

Part 1. The Heart of an Octopus

An Anti-Buddhist Movement Called Haibutsu Kishaku (Literally Abolishing Buddhism and Dismissing Shakyamuni's Teachings) in the Meiji Era

Shinno Abe was in tears.

Ups and downs
In Fukagawa –
A life like an octopus

With tears trickling down his cheeks, Abe gulped down a small cup of sake and said to a young priest, “Each time this *waka* poem occurs to me, I can’t help but cry. Don’t you feel the same way?”

All the young priest could do was to say ambiguously, “Well, what does the poem mean, sir?”

Abe replied, “Hey, don’t you know its meaning? High Priest Nichio composed this poem. You can’t serve as a priest if you don’t understand the heart of this poem.”

This same Shinno Abe later became high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, renaming himself Nikken Abe. Giving himself the superhuman title of “the Absolute Highness, Lord of the Law,” Nikken Abe ascended to the supreme position that is almost synonymous with a living Buddha. Alas, the current mentality of the priests and believers of Nichiren Shoshu dictates that he is indeed a living Buddha who is as important as Nichiren Daishonin. Why did such a holy priest become so emotional and shed his tears over such a secular poem? It may not be easy to understand the sentiment hidden in this *waka* poem. And the poem seemingly concerns an octopus. Why would the octopus cause him to cry?

Nichio Oishi, the composer of this *waka* poem, was the 56th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu. He served as the chief administrator of the Nikko School of the Nichiren Sect for one year, starting on April 7, 1891. In those days, Nichiren Shoshu was part of the Nikko school of Nichiren Shu. The Nikko School also included such temples as Kitayama Honmonji-temple, Nishiyama Honmon-ji temple, Koizumi Kuon-ji temple, Hota Myohon-ji temple, and Kyoto Yobo-ji temple – the temples that Nichiren Shoshu Taiseki-ji regards as heretical today. After being in the position of the chief administrator of this

Nikko school, Nichio Oishi transferred the position to Nichiju Sakamoto of Kyoto Yobo-ji temple.

The Nikko School of Nichiren Shu renamed itself Honmon Shu (True Teaching Sect) on February 15, 1899. Taiseki-ji temple seceded from the Honmon Shu on September 18, 1900, calling itself the Fuji School of Nichiren Shu. Nichio Oishi was its first chief administrator. In 1898, two years prior to the secession, Nichio Oishi opened the propagation center of Taiseki-ji, the head temple of the Fuji School of Nichiren Shu, in Nishikata, Bunkyo Ward of Tokyo. The center was distant from Fukagawa. In May 1902, the propagation center moved to Fukagawa. It follows that the above octopus *waka* poem was composed after May 1902.

What was Taiseki-ji like in those days? The anti-Buddhist movement had become popular under the Meiji new government. This movement intended to diminish the significance of Buddhist temples and priests. In those days, many priests were living extravagant and decadent existences. They demanded handsome offerings for writing posthumous names for the deceased, conducting funerals or memorial services, or officiating at ceremonies for the construction of buildings. Because of this corruption, the anti-Buddhist movement began.

The anti-Buddhist movement existed in the Edo period, too. During the Edo period, Buddhist temples functioned to police people's thoughts, because they served as registrars in the community. In those days, Christianity was an illegal religion in Japan. The Buddhist temples had the function of issuing each local resident a document proving he or she was not a Christian. Without this proof, people in those days could not marry, they could not be employed or travel without it. Taking advantage of their authority in the community, the priesthood demanded that people give them large offerings.

During the Edo period, the anti-Buddhist movement was sporadic. Under the Meiji government, the anti-Buddhist movement gained momentum along with the collapse of the traditional governing system that was prevalent in the Edo period. This traditional system worked through a top-down hierarchy, that is, from the shogunate to the magistrate administering temples and shrines to the head temples, on down to the temples that were selected to communicate orders from the magistrate to local temples, finally to local temples. With the collapse of the Tokugawa shogunate (which backed up

Buddhist temples and priests) people's frustration at Buddhism came forth under the Meiji new regime.

In 1872, the Meiji government issued Ordinance No. 133, which read, "From now on, priests are free to eat meat, marry, and grow hair. Moreover, they can wear civilian clothes except on the occasion of conducting a service." At this time, many priests got married and, in many instances, their past mistresses became their wives. Also, a number of priests found new wives. The priesthood also began to eat meat freely, and their lifestyles suddenly became very loose. People began to lose respect for them.

In addition, the ban on Christianity was lifted in 1873, which meant that the Buddhist temples were no longer in an exclusive position to control their believers. A strong reaction against many years of oppression by Buddhist temples and priests arose among the people in Japan.

Praying for Victory in the Japan-Russia War, Nichiren Shoshu Disseminated 10,000 Gohonzons Inside and Outside the Sect

Because of the anti-Buddhist movement in the Meiji period, half of the Buddhist temples in Japan were abandoned in this time-period. Taiseki-ji was extremely destitute in those days. Nippu Shimoyama, the 55th high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, remained in the position from 1874 to 1885. Taiseki-ji was a deserted temple during the time of Nippu.

There was a five-storied pagoda on the grounds of Taiseki-ji. Copper covered its roof. However, Taiseki-ji changed the roof to galvanized iron sheet and sold the copper at a good price. This was because more money was needed under the new rules for food and alcohol. Sake barrels were lined up at Taiseki-ji. Priests were able to drink and eat as much as they wanted at that time. Naturally, because of the new ordinance, women began to visit Taiseki-ji freely. In those days, it was said, "Taiseki-ji could not even borrow one *sho* of salt from a merchant" (from "Hearing about the History of Nichiren Shoshu from High Priest Hori," December 1956 issue of *Daibyaku Renge*). Taiseki-ji in those days was surviving on debt and could not afford to pay back the debt. Taiseki-ji needed to do something to change the situation. In 1898 after Nichio Oishi became high priest, Taiseki-ji opened its propagation center in Tokyo. The purpose was to recruit new lay members.

The propagation center moved from Nishikata to Kojimacho in Asakusa, then to Morishitacho in Fukagawa, and then to Higashimotomachi in Fukagawa. The propagation center was called Hodo-kai. It later became Hodo-in temple. Presently, it is located in Ikebukuro, Tokyo. However, it was located in Fukagawa while Nichio was alive.

Fukagawa is famous for its *geisha* girls. In Fukagawa during the Edo period, there were many illegal prostitution houses, which were called the Fukagawa Seven Places. The Fukagawa *geisha* girls were also called *tatsumi geisha* because Fukagawa was located in the direction of *tatsumi* (southeast) of the Edo castle.

Among the lay believers who were devoted to Nichio Oishi were people related to the *geisha* world in Fukagawa. Bun Hikosaka was one such lay believer – she was mistress to someone named Ishikawa. Suma Hikosaka, Nikken's mother, who was later called Myoshu-ni (Nun Myoshu), was a daughter of Bun Hikosaka. Both of them were lay believers who were devoted to Nichio Oishi.

The Japan-Russia War broke out on February 10, 1904. About a month later, on March 12 and 13, Nichio Oishi conducted a service to pray to win the war for the purpose of enhancing the emperor's power and to conquer Russia. Volume Twelve of the pamphlet titled *Ho no michi* (*The Path of the Law*), issued by Hodo-kai in April 1904, states, "The Hodo-kai contributed to the military all the offerings that the participants made on both days, and conferred upon these pious believers 10,000 Gohonzons inscribed for the victory of the war." The pamphlet referred to how the service was conducted:

"To describe how the service was attended: It was heavily overcast on 12th. But our believers and other sects' believers showed up, one after another, because of good preparations made for this event through advertisements or standing signboards. The Gohonzon was set up in a simple yet dignified manner. High Priest Nichio took his seat in front of the Gohonzon on time, followed by priests and believers. With the opening of the door of the altar where the Dai-Gohonzon (founder Nichiren Daishonin's original one) was enshrined, the ceremony started with the recitation of the sutra and the chanting of daimoku. After gongyo, Jiyu Hayase, teacher of Hodo-kai, took the rostrum and explained the purpose of the service, followed by addresses by Mr. Arimoto, Mr. Jikan Tsuchiya, and High Priest Nichio."

There are two points that we can note in this quote. One is the expression of “our believers and other sects’ believers.” The other is the description of “with the opening of the door of the altar where the Dai-Gohonzon (founder Nichiren Daishonin’s original one) was enshrined.” In other words, they all prayed for the victory of the war, exposing the Daishonin’s original Gohonzon to both those who had faith in it and those who didn’t.

Furthermore, the *Ho no Michi*, the organ of Hodo-kai, was printed at the number of 3000 in those days. But the fact that ten thousand Gohonzon were conferred on that occasion indicates that at least 7000 Gohonzons were distributed to those who were not Nichiren Shoshu believers.

Why did Nichio Oishi conduct such a big event? It can be conceived that, rather than praising and enhancing the spirit toward the war, he wanted to create a good image of Nichiren Shoshu in the community. But, more importantly, Nichio Oishi had his own perspective and belief. The August issue of the *Ho no Michi* reads:

“A holy sage, who did not appear in the past in Japan, will appear, giving an order to defeat the violent and evil nation of Russia, followed by European nations and the United States, and put them all under our nation’s control. When we make them all worship our emperor as the king of the world, one sage should appear in Japan and propagate this great Law throughout the world. It is obvious from the sutra that the time has come. If so, in waging war against other countries, we may have a chance to fight against Germany and France, just as we fought against Russia to the point where we made her surrender to us.”

Nichio’s overly simplistic view of kosen-rufu is obvious in this quote. His view of kosen-rufu included defeating Russia, Germany, France, and the United States, and putting them under the reign of the Japanese nation. With this accomplished, according to Nichio, a holy sage will appear and kosen-rufu will be achieved. At that time, the Fuji School of Nichiren Shu had such a childish, distorted view of kosen-rufu.

Nikken Intends to Pour Poison into the Soka Gakkai

With the history of Nichiren Shoshu getting clearer, you may understand better the emotions that Nichio Oishi put into his *waka*

poem. When it was written, the head temple Taiseki-ji was in a pathetic shape. The propagation efforts in Fukagawa were not bearing much fruit. Under such circumstances, Nichio was going through ups and downs spiritually in Fukagawa.

So why did Shinno Abe cry over this poem? How he felt toward this poem is still unclear, even when we know that his grandmother and mother were both introduced to Nichiren Shoshu by Nichio.

Nikken Abe was born when his father Ho'un Abe was the chief priest of Josen-ji temple in Mukojima, Tokyo. Nikken's mother, Suma Hikosaka, was a maid at the temple. On June 2, Ho'un Abe became the 60th High Priest of Nichiren Shoshu and changed his name to Nikkai Abe. On June 23, 1928, Nikkai legally acknowledged Nikken as his son. Two months later, Nikken became a Nichiren Shoshu priest.

Taiseki-ji was still poor when Nikkai took office. It was barely surviving.

Nikken moved to Taiseki-ji when he was an elementary school student. His mother, Suma, took him to the head temple. Those who saw this family were shocked, for Nikken looked like a beggar.

Now for the first time, you may be able to empathize with Nikken, who cried over the octopus poem. He had to expound the Law to get offerings for his own survival. He had no other recourse to survive other than as a priest. And the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood was indeed in dire circumstances in those days.

Let me talk about the octopus here. Biologically, the octopus is classified as a mollusk. It is the apex of the non-vertebrate animal. The human species are the top of the vertebrate animals. We can't make light of the octopus.

The octopus has eight hands, not eight legs. It is called the devilfish in Western society. It is noteworthy how an octopus catches a crab or a shellfish — if a shellfish has its shell shut, the octopus opens a hole on the shell using its mouth: using its teeth, a tongue, and black nails. The octopus then squirts poison called *chiramin* into the hole. After numbing the shellfish with this poison, the octopus sucks out meat from inside the shell and eats. The octopus uses the same technique to eat a crab.

Such is the octopus's behavior toward the weak. But when the octopus senses danger, it escapes by spitting out ink. And the animal can change its skin colors in accord with the color of its surroundings. The octopus is a very capable animal indeed.

However, what we need to fear most is the human being with the "octopus-like life-tendency." The octopus's head contains its intestines. The head of an octopus is like a bug — a bug filled with desires. Human beings with the octopus-like tendency seem to have their heads occupied by compassion, but the truth is their heads are full of earthly desires.

On December 1990, the Soka Gakkai donated to Nichiren Shoshu the Buttoku-ji temple in Shiroyama-cho, Mie prefecture. High Priest Nikken stated on that occasion: "Today we have conducted a completion and Gohonzon enshrinement ceremony at this temple, which the Soka Gakkai donated to Nichiren Shoshu as part of its series of offerings in the form of the construction of new temples to commemorate the 700th anniversary of the founding of the head temple. I believe that the Three Treasures are deeply happy about your sincerity in faith." (February 1991 issue of *Dai-Nichiren*)

However, in contrast to the above statement, Nikken and other priests had been engaged in a plot to destroy the Soka Gakkai.

On July 17, Nichiren Shoshu High Priest Nikken Abe convened a meeting with General Administrator Nichijun Fujimoto, General Affairs Bureau Director Gikan Hayase, Taiseki-ji Chief Director Shin'ei Yagi, Hokkaido Great Parish Director Jitoku Kawabe, Public Relations Bureau Director Kogaku Akimoto, and Overseas Bureau Staff Chief Kaido Seki in Nishikata, Tokyo. The same people met again at Daisho-in building at the head temple on July 18. The topic of their discussion was how Nichiren Shoshu would excommunicate the Soka Gakkai and usurp its members. They were discussing the so-called Operation C.

These priests' instinctive way of thinking was just like that of an octopus; that is, "We don't want a shell. All we want is meat inside."

Compelled by their instinctive desires, Nikken and his cohorts were looking for an opportunity to create *danto* members, or believers who directly connect themselves with their temples. To this end, the

priesthood was ready to pour poison into the Soka Gakkai. Those priests were no different from an octopus under the water.

In Buddhism, those priests with the “octopus-like tendency” in their lives are regarded as the embodiment of the devilish functions that cause the Law to perish. Nikken couldn’t have shed his tears of sympathy with the *waka* poem if he hadn’t had the same mind of animality as the nature of the octopus.

To conclude this piece, let me share another *waka* poem that displays the fruitlessness of the octopus’ animality.

An octopus pot
A fleeting dream
The summer moon