

Yukio Matsudo, shared with Public in April & May 2021
on Facebook

**A short review by Yukio Matsudo on
"The evolving Buddha: New Perspectives
and Dynamic Change in Nichiren Buddhism
(SGI)" of J.D. Gilbert (February 2021)**

1. A universalist approach

To begin with, I passionately share Gilbert's intention: "*A Universalist approach rejects absolute dogma or the fundamentalist viewpoint of the primacy and unchallenged superiority of a particular religions. It is open to criticism and analysis but is willing to state the validity and efficacy of its particular practice*" (p. 10). I have been actually practicing this perspective and have offered proposals to get rid of the exclusivist dogmas of Nichiren Shoshu Head temple (NST) since the 1990's shortly after the excommunication.

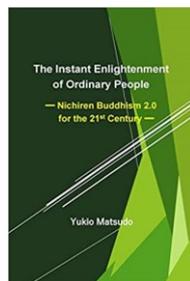
The main critical subjects are "the Dai-gohonzon as the mandala for the *Honmon no kaidan*" and "the thesis about Nichiren as eternal original Buddha" that additionally gave a basis for "the absolute power of the high priest". After publishing the first book in this regard I was involved in a series of controversial discussions with NST priests and scholars, that contributed to make sharper my own position. At the end I published three books in Japan to present my new interpretation of Nichiren Buddhism until mid 1990's.

It became imperative for SG-HQ to get rid of these myths that are not only false but also serve as the foundation for legitimating the authoritarian structure of the temple with the High priest. SG announced its doctrinal separation from NST in November 2014, more than 20 years later exactly in the direction I had been proposing. SG officially declared to give up the faith in the Dai-

Gohonzon and recognize all other mandalas of Nichiren and priests as Gohonzon.

Based on my publications I could finally complete my point of view in the form of “the instant enlightenment of ordinary people” as the title of my recent publication is («The Instant Enlightenment of Ordinary People: Nichiren Buddhism 2.0 for the 21st Century» (2018)).

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/1724519840/>



In this respect I appreciate Gilbert’s reference to my book NB2.0 mainly in chapter 2 “Nichiren – The Ordinary Buddha” and chapter 4 “The Gohonzon – Entering the Treasure Tower” of his book. Let me cite what Gilbert has taken up from my explanation:

The scholar Yukio Matsudo has examined this issue based on Nichiren’s writings. He considers the view of Nichiren as a special primordial Buddha as nothing but ‘founder worship’ and a hagiographic deification of Nichiren himself. Nichiren fully manifested his Buddhahood but revealed in his own life nothing other than the “mystic principle that is originally inherent in all living beings,” in other words, the universal essence of enlightenment, the world of Buddhahood. Conversely, Nichiren held up as the only eternal original Buddha creates a “dogmatic, exclusivistic and fundamentalist understanding of Nichiren” (SGI Newsletter 9404, p.36), and he ceases to be an ordinary person. Instead, Matsudo suggests Nichiren was a pioneer opening up the Buddha way to all ordinary people and that the eternity is only found in the present moment when we reveal our Buddhahood (Gilbert, p.53f.).

2. A fundamental misunderstanding of daimoku

My book NB2.0 presents at the same time a perspective on the future of SGI study and explored, for example, the

differentiated understanding of five and seven characters of daimoku. I concluded my view as follows:

“To propagate the five characters of Myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō” means to propagate the seven characters of Nam-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō, which is the practice of chanting the Daimoku of Nam-myō-hō-ren-ge-kyō” (NB2.0: 164).

This understanding exactly corresponds to the Goshō passage that Gilbert himself cited in Chapter 1:

“Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, both the Lotus Sutra and the other sutras are of no use. Only Nam-myoho-rence-kyo (has the power of benefit to lead to enlightenment) (s. WND 1, p902). The chanting of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo therefore supersedes the Lotus Sutra entirely (p.32).

Though Gilbert must have surely taken notice of my interpretation based on Nichiren’s statement, he explains the difference in a very strange way. He firstly tries to “clarify that Nichiren often refers to Myoho-rence-kyo, the title of the Lotus Sutra, as the key fundamental law and the phrase to be chanted” (p. 76). This is a wrong assumption because we do not chant Myoho-rence-kyo alone.

Starting from this fundamentally false assumption Gilbert offers an odd “metaphor of a swimming pool” to explain why he regards the Nam(u) “a relational marker, a sign of respect towards the Mystic Law” (76):

The Nam is the diving board into the swimming pool of the law of life, My-oho-rence-kyo. In that sense the use of Nam is acceptable as it does not form part of the essential phrase itself (ibid.).

Sorry, this is just nonsense.

By separating the two element of Nam (devotion to) and the Mystic Law Gilbert falls back to the pre-Nichiren understanding of the daimoku. He contradicts even Ikeda’s conviction that

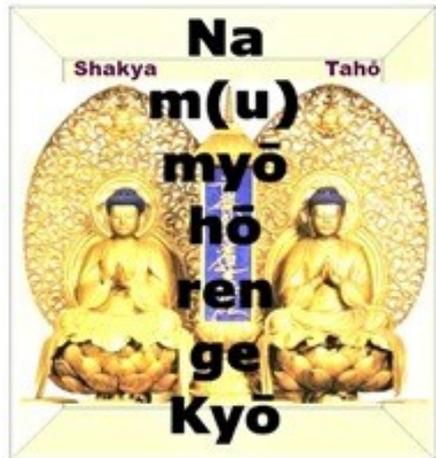
“Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the essential teaching because it is the great law to be propagated in the Latter Day” (32).

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo presents an inseparable unity beyond any analytical explanations and has its own significant meanings because it is conceived as a mantra that should be recited repeatedly in order to produce certain effects as such.

To stay with the metaphor, swimming itself must correspond to the practice of daimoku chanting, so that one becomes one with the water like "a fish in the water". This activates all the protective and transformative functions of the Dharma. This picture corresponds to the practical principle of *“Ji no Ichinen Sanzen”* Nichiren developed in contrast to its theoretical *“Ri no Ichinen Sanzen”* of T'ien-t'ai, just to watch the water at the pool or to sit in the water.

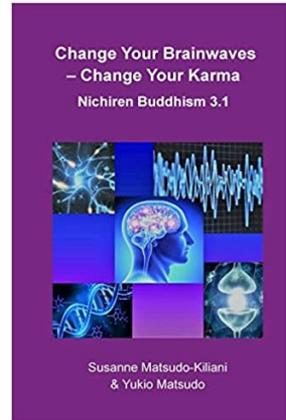
By the way, the oneness in and with the water in this metaphor is expressed by the principle of *“Kyochimyogo,”* symbolized by the “Two Buddhas sitting in the Treasure Tower” in the Gohonzon. So far, it is not correct to say that *“The central inscription of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the treasure tower surrounded by the Buddhas.....”* (Gilbert, 124).

This corresponds to the understanding of Nichiren-shu, as the picture on the right side indicates (see NB4.0, p. 66). The two Buddhas are actually sitting in the Treasure Tower.



3. Ignoring scientific explanation to the effects of practicing daimoku

In our book »Change your Brainwaves, Change your Karma: Nichiren Buddhism 3.1« (2017, hereafter referred to as NB3.1) we made clear the view of Mr. Ikeda who – in his dialogue with a Japanese neuroscientist – made this concluding remark about the relationship between religion and science: “[*They*] should not be treated as separate from each other, nor should they remain in a conflict relationship. Instead, they should complement and mutually benefit each other” (NB3.1, p.9). In this sense we have observed our brainwaves to see if there are some significant changes whilst chanting.



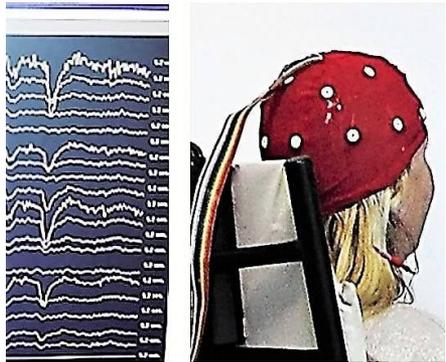
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1) Gilbert seems also to be interested in such scientific research when he often states that we are living “*in a scientific age*” (71) and therefore that a religious teaching should be reasonable. He even suggests that “*our understanding of chanting, how it functions and the science behind it, is evolving*” (79) and that “*Ikeda’s dialogues ... have set SGI on an open-minded path to engage with science*” (110).

2) Nevertheless, Gilbert mentions our measurement results presented in our NB3.1 by referring to “*two authors jointly have put themselves under EEG analysis during the chanting of the daimoku*” and “*experienced an increase in delta and theta waves*” as well as “*in alpha and theta crossover*” (s. 113). Then Gilbert makes a strange negative comment on our experiences with the change of brain waves “*with no control groups and such limited numbers of participants involved, however, nothing conclusive can be proved from these results*” (ibid.). Did we ever make a

claim that these measurements would “prove” the validity of the practice? No, we have just wanted to know what is happening during the chanting and this was indeed a pioneer task in this regard. To make a scientific claim is completely another issue that requires a great number of subjects to get a statistical probability of the results. Yet, still until we can make such a big research project, our measurement results have their own validity as possible indications.

Measuring our own brainwaves presents primarily part of our personal experience while we are indeed interested in expanding these experiments later at a scholarly level. Apart from this academic research project, our measurement results are encouraging our readers to deepen their practice and we are incredibly happy about that.



3) Gilbert remains skeptical about any scientific investigations *“to validate the practice”* and confesses his conviction that *“chanting and practicing SGI Buddhism are about far more than achieving altered states in the brain”* (114). However, so far as I know, nobody ever made such a narrow-minded claim. He continues: *“It is about achieving our determinations, about our relationships with others and about deep personal change which manifests in daily life”* (114). A few sentences later, he stresses again: *“there are many aspects of life”* (ibid.).

By saying so, Gilbert violates among others a basic rule of scholarly analysis to not disparage the subject in question by saying that this subject does not cover the whole system or that there are other issues to be considered in completely different research fields. Because our life is comprehensive and

multifaceted, we have to start with examining each of vast aspects, that has its value in it. And any research is always in the process of evaluation and expansion.

4. Rejecting scientific explanation to the effects of practicing daimoku

We are consistently advocating to regard the chanting of daimoku towards a mandala as a form of “mantra meditation”, a very spiritual practice. In our NB3.1, we emphasized the importance of fusion with the mandala, and we observe that evokes “altered states in the brain”. Further, in this respect, we are also dealing with the deep psychology of nine kinds of consciousness in relation to different levels of brainwaves as well as changing karmic tendencies and patterns. In this way, we have never suggested such a nonsense that Nichiren Buddhism would be only about achieving altered states in the brain.

1) Gilbert was professedly suffering under a kind of allergy to scientific research on meditative practice. His negative judgement is related, among others, to mindfulness meditation that he practiced personally and made negative experiences. Based on them he wants to draw a distinct line between this meditative practice and SGI practice:

Explanations based on material brain changes or physical health benefits, which have been the basis of mindfulness’ evidential claims in recent years, are not the prime focus of SGI practice (84).

Really? Gilbert seems to have a very biased and even hostile understanding of mindfulness. As I explained above, any explanations about brainwaves changes should present just a certain visible illustration of what is going on in the brain, in addition to our emotional, mental, and physiological perception. If you are in a busy monkey mind, this brain state will be shown by a lot of high-beta brainwaves. When you calm down your mind by a meditative practice and feel relaxed and peaceful, alpha and

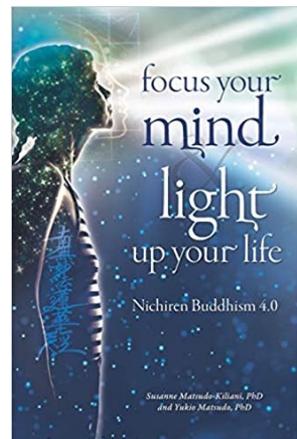
theta brainwaves will increase. The theta waves are important for any kinds of healing. We have demonstrated, though just through our personal experience, that chanting daimoku increases this wholesome brainwave and contributes to a lot of improvements for mental and physical health. Though without knowing these scientific measurements, Mr. Toda encouraged hundreds thousands of people to overcome their diseases. “Physical health benefits” always played an important role as a focus of SGI Buddhism.

Referring to the “Handbook of Religion and Health” (2012), that reviewed thousands of data-based studies since the year 2000, Gilbert himself mentions its *“conclusion that religious and spiritual practices conferred a wide range of physical and mental health benefits”* (179). Therefore, I wonder why Gilbert denies this aspect.

2) He describes his experience of suffering under insomnia and the failed experience that *“mindfulness had not given me the health benefits I sought and I decided to fully reconnect with my Buddhist practice with the SGI, where I truly had received benefit and an approach that engaged me with society”* (108). However, as he admits, *“this is merely my personal experience”* (ibid.). There are certainly a lot of personal conditions and circumstances contributing to a success or a failure of getting the health benefits from a Buddhist practice.

In our latest book »Focus your mind, Light up your life – Nichiren Buddhism 4.0« (2020, hereafter referred to as NB4.0) we are dealing with Nichiren’s conviction that *“No prayer will go unanswered!”* while he warns that *“everything depends on your faith.”*

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08HTD9Z5V/>



cannot deal with because it is outside of brain. On the other hand, he refers to several scientists who study and postulate a “*universal consciousness*” (89). Gilbert himself come to “*a greater understanding of chanting’s connection to and impact on this universal consciousness filed*” (90). This is however exactly what we have been dealing with in our publications.

2) Gilbert takes a fundamentalist position in favor of an organized form of religion when he writes:

“*Chanting the phrase Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the absolute, which goes beyond any human myths or order to tap a natural, universal law. But this chanting and its associated teachings find fullest expression within the structures of an organization*” (249). However, the credibility of this statement depends on the form of organized structure. In contrast to the expectation of Gilbert, the same criticism can be exercised against SGI when it behaves exactly as Bryan Wilson warned to the cult movement:

Their general attributes are single-minded fanaticism, the supreme conviction of their own righteousness, a determination to ‘save’ individuals from their delusions, and indeed, thereby ‘save the world’” (175).

I was active in the same scholarly association of sociology of religion with Wilson and observed the organization, much more with deep insights than him, because I had insider information and contact with critical ex- and still-members who suffered under this sectarian, cult-like behaviors of other members and leaders. I have been wishing that SGI could overcome this tendency and become an organization that “*does not show the ‘secrecy, authoritarianism, inflexibility, and entrenched resistance to change’*” (177). This can be however never realized so long as it is glorified and accepted uncritically while it needs a series of proactive and constructive contributions to overcome its exclusivist tendency.

3) Gilbert promotes the idea of “*practicing with a community of believers*” in contrast to a modern trend towards “*spiritual individualism*” (209). I do not regard both forms as contradicting but complementary. Or for me the latter is the basis of any organized form of faith community while this should serve for the individuals and not the other way around.

6. Unfair method to use scholarly works in his own favour

Gilbert is eager to discredit the mental and physical benefits of mindfulness meditation or MBSR (Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction).

1) For this purpose, he refers to a book which should confirm “*that barely any research had involved an active control group to ensure scientific rigour*” (106). There are, however, another study research including control group, that confirm the positive effects of mindfulness meditation. Just as Gilbert does, I can mention one example: “Randomized Controlled Trial of Mindfulness Meditation for Generalized Anxiety Disorder: Effects on Anxiety and Stress Reactivity” by Elizabeth A. Hoge and 8 researchers, mainly from the Department of Psychiatry, Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, MA., published in August 2013. This paper starts with the following message:

Mindfulness meditation has met increasing interest as a therapeutic strategy for anxiety disorders, but prior studies have been limited by methodological concerns, including a lack of an active comparison group. This is the first randomized, controlled trial comparing the manualized Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program with an active control for Generalized Anxiety Disorder, a disorder characterized by chronic worry and physiological hyperarousal symptoms (p.1).

This research was partly already reported in an annual meeting held in 2012, three years before the book that Gilbert quoted was published in 2015. Since I did not read this book “The

Buddha Pill” of Farias and Wikholm, I can only ask Gilbert whether this report was considered in the book or not.

Gilbert makes use of this book because “*they (the authors) describe the limitations to some of the research on mindfulness and also some of the adverse effects of meditation practice centred on dissolving ego*” (104). He is skeptical of the “*dissolution of the ego*” through meditation, which can induce “*depression, anxiety, panic and disorientation*” (105). Gilbert’s message here is: “*In contrast, SGI philosophy seeks to fuse with the greater self and to put the ego in proper perspective but not to destroy it*” (ibid.). I don’t see any significant difference while there can only be a gradual difference in merging with the Higher Self.

2) In this connection Gilbert does not forget to refer to “Zen at War” (1997) of Brian Victoria and wants to make clear contrast with the actions of Makiguchi and Toda:

Violence and killings were even regarded as synonymous with Zen Buddhist compassion. These examples starkly contrast with the actions of the first two presidents of the Soka Gakkai, Makiguchi and Toda who stood up against the militarist authorities in World War Two (105f.).

However, it was not only Zen Buddhist leaders but also almost all Buddhist priests who were involved in supporting the Japanese militarist authorities and invasion wars in Asia. Some right-wing Nichirenist movements were even proactive while they were backed up by their politico-religious ideologies of emperor and Japan as a divine country (s. 214-5)

Apart from this general trend, Brian Victoria published an article in *the Journal of Global Buddhism*, “Engaged Buddhism: A Skeleton in the Closet” (2001) and condemned, among others, Makiguchi as an active supporter of the Japanese imperialist wars. Against this biased view Koichi Miyata, the specialist of research on Makiguchi, quickly responded with critical comment and concluded precisely as follows:

It was against this political and social backdrop that Makiguchi came to criticize the religious policy of the military regime. His arrest under the Peace Preservation Law shows that the regime judged his actions a hindrance to their conduct of the war. Thus, Makiguchi directly opposed the militarist ideology of imperial fascism for its religious policies, and because this opposition constituted an impediment to conduct of the war by the military regime, there is no doubt that he was persecuted for implicitly anti-war activities (Miyata 2002, p. 84)

Likewise, Daniel Metraux, one of scholars specializing in research on Soka Gakkai, published an essay “A Critical Analysis of Brian Victoria’s Perspective on Modern Japanese Buddhist History” and remarked as follows:

Thus, Makiguchi and Toda defied the government and went to prison not necessarily for anti-war beliefs, which the Soka Gakkai preaches today, but because it was against their deeply felt religious principles to adopt Shinto practices or to merge with another religious sect, even if it had Nichiren connections (Metraux 2015, p.12).

It is not true that both founders “stood up against the militarist authorities” in the wartime as, for example, the Japanese Communist Party had consistently carried out an anti-war campaign and was severely suppressed. Both SG founders were arrested under the revised Peace Preservation Law of 1939 that should punish religious groups found to be committing blasphemy against the Ise shrine and thus reject the authority of the emperor.

It would be more correct to say: Makiguchi denied accepting the Shinto talisman and protested the religious policies based on imperial fascist ideology of military government.

4) I had to expand this issue to demonstrate that Gilbert often uses scholarly works only to assert his own view, but in an unfair and biased manner. In this way Gilbert violates another basic rule of scholarly analysis to be objective and fair.

By this I mean Gilbert should have continued his critical scholarly observation that he began in Chapter 1 consequently until the end.

7. A strange legitimation for the coalition

As already mentioned above, in November 2014, SG declared to renounce the faith in Dai-Gohonzon as the ultimate object of worship preserved in the Nichiren Shoshu Head temple (NST). Gilbert wondered “what took SGI so long to free itself from the association with this object?” (140). Then, Gilbert gives the answer that “*As a lay movement of Nichiren Shoshu, SGI was obliged to go along with its doctrine*” (ibid.) as if SG pursued unwillingly this path. For supporting this view, he quotes:

J.M. Walsh interprets the SGI’s former acceptance of the object’s claimed superior status as nothing more than a necessary collaborative spirit whilst both organizations were affiliated (ibid).

To be honest, this is for me the worst apologetic excuse for the collaboration, that I ever read. It was Toda who gave a minor Nichiren Shoshu school an extraordinary growth and wealth while the NST doctrines with the Dai-Gohonzon served as Exclusionist dogma. This dogma gave SG an enormous explosive thrust for its development, but at the same time a great number of conflicts and sufferings in family and society all over Japan.

It was then Mr. Ikeda who propagated this NS Buddhism in the world since 1960’s. In the capacity of general head of all lay believers of NST he initiated the construction of *Shohondo* and could collect funds from members more than \$ 300 Mio. within 4 days of October 1965, supposed to be the *Honmon no kaidan*. Komeito party was also established firstly within this doctrinal framework. Mr. Ikeda donated 356 new temples (with a budget of \$ 1 Mio. per temple) until 1990. Thus, there was no *raison d’être* for SG/SGI without NST and through their collaboration SG supported NST in an extraordinary intensity.

Gilbert tends to play down the organizational aspects of SGI and glorifies them too much. If his book is an internal publication, he can do it because it would be his job. However, any independent research work should fulfil some basic requirements like objective observation and description, fair reference to available literature, considering not only the surface but also the deep structure, looking at many aspects, etc. (These conditions would be the same for any sincere and courageous journalists in search of truth). The basic orientation would be: don't close your eyes and gaze at the historical reality. Otherwise, people will be deceived and misled by internal indoctrination based on manipulated historiography.

8. Every Buddhist organization needs financial incomes

In reading his book I was often astonished how Gilbert could be so naïve and unaware of many hidden realities behind the surface of idealistic proclamations. There is at least one misunderstanding I must address because most of members are left in false belief. It is about the money issue.

1) Gilbert praised SGI triumphantly that it is accessible for everyone due to "*the lack of expense in practicing its teachings*" (187).

Unlike many contemporary self-development courses or even other forms of Buddhism centred on residential retreats, the core of SGI practice is free. For example, in SGI-UK there is no cost to receiving the Gohonzon, no charge to attend local meetings and any contributions to the upkeep of centres in what is known as the 'kosen rufu fund' are entirely voluntary (187).

"*This SGI model of participation, free of cost*" is a very common misconception that is often used for discrediting all other forms of charging for services as "doing business with Buddhism".

2) This misunderstanding is based on a distorted perception of “membership”.

Many, including Gilbert, do not seem to be clearly aware of the fact that there are two different types of organization and membership. One is the membership of a “registered non-profit / charity association”, the other refers to that of the “religious community”, in which one can only be active on a volunteer basis and make donations to the charity association.

It is customary in all forms of association to have members who pay a membership fee and have the right and duty to maintain the association, such as electing the board of directors and adopting the annual balance sheet. This association also maintains employees who receive monthly salaries for their jobs, which is normal business practice.

SG is now likely to have assets of \$ 100 billion, roughly the size of internationally renowned companies such as Sony, Hitachi, and Honda. These funds are deposited with large banks and invested for various companies. In addition, a few billion euros flow into the organization’s coffers every year, through member donations, the sale of its own daily newspapers and books in millions of editions, or through the sale and management of cemeteries. One may need about \$ 10.000 Eur to obtain a tomb, this is still a reasonable price in Japanese comparison to temples. Many employees in the headquarters receive a good annual salary and receive additional support in the form of contributions to expenses for their activities.

I know a large Buddhist association in which not a single member receives a salary including the general director of the association. All activities are consistently carried out on a volunteer basis. From this perspective, all SGI associations appear like an ordinary business company with many employees and lots of business activities.

3) In contrast to this, the other so-called "members of the religious community" are not members of this officially registered

association and therefore do not participate in the association's business. They have no right to select the directors, to decide how the money should be spent or to check the balance sheet. They can only donate to the association and have also no right to check how the donations are to be spent.

Most of the "members" of the faith organization are only allowed to volunteer for various SG / SGI activities free of charge. This difference, whether you get a monthly salary for your services or serve on a voluntary basis free of charge and contribute everything at your own expense, becomes more glaring.

It is therefore misleading to claim that volunteering is more noble than the services that are provided in an association or in some form of society for a fee. These are simply different forms of activities and their rewards.

4) I have personally no objection to the present business form of SG/SGI and regard them as reasonable because of the great number of members. I am just against any manipulated misconception that is used to discredit and demonize others.

9. The structural problem of authoritarianism

1) Any time we feel treated unfairly it is natural for us to get angry. In this case your talk with the authoritarian person did not resolve your conflict and a senior leader gave you the guidance mentioned above: "*This is your anger, not his!*", in other words, I had to take responsibility" (191). This is a good advice on a personal level so that you will be challenged to do your human revolution, but it is also a typical tactic to protect all leaders and the organization. It never challenges the authoritarian leaders or the culture and structure of the organization. The same logic relates to any official decisions and it is also completely correct for Gilbert to wish "*to inspire debate, allow access to the academic research and contribute to the ongoing development of SGI*" (257). But unfortunately, it never happened, and I fear it will remain so.

All the country leaders are only interested in the directives from Tokyo since they are paid for their jobs.

2) I also wished that the 1991 split would enable SGI “*to become a less rigid organization, to reject authoritarian leadership and to become more democratic, participatory and open so there was no discrimination between members and non-members*” (229). This remains very superficially observed. Critical members and Non-members have been systematically demonized, slandered and excluded. “*The independence and autonomy of the constituent organizations in each country,*” as the SGI charter formalized in 1995, hadn’t been guaranteed, especially after Mr. Ikeda is not active since June 2010 anymore. Even the 2014 re-nounce of the faith in Dai-Gohonzon did not seem to improve the situation.

10. Others

I now stop my comment on your book. I don't want to make members uncertain by going into the chapter 5 & 6 that shocked and terrified me. I don't like Gilbert's glorification of the organization and find it scaring.

I only wish that SGI will become a fantastic org. for serving to members and not the other way around.

For this everyone is challenged to stop being a blind sheep and to awaken to a brave lion.

There are so many ideas that Gilbert seems to have borrowed from our books like NB4.0 without mentioning the source. This is against the fair use of literature.

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Yukio Matsudo about his master-disciple relationship

Quote from my book "The Instant Enlightenment of Ordinary People: Nichiren Buddhism 2.0 for the 21st Century" (2018), p. 73-76:

At this point, to avoid misunderstanding, I would like to briefly describe my personal encounters with Ikeda. For I consider that my own work to be in direct succession to his "Buddhist Humanism", which is an attempt to construct a radically new systematic understanding of NB.

I first met Ikeda personally in May 1981 when he visited Germany. At that time, I was a member of the executive committee, and he just came over to several of us, who were waiting for the next event. He began talking to us quite spontaneously about something which was obviously on his mind: "To tell you the truth, I have a problem, I am going to give a lecture at the University of Sophia soon, but I am in trouble because of translation difficulties". I replied also quite spontaneously and without hesitation: "There are certainly only a few people who can translate directly from Japanese to Bulgarian, but from German it should be much easier. As I am qualified Japanese-German translator, shall I translate your lecture into German?" Ikeda accepted at once: "I would appreciate that, thanks". That was the day before his departure to Bulgaria, so I had to complete the translation overnight. In fact, during that night while I was working, he called me down to the lobby of the hotel. He appeared anxious and wanted to give me some warm words of encouragement. By the next day, his party had already left the hotel. So, as soon as I finished the work, I drove to Frankfurt airport and handed it to his assistant.

Subsequently, as part of his dialogue with Josef Derbolav (1912-1987), professor of philosophy and education at the university of Bonn, I was assigned to the position of coordinator on the German side ((This dialogue was published in German in 1988, in Japanese in 1989 and in English in 1992 with the title

»The Search for a New Humanity«) . In order to work on the translation and publication of the documents relating to the dialogue, I was invited to Japan to have access to resources at SG headquarters, where I remained for about a month. During that stay, I had several opportunities to attend lunch parties and Gongyō, in a very small private circle with Ikeda. Consequently, these encounters also became precious opportunities to get to know Ikeda closely.

When Ikeda visited Europe again in May 1989, I was involved in the executive committee which organized and supported his visit. At that time, I was working freelance and undertaking SGI responsibilities as the national leader of the Young Men's Division and later of the Youth Division. As well as this, I was writing my Ph.D. thesis in Philosophy, although it took me several years to finish. When Ikeda visited the U.K., I had a chance in Taplow Court, the HQ of SGI U.K., to report to him personally, that I had been awarded a doctoral degree. He was very pleased and later arranged to appoint me Director of Research at the newly established European Center of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP). I prepared to establish a library related to Buddhism at Taplow Court, held lectures and meetings with invited scholars from several European countries, and I myself participated in academic conferences related to Buddhism and religious sociology throughout Europe and the US. I served in this position for ten years, between 1990 and 2000.

Subsequently, Ikeda visited Germany several times. In May 1994 there was a lunch meeting with him at a Chinese restaurant in the city of Frankfurt. I sat at the table opposite his. As chance would have it, he turned around and talked to me directly: "One of my relatives ((his son, Hiromasa)) read your book and told me that its theme is most interesting". Albeit subtly and indirectly he thereby transmitted to me his favorable impression of my book on "The Theory of the Ordinary Person as True Buddha", just recently published in Japan. His encouragement allowed me to

feel confident of his support in the midst of the furor occasioned by the fiercely controversial debate on doctrine ((with NST priests and scholars)), which I had to face alone without any organizational support. As I myself was acutely conscious of inheriting and further developing his humanistic approach to NB, I was naturally deeply encouraged by receiving such a “positive response” directly from him.

Here I would like to recount my personal impressions of Ikeda. He is a really kind hearted, caring warm person, as well as being trustworthy. He oversaw my personal development and gave me some concrete opportunities in which to demonstrate my abilities. He also gave me the chance to eat together and to do Gongyo together time after time. And he never abused me by assuming that I would only work pro bono. No, rather, he was attentive to always pay me above the normal rate of remuneration. Consequently, for me, he has been and is a trustworthy mentor, whom I very much admire and to whom I will always be deeply grateful.

So far, I have briefly described some personal encounters with Ikeda. It was my great good fortune and honor to get to know him personally “as an ordinary man” in a very direct manner. Consequently, I felt that I had built a very natural human relationship with him. Conversely, because of this, I myself did not proclaim loudly “the doctrine of the Unity of Master and Disciple”, nor did I demand this from other people. Each person is able to read and listen to his lectures and receive his guidance to as a means of deepening his or her faith. Yet, I always remained very uneasy and deeply repelled at times when the “doctrine of the Unity of Master and Disciple” was blatantly abused as a political ideology intended to maintain the hierarchy and status quo within the organization. For example, the name “Sensei” was often used to simply suppress unwelcome questions or reasonable criticism simply by asserting: “Sensei said this and that”, “This is Sensei’s wish”, “We should not bother Sensei” and so on. Some almost screamed out the name and exhibited an attitude and demeanor

of total obedience and abject surrender. It is quite abnormal and in fact even dangerous to fanatically worship Sensei as an authoritarian guru. Indeed, outside Japan, this kind of “guru worship” deeply tarnished the reputation of SGI, which was perceived by outsiders as an “Ikeda Cult”. As a result, some left the organization. Consequently, I became fearful every time that I heard or read that the “righteous attitude of absolute obedience” was exclusively the “true way of the Master and Disciple” – Yet doesn’t this attitude remind one of an authoritarian belief system found elsewhere? This is most frustrating, as what I have learned from Ikeda personally is the exact opposite: i.e. to take care of everyone sensitively and with true affection and to listen to everyone’s individual concerns and aspirations, in order that each be encouraged and enabled to truly grow spiritually.

Thus, I consider myself to be in succession to Ikeda’s essentially humanistic approach to NB, although I have expanded it by way of a more radical and systematic critique grounded in contemporary Buddhist studies.