

## **Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple of UK Newsletter**

**July-August 2008**

### **The Third Treasure: Sangha**

In Buddhism, there are Three Treasures in the Doctrine. They are known as 'Sanbo': Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. Buddha means the object for worship, Dharma means the teaching to rely on and Sangha means a religious order. These three are very important as they are the main bases to become a Buddhist. When people want to become Buddhist, they vow to devote themselves to the Three Treasures in the Conversion Ceremony. The Three Treasures of Nichiren Shu are; the Eternal Buddha, the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Shonin/Nichiren Shu. As you know Nichiren Shu believes in the Eternal Buddha as the Original Buddha. It is not Nichiren Shonin but he belongs to the Sangha. The Dharma is the Lotus Sutra which is known as the "Supreme Teaching", because it was expounded with the Buddha's compassion, wisdom and enlightenment in the last eight years before He passed away. The Sangha is Nichiren Shonin and his Order, Nichiren Shu that maintains his tradition and spreads the Buddha's teachings properly.

Without the Three Treasures, there is no Buddhism. Without the Buddha, to whom can we devote and pray? Without the Lotus Sutra, what kind of teaching can we rely on and how should we study, practice and approach enlightenment? Without Nichiren Shonin/Nichiren Shu, how can we understand the Buddha's salvation and the Lotus Sutra properly? These three form the central core of Buddhist Faith; so without even one of them Buddhist Faith does not exist. Therefore it is called, "Three Treasures in One Body". Buddhist history has developed and is based on these Treasures. In particular the Sangha has an important role in the growth and development of Faith. This time, let us focus on the Sangha/Nichiren Shu and how important it is.

Originally, Sangha was derived from "Samgha" in Sanskrit which means a meeting, a group or an organization with a council system in ancient India. After it was incorporated into Buddhism, the Sangha came to mean a religious organization with only practitioners who renounced their worldly relations. In the process, more practitioners gathered around the Buddha, seeking His teachings and studying and practicing to attain Enlightenment; the Sangha had been organized with the precepts and doctrine. Today the Sangha which includes lay believers, holds various ceremonies and prayers and transmits the Faith and tradition to the next generation. Therefore, the Sangha holds the lead part to maintain Buddhist Schools.

What about our knowledge and faith? At a Conversion Ceremony we, Buddhists, vow to devote ourselves to the Three Treasures. Are you still devoted to the Three Treasures now? People who consider themselves Buddhists may have no problem with two of the Treasures - Buddha and Dharma. How about the third one, Sangha/Temple? Actually, Sangha is very difficult because the first two Treasures are to assist you in prayer and understanding. However, the third one, Sangha is not only for prayer and understanding, but you also have to show your faith through your practical behaviour and your commitment to the Sangha voluntarily. There is a word in Buddhism to manifest a principle mind for Enlightenment. It is "Gudeo": seek the way. This means that the person who wishes to achieve Enlightenment should have a

good desire: to see the Buddha with all your heart, and voluntarily explore the way of the truth. This shows that Buddhism is the teaching to develop your growth to become a Buddha. However, without a Teacher or Minister it is very difficult to maintain the way of Enlightenment. So you require the Sangha/Temple. Therefore, devoting yourself to the Sangha means belonging to the Sangha and supporting the Sangha doctrinally and financially and also to study, practice and seek Enlightenment along with others.

If we lost our Sangha/Temple, what would happen to your Faith? Some say "I will continue my faith by myself" or "I am okay because I do Gongyo every day on my own." However, it is not easy to maintain the Faith by yourself without the Sangha, because a Nichiren Shu Sangha/Temple is the best place to develop and practice your faith. This influence will appear in your Gongyo or prayer. If you continue to perform Gongyo alone every day, naturally you will fall into a habit of doing everything your own way. This will materialize in your chanting pronunciation and service manner. What is worse is that there is no specialist like a Minister to correct what is wrong. You will not notice the wrong by yourself and therefore will continue to do everything improperly and think that your way is correct. This can occur even to a well-trained Minister who has had long strict training. Therefore, the Sangha has a function to check and correct wrong ways or habits and helps you to improve. Nichiren Shonin always treated such improper manners with a strict attitude.

Also, our own wrong habits influence even the teachings. Due to having no Minister, one tends to choose teachings that they prefer or think they understand. This means that you will become content with a shallow meaning and it will be very difficult to grasp a much deeper meaning when you teach yourself. This is called "Choosy Buddhism." Sooner or later, you will feel something is missing and before long you will quote or chant Theravada Buddhism's teachings or other teachings. Soon, you will lose the pureness of Nichiren Buddhism. You will get into the habit of searching for other Buddhism or other teachings. You will wander from school to school in Buddhism or from religion to religion according to your life troubles just like a balloon cruising in the wind. This is wrong "Gudeo", because you made light of the Sangha. Also you are no longer Buddhist (as person who is devoted to the Three Treasures is called "Buddhist"). You are a self-taught individual who studies and practices Buddhism - you love debate or criticism because you have a strong ego. So, you will not last long, even if you try to belong to a Sangha, because of your accumulated delusion. This sad Faith occurs because of your disregard for the Sangha of the Three Treasures.

The Sangha has an important responsibility as a place to pray and hold ceremonies, such as blessing a baby or children; wedding ceremonies; memorial services; funeral ceremonies, etc. I heard an unbelievable story about a funeral ceremony- that people who didn't belong to any Temple gathered their friends at the deceased person's house and held the funeral ceremony by themselves. The prayer to make a deceased person's spirit peaceful is very special and should be solemn. Making a deceased person peaceful is not easy because it requires a spiritual skill. Therefore, the prayer should be conducted by well-trained Ministers.

The Sangha has the additional role through these ceremonies. It transmits the Faith to your family as well as the next generations. So if you don't have a Temple, even if

you leave a will stating your wish to "hold a funeral in Buddhism", no one will understand your faith. Your family will hold your funeral their way. After all, when you don't have a Sangha, sooner or later, you will lose your relationship with Buddhism completely. Therefore, the Sangha is the sacred key which protects and strengthens your Faith in Buddhism. I often wonder why there are so many people who want to have a "Gohonzon" but no one wants a Sangha/Temple. This is very strange. Sangha/Temple should be a "top priority" over a private Gohonzon because Temple is "Kaidan":the precept dais - it is the only place able to offer a Gohonzon. Therefore, if you don't have a Temple, you cannot receive a private Gohonzon.

Sangha/Temple is the place to study, practice, pray, hold ceremonies, receive Gohonzon and transmit Faith. Even though the Temple is such an essential place, sometimes disappointing matters occur: due to the regular Minister being transferred to another Temple, some congregation quit attending the Temple even though they have commuted to the Temple for a long time. Do you know what this implies? It implies that they were devoted to the Minister not the Sangha/Temple. However, please remember what true Faith is; and if you believe in Nichiren Shonin's teachings, no matter who becomes your Minister, your Faith does not change your devotion to the Nichiren Shu Sangha. Ministers are to connect you with and tie you firmly to the Buddha and Nichiren Shonin. Even though you may not like some Ministers, we are not your enemy. Your Faith must not be influenced by feelings of likes or dislikes. True Faith has enough strength, ability and patience to overcome and handle various life troubles, and maintain the devotion of the Three Treasures because of the Buddha and Nichiren Shonin rather than because of the Minister(s). Therefore, congregation who still continue to attend the Temple since the Temple was established can be said to have true Faith. Please remember that the Sangha is a training place to develop and strengthen your Faith.

We, Buddhists, know in our hearts what true peace is. One Minister said, "If all the people in this world become fundamental Buddhists, murder and war will not occur on this earth." Also we know about the Lotus Sutra, how powerful and wonderful the teachings are for world peace. The Lotus Sutra appeals to us, "Please share this teaching with other people." We, Nichiren Shu Buddhists, have a responsibility to deliver the Lotus Sutra to others with Odaimoku: the essence of the Teaching.

In order to achieve this, we need our Nichiren Shu Temple as our spiritual anchor in Britain. It should be managed and maintained by British Nichiren Shu Buddhists. Now, our London Temple is managed one hundred percent by Nichiren Shu headquarters in Japan. Nichiren Shu came to Britain ten years ago but we did not come here to build a Temple for Japanese people. Britain needs a British Nichiren Shu Temple which is reflected with British culture. I hope that everyone awakens to this and realizes how important a Nichiren Shu Temple is in Britain. Gassho

Thank you very much for your help and donations.