



STATEMENT DN091

“Name It and Claim It” Style of Buddhism Called America’s Fastest Growing Religion

What is the fastest growing religion in America? According to a recent report in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* it’s the Japanese Buddhist sect **Nichiren Shoshu of America (NSA)**.

Since coming to America in 1960 NSA has launched an aggressive proselytizing program. In 1967 it built a national headquarters and **World Culture Center** in Santa Monica, California, and has since established offices in most major U.S. cities. According to NSA’s figures the sect, which is part of the Japan based umbrella organization **Soka Gakkai** (Value Creation Society), now claims a half million members in the U.S. — *up 100,000 from a year ago*.

Furthermore, NSA is likely to continue its rapid growth due in part to the recently publicized conversions of prominent jazz and pop musicians. Included in these ranks are **Herbie Hancock**, **Wayne Shorter**, and **Larry Coryell**, according to a November 24 Reuters News Service dispatch, and **Tina Turner**, according to a September 27 *Los Angeles Times* article.

The Nichiren Buddhist movement has shown explosive growth worldwide as well, claiming 17 million members (including 10 million in Japan) in over 117 countries. The movement has also attracted its share of critics everywhere who charge that it exercises mind control over its followers.

What is NSA? Leaders trace it to a thirteenth-century Japanese monk named **Nichiren Daishonin** who claimed to have found the “true Buddhism.” According to an NSA pamphlet, the first Buddha, Shajyamuni, who lived in India 3,000 years ago, predicted that his own teachings would lose their “validity and fall into confusion.” He predicted that “a great teacher would propagate the correct form of Buddhism for the new age....(and) Nichiren Daishonin...fulfilled all the conditions of the prophecy.”

The pamphlet further states that Nichiren Shoshu was founded on April 28, 1253, when Daishonin “began chanting and propagating NAM-MYOHO-RENGE-KYO” (which is said to mean “glory to the lotus sutra of the mystical law”).

Despite its early roots Nichiren Shoshu didn’t take hold with any kind of strength until the 1930s, when Soka Gakkai was formed as a lay branch. Today the Soka Gakkai is reported to be the largest single religious group in Japan.

In 1960 **Diasaku Ikeda** became president of Soka Gakkai and rapidly became the driving force in the movement. A prolific writer, Ikeda has penned over 100 books. As the current honorary president, his picture is prominently placed near Nichiren Shoshu altars worldwide.

On such altars rests the object of morning and evening chanting, the **Gohonzon**, which is a scroll of sacred writings contained in a black box. Herbie Hancock said such chanting “gets your life in tune for the day.”

A May 6, 1986, *Wall Street Journal* story on the movement noted that this style of Buddhism differs from others in that many members chant to “focus right here on the here and now. They chant for a better job, a new coat, a white BMW,” and other material blessings.

Cynthia Kissler of the **Cult Awareness Network** of Chicago said this is a reason for NSA’s fast rise in America. “It’s like a Buddhist ‘name it and claim it’ movement” that appeals to the upward bound, she observed.