichidatsu Fujii says, 'It is the power of the Lord Buddha given to us by him. It took the form of a word and was bestowed on us. All the Dharma, all the unrestricted transcendental powers, and all the inconceivable spheres of the Buddha were encompassed by the word of *Odaimoku* and given to us' (*World Peace*, 188–9).

It will do me no good to go off to a mountaintop and there awaken to enlightenment. Unless you are enlightened, too, my enlightenment is only partial — an expedient, to use the term of the *Dharma Flower.* Even Shakyamuni Buddha's enlightenment under the Bodhi Tree was just an expedient. Perfect enlightenment (*Anuttara-samyak-sambodhi*) is universal and timeless by its very nature; either it involves everyone or it does not take place at all. Meanwhile, the only advantage held by a believer over a non-believer lies in 'benefits'; his life will run smoother, and he will be happier than the non-believer. Firmly centred in the Buddha's infinite compassion, he can face obstacles in his path and overcome them one by one, but until he can spread that security to others his own happiness is partial, not total. He must proclaim *Odaimoku* for others as well as for himself. This is the built-in missionary imperative of Nichiren Buddhism.

In the twentieth century Nichiren Buddhism has burst forth from its Japanese boundaries and become global. Sometimes its missionary effort is institutional, well financed, and well organized; at other times it is personal, without any visible means of support, and strongly individualistic. Nichiren Shoshu/Sokagakkai is the best example of the former; Nichidatsu Fujii Guruji and Nichijo Shaka are exemplars of the latter. They did not seek to make converts, their only desire being to let people hear the drumbeat of the Wonderful Dharma and become aware of its existence. They wanted to 'sow the seed of Buddhahood' far and wide. The Lord Buddha would bring the seeds to fruition in good time, just as the warming rays of the sun cause plants to shoot up once the seed has been sown. This is why so many Nichiren Buddhists pound a drum as they chant. It is not necessary that people believe; belief and understanding will come eventually. The truth is irresistible, but it is necessary that everyone should hear it.

Guruji sought to make the all-saving Dharma visible as well as audible. He built Peace Pagodas from Nepal to London as beacons to hasten the day of world harmony. Other Nichiren groups have raised the banner of world peace in their own ways. Reiyukai seeks to realize it through friendship, Rissho Kosei-kai through mutual understanding. Under the leadership of Archbishop Nichijo Fujii, Nichiren Shu espoused the cause of World Federalism. However, none are as active as Sokagakkai in sponsoring huge rallies for world peace and friendship.

Nichiren Shu, too, after basking for centuries under official patronage, is now reaching out to the laity. In 1966 it launched the 'Protect the Dharma Movement' to organize its followers locally and regionally along lines not unlike those of the new religions. A uniform service for all members was put into effect, which is exactly what Niwano of Kosei-kai had wanted Nichiren Shu to do 20 years before.

Nichiren's missionary imperative divides the world into two classes of people: those who are consciously saving the world and those who are unconsciously causing its misery. No one is neutral. The only way

to save the world from its sorrows is to 'beat the drum of the Dharma' as far afield as possible. Now that centuries of government-imposed restrictions have been lifted, Nichiren Buddhists have once more sprung into action. Since the Second World War, Nichiren Buddhism has grown more rapidly than any other Japanese religion and has now moved into the number one slot long enjoyed by Pure Land (Shin) Buddhism, as well as branching out to foreign shores. Japanese emigrants and businessmen have carried it with them to every continent, setting up Nichiren-inspired societies even in such traditionally Buddhist countries as Thailand and Nepal. Their goal is straightforward: to gain peace for the world and salvation for themselves. The two go together; there cannot be one without the other.

Besides the missionary imperative, each Nichiren believer is called to develop his individual potential. This is what 'becoming a Buddha' means to him: he must face the absolute on a one-to-one basis. There is no intermediary between him and the Gohonzon. No esoteric master will initiate him into higher mysteries, no Zen *roshi* guides his progress, and there is no divine or semi-divine saviour to shoulder his problems. Even the holy book, the *Sutra of the Dharma Flower*, only leads him to the door. It is but a symbol, the quintessence of which is contained in its title. Armed only with this Sacred Title, the Nichiren believer is called to emulate the founder and persist until he has attained to Buddhahood. No obstacle can overcome him, no set-back is permanent. Within him lies the power of infinite creativity.

No true Nichiren Buddhist can accept his religion spoon-fed and second-hand. Of course, many nominal believers are content to rely on heavenly Bodhisattvas, charismatic leaders, sacred objects and talismans. Here as everywhere there are more followers than leaders, but individual self-expression always lies just beneath the surface and can burst forth when least expected. The history of Nichiren Buddhism is replete with 'heresies' and spin-off movements. Since everyone must face the Gohonzon one-to-one, the results can be explosive. Strong personalities, from Nikko in the thirteenth century to Guruji in the twentieth, have refused to bow down before any authority except their own conscience.

The real centre for the believer is not his sect but his personal life. Peer organizations like Sokagakkai and other tightly knit societies reinforce what the believer is doing at home and at work by himself. He sets up his own home altar arranged according to the tenets of his particular sect, and this serves as his mystical link with the world of Buddha. It is his personal *kaidan*, the sacred platform where he realizes the Dharma and encounters the Ground of Being. It is here where he changes the quality of his inner life. Normally he performs his devotions twice a day, for about 30 minutes each time, although if he belongs to Nichiren Shoshu he may spend many hours at it.

Whether he is at work or play he puts his whole self into it, changing

the quality of this world into Buddha's world. All Nichiren believers chant *Odaimoku*, the Sacred Title, as often as possible throughout the day, whether at home, at work, riding in a bus, or winding up to pitch a baseball. They may give it different interpretations; to some the mantra has magical power, and the more it is recited, the better it will work. For them any problem can be met and overcome through vigorous chanting. For others, it calms and directs the mind by shutting out distractions. For members of Reiyukai, which has its own method of chanting (pronouncing each syllable slowly, beginning softly and ending in a shout), it is a battle cry meaning 'I am going to do my best to make the teachings of the Lotus Sutra come alive in my own life' (*Inner Quest* December 1983, 18).

Another practice common to all Nichiren groups is reciting passages from the *Dharma Flower*. The traditional groups call this the 'secondary practice', but in Rissho Kosei-kai and Reiyukai it is primary. 'It is easy to say that we must know our mind and reform our evil ways,' says a Reiyukai flier, 'but we need a mirror to reflect our mind. The holy sutras are this mirror. By their recitation, we are given a chance to see and contemplate our mind. They guide us to a better knowledge of ourselves' (*The Reiyukai*).

Each denomination has its own favourite scriptural selections, but two are used by nearly all. These are the opening passages of Chapter II, 'Expedients', which introduce the message of the Imprinted Gate that everyone can become a Buddha, and the verses of Chapter XVI, 'The Duration of the Tathagata's Life', the heart of the Original Gate. The latter reveals the essence of the Buddha's original enlightenment: the eternity of all beings as the foundation of universal compassion.

> I am always thinking:
> How shall I cause all living beings
> To enter into the unsurpassed Way
> And quickly become Buddhas, themselves?
>
> (Chap. XVI)

Most groups add other passages at the beginning and end of the recitation. Nichiren Shu now has a fixed service, but advises its members that they may alter it for variety's sake. Chanting is done at a deliberate pace, often to the beat of a drum or wooden clapper. Nichiren Shoshu uses the above two chapters only, repeating them up to five times, and only in the original Chinese;[88] Other groups permit the vernacular or foreign-language translations.

Rissho Kosei-kai recommends private devotional reading or recitation of the entire Threefold Lotus Sutra, generally by taking one chapter a day. No other group places such emphasis on rational understanding of the Sutra and basic Buddhist doctrines. In this way it departs from the Nichiren norm, which sees the Sutra as a means but

not an end. Rissho Kosei-kai is the most ecumenical of the Nichiren-derived groups, seeking to balance Mahayana faith with southern Buddhist rationalism. Reiyukai, on the other hand, by refusing to define the absolute and insisting that the believer face the 'spirit world' directly, retains the spirit if not the letter of Nichiren.

In Nichiren Shoshu the study of Nichiren's writings has all but replaced studying the Sutra; doctrinal understanding plays an important role. Doctrine is even more important in Rissho Kosei-kai, where the Sutra is consulted as a guide to daily conduct. This has led Kosei-kai to train its own professional ministry to interpret the Sutra correctly. The same process happened in Hommon Butsuryu-shu, which began as a lay society and ended by ordaining its most qualified participants. Today it draws a sharp line between clergy and laity. For instance, no layman may touch his Gohonzon; if he wishes to clean it, he must call a priest to do it for him.

The *Dharma Flower* is a unique book. Beginning at Chapter XV (the Original Gate), it propounds that the historical Buddha is the eternal Buddha. In *The Lotus Sutra and Religious Realities*, Dr Yensho Kanakura, Member of the Japan Academy, points out that 'the identification of historical existence with eternal existence, in other words, the identification of phenomenon with noumenon, or of reality with ideality, is a very unique thought, not found in other Buddhist sutras or non-Buddhist sutras, including the scriptures of Hinduism. The repeated statement in the Lotus Sutra that this sutra is very difficult to understand, very difficult to believe, may come from the difficulty in understanding this relationship' (2). Since the Ten Worlds including Buddhahood are contained in a moment's thought, this 'identification of historical existence with eternal existence' applies as much to the individual as to the Buddha.

Nichiren was correct when he said that no one before him — not even Chih-i or Dengyo Daishi (Saicho) — had successfully depicted this identification in graphic form. The Sacred Source can be named — 'Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni', for example. The first part of the name is transcendant, the second historical; the two are one Person. However, the name in itself separates the Buddha from our own lives. How can ultimate reality be expressed to show that it is both within us and beyond us?

Nichiren attempts to do this in his Great Mandala-Gohonzon. He depicts ultimate reality as the *relationship* of all beings to each other and to the One Law: *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*. This One Law brings us, too, into the proper relationship. The Gohonzon is as subtle and profound as the truth it displays; it is both objective and subjective, the many and the one. Nichiren believers find it the perfect manifestation of the Truth 'so difficult to understand'.

It is one thing to expound the 'three thousand things in one mind', as the Sutra does, or to depict it, as Nichiren does; it is more difficult

to maintain it. As the old sects became institutionalized, they lost their human touch. The new sects have poured into the vacuum, emphasizing 'heart-to-heart communication', but in stressing 'the many' they risked losing identity with 'the one' — the identity that Nichiren considered crucial. In Reiyukai and Rissho Kosei-kai the Eternal Buddha Shakyamuni is worshipped in the form of a giant statue. As such, he becomes an object of worship distinct from and far above us common mortals.

Helen Hardacre describes the extraordinary theatrics used at Shakaden, Reiyukai headquarters, to present the Eternal Buddha to an adoring public (*Lay Buddhism*, 79):

> The side walls of the auditorium are paneled with very thin, streaked marble, lit from behind. At a signal from the mistress of ceremonies, the audience began to chant the daimoku. As we chanted, the overhead lights began to dim, leaving only the pale green light from behind the marble, and a blue ultraviolet light shining down on something behind the brass doors of the altar. After five minutes or so, eerie music of violins and falsetto voices began, and slowly, as the chanting continued, the great brass doors began to open. Parting, they revealed a huge unpainted wooden statue of Shakyamuni, the right hand raised in the *abhaya*, 'fear not' mudra. Even from the back of the hall, the five-meter high statue evoked audible gasps of astonishment. Gradually the chanting ceased as the audience sat staring at the statue. Some people were crying or praying. Later, people I interviewed said that the statue was alive. A voice was heard, telling the audience to make a vow in the presence of the Buddha on how we would live our lives from that moment on. After an interval of perhaps five minutes more, we began chanting the daimoku again, and the doors closed.

Nearly all the domestic and foreign missions of the Nichiren societies are well financed, enabling them to put on a good appearance before the public. Salaried employees, however, can become entrenched bureaucrats, and the spirit of innovation can get buried in committees. 'Busy-ness' can replace real accomplishment. The calendar of events at a mission headquarters in California, staffed by three or four full-time employees, often reveals less activity than is found at a Protestant church down the street, manned by one hard-working pastor. Sokagakkai International, on the other hand, has demonstrated that missions are most successful when conducted by enthusiastic volunteers, who work in their own time and at their own expense, evangelizing with all their hearts to usher in the happy world of *kosen rufu*.

It is often said that Nichiren was the most intolerant of all Buddhist teachers. 'Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan,' he told the officer

come to arrest him and later reiterated in writing. 'If you lose me, you will be toppling the pillar of Japan! Immediately we will face the disaster of . . . conflict within the realm and also foreign invasion. Not only will the people of our nation be put to death by foreign invaders, but many of them will be taken prisoner. All the Nembutsu and Zen temples . . . should be burned to the ground and their priests taken out to Yui beach to have their heads cut off! If this is not done, then Japan is certain to be destroyed' (MW 3.171). He was a 'monotheist' who maintained that there could be but one Dharma and one Buddha. His followers have carried on his militant spirit by challenging all rivals to public debate. A defeated foe is then expected to drop his old religion for the true faith.

Nichiren Buddhists, however, have been less willing to give up their position even after defeat in a debate. They prefer death to compromise, and their stubbornness has sometimes brought persecution down on their heads. The *Dharma Flower* praises those who are 'willing to lay down their lives' for the truth. In some cases, outlawed Nichiren Buddhists will 'go underground', as did the *Fuju-fuse* believers, but rarely will they renege.

Nichiren Buddhists see themselves as possessing a mandate to save their country and through it the world. Just how this is to be done is spelled out most clearly by President Ikeda of Sokagakkai: convert one-third of the Japanese people, change a second third from enemies into friends, and then be able to help the final third indirectly. Nearly one-third of the Japanese people have already been converted. The second step, he says, is now underway: to earn the respect and friendship of a second third. This means toning down aggressive *shakubuku* conversions and replacing them with peaceful methods, such as *shoju* (conversions by good example). The same 'one-two' tactic must be launched around the globe. There can be no peace for Japan as long as the rest of the world is in chaos.

> When all the vehicles of the world are united into the One Buddha Vehicle and all the people of the world chant, *Namu Myoho Renge Kyo*, the wind will not beleaguer branches nor boughs, nor will the rain pour down hard enough to break a clod. The world will become as peaceful as in the reign of Emperor Fu Hai or Shen Nung. Disasters will be driven from the world, man's life will be prolonged, and both the teachers and the taught will retain perennial youth and eternal life. This is the only way to secure the peace of our present lives in this world.
>
> (Nichiren, *Nyosetsu-shugyo-sho*, *Showa-teihon*, 733)

The fire in the lotus is spreading across Japan and over the seas. Its goal is to ignite the earth.