



THE NSGI TIMES

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May

Living the GOSHO

Living Each Day without Regret

Be diligent in developing your faith until the last moment of your life. Otherwise you will have regrets. For example, the journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?

From "Letter to Niike" (WND-1, 1027).

WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT

- *Daisaku Ikeda*

This is a Gosho passage that I engraved in my life together with my beloved Kansai members during the Osaka Campaign of 1956.

In any struggle, those who keep striving to the very end, firmly resolved to win, will be victorious. By fighting our hardest at a crucial moment, we can put our lives on an imperishable trajectory forever imbued with the four noble virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.

Chanting powerful daimoku that resounds like a lion's roar, let's exert ourselves bravely and vigorously each day.

(Translated from the December 13, 2012, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbum*, the Soka Gakkai daily newspaper)

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SGI President Ikeda's Editorial

Winning through Faith as "Heroes of the World"

"As long as you have an iron will... you can turn misfortune into advantage." Former South African president Nelson Mandela (1918–2013), an indomitable champion of human rights, wrote these words in a letter from prison to his beloved daughter Zindzi Mandela. No doubt President Mandela's beaming smile, which embraced and encouraged so many people, derived from this unshakable conviction.

Our noble members are also facing all kinds of hardships and challenges amid the difficult realities of society. Some are probably going through truly harrowing struggles. There may be times when those experiencing setbacks feel as if they are failures, causing them to weep bitter tears of frustration.

Let's remember, however, that one of the honorific titles of the Buddha is "Hero of the World"—in other words, an invincible champion who triumphs in society without fail. Therefore, as individuals who embrace the great teachings of the Buddha, there is no difficulty we cannot surmount.

In 13th-century Japan, Nichiren Daishonin's followers faced the constant threat of social and economic persecution, which included having one's lands confiscated because of false accusations, or being disinherited. In such situations, the Daishonin urged them not to show grief (cf. WND-1, 824) or to falter in the least (cf. WND-2, 597). Taking such encouragement to heart, his followers went on to achieve great

victories in their lives.

While striving to help my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, keep his businesses afloat [in the early 1950s], there were many times when I felt we had exhausted all options. But the true struggle of faith starts when we're at rock bottom. I roused the strength and energy of a charging lion and did everything I could to support and assist my mentor.

As practitioners of the Mystic Law, we can employ "the strategy of the Lotus Sutra" (WND-1, 1001), which enables us to withstand anything and resolutely find a way forward.

"When great evil occurs, great good follows"

When encouraging members facing trying circumstances, Mr. Toda would often cite the Daishonin's words: "When great evil occurs, great good follows" (WND-1, 1119). He would also offer such encouragement as: "The time has come to achieve great benefit by changing poison into medicine a hundredfold through the power of the Mystic Law!" and "Those who have struggled the hardest always triumph in the end."

No matter what obstacles we may come up against, it's important that

we keep chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, bring forth our inner wisdom, exercise our creativity and resourcefulness, and make sincere, steadfast efforts to overcome the situation. By doing so, we will definitely be able to make a breakthrough.

Why do we encounter difficulties in the course of our Buddhist practice? Because they help us gain the eternal life state of Buddhahood. By surmounting such difficulties, we can impart hope and courage to others who are struggling in this troubled world in which we live, telling them: "Even when faced with such an obstacle, I wasn't beaten. I managed to endure and win out in the end." Therefore, please take on challenges without fear or hesitation. Be determined to win with confidence and composure.

A husband and wife—pioneering Soka Gakkai members from Japan's Shiga Prefecture, who experienced a series of business failures and bankruptcy—finally built a successful business that began with one machine and grew into a large factory. They never retreated a single step in the struggle for kosen-ruffu, taking a courageous stand against ungrateful priests at the time of the priesthood issue. Looking back on those days, the husband said: "If you're afraid, the devilish forces rejoice. We were determined to show our real strength as Gakkai members, and fought all out until adversity itself threw in the towel. We are nothing but grateful for all the hardships we went through." The magnificent fighting



spirit of this couple has been admirably inherited by their son, who is a graduate of Soka University.

One person's victory can transform a workplace and even an entire community.

The towering spirit of our members—"Heroes of the World"—shines like the sun, undefeated by difficult economic times and natural disasters, bringing peace and happiness to society.

Let us once again today, with indestructible faith, make the lion's roar of daimoku resound, and strive to create the greatest possible value we can through our sincere efforts, whether or not others are aware of them.

The presence of our members, bravely challenging difficulties in this troubled age, brings smiles of hope to society and the world.

(Translated from the May 2014 issue of the *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai monthly study journal)

Opening a New Era of Kosen-rufu Together

(4) Be Intrepid! Be Bold!

What is the key to fostering capable people? It is treating them with the same warmth and care you would have for your own children or younger brothers and sisters. It is sincerely chanting for their happiness and victory.

Not only SGI meetings but every aspect of life can be used as a teaching experience in our effort to foster capable people. Chanting together, talking together, doing activities together—in this way, my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, took every available opportunity to foster and train me.

From morning until late at night, 365 days of the year, there is not a moment that I forget Mr. Toda. I have striven for kosen-rufu all these many decades, always at one with him in my heart.

Once disciples learn the basics

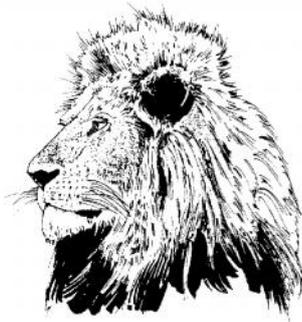
You are indeed noble champions, having overcome tempests arising from the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death to shine as bright beacons in society and in our organization for kosen-rufu. Though your efforts may go unseen, they are known to the Daishonin.

How infinitely profound and immense is the benefit we accrue through spreading the Mystic Law! It will enable not only you, but your families as well, to enjoy protection and prosperity throughout the three existences of past, present, and future.

Your striving each day in high spirits gives me the greatest joy.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "Each of you should summon up the courage of a lion king and never succumb to threats from anyone. The lion king fears no other beast, nor do its cubs. Slanderers are like

Those who are never defeated are victors.



The lion king fears no other beast, nor do its cubs. Slanderers are like barking foxes, but Nichiren's followers are like roaring lions"

from their mentor, there is no limit to what they can achieve.

My young successors, I want you to take full responsibility for our movement. Now is the time for you to develop yourselves. I am chanting for you every day.

*

Our men's division members, especially those who are active in the Ojokai (the men's division equivalent in Japan of the Gajokai, whose role it is to safeguard SGI community centers), are full of vigor and vitality.

barking foxes, but Nichiren's followers are like roaring lions" (WND-1, 997).

Intrepid individuals who have summoned forth the invincible "courage of the lion king" are not daunted by anything. Those who continue practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism and sharing it with others, come what may, are absolutely assured of winning in the end.

My friends, I pray with all my heart that you will be intrepid, bold, and persevering. Those who are never defeated are victors.

(Translated from the January 25, 2014, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai daily newspaper)

(5) Strive on the Front Lines of Kosen-rufu with a Vibrant Youthful Spirit!

February, the Soka Gakkai's traditional month for sharing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with others, is here again. Our reliable youth division members, many of them still new to the practice, are eagerly taking their place on the stage of kosen-rufu and enthusiastically expanding our network of friendship. I'm delighted to see everyone striving with such energy.

I hope you will all live out your precious lives with a vibrant youthful spirit. I intend to do the same.

The inspiring sight of our members standing up to fulfill their great mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth moves me deeply. There is surely no life more noble or respectable.

Please keep pressing forward, ever forward, come what may. Please win victory after victory, and enjoy a life of ever-increasing happiness.

*

When my mentor, Josei Toda, was inaugurated as second Soka Gakkai president (in May 1951), I was the leader of Omori District (in Tokyo's Ota Ward). My resolve at that time was to be a district leader directly connected to the heart and spirit of my mentor.



In the early 1950s, my wife, Kaneko, was also the women's division leader of a district in Tokyo's Meguro Ward. She actively participated in Gakkai activities, taking our two infant sons with her—leading the eldest by the hand and our second son strapped on her back. She, too, was determined to strive alongside our mentor on the front lines of kosen-rufu, for the happiness and welfare of her fellow members.

I hope that all of our dedicated frontline leaders—including the group and district leaders and, especially, the chapter leaders who are the central pillars of our movement, as well as the youth division leaders—will make fresh strides forward in beautiful unity.

*

Those who exert themselves tirelessly on the front lines of our organization are truly admirable.

Even if your efforts to share the Daishonin's Buddhism may not always go as hoped, your deep concern to promote kosen-rufu itself embodies the noble concern of the Buddha. You have already sown the seeds for your own happiness and that of others. All of your efforts will give rise to great benefit. Beautiful flowers are also certain to come into bloom in your life and in the movement for kosen-rufu.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "I am . . . praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground" (WND-1, 444). Wholehearted prayer to the Gohonzon enables us to break through all of our obstacles and limitations.

Please create waves of victory from your local areas that will ripple out to encompass the entire world.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "I am . . . praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground" (WND-1, 444).

(Translated from the February 2, 2014, issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai daily newspaper)

What is Love?

By Daisaku Ikeda

The agonies of love are many and varied. Each person has their own character and personality; they have different backgrounds and circumstances. So there is no set rule that applies equally to everyone . . . Whom a person dates is also a matter of personal choice. No one has any right to meddle in your private affairs.

However, I would like to stress at the outset how important it is not to lose sight of pursuing your own personal development.

Love should be a force that helps you expand your life and bring forth your innate potential with fresh and dynamic vitality. That is the ideal but, as the saying

"Love is blind" illustrates, people often lose all objectivity when they fall in love.

If the relationship you're in is causing your parents to worry, or making you neglect your studies or engage in destructive behavior, then you and the person you're seeing are only being a negative influence and hindrance to each other. Neither of you will be happy if you both just end up hurting

each other.

If you are neglecting the things you should be doing, forgetting your purpose in life because of the relationship you're in, then you're on the wrong path. A healthy relationship is one in which two people encourage each other to reach their respective goals while sharing each other's hopes and dreams.

A relationship should be a source of inspiration, invigoration and hope.

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yourself. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, the author of *The Little Prince*, once wrote, "Love is not two people gazing at each other, but two people looking ahead together in the same direction." It follows then that relationships last longer when both partners share similar values and beliefs.

Furthermore, please don't succumb to the view that love is the be-all and end-all, deluding yourself that as long as you are in love, nothing else matters. Nor, I hope, will you buy into the misguided notion that sinking ever deeper into a painful and destructive relationship is somehow cool.

All too often when a relationship ends, the great passion it once inspired seems nothing more than an illusion. The things you learn through studying, on the other hand, are much more permanent. It is important, therefore, that you never extinguish the flame of your intellectual curiosity.

Far too many people nip their own brilliant promise in the bud because of their blind pursuit of love.

Much of daily life tends to be ordinary and unexciting. Making steady efforts day-to-day can be trying. It's not always going to be fun. But, when you fall in love, life seems filled with drama and excitement; you feel like the leading character in a novel.

But if you lose yourself in love just because you're bored, and consequently veer from the path you should be following, then love is nothing more than escapism. What you are doing is retreating into a dream world, believing that what is only an illusion is actually real.

Even if you try to use love as an escape, the fact is that the euphoria is unlikely to last for long. If anything, you may only find yourself with even more problems along with a great deal of pain and sadness. However much you may try, you can never run away from yourself. If you remain weak, suffering will only follow you wherever you go. You will never find happiness if you don't change yourself from within. Happiness is not something that someone else, like a lover, for instance, can give to you. You have to achieve it for yourself. And the only way to do so is by developing your own character and capacity as a human being; by fully maximizing your potential. If you sacrifice your own growth and talent for love, you will absolutely not find happiness. True happiness is obtained through fully realizing your own potential.

I would also like to add that to embark on a relationship as an escape from something is extremely disrespectful to both your partner and yourself.

Each of you has a precious mission that only you can fulfill . . . To neglect one's mission and seek only personal

pleasure is a sign of selfishness. It is impossible for an egotistic, self-centered individual to truly love another person.

On the other hand, if you genuinely love someone, then through your relationship with them, you can develop into a person whose love extends to all humanity. Such a relationship serves to strengthen, elevate and enrich the inner realm of your life. Ultimately, the relationships you form are a reflection of your own state of life. The same is true of friendship. Only to the extent that you polish yourself now can you hope to develop wonderful bonds of the heart in the future.

Please have the confidence and fortitude to think to yourself when you face rejection: "It's their loss if they can't appreciate how wonderful I am!" This is the kind of resilient spirit you must strive to cultivate.

With some people, however, once they have gotten into a relationship, they have a hard time saying "no" to the other person for fear of losing them. In that respect, love is like riding in a car with no brakes. Sometimes, even if you want to get out, you can't; even if you regret hav-

ing gotten in, the car won't stop. In many cases, people get involved in a relationship thinking they are free and independent, but at some point find they have become captive to the relationship.

Each one of you is infinitely precious. Therefore, I hope you will treat yourself with utmost respect. Please don't follow a path that will cause you suffering, but take the road that is best for your well-being.

The truth is, ideal love is fostered only between two sincere, mature and independent people. It is essential, therefore, that you work on polishing yourself first.

It is demeaning to be constantly seeking your partner's approval. Such a relationship is bereft of real caring, depth or even love. If you find yourself in a relationship where you are not treated the way your heart tells you you should be, I hope you will have the courage and dignity to decide that you are better off risking being scorned by your partner than enduring an unhappy relationship.

Real love is not two people clinging to each other; it can only be fostered between two strong people secure in their individuality. A shallow person will only have shallow relationships. If you want to experience real love, it is important to first sincerely develop a strong self-identity. True love is not about doing whatever the other person wants you to do or pretending you are something you're not. If someone genuinely loves you, they will not force you to do anything against your will nor embroil you in some dangerous activity.

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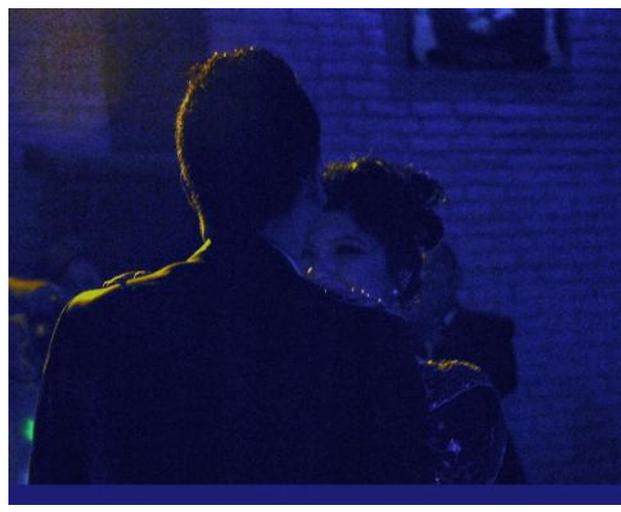
Please don't let a broken heart discourage you. Tell yourself that you're not so weak or fragile as to let such a minor thing bring you down. You may think there is no one who could possibly compare to that person, but how will they compare to the next hundred, the next thousand, the next ten thousand people you will meet? You cannot declare with certainty that there will not be others who far surpass them. As you yourself grow, the way you look at people will change as well.

I'm sure quite a few among you have had your hearts broken or been badly hurt, and perhaps feel unable to go on, your self-esteem in tatters. But you must never believe that you are worthless. There is no substitute for you who are more precious than all the treasures in the universe gathered together.

It is important for you to become strong. For if you are strong, even your sadness will become a source of nourishment, and the things that make you suffer will purify your life.

Only when you experience the crushing, painful depths of suffering can you begin to understand the true meaning of life. Precisely because you have experienced great suffering, it is imperative that you go on living. The important thing is to keep moving forward. If you use your sadness as a source of growth, you will become a person of greater depth and breadth—an even more wonderful you.

Excerpted from *Discussions on Youth Vol. 1* (SGI-USA, 1998)



"Love is not two people gazing at each other, but two people looking ahead together in the same direction."

But, when you fall in love, life seems filled with drama and excitement; you feel like the leading character in a novel.

The New

Volume 24, Chapter 2
Vigilant Safeguarding

Human Revolution



SGI President Ikeda's ongoing novel *The New Human Revolution*, which he began writing in 1993, depicts the historical progress of the Soka Gakkai following his inauguration as its third president, as well as records the modern development of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI. It also serves as a practical guide on how to further expand our movement for *Kosen-rufu* (achieving peace and happiness for all people).



rained hard; they took that as a challenge and opportunity to pray even more for fine weather for the next pilgrimage. Weather, of course, is a natural phenomenon, over which we have no control. As such, bad weather on a pilgrimage day is in no way the fault of the TCG

The TCG had deeply engraved a Goshō passage in their hearts: "If one can move Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, can the grass and trees fail to respond, can the waters remain calm?" (WND-2, 811). Here, Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of the teachings, refers to the foundation of the universe, which is expressed in the Gohonzon (the embodiment of Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō). In other words, through earnest prayer to the Gohonzon anything can be transformed.

The Daishonin also wrote: "One's body and mind at a single moment pervade the entire realm of phenomena" (WND-1,

366). The inner realm of our life is so vast that it encompasses the entire universe.

The youthful members of the TCG in the light of the teachings of Buddhism, were certain that their prayers could help them respond to any situation, even the worst weather. In the case they had to direct traffic in the pouring rain they were ready to faithfully carry out their duties and take every necessary step and precaution to ensure the health and safety of the members.

This was the way that Shin'ichi Yamamoto lived. Since becoming the president of the Soka Gakkai, he had always prayed that there would be no natural disasters, that there would be rich harvests, and that the pilgrimages to the head temple would take place safely. And the TCG members were united in that attitude with their mentor.

Shin'ichi was deeply grateful that the members of the TCG shared his spirit and fervently prayed with a determination powerful enough to move the universe that they would remain dedicated to protecting the members in any given situation.

Vigilant Safeguarding 34

The most impressive thing about fostering the youth of the TCG was the way that they all developed a strong sense of personal responsibility.

For several days before they were to be on duty, TCG members would wholeheartedly chant *daimoku* for the safety and success of the pilgrimage. When the weather turned out to be bad on the pilgrimage day, for example, it



act. Hands-on training, repeated until fully mastered, best prepares one for action in a crisis. Training instills the lesson in one's body, and in one's life.

One of the problems with modern society is that there are few opportunities for young people to receive training in safeguarding human life.

The Soka Gakkai, however, plays the role of a great training institute, fostering and educating youth to serve society.

The leaders of the Soka Group continued to think about ways to value the practical training they'd used since their days as the TCG and how to pass that spirit on to the next generation and foster leaders for a new era.

Shin'ichi poured his life into encouraging the members of the Soka Group. He attended other Soka Group General

Meetings and personally trained the members. He wrote messages, essays, and poems for them. He praised them in countless short poems. He wanted to respond to their thoroughgoing dedication to vigilantly safeguarding the Soka Gakkai.

*A Soka Group member,
stands alone
in the cold wind.*

The members of the Soka Group—grounded in the principles of safeguarding the Soka Gakkai, caring for its members, and striving tirelessly behind the scenes—were without doubt disciples of Shin'ichi who faithfully embodied his spirit. That is why Shin'ichi was deeply confident that they were capable and treasured successors of the Soka Gakkai.

Shin'ichi started 1977 together with the Soka Group and all the youth. It was an indication of his determination to build a youthful Soka Gakkai in which young people were in the forefront in every respect, striving passionately.

Vigilant Safeguarding 35

As the ancient Roman poet Horace wrote: "Doth wise schooling inborn powers extend."

Understanding something in theory doesn't necessarily mean one will actually be able to do it. During a disaster or accident, it is often the case that people know what they should do but freeze up and are unable to



Vigilant Safeguarding 36

The Soka Gakkai's Year of Study, 1977, was a year of special emphasis on studying the teachings of Buddhism. Before the year had even started, Soka Gakkai study department introductory-level examinations were conducted in December 1976. Then on January 9, about 450,000 associate professors and assistant professors

sat for the intermediate-level examinations across the country.

On January 23, oral examinations were held for those who passed the intermediate-level examinations. Shin'ichi, who was in Osaka that day, acted as one of the examiners for candidates at the Kansai Centre. He also encouraged those taking the examination before and after the test.

On February 6, nearly 433,000 teachers and assistant teachers sat for the elementary-level examinations that were held simultaneously throughout Japan.

In addition, qualification examinations for those of professor status were held from the end of January through mid February. The dates and methods differed by region and prefecture, through such means as written examinations, oral examinations, and essay questions. Shin'ichi himself chaired the committee to determine professor status.

Many of those sitting for the professor-level examinations were

also in charge of the study groups for the introductory-level examinations, the elementary-level examinations and the intermediate-level examinations. They were all exceptionally busy, but in spite of that they remained extremely energetic and dynamic. While leading study groups for others they saw the exam candidates deepen their conviction about Buddhism, brim with joy, and grow as individuals.

Teaching the philosophy of Buddhism is teaching Buddhist faith and practice as well as fostering capable individuals. While teaching Buddhist philosophy with care and precision, their own lives were naturally filled with joy and energy.

As Nichiren Daishonin writes: "One who recites even one word or phrase of the Lotus Sutra and who speaks about it to another person is the emissary of Shakyamuni Buddha, lord of the teachings" (WND-1, 331). The life-state of the Buddha wells up from within those who together read the Goshō and discuss Buddhism.



Vigilant Safeguarding 37

The driving force for the major study campaign in 1977 was Shin'ichi Yamamoto's lecture on Nichiren Daishonin's writing "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," which appeared in the *Seikyo Shimbun* in four installments starting on New Year's Day of that year.

At the opening of the lecture, Shin'ichi outlined the aims of the Soka Gakkai's study campaign through speaking about the renowned Buddhist scholar and translator Kumarajiva (344-413).

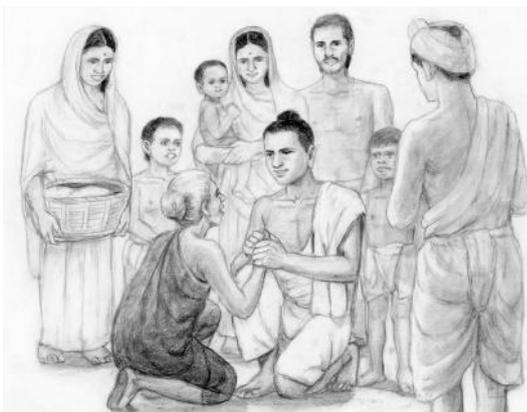
Kumarajiva was born in the land of Kucha (in present-day Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, China) and began studying Buddhism at the age of seven. He went on to translate Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, including his enduring translation of the Lotus Sutra. He was over 50 years old when he began translating the Buddhist scriptures in the Tang-dynasty capital of Ch'ang-an (present-day Xi'an). From that point on, for the next 8 or possibly 12 years before he passed away, he translated Buddhist scriptures at the amazing pace of two or even three volumes a month.

Many talented translators and scholars flocked to his side to assist him in his labors—at times, as many as 800 to 2,000. Sitting before them, with scriptures in hand, Kumarajiva translated in a lecture format. Telling

those assembled why he chose to translate as he did and explaining the underlying meaning of the scriptures, sometimes working in a question-and-answer format, he collaborated with his assistants until they found the best possible translation.

Kumarajiva did not translate by sitting alone in his study surrounded by reference materials; nor did he write in difficult technical language. He explained the Buddhist teachings and translated them while interacting with the lives of the common people, in a dialogue setting. That's how he was able to produce such smooth and excellent translations conveying the true meaning of the sutras, solidly based on the original texts.

Explaining Kumarajiva's translation method, Shin'ichi passionately declared: "Philosophy shines through discussing it with others and putting it into practice in our lives. Our study campaign follows the example set forth by Kumarajiva. With our scripture, the Goshō, in hand, sometimes we adopt a lecture format, sometimes a question-and-answer format, and sometimes a one-on-one discussion, always staying in direct contact with others and presenting Buddhism in a dialogue setting."



Vigilant Safeguarding 38

Shin'ichi also discussed how Shakyamuni conveyed his teachings: "The Chinese Buddhist philosopher T'ien-t'ai (538-597) categorized the so-called 'eighty thousand teachings' of Shakyamuni into the five periods and eight teachings. To some, that might sound like it was a carefully

organized doctrine, implying that Shakyamuni taught in accord with an established curriculum. But in truth Shakyamuni's teachings were a form of encouragement to ordinary people. At times he would offer words of sympathy and encouragement to those crushed by the grip of poverty or to elderly women suffering from illness, and on other occasions he would provide warm assurance to young people despairing over their own internal struggles.

"Shakyamuni stood on the side of the ordinary people, who were suffering and discriminated against under the burden of ancient India's caste system, and his impassioned words uttered over the course of his life have become the 'eighty thousand teachings' that we know today. This is symbolized by the fact that the Buddhist scriptures almost always take the form of a question-and-answer session.

"In other words, Shakyamuni's teachings of enlightenment, welling forth from his dialogues with the people and in his actions, were collected and form what we now regard as the Buddhist sutras."

Shin'ichi went on to say that the same was true of Nichiren Daishonin's numerous writings: "The Goshō is simply the crystallization of the Daishonin's dialogues with individuals. Throughout his tumultuous life, he would always lend his support to help others attain absolute happiness. He would write, talk to others, and then write some more, all while facing the countless struggles and challenges of life.

"Some think of Buddhist practice as retreating to a quiet place and leading a life of calm and contemplation, but you should know that from its earliest origins Buddhism was a philosophy of practice, of living and energetically engaging with others in dialogue."

Buddhism is a teaching for helping all living beings, and especially the people who are suffering the most. Therefore, study needs to be rooted in daily life and serve as a guide for action. Study becomes a revitalizing force when it provides assurance and self-confidence in the power to overcome life's difficulties and tribulations. The Soka Gakkai's emphasis on study has achieved just this in the real world.



Vigilant Safeguarding 39

The supreme teaching of Nichiren Buddhism vibrantly exists in the lives of the ordinary men and women of the Soka Gakkai as a sure and sound philosophy.

As Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the pioneering thinker and founder of psychoanalysis, observed: “Men are strong so long as they represent a strong idea.”

When an obstacle arises in the path of kosen-

rufu, our members rouse themselves with the knowledge that “If you propagate it [the Mystic Law], devils will arise without fail. If they did not, there would be no way of knowing that this is the correct teaching” (WND-1, 501) and are thus able to develop even stronger faith. No matter how harsh the circumstances they find themselves in, they know that “Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside oneself; both lie only within one’s own heart” (WND-1, 456). As a result, they’re able to fundamentally transform their state of life through their Buddhist practice without being swayed by any adversity.

Those suffering from illness know that “Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?” (WND-1, 412). This enables them to chant with even greater fervor and bring forth the life-state of Buddhahood.

Some follow the Daishonin’s instruction “Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken in your resolve even a bit, devils will take advantage” (WND-1, 997). They challenge themselves day after day, striving their hardest in Gakkai activities and advancing steadily and persistently toward



Vigilant Safeguarding 40

It had been Shin’ichi’s idea to designate 1977 the Year of Study, because he believed that for the Soka Gakkai to make a great leap forward in starting a new phase in the effort for kosen-rufu, all the members would have to engrave the Goshō in their hearts more than

ever.

What does it mean to be a human being? What is life? What is the self? What is the purpose of life? What is true happiness? Why are we born? Why do we die? Buddhism is a philosophy of life that provides the fundamental answers to all of these questions. Therefore, studying Buddhism and mastering its teachings is exploring the meaning of our own lives and opening the door to a storeroom of the richest spiritual treasures.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Exert yourself in the two ways of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” (WND-1, 386). Unless we also study while developing our faith, we can’t gain a profound understanding of the fundamental principles of Buddhism and genuinely deepen our faith.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda noted: “Faith seeks understanding, and understanding deepens faith.” He also said: “Study strengthens and deepens faith, which brings benefit.”



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When Josei Toda set about to rebuild the Soka Gakkai after World War II, he concentrated all his energies on encouraging each member to engrave the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism in their lives through study.

During the war, pressure by Japan’s militarist government led to the arrest of 21 Soka Gakkai’s leaders. Toda was racked with sorrow and disappointment when all the leaders but he and President Makiguchi renounced their Buddhist faith.

The families of those imprisoned lost their main breadwinners and were thus faced with starvation and ruin. In addition, they were branded as unpatriotic families. They were the first to begin to have doubts about their faith and renounce it. Wives tearfully begged their incarcerated husbands to do so in order to return home as quickly as possible. In this manner, one after another the leaders gave in to the oppression of the militarist authorities.

Even the majority of those who weren’t arrested foolishly renounced their faith, out of fear that they’d also be persecuted.

After his release from prison, Toda bitterly resented this turn of events. He felt that if all those who quit had really understood the Daishonin’s teaching “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form” (WND-1, 501), they would’ve been able to maintain unshakable conviction in the principles of Buddhism.

On the other hand, Makiguchi sent letters from prison to his family conveying his upbeat spirit: “It is only natural that the three obstacles and four devils should have assailed me; it is just as the sutra states.”

each new goal, knowing “If one cannot cross a moat ten feet wide, can one cross a moat that is twenty or thirty feet wide?” (WND-1, 808).

Others make their work their challenge, as the Daishonin advises in the passage “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-1, 905). They strive to demonstrate actual proof of their victory through their wholehearted efforts in their workplaces or professions.

Many Soka Gakkai members make as their motto “The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being” (WND-1, 852). They polish their characters and do their utmost to be examples of Buddhist humanism for all to see and emulate.

Presently, the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism have been revived as a way of life and a philosophy of the people through the Soka Gakkai study movement. Shin’ichi vowed to expand the groundswell of the study movement, open an age of the Buddhism of the people, and build a century of life.

In citing the scriptural passage “Become the master of your mind rather than let your mind master you” (WND-1, 486), the Daishonin confirmed the path of Buddhists. To be “the master of your mind” means to make the principles of Buddhism our guide, and we achieve this through study. Study is also a measure to indicate whether our behavior and way of life as Buddhist practitioners is correct or not. It is a mirror that shows us who we are.

In addition, study is like a beacon illuminating our course toward realizing kosen-rufu and attaining Buddhahood in this existence, undeterred by the three obstacles and four devils that attempt to obstruct Buddhist practice. Also, a moral and ethical foundation forms through learning that all living beings possess the life-state of the Buddha and about the Law of cause and effect that governs our lives throughout past, present, and future.

After long and careful consideration, it was Shin’ichi’s conclusion that study is indispensable in furthering the Soka Gakkai’s movement for human revolution.

In his copy of the Goshō, Makiguchi underlined in red a passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”: “This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law” (WND-1, 280). Makiguchi was overjoyed that through experiencing great persecution he could give his life to upholding and living the teachings of the Goshō.

Cherishing the Lotus Sutra passage “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers” (LSOC7, 178), Toda persevered through his prison ordeal as an inseparable disciple of Makiguchi.

Toda realized that those who renounced their faith during the war did so because they lacked conviction in faith and didn’t understand the teachings of Buddhism. He couldn’t allow the same thing to happen again. With this thought deep in mind, Toda set out to rebuild the Soka Gakkai with a firm emphasis on study. Beginning on New Year’s Day 1946, the year after the war ended, he delivered lectures on the Lotus Sutra. He also lectured on such essential teachings of the Daishonin as “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” “The Opening of the Eyes,” and “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” with the aim of fostering capable individuals.



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Shin'ichi thought long and hard about which of the Daishonin's writings would be best for everyone to learn about in order to promote the study movement that would help build a new era in the Year of Study. He decided to start with lectures on "The True Aspect of All Phenomena." In his "Postscript" to that treatise, Nichiren Daishonin writes: "Those [doctrines] I have revealed to you in this particular letter are very important" (WND-1, 386-87). This was an indication of the significance of

this particular writing, which describes in great depth the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

This letter was written to Sairen-bo Nichijo in May 1273, when the Daishonin was 52 and in exile on Sado Island in a place called Ichinosawa.

Starting with the true aspect of all phenomena, the ten factors of life—regarded as the key to the enlightenment of Shakyamuni's contemporaries in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra—the writing explores the essence of the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and concludes that Myoho-enge-kyo, the entity of the sutra, is manifested as the Gohonzon. In other words, the treatise reveals the object of devotion in terms of the Law.

It also indicates that Bodhisattva Superior Practices, leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, has the duty to propagate the Lotus Sutra, and states that this is the practice that the Daishonin himself has carried out in his life. The Daishonin is, on one level, in terms of outward behavior, the reincarnation of Bodhisattva Superior Practices. On another level, in terms of his inner enlightenment, he represents the Buddha of beginningless

time who establishes the great teaching to save all living beings in the Latter Day of the Law.

This one treatise, then, is the consummation of "The Opening of the Eyes," which reveals the object of devotion in terms of the Person, and "The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind," which reveals the object of devotion in terms of the Law.

In the second part of the treatise, the Daishonin states that kosen-rufu will be realized in the future, and he concludes by elucidating that the way of faith, practice, and study is key to carrying out Buddhist practice during the Latter Day of the Law. The essence of Nichiren Buddhism is clearly articulated in this treatise.

For that reason, Shin'ichi planned to use his lectures on this writing to shed light on genuine Buddhist faith, the practice of Nichiren's disciples, and the significance and mission of the Soka Gakkai's appearance in the world.

The bright mirror of the Gosho is our standard and compass in all things. To return to the Gosho is to be directly linked with the Daishonin, which is the supreme path of faith.



Vigilant Safeguarding 43

In his lecture on "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," Shin'ichi explained that all phenomena in society and the entire universe are expressions of the Mystic Law, and that the Gohonzon represents a microcosm of the universe

and the source of everything. He also stressed that the Buddha is not some illusory, abstract being, and both Shakyamuni and Many Treasures Buddha are concrete expressions of the power of the Mystic Law. He emphasized that Nichiren Daishonin's teachings that ordinary mortals can be regarded as true Buddhas and all living beings are entities of the Mystic Law stand out as great principles of humanism that completely overturned Buddhist thought of his day.

Shin'ichi said that in the Lotus Sutra only the Buddha's disciples from beginningless time were entrusted with the mission of propagating the Mystic Law in the Latter Day, which is to say, those propagating the Law in the present age are just such disciples and Bodhisattvas of the Earth. For disciples of the Daishonin, genuine faith and practice are found within the courageous struggle to further kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law. As the Lotus Sutra states: "He or she is the envoy of the thus come one. He has been dispatched by the thus come one and carries out the thus come one's work" (LSOC10, 200).

Shin'ichi then spoke of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth: "The Bodhisattvas of the Earth do not act because someone tells them to. Because their lives are dedicated to the Mystic Law inherent in the universe, they spontaneously chant daimoku and contribute to world peace and the welfare of society, as naturally as plants and trees grow from the earth."

During his wartime imprisonment, Josei Toda awakened to his identity as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. He declared that he was the great leader of propagation and that the Soka Gakkai was the one and only organization in the entire world propagating the correct teachings of Buddhism in the Latter Day of the Law. The Joju Gohonzon at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters is inscribed with the words: "For the Fulfillment of the Great Desire for Kosen-rufu through the Compassionate Propagation of the Great Law."

Toda always said: "The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth entrusted by Nichiren Daishonin to propagate the Mystic Law in the present age, the Latter Day of the Law. It is an organization functioning in complete accord with the Buddha's intent and decree."

This was Toda's firmly held conviction.



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The third installment of Shin'ichi's lecture on "The True Aspect of All Phenomena" was published in the January 5 issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*. From this installment he described the faith of disciples and the method of practice for kosen-rufu. When he reached the section of the Gosho, "Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be

known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life" (WND-1, 385), his lecture took on even greater intensity.

Shin'ichi strongly believed that the words "Now, no matter what" expressed the Daishonin's vast determination and compassion to enable all his disciples to bring forth their Buddhahood without fail.

Nichiren Daishonin's disciples, unaware that they were the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, had wandered lost in the darkness of delusion for countless eons, repeating the cycle of birth and death. But in this life they became the Daishonin's disciples and encountered his great Buddhist teaching. The Daishonin, their mentor, survived the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and then declared himself to be Bodhisattva Superior Practices, leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, and the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

The harsh winds of persecution also struck his disciples, providing them with the perfect opportunity to read the Lotus Sutra with their lives. The moment to stand up and carry out kosen-rufu in the Latter Day of the Law had come. For Nichiren Daishonin's disciples the

decisive chance to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime had arrived.

"My disciples, do not fear! Don't let this golden opportunity slip away! Now is the time to stand up with courage. Based on correct faith, become a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain a loyal disciple of Nichiren Daishonin as long as you live!"—Shin'ichi felt this impassioned call of the Daishonin roar through his heart like thunder.

Shin'ichi asserted: "Standing up with the awareness that we are disciples of Nichiren, in terms of our concrete practice, is committing ourselves to the Soka Gakkai, striving for kosen-rufu, and living out our lives in the spirit of 'many in body, one in mind'."

"Directly linked to the life of Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law who battled the three powerful enemies, the Soka Gakkai is the sole organization carrying out kosen-rufu in complete accord with his teachings."

To be continue on next issue....

Desires and Enlightenment

"The teachings of Nichiren stress the transformation, rather than the elimination, of desire. Desires and attachments are seen as fueling the quest for enlightenment. As he wrote: 'Now Nichiren and others who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo... burn the firewood of earthly desires and behold the fire of enlightened wisdom.'"

People encountering Nichiren Buddhism for the first time are often surprised by the stance taken toward desire which seems to contradict prevailing images of Buddhism. For many, Buddhism is associated with asceticism, and indeed there are many schools and traditions which stress the need to eliminate desire and sever all attachments.

Needless to say, a life controlled by desires is miserable. In Buddhist scriptures, such a way of life is symbolized by "hungry demons" with giant heads and huge mouths, but narrow, constricted throats that make real satisfaction unattainable. The deliberate horror of these images grew from Shakyamuni Buddha's sense of the need to shock people from their attachment to things—including our physical existence—that will eventually change and be lost to us. Real happiness does not lie here, he sought to tell them.

The deeply ingrained tendencies of attachments and desire (Jpn bonno) are often referred to by the English translation "earthly desires." However, since they also include hatred, arrogance, distrust and fear, the translation "deluded impulses" may in some cases be more appropriate.

But can such desires and attachments re-

ally be eliminated? Attachments are, after all, natural human feelings, and desires are a vital and necessary aspect of life. The desire, for example, to protect oneself and one's loved ones has been the inspiration for a wide range of advances—from the creation of supportive social groupings to the development of housing and heating. Likewise, the desire to understand humanity's place in the cosmos has driven the development of philosophy, literature and religious thought. Desires are integral to who we are and who we seek to become.

In this sense, the elimination of all desire is neither possible nor, in fact, desirable. Were we to completely rid ourselves of desire, we would end up undermining our individual and collective will to live.

The teachings of Nichiren thus stress the transformation, rather than the elimination, of desire. Desires and attachments are seen as fueling the quest for enlightenment. As he wrote: "Now Nichiren and others who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo...burn the firewood of earthly desires and behold the fire of enlightened wisdom..."

In the same vein, the Universal Worthy Sutra states: "Even without extinguishing their earthly desires or denying the five desires, they can purify all of their senses and eradicate all of their misdeeds."

democratizing Buddhism. In other words, by making the aspirations, dreams and frustrations of daily life the "fuel" for the process of enlightenment, Nichiren opens the path of Buddhist practice to those who had traditionally been excluded by the demands of a meditative withdrawal from the world—those, for example, who wish to continue playing an active role in the world.

It is thus not a coincidence that this attitude toward desires should be central to the Mahayana tradition of Buddhism, with its emphasis on the role of lay practitioners. For people living in the midst of ever-changing, stressful realities, those challenges are a far more effective spur to committed Buddhist practice than an abstract goal of "enlightenment" through severing of all desires and attachments.

Overcoming problems, realizing long-cherished goals and dreams—this is the stuff of daily life from which we derive our sense of accomplishment and happiness. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has emphasized the importance not of severing our attachments, but of understanding and, ultimately, using them.

Often the faith experiences of SGI members describe events and changes that seem at first glance to be focused on the external, material side of life. But such "benefits" are only part of the story. Buddhism divides the benefits of practice into the "conspicuous" and the "inconspicuous." The new job, the conquest of illness, the successful marriage and so on are not separate

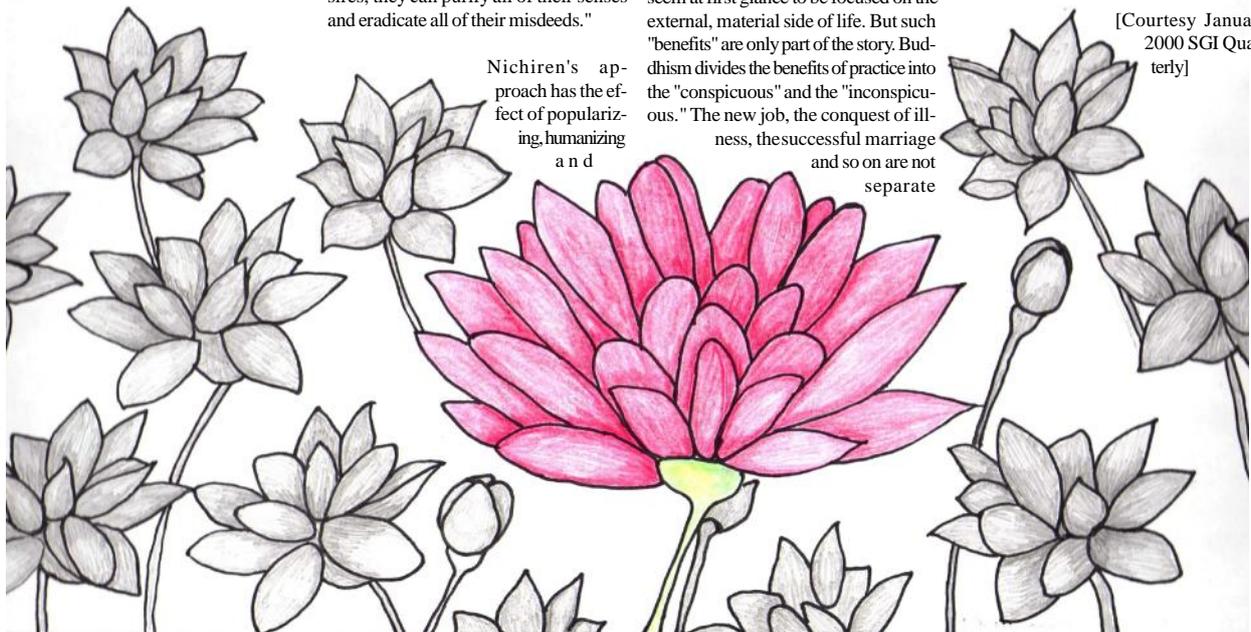
from a deep, often painstaking process of self-reflection and inner-driven transformation. And the degree of motivation generated by desires can lend an intensity to our practice which ultimately reaps spiritual rewards. Bonno soku bodai—literally, "Earthly desires are enlightenment"—is a key tenet of Nichiren Buddhism.

Through our Buddhist practice, even the most mundane, deluded impulse can be transformed into something broader and more noble, and our desires quite naturally develop from self-focused ones to broader ones concerning our families, friends, communities and, ultimately, the whole world.

In this way, the nature of desire is steadily transformed—from material and physical desires to the more spiritually oriented desire to live the most fulfilling kind of life.

As President Ikeda says: "I believe in the existence of another kind of human desire: I call it the basic desire, and I believe that it is the force that actively propels all other human desires in the direction of creativity. It is the source of all impelling energy inherent in life; it is also the longing to unite one's life with the life of the universe and to draw vital energy from the universe."

[Courtesy January 2000 SGI Quarterly]



Nichiren's approach has the effect of popularizing and democratizing Buddhism. In other words, by making the aspirations, dreams and frustrations of daily life the "fuel" for the process of enlightenment, Nichiren opens the path of Buddhist practice to those who had traditionally been excluded by the demands of a meditative withdrawal from the world—those, for example, who wish to continue playing an active role in the world.

Thoughts on Friendship

By Daisaku Ikeda

Friendship is the most beautiful, most powerful, and most valuable treasure in life. It is your true wealth. No matter how much status a person may gain or how rich one may become, a life without friends is indeed sad and lonely; it also leads to an unbalanced, self-centered existence.

You were born in this vast universe on the tiny planet Earth, and in the same era as the people around you. Yet, it is extremely rare to find, among the billions of people on this planet, genuine, unconditional friends with whom you can totally be yourself and who will intuitively understand your thoughts and feelings without need for words.

It's important to understand that friendship depends on you, not on the other person. It all comes down to your own attitude and contribution. I hope you will not be a fair-weather friend, only helping others when circumstances are good and leaving them high and dry when some problem occurs; instead, please become the kind of person who sticks by their friends with unchanging loyalty through thick and thin.

Our human relationships are like a mirror. So if you're thinking to yourself, "If only so-and-so were a little nicer to me, I could talk to them about anything," then that person is probably thinking, "If only such-and-such would open up to me, I would be nicer to them."

Therefore, you should make the first move to open the channels of communication. If despite these efforts you are still rebuffed, then the person you should feel sorry for is not yourself, but your friend.

The human heart is truly complex; we cannot read what's in another person's heart. People change. What should you do? My advice is that you hold fast to your own identity with the spirit—"Others may change, but I will stay who I am." If you should be snubbed or let down by others, have the strength of character to vow that you will never do the same to anyone.

The Buddhist scriptures clearly reveal that Shakyamuni Buddha was a person who initiated dialogue with others. You need to be strong to initiate a dialogue. You must remember that experiencing rejection and disappointment is an inevitable part of life.

If you feel hurt or betrayed by someone, isn't it better to make a new friend, rather than stop trusting people altogether? If you



don't trust anyone, yes, certainly, you might avoid being hurt or let down, but you'll only end up leading a lonely, barren existence locked up in your own shell. The fact is only someone who has experienced pain and hardships can empathize with others and treat them with kindness. It's essential, therefore, that you become strong.

Be like the sun. For the sun shines on serenely even though not all of the stars will reflect back its light, and even though some of its brilliance seems to emanate only into empty space. You may find that those who reject the radiant light of your friendship will naturally fade out of your life. But the more you shine your light, the more brilliant your life will become.

No matter how other people are or what they do, it is important that you walk your own path, believing in yourself. If you remain constant and stay true to yourself, others will definitely come to understand your sincere intent one day.

More importantly, you have the power of daimoku behind you. I have heard many experiences in which people have recounted that they were victims of bullying, but after chanting sincere daimoku, they suddenly found one day that the bul-

lying had ceased. By chanting about your problems, you will find yourself quite naturally overcoming all hardships and sufferings, almost without your even being aware of it. When you look back later, you will clearly appreciate this fact.

It is also important that you chant for your friends. This is a sign of true friendship.

You may have friends who are sick or are unable to attend school, or who are struggling to cope with problems at home. Whatever the case may be, the best thing you can do is to chant for them. Your prayers, like invisible radio waves, will definitely reach them.

And when you chant, you should do so sincerely and honestly, following the feelings in your heart without restraint, just as a baby instinctively seeks its mother's milk. There is no need to be stoically formal when you chant; there is no need for pretense. If you are suffering, then take that suffering to the Gohonzon; if you feel sad, then take your sadness to the Gohonzon.

It is also best to chant with clear determination, having a concrete goal in mind about how you want to grow or change or what you want to accomplish. It's also

important to chant for those people whom you may not like, or find hard to deal with, or feel resentful toward. It may be difficult and perhaps even impossible for you to do so at first. But if you challenge yourself and chant for them, the wheels of change will definitely be set into motion. Either you will change or the other person will. Either way, you will be able to open a path leading in a positive direction. Many people have experienced this firsthand. Most importantly, your own transformation into a person able to chant for even those you harbor negative feelings toward will become your greatest fortune.

Sometimes your friends can have a stronger influence over you than your parents or anyone else. So if you make good friends—friends who are interested in improving and developing themselves—you will move in a positive direction as well.

Nothing is more beautiful than friendships developed among people challenging themselves and encouraging each other as they work toward the realization of a common goal.

People of conviction, people who stand alone, people who pursue their chosen path—not only are such people good and trustworthy friends themselves, but they can make genuine friends of others.

The bamboo groves of autumn are gorgeous. Each bamboo tree stands independently, growing straight and tall toward the sky. Yet in the ground, out of sight, their roots are interconnected.

In the same way, true friendship is not a relationship of dependence, but of independence. It is the enduring bond that connects self-reliant individuals, comrades who share the same commitment, on a spiritual dimension.

Friendship is also determined by the way we live our life.

If you always remain sincere in your interactions with others, you will one day naturally come to find yourself surrounded by good friends. And from among those people, I'm sure you'll forge lifelong friendships that are as strong and unshakable as a towering tree. Don't be impatient. Please work first on developing yourself. Rest assured that an infinite number of wonderful encounters await you in the future.

Excerpted from *Discussions on Youth* Vol. 1 (SGI-USA, 1998)



Interfaith

SGI - Spain Hosts Interfaith Symposium, Lecture on Media and Religion

SSA Strengthens Interfaith Ties

On March 29, SGI-Spain hosted an interfaith symposium organized by the Madrid Community Interfaith Dialogue Association (ADIM). The symposium, held at the SGI-Spain Culture Center in Rivas-Vaciamadrid, near Madrid, was attended by some 100 people including representatives from the Bahá'í faith, Brahma Kumaris, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, Tibetan Buddhism and SGI-Spain.

Following an opening speech by ADIM President Margarita Pintos, Adela Cortina Orts, professor of Ethics at the University of Valencia, and Javier Ruiz Calderón, a scholar specializing in the philosophy and history of religion in India, gave keynote speeches.



Dr. Cortina (left) addressing the symposium (March 29)

Dr. Cortina characterized globalization today as being rooted in human egoism. Toward establishing a new kind of global society based on human values, she highlighted the importance of transforming the present mindset of competition to one based on cooperation. In this transformation, compassion, she said, would be a driving force and, as religion fosters such compassion, it would also be a vital driving force. Dr. Calderón concurred that religious values have an important role in establishing a new and better global society.



The interfaith symposium

The event included workshops and activity reports from representatives of the different faith traditions on their efforts to create a better world.



Professor Tamayo (center) speaking on the role of the media (April 12)

On April 12, SGI-Spain held a lecture, attended by some 60 people, on the portrayal of religion in the media. The guest speaker was Professor Juan José Tamayo Acosta, director of the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Carlos III University of Madrid. Professor Tamayo posited that the Spanish media underrepresents minority religious groups. He recommended that the media provide equal opportunities to all religious groups to communicate their philosophies and that religious groups open their activities up to the public and become better communicators.

[Adapted from reports from SGI-Spain; photos courtesy of SGI-Spain]

In March, in line with their commitment to deepen mutual understanding in a racially and religiously diverse society, Singapore Soka Association (SSA) participated in two interfaith events and co-organized a seminar on parenting with other faith-based organizations.

On March 1, the Tampines West Inter-Racial and Religious Confidence Circle (IRCC) invited SSA young women's leader Li Jin Haw to represent the Buddhist perspective at their Interfaith Dialogue 2014 titled "Religion through Social Media." Some 120 people attended the event, held at Tampines Primary School, including students and representatives from welfare and religious organizations. IRCCs are local-level interfaith platforms formed to provide opportunities for community grassroots organizations in Singapore to come together to learn about each other's cultures, traditions and religious practices.



Li Jin Haw (right) at the Interfaith Dialogue

During the dialogue, Ms. Li highlighted the opportunities and challenges posed by social media for faith-based groups. While recognizing that information today can be disseminated at unprecedented speed across the world, she stated that the essence of religious teachings can only be truly conveyed through dialogue and genuine concern for others, both of which are emphasized in Buddhism.

Other invited panelists were Pastor Joshua Woo from Princep Street Presbyterian Church and Ustaz Zulhilmi Mohamed from the An-Nahdhah Mosque.

On March 15, some 15 SSA student group members joined the Roses of Peace Initiative 2014 organized by Jamiyah (Muslim Missionary Society) Singapore. The action involved some 300 student volunteers distributing 5,000 roses at 10 locations across Singapore. Each rose had a quote on peace from the scriptures and founders of the major religions (Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism) in Singapore. The initiative aimed to cultivate a better understanding of different faiths and foster an appreciation of universal values such as peace and human happiness that underlie the teachings of different religions.



Bundles of roses for peace

On March 29, a seminar on parenting by authors Richard and Linda Eyre was held at SSA Headquarters. The event, "The Entitlement Trap: Parenting Tips for Raising Successful Children," was the result of an interfaith collaboration between SSA, Jamiyah Singapore and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The guest of honor was the Speaker of Parliament of Singapore Halimah Yacob.

[Adapted from articles in the April 4, 2014, issue of SSA Times, Singapore Soka Association (SSA): photos courtesy of SSA]

Treasures of the Heart

Among the vast number of parables in Buddhist literature, SGI President Ikeda wrote an essay around the core teachings of Buddhism and their relevance to our daily lives.

The Cloud of Transiency

Kumo wa Tensai de Aru (Cloud is Genius) by Takuboku Ishikawa (1886-1912) used to be my favourite novel. A brilliant but solitary poet, his pride in himself and his belief in his own competency were such that he probably must have chosen to converse with clouds rather than with people. I would like to stress, however, that it is the zest of youth to form friendships which binds people together. In this sense, I would like boys and girls, who have a boundless future, to read *Hashire Merosu* (Melos, Run!) by Qsamu Dazai (1909-1948); it movingly describes the very quintessence of friendship.

Yoshida Kenko (1283-1350) stated in his *Essays in Idleness* "Seven kinds of persons make bad friends." He mentioned the seven types of people that one should avoid making friends with. He said: "The first is the man of lofty position; the second, the young man; the third, the man of robust constitution who has never known a day's illness; the fourth, the man fond of liquor; the fifth, the fierce soldier; the sixth, the liar; the seventh, the miser. Kenko included those who are in a higher social status and young people. I wonder if I am correct in attributing this choice to the penetrating insight of a man in his latter forties who had forsaken the secular world at the young age of 29. I would imagine that his mention of a man fond of liquor indicates that he himself may have encountered many drunkards. What is most impressive to me, however, is his mention of a man of robust constitution who has never known a day's illness. Of course, I do not think Kenko exactly recommended illness a virtue. What he meant by "illness" is, as I understand it, the inner spiritual depth of a human being which is brought about not only by physical illness but also by other difficulties which he experiences during the course of his life.

It is true that those who have never been bedridden even once are less likely to feel sympathetic towards the weak. But, more than anything else, the suffering of illness is a strong motivating force which, whether one wants to or not, makes one think about what matters most in life. I am especially sensitive to this point because I myself have had a weak physical constitution since childhood.

Nichiren Daishonin states in one of his writings: "Illness gives rise to the resolve

to attain the Way. Those early years when I devoted my entire being to activities while keeping this phrase deep within my heart now hold for me fond memories. At the same time, they are the priceless treasures of the heart which indelibly adorn the pages of my adolescence.

A minor masterpiece of Leo Tolstoy called *The Death of Ivan Ilyich* describes the process in which an ordinary human being is gradually awakened to the truth of life, and illness serves as a turning point. In this work, the author shows unparalleled skill in describing the problem of life and death; its appeal to the readers equals that of any other major literary piece.

The story is about Ivan Ilyich Golovin, an ordinary government official who began his career with the post of confidential clerk and emissary to the governor. He was the son of an official and a member of the elite; he finally rose to the position of a member of the Court of Justice, but the first half of his life was quite simple and ordinary. With his wife and two children, Ivan Ilyich enjoyed life.



His pleasure, as far as his career was concerned, lay in the gratification of his

pride; his social pleasure lay in the gratification of his vanity. He also found delight in playing cards. Ivan Ilyich's life as an official continued to go along as he considered it should — pleasantly and predictably; he carried out his job responsibilities tactfully and he lived his life as just another government official.

One day, however, he came down with an ill-defined illness. Having climbed a stepladder to do some drapery work at home, he slipped and fell, hitting his side against the knob of a window frame. The bruise on his side was painful but it soon passed. But sometime thereafter, Ivan Ilyich began complaining of a funny taste in his mouth and a sort of lingering uncomfortable feeling in the left area of his stomach. Ivan Ilyich went to many reputable doctors to find out what was wrong, but none of them could diagnose his condition; his pain steadily became worse.

He tried to ignore it by concentrating on his job, but the pain in his side would seize him even during court proceedings.

N i c h i r e n
Daishonin states in one of his writings: "Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the Way."

The story goes on: "It would come and stare at him while standing right in his way." Bewildered and surprised, he would begin asking himself whether it alone was true.

Thereafter Ivan Ilyich began to desperately carry out his life-or-death struggle against this illness. He said to himself: "It's not a question of just an appendix or a kidney but one of life and ... death." His honoured profession, association with other people, card games and other pleasures of life which seemed to fulfill his life, when compared to the essential question of life and death, now became a mere illusion. As soon as this period of Ivan's struggle with illness began, whatever had brought Ivan Ilyich joy from the time of his childhood now dwindled before his eyes and became insignificant and often repulsive.

Just two hours before his death, a revelation came to him. The "right thing" came to him. His fear of death vanished and a realisation overcame him. Leo Tolstoy puts the finishing touches to his masterpiece: "It's all over," said someone near him. He caught the words and repeated them in his soul: 'Death is over,' he said to himself. 'It is no more.' He drew in a breath, stopped in the middle of a sigh, stretched out and died." Here, Tolstoy's portrayal is really true to life.

Nichiren Daishonin states in one of his writings: "The companions with whom we enjoyed composing poems praising the moon on autumn evenings have vanished with the moon behind the shifting clouds. Only their mute images remain in our hearts. Though the moon has set behind the western mountains, we will compose poetry under it again next autumn. But where are our companions who have passed away?"

Every phenomenon in life is subject to change and will eventually disappear. Of course, human beings naturally and understandably take delight in the transient aspects of life, but if they consider them to be all that life means, they will experience nothing but the feeling of indescribable emptiness when these phenomena disappear behind thick clouds. This is just what Ivan Ilyich realised at the last moment of his life. Our life span is finite and limited. I sincerely hope that each one of you will spend each day forging ahead with a seeking spirit so that you will never lose sight of the "right thing" in life.

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