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 2018 - Year of Brilliant Achievement in the New Era of Worldwide Kosenrufu



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NEW RELEASES!

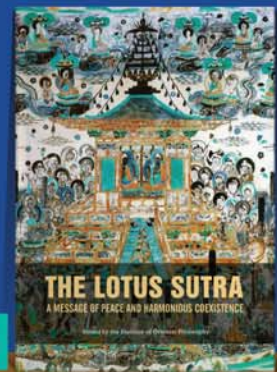
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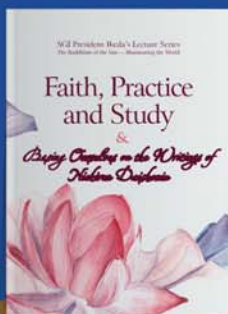
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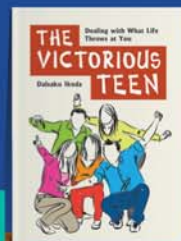
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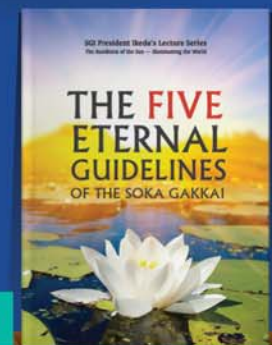
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-SGI President Daisaku Ikeda



Striving with an Ever-Positive Spirit as “Champions of Challenge”

Nichiren Buddhism is a religion of challenge.

—The challenge of continuously creating, in rhythm with the Mystic Law, new value with a life force that is revitalized day after day and month after month.

—The challenge of overcoming, with the Gosho as our guide, every trial and obstacle in life, especially, the sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death, and helping others do the same.

—The challenge of confronting, together with our fellow members, the problems of society, and expanding our network for happiness and peace.

During the Atsuhara Persecution, Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, called out fervently to the 21-year-old Nanjo Tokimitsu: “My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow” (WND-1, 1003). He also shared with him a passage from the Lotus Sutra: “We beg that the merit [we have] gained . . . may be spread far and wide to everyone, so that we and other living beings all together may attain the Buddha way” (LSOC7, 168).

When we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and strive to realize the great vow for kosen-rufu, our lives are one with the Mystic Law and the Buddha, and will not fail to overflow with the positive power of benefit as vast as the universe.

That is why we can triumph over all trials and obstacles that arise, and surely and steadily lead our families, friends, and others with whom we share a connection to the path of eternal happiness—the path of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.

What are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth? Nothing other than heroic challengers who emerge at the appropriate

time in the place where they have vowed to fulfill their mission from time without beginning. The challenging spirit of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth pulses vibrantly in the Soka Gakkai.

I am reminded of the inspiring words of a women’s division member from the early days of our movement in Kansai: “I have always exerted myself wholeheartedly with the constant wish, awake or asleep, to help everyone become happy and to foster capable individuals.”

When we keep challenging ourselves as practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism, no matter what our age, our lives will shine with an ever more youthful and vibrant light.

It is just as the Daishonin teaches us, when he says: “Strengthen your resolve more than ever. Ice is made of water, but it is colder than water. Blue dye comes from indigo, but when something is repeatedly dyed in it, the color is better than that of the indigo plant”¹ (WND-1, 615).

During the assembly of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni’s disciples who profess to be “old and decrepit” hear from their mentor a Law that they had never known before and dance with joy, inspired to challenge themselves anew with a rejuvenated spirit (cf. LSOC4, 117–25).

The mind of faith is free and unfettered, and prayer based on the vow for kosen-rufu is limitless.

In a letter to one of his female disciples, the Daishonin writes: “I am at a loss to say how moved I am that . . . until now you have never retreated” (WND-2, 465). I feel these words could also be taken as praise for all the noble pioneering men’s and women’s division members of our Many Treasures Group.

My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, instructed us: “Our Buddhist practice is the challenge to overcome our complacency and change ourselves, our families, and our communities for the better.”

The key is to take on a fresh challenge, no matter how small it may be, and chant clearly and specifically about actualizing our goal.

Reach out sincerely to even just one person a day, encouraging them and helping them form a connection with Buddhism.

This year we will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the ceremony of March 16, 1958, when President Toda passed the baton of kosen-rufu to his successors in the youth division. It is delightful to see our youth division and student division members rising vigorously to the challenge of expanding our network of Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

Together with the youth, let us continue to increase, one by one, the ranks of new members in our communities who will join us in this challenge.

Brilliant achievement awaits champions of challenge who strive with an ever-positive spirit!

Soka
is another name for
“champions of challenge.”
Triumph through all
with overflowing courage.

(Translated from the February 2018 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai monthly study journal)

Footnotes

¹ This expression is based on a passage in the classical Chinese work Hsün Tzu. Great Concentration and Insight reads: “From the indigo, an even deeper blue.”

SGI President Ikeda's Guidance for the Future Division

A series of encouragement from SGI President Ikeda addressing members of the boys and girls division.



[24] Valentina Tereshkova, First Woman in Space:

Expressing Your Appreciation

There are still many unsolved mysteries in the universe, and scientists across the globe continue to seek answers.

In February 2016, a “discovery of the century”—a major step forward in deepening our understanding of the cosmos—was announced. For the first time, scientists have been able to detect gravitational waves, or ripples in spacetime.

The great physicist Albert Einstein (1879–1955) predicted the existence of these waves some 100 years ago, and since then, scientists have been searching for them. So this discovery came as a surprise and delight to many.

I am certain that some of you, our future division members, will also become renowned scientists who will make important discoveries and shed light on the mysteries of life and the universe.

The discovery of gravitational waves was the result of the combined efforts of countless people. Every outstanding achievement owes its accomplishment to the untold individuals who supported behind the scenes.

The Russian cosmonaut, or astronaut, Valentina Tereshkova was also able to become the first woman to travel into space thanks to the encouragement of many others. Ms. Tereshkova, who is a dear friend of my wife, Kaneko, and I, has a beautiful heart, never forgetting her appreciation

for everyone who helped her achieve what she did, including her beloved mother who gave birth to her and raised her.

Let's all imagine that we are flying through space together with Ms. Tereshkova, as we learn from the story of her life.

*

Ms. Tereshkova was born on March 6, 1937, to a poor farming family living in a small village surrounded by woods. She lived with her grandmother, parents, older sister, and younger brother.

Her father was a tractor driver, but Ms. Tereshkova doesn't remember him well because he was sent to war when she was only two years old. A short time later, the family received news that he was killed in action.

Her mother wept and was deeply saddened, but she refused to be defeated. She worked on farms and in factories to support and raise her three children on her own.

Ms. Tereshkova loved her mother very much. In art classes in elementary school, she would sketch pictures with colored pencils of her mother performing daily chores, such as washing clothes in a pond and carrying firewood.

After finishing school, Ms. Tereshkova got a job at a textile mill. One day, she heard some very exciting

news: the young Russian cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin (1934–68) had become the first person to make a space flight.

Ms. Tereshkova's family talked about this event, too. Her mother said: “Now that a man has gone into space, it will be a woman's turn next.”

Her mother's casual remark inspired Ms. Tereshkova to strive to become a cosmonaut herself.

But it was not easy. She had to make many efforts to qualify to become a cosmonaut, such as studying very hard, building her physical strength, and completing parachute training.

Despite these challenges, Ms. Tereshkova didn't give up on her dream. She spent her days undergoing intense training, far away from home.

When she returned to her room at night, she would gaze at her mother's photograph. She felt as if her mother was encouraging her: “I know you can do it!” This lifted her spirits.

Ms. Tereshkova once shared: “I believe that when you have a dream and dedicate all your strength and being to achieve it, you can realize it without fail.”

She studied even harder, prepared herself physically and mentally, and exerted herself through each stage of her training to finally be given the chance to go into space at age 26. On June 16, 1963, people around the world watched as she became the first woman to be launched into space. When the liftoff was successful, she sent

a message back to Earth: “It is I, Seagull. I am fine.”

“Seagull” (or *Chaika*, in Russian) was the call sign, or nickname, she used when communicating with the mission control center on Earth. Her words “It is I, Seagull” were broadcast across the globe, and it became a popular phrase in many countries.

Seen from space, the blue planet Earth was indescribably beautiful. The city lights resembled pearls in a necklace.

Ms. Tereshkova also saw lightning shoot sparks like fireworks over the oceans at night. As she orbited the Earth, she thought of her mother back home. She thought of how all people in every country she could see from space had mothers, that all birds flying through the air, fish swimming in the sea, and animals moving across the ground had mothers. She couldn’t help but wish for the happiness of all those mothers who were nurturing and caring for the precious lives born on this fascinating planet.

Ms. Tereshkova orbited the Earth 48 times over the course of 70 hours and 50 minutes. It was a brilliant achievement for women and for all humankind.

She returned from her mission with a profound awareness of how amazing our planet truly is. Everything

filled her with joy and emotion—taking a deep breath of the pure, clean air; hearing birds singing; listening to people talking. To live on this planet seemed a wondrous miracle in itself.

*

I have met Ms. Tereshkova three times, and our conversations covered many subjects, including her work in space and efforts for peace. We first met on May 22, 1975, during my visit to Russia.

When I told her how wonderful her mother must have been to have raised such a remarkable person like herself, Ms. Tereshkova replied: “I believe from the bottom of my heart that I owe everything I am today to my mother.”

No doubt her gratitude to her mother had always served as the driving force for taking on life’s challenges.

Ms. Tereshkova has traveled to Japan on numerous occasions, and she visited Fukushima and Miyagi prefectures (in 1981), where people are bravely rebuilding their lives and communities following the devastating March 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. During her visit there more than three decades ago, she said to a group of local women: “Let’s create

peace together for these beautiful children!”

To your mothers and fathers, you are their most precious treasures and nothing could take your place.

Some of you may have lost one or both of your parents or live in a single-parent household, but your fellow SGI members, as well as my wife and I, are always praying for and thinking of you with the same love and care as parents.

*

In Japan, March is the month of graduation ceremonies. It is an opportunity for those of you who are usually a little embarrassed to thank your parents, to convey your heartfelt appreciation to them.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “It is like the situation when one faces a mirror and makes a bow of obeisance: the image in the mirror likewise makes a bow of obeisance to oneself” (OTT, 165). Those who show appreciation, respect, and concern for others, will also be appreciated and respected in return. Becoming such individuals will bring forth the strength to move forward and grow.

For example, you can say to your family:

“Thank you for waking me up every morning.”

“Thank you for making my meals every day.”

“Thank you for being so thoughtful and supportive.”

All it takes is a small gesture. Please express your appreciation to others, such as your parents, your teachers and friends, and those who support you behind the scenes, by looking them in the eye and saying: “Thank you.”

Let’s happily take off on an exciting new journey of learning and fresh challenges!

(Translated from the March 1, 2016, issue of Boys and Girls Hope News, the Soka Gakkai monthly newspaper for the boys and girls division)

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “It is like the situation when one faces a mirror and makes a bow of obeisance: the image in the mirror likewise makes a bow of obeisance to oneself” (OTT, 165). Those who show appreciation, respect, and concern for others, will also be appreciated and respected in return. Becoming such individuals will bring forth the strength to move forward and grow.

SGI President Ikeda's Study Lecture Series

LEARNING FROM THE WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN: THE TEACHINGS FOR VICTORY

Daimoku as the Seed of Buddhahood

Kosen-rufu—An Epic Drama of Victorious Resolve

Concerning this resolve of yours, I can't help but be reminded of the late Ueno.

I have received the horseload of taros as well as the chestnuts, parched rice, and ginger.

In the deep recesses of the mountains here no one cultivates taros. Chestnuts never ripen and ginger never sprouts. And of course parched rice is not to be seen.

Even if, for example, chestnuts were to ripen, monkeys would blight the branches and treetops. And no one cultivates taros. But even if people were to cultivate them, they detest me so they would never share them. Why was it that I had to come to such a high mountain?

When one looks at the mountain, one sees that it drops down gradually from its heights to its foothills. When one looks at the sea, one finds that it gradually goes from shallow to deep. When one looks at the world, one finds that it has gradually declined year after year, from thirty years ago to twenty, to five, four, three, two, one year ago. The same is true of people's minds.

Now when an age comes to its end, only twisted trees remain on the mountainside, only low grasses grow in the fields. In the world wise people are few, while foolish ones abound. They are like cows and horses, which never know their fathers, or like hares and sheep, unable to pick out their mothers.

It has been more than 2,220 years since the Buddha passed into extinction. Now we have come to this latter age, when men of wisdom gradually disappear from view, in the same way that a mountain slopes down, or like the shallow grasses. Though there are many who do things such as chant the Nembutsu or uphold the precepts, few rely on the Lotus Sutra. Though there are multitudes of stars, they fail to illuminate the great sea. Though there are myriads of grasses, they never become pillars in the imperial palace. In the same manner, even if one chants the Nembutsu many times, it can never be the path to attaining Buddhahood. And even if one upholds the precepts, it can never be the seed for rebirth in a pure land. Only the seven characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are the seed for attaining Buddhahood.

When I spoke out in this way, people felt hatred and rejected it, but the late Ueno believed and thus attained Buddhahood. You are all his kin and therefore I am certain you will be able to carry out this resolve. Is this not what is meant by the sayings that a mite clinging to a fleet horse flies a thousand miles, and that the ivy winding around the pine tree soars a thousand feet? Each of you possesses the same heart as the late Ueno.

A man who offered a mud pie to the Buddha was reborn as a king. Because the Lotus Sutra is a teaching superior to the Buddha, having made offerings to it, how could you possibly fail to both enjoy benefit in this lifetime and attain Buddhahood in the next?

Moreover, since you are poor, you have no servants. There are obstacles at mountains and rivers. Even if you have a firm resolve, it may be difficult to act upon. But judging from the resolve you are displaying now, I see that yours is hardly ordinary. There can be no doubt that the ten demon daughters of the Lotus Sutra will protect you. How reassuring it is to think so! It is impossible to say all that I wish.

*With my deep respect,
Nichiren*

(WND-2, 804-5)

Lecture

With the arrival of July each year, I am reminded of that hot summer in Osaka in 1957. On July 3 that year, I was arrested on false charges of violating the election law, in what is now known as the Osaka Incident.¹ For the purposes of interrogation, I was first held in a police cell, then later confined at the Osaka Detention Center. For about two weeks, I waged a solitary battle behind bars, shut off from the outside world. But what I was deeply grateful for at that time was the fact that I was not fighting alone. Thousands and thousands of fellow members were concerned for my well-being as if it were their own and praying earnestly for my safety. There were women's division members who delivered care packages to me each day. Other members, impelled to do something to show their support, went to the police headquarters or the detention center and expressed their outrage to the authorities at my false arrest.

Above all, I was deeply touched by the fact that before I was detained, my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, met me at Tokyo's Haneda Airport and urged me: "You must not die. Please—do not die!" With great emotion, he proclaimed: "Daisaku, should death overtake you, I will rush to your side and throw myself upon you and accompany you in death." I was prepared to undergo anything, no matter how unreasonable, to protect such a great mentor.

The authorities sought to oppress the Soka Gakkai, which was flourishing as a rising new people's movement and forging solidarity among ordinary citizens. They attempted to destroy the cornerstone of our unity, particularly in Kansai. Malicious sections of the media collaborated, widely depicting the Soka Gakkai as an antisocial organization.

Working for the Happiness of the People

At the time, the Soka Gakkai was criticized and disparaged as "a gathering of the poor and sick." But who in society, if not the Soka Gakkai, was reaching out to help the poor and the sick? Who was joining the people in the midst of their hard-fought struggles against adversity, engaging in dialogue with one person after another, encouraging them tirelessly with the promise that they could transform karma into mission and open the way to happiness and victory?

The Soka Gakkai undertook this most difficult challenge, practicing exactly as Nichiren Daishonin had instructed. It wholeheartedly strove to value and respect all people and to treasure each individual.

Authoritarian forces seek to use people as pawns, moving them about as they please in the pursuit of their own selfish aims. That is also the essence of what Buddhism refers to as the devil king of the sixth heaven [also known as Freely Enjoying Things Conjured by Others and the personification of fundamental darkness inherent in life].

The approach of Nichiren Buddhism is the exact opposite of such authoritarian forces. Nichiren Buddhism focuses on the heart of each individual and illuminates the essence of their life, seeing the infinite potential for goodness—the indestructible Buddha nature—that resides within them.

The SGI is a great human network built on the foundation of one-to-one ties of mutual trust as its members strive to connect people's hearts and bring people closer together.

Each person is important beyond measure. Each has an incredibly noble mission.

Reading the Gosho, we see that Nichiren Daishonin constantly

directs his compassionate gaze at the life and mind of each individual. The momentous undertaking of kosen-rufu can never exist apart from compassionate action for the welfare of others and efforts to unite people's hearts.

In this installment, let's study the Daishonin's writing "Daimoku as the Seed of Buddhahood," and learn the essence of the humanism of Nichiren Buddhism.

*Concerning this resolve of yours [in making this offering], I can't help but be reminded of the late Ueno [Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro].
I have received the
horseload of taros [a starchy
vegetable similar to a potato] as well
as the chestnuts, parched rice, and
ginger.*

In the deep recesses of the mountains here [in Minobu]² no one cultivates taros. Chestnuts never ripen and ginger never sprouts. And of course parched rice is not to be seen.

*Even if, for example, chestnuts were to ripen, monkeys would blight the branches and treetops. And no one cultivates taros. But even if people were to cultivate them, they detest me so they would never share them. Why was it that I had to come to such a high mountain?
(WND-2, 804)*

Praising the Faith of a Solitary Practitioner

The writing titled "Daimoku as the Seed of Buddhahood" is a letter written by the Daishonin on Mount Minobu and addressed to a lay follower named Kuro Taro.³ The first line, "Concerning this resolve of yours, I can't help but be reminded of the late Ueno"

Footnotes

¹ Osaka Incident: The occasion when SGI President Ikeda, then Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff, was arrested and wrongfully charged with election law violations in a House of Councilors by-election in Osaka in 1957. At the end of the court case, which continued for more than four years, he was fully exonerated of all charges on January 25, 1962.

² Minobu: Also, Mount Minobu. Located in present-day Yamanashi Prefecture, Japan. Nichiren Daishonin lived there during the later years of his life, from May 1274 through September 1282, just prior to his death. There, he devoted himself to educating his disciples, directing propagation efforts, and writing doctrinal treatises.

³ Though traditionally it was held that this letter was written in 1278, old handwritten and printed copies only have the date, "first day of the eleventh month" (November 1), without the year given. Recent research on the partial original manuscript of the letter has suggested that it was written soon after the Daishonin took up residence on Mount Minobu in 1274.

(WND-2, 804), is actually a postscript. The Daishonin wrote these words in the empty space at the top of the paper after completing the body of the letter.

“The late Ueno” here refers to Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro [the name Ueno coming from the name of the village where he resided], the father of Nanjo Tokimitsu.⁴ In the second part of this letter, the Daishonin refers to Kuro Taro’s relationship to the late Ueno by saying, “You are all his kin” (WND-2, 804), indicating that Kuro Taro was a relative of the Nanjo family.

Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro was a steward [governing Ueno Village in Fuji District] in Suruga Province (present-day central Shizuoka Prefecture). It is not known exactly when he started practicing the Daishonin’s teachings. As a retainer of the Kamakura military government, however, he was called to Kamakura for an official tour of duty, and it is believed that he came into contact with the Daishonin during that time.

In December 1264, the Daishonin sent heartfelt encouragement to Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro, who was ill. That letter, “Encouragement to a Sick Person” (WND-1, 76–82), is the only surviving letter from the Daishonin addressed to him. In it, he offers strict guidance, stressing the importance of not being of “two minds” (WND-1, 82). Though the Hyoe Shichiro had embraced faith in the Lotus Sutra, his illness had made him feel anxious and tempted to return to his former Nembutsu practice.⁵ The Daishonin, therefore, wanted to help him overcome his doubt and continue on the correct path of faith. In the letter, he encourages Hyoe Shichiro to live out his life fully to the end as “a disciple of the priest Nichiren, the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in Japan” (WND-1, 82).

Taking the Daishonin’s instructions to heart, Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro continued to uphold faith in the Mystic Law and died peacefully a short

time later, his appearance evidently giving every sign that he had attained Buddhahood.⁶ His wife, the lay nun Ueno, as well as his son Nanjo Tokimitsu and other children, inherited his sincere commitment to faith and practiced the Daishonin’s teaching throughout their lives.

This brief postscript reveals the depths of the eternal mentor-disciple bond linking the Daishonin and Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro.

Deep Gratitude for a Precious Gift of Food

At the beginning of the body of the letter, the Daishonin lists the food items he has received as an offering from Kuro Taro—taros, chestnuts, parched rice, and ginger—and conveys his deep appreciation, explaining what rarities they are in the deep recesses of Mount Minobu.

The Daishonin refers to each item in surprising detail. This can be seen as an expression of his profound gratitude to Kuro Taro, who sent this gift of food before the start of winter out of his concern for the Daishonin residing in Minobu. With the approach of the harsh cold, the roads there would soon become too perilous for travel and few would be able to visit him or bring supplies.

In the mountainous area of Minobu, food was scarce. Even if people in the area grew taros, they would not be inclined to share their crops with the Daishonin. As a result, the offerings sent to the Daishonin by his followers living elsewhere were crucial for his survival.

Many of his followers, however, were not well-off themselves. The beginning of November, when this letter was written, was immediately after the rice harvest. But the fact that Kuro Taro did not send him newly harvested

rice but parched rice [in other words, rice that was dry roasted to preserve it and was usually eaten in hard times] would seem to suggest that he was experiencing economic difficulty of some kind. Ginger was a medicinal food, and no doubt Kuro Taro sent it out of his sincere concern for the Daishonin’s health during the winter.

In addition, Kuro Taro was from Suruga Province, an area directly administered by the ruling Hojo clan, and, as such, a place where forces hostile to the Daishonin were extremely influential.

With the spread of the Daishonin’s teachings, conflicts expanded in Suruga’s Fuji region [home not only to the Nanjo family but also to many followers who were converted through the propagation efforts of Nikko Shonin and other disciples], and eventually the Atsuhara Persecution⁷ occurred. It must have been incredibly difficult to continue practicing the Daishonin’s teachings under such circumstances. The Daishonin perfectly understood the many challenges his followers faced.

Responding to Sincerity with Sincerity

One more letter from the Daishonin to Kuro Taro exists—“Reply to Kuro Taro” (WND-2, 664). In that letter, too, the Daishonin thanks him for another offering of taros he received. In an accompanying note or message, Kuro Taro must have humbly described them as “nothing unusual” (WND-2, 664). Expressing his immense gratitude, the Daishonin replies that the gift of taros was indeed rare and precious to him, dwelling as he did on Mount Minobu.⁸

Fully aware of the indescribable effort and thought that each of his followers—ordinary, yet

⁴ Nanjo Tokimitsu (1259–1332): A staunch follower of the Daishonin and the steward of Ueno Village in Fuji District of Suruga Province (present-day central Shizuoka Prefecture).

⁵ Prior to his conversion to the Daishonin’s teachings, Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro was a follower of the Pure Land (Nembutsu) school of Buddhism. The Nembutsu practice entailed invoking the name of Amida Buddha, i.e., chanting the phrase *Namu Amida Butsu* (“Homage to Amida Buddha” or “I take refuge in Amida Buddha”), directed toward being reborn in Amida’s Pure Land of Perfect Bliss.

⁶ In “Reply to Ueno,” the Daishonin writes: “I was told that your husband [Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro] had attained Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-rence-kyo]” (WND-2, 495).

⁷ Atsuhara Persecution: A series of threats and acts of violence against followers of Nichiren Daishonin in Atsuhara Village, in Fuji District of Suruga Province (present-day central Shizuoka Prefecture), starting in around 1275 and continuing until around 1283. In 1279, 20 farmer-believers were arrested on false charges. They were interrogated by Hei no Saemon, the deputy chief of the Office of Military and Police Affairs who demanded that they renounce their faith. However, not one of them yielded. Hei no Saemon eventually had three of them executed.

⁸ The Daishonin writes to Kuro Taro: “Here [in Minobu] a taro is rarer and more welcome than a lamp on a dark night or a drink of water when one is thirsty. How can you say there is nothing unusual about these taros? You say that, I suppose, because there are lots of them where you are, but to us they are very dear!” (WND-2, 664).

extremely dedicated, men and women—put into the offerings they sent to him, the Daishonin always responded with warm words of appreciation and encouragement. He wholeheartedly treasured each person.

In addition to such socially well-established followers as Nanjo Tokimitsu, Shijo Kingo, and Toki Jonin, to whom he wrote many letters, the Daishonin also had many other followers as well, people about whom we know few details, but who were still connected to him through golden heart-to-heart ties. Numerous individuals sought out the Daishonin, practicing his teachings with quiet dedication and devotion.

The Daishonin would never overlook their noble struggles; he valued them, praised them, and encouraged them with all his heart. Responding to sincerity with sincerity—that is the humanistic spirit of Nichiren Buddhism that each of us should strive to carry on.

When one looks at the mountain, one sees that it drops down gradually from its heights to its foothills. When one looks at the sea, one finds that it gradually goes from shallow to deep. When one looks at the world, one finds that it has gradually declined year after year, from thirty years ago to twenty, to five, four, three, two, one year ago. The same is true of people's minds.

Now when an age comes to its end, only twisted trees remain on the mountainside, only low grasses grow in the fields. In the world wise people are few, while foolish ones abound. They are like cows and horses, which never know their fathers, or like hares and sheep, unable to pick out their mothers. (WND-2, 804)

An Age When People's Minds Are Distorted and Confused

Mountains drop gradually from the heights to lower reaches. The sea gradually deepens as one moves farther out into it. Akin to this principle of gradual decline, the Daishonin says, as time goes on, people's minds and life-force also gradually decline. This reflects a viewpoint prevalent in the Daishonin's day based on the idea of the "kalpa of decrease." Taught in the Buddhist scriptures, the kalpa of decrease refers to the period when human life span declines in the cycle of change that a world undergoes as it comes into being and eventually moves on to destruction. The Daishonin cites the increased intensity of the three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness⁹ in people's lives as the cause of this decline.¹⁰

During the Daishonin's day, the shortening of people's life spans may well have been a troubling reality. The first Mongol invasion of 1274, which had just recently taken place, was a major incident that had struck terror and uncertainty in people's hearts. In addition, the repeated epidemics and famines had caused the deaths of multitudes. Grief filled the land at the loss of so many of the younger generation in war and young children from illness and starvation. The Daishonin felt the pain of the general populace intensely.

In this section of "Daimoku as the Seed of Buddhahood," he writes: "The same is true of people's minds" (WND-2, 804). Through his assertion that only twisted, stunted trees and low grasses remain, he is telling us that people's spirits have become distorted, that there is a serious lack of competent leaders, that ethics and morals are in confusion, and that people spend all their time in petty disputes and conflicts.

In this corrupt and chaotic society, he explains, wise people are nowhere to be seen, and the situation is only growing darker and more disturbed.

The Daishonin uses the metaphor of not knowing one's parents as an example expressing the foolishness that prevails in this troubled age, the ingratitude arising from not knowing the basic and most immediate form of gratitude—that for one's parents.

Ignorance of how one comes to be in this world, of that profound causality in one's life, is not just ignorance of gratitude for one's parents, but is connected with all forms of gratitude, including gratitude for all living beings and gratitude for one's teacher. Such absence of a sense of gratitude represents the decline and fall of one's humanity.

Shakyamuni preached the Lotus Sutra to enable all people of the Latter Day of the Law, an age stained with the five impurities,¹¹ to attain enlightenment, entrusting the votary of the Lotus Sutra with the propagation of his supreme teaching.

In the next passage, the Daishonin sheds light on the fundamental teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which enables human beings to lead the most noble lives possible.

It has been more than 2,220 years since the Buddha passed into extinction. Now we have come to this latter age, when men of wisdom gradually disappear from view, in the same way that a mountain slopes down, or like the shallow grasses. Though there are many who do things such as chant the Nembutsu or uphold the precepts, few rely on the Lotus Sutra. Though there are multitudes of stars, they fail to illuminate the great sea. Though there are myriads of grasses, they never become pillars in the imperial palace. In the same manner, even if one chants the Nembutsu many times, it can never be the path to attaining Buddhahood. And even if one upholds the precepts, it can never be the seed for rebirth in a pure land. Only the seven characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are the seed for attaining Buddhahood. (WND-2, 804)

⁹ Three poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness: The fundamental evils inherent in life that give rise to human suffering. In the renowned Mahayana scholar Nagarjuna's *Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom*, the three poisons are regarded as the source of all illusions and earthly desires. The three poisons are so called because they pollute people's lives and work to prevent them from turning their hearts and minds to goodness.

¹⁰ In the writing "The Kalpa of Decrease," the Daishonin states: "The kalpa of decrease has its origin in the human heart. As the poisons of greed, anger, and foolishness gradually intensify, the life span of human beings gradually decreases and their stature diminishes" (WND-1, 1120).

¹¹ Five impurities: Also, five defilements. They are impurity of the age, of desire, of living beings, of thought (or view), and of life span. This term appears in the "Expedient Means" (2nd) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. (1) Impurity of the age includes repeated disruptions of the social or natural environment. (2) Impurity of desire is the tendency to be ruled by the five delusive inclinations, i.e., greed, anger, foolishness, arrogance, and doubt. (3) Impurity of living beings is the physical and spiritual decline of human beings. (4) Impurity of thought, or impurity of view, is the prevalence of wrong views such as the five false views. (5) Impurity of life span is the shortening of the life spans of living beings.

The Mystic Law Is the Seed of Buddhahood for All

The Daishonin writes: “It has been more than 2,220 years since the Buddha passed into extinction” (WND-2, 804). The age in which the Daishonin lived was the start of the Latter Day of the Law, an age long after Shakyamuni’s lifetime. Since so much time had passed since the Buddha originally expounded the correct teaching, most people no longer knew where to look for the true origin of those teachings, and any people of wisdom capable of communicating the spirit of the correct teaching had disappeared as well. As a result, the Daishonin points out, very few correctly carried on the Buddha’s original intent and put his true spirit into practice. Instead, he says, growing numbers of people throughout Japan, deploring this world of suffering and seeking to leave it, turned to the Nembutsu practice for rebirth in an otherworldly pure land, or maintained a formalistic practice of upholding various Buddhist precepts.

Referring to this state of affairs, the Daishonin draws the following parallel: “Though there are multitudes of stars, they fail to illuminate the great sea. Though there are myriads of grasses, they never become pillars in the imperial palace” (WND-2, 804). His inference here is that no matter how numerous their adherents, erroneous teachings could never be a profound source of illumination that dispels the darkness of human suffering or a pillar of support that brings people genuine peace of mind.

By extension, therefore, great importance resides in the system of thought or philosophy adopted as a fundamental norm by a society’s leaders—or, in the context of modern democratic society, by each citizen in whom sovereignty resides.

What, then, is the essential wish, the original intent, of the Buddha, which we should never lose sight of, no matter how the times may change? It is

the wish for all people to attain enlightenment, as elucidated in the Lotus Sutra. It is the desire to enable everyone to reveal their Buddha nature and realize the life-state of Buddhahood, in which they can freely and fully experience happiness and help others do the same.

In this letter, the Daishonin explains that the erroneous teachings of the day, which disregard this original intent of the Buddha, can never serve as “the path to attaining Buddhahood” or “the seed for rebirth in a pure land” (WND-2, 804). He tells Kuro Taro: “Only the seven characters of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo are the seed for attaining Buddhahood” (WND-2, 804).

In other words, he clarifies that the Mystic Law is the seed of Buddhahood—namely, the cause for attaining enlightenment. In addition, his statement that “the Lotus Sutra is a teaching superior to the Buddha” (WND-2, 805) indicates that all Buddhas of the ten directions and three existences also attained enlightenment through the Mystic Law. Everything arises from this fundamental seed.

Incidentally, lotus seeds that have been excavated after being buried in the earth for millennia have been made to germinate and produce pure and beautiful flowers. Examples of this are the Oga lotus¹² of Chiba and similar lotus plants that have been derived from ancient seeds and are on display in Gyoda City in Saitama and elsewhere.

When the conditions are right, a seed manifests its inner nature. Even the tallest tree, stretching into the sky, starts out as a tiny seed—a seed with enormous potential.

The seed of Buddhahood, in particular, unfailingly engenders the blossoming of Buddha nature. The seed of Buddhahood, Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, causes the great flower of Myoho-rence (lotus of the Mystic Law) to bloom within the depths of our lives. It enables us to bring forth flowers of happiness and victory for ourselves and

others, unconstrained by any hardship or suffering.

The Lotus Sutra states: “The seeds of Buddhahood sprout through causation” (LSOC2, 75 [LS2, 41]).¹³ And [in “How Those Initially Aspiring to the Way Can Attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra,”] the Daishonin writes: “Because one has heard the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-rence-kyo], which leads to Buddhahood, with this as the seed, one will invariably become a Buddha” (WND-1, 882).

Through one-on-one dialogue, we talk to others about Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra, enable them to hear it, and let it resonate in their lives. By so doing, we help ever growing numbers of people form a connection with Nichiren Buddhism. Our propagation efforts constitute the challenge of sowing the seed of Buddhahood, the Mystic Law, in people’s lives.

In the Japan of his day [a country in the Latter Day of the Law where the correct teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha had all but disappeared and great slander of the Law prevailed], the Daishonin identified shakubuku as the method of propagation required. Employing this method, which entails refuting the erroneous and revealing the true, invariably results in persecution by the three powerful enemies,¹⁴ as the Daishonin indicates in many of his writings. In the next section of this letter, too, he describes how people hate him for his sincere and principled practice of Buddhism, and refuse to accept his teaching of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo (cf. WND-2, 804).

When I spoke out in this way, people felt hatred and rejected it, but the late Ueno [Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro] believed and thus attained Buddhahood. You are all his kin and therefore I am certain you will be able to carry out this resolve. Is this not what is meant by the sayings that a mite clinging to a fleet horse flies a thousand miles, and that the ivy winding around the pine tree soars a

¹² Oga lotus: A plant produced from ancient lotus seeds discovered and germinated by Japanese botanist Ichiro Oga (1883–1965).

¹³ The Daishonin also cites this passage from the Lotus Sutra in “The Properties of Rice,” saying: “It is stated that ‘the seeds of Buddhahood sprout [through causation]’ [LSOC2, 75 (LS2, 41)]” (cf. WND-1, 1117).

¹⁴ Three powerful enemies: Three types of arrogant people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death, described in the concluding verse section of the “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China summarizes them as arrogant lay people, arrogant priests, and arrogant false sages.

thousand feet? Each of you possesses the same heart as the late Ueno.

A man who offered a mud pie to the Buddha was reborn as a king.¹⁵ Because the Lotus Sutra is a teaching superior to the Buddha, having made offerings to it, how could you possibly fail to both enjoy benefit in this lifetime and attain Buddhahood in the next? (WND-2, 804–5)

Carrying On the Commitment to Faith

“The late Ueno”—Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro—first embraced the Lotus Sutra at a time when the Daishonin was the target of harsh persecution, as predicted in the passage that reads: “Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?” (LSOC10, 203 [LS10, 164]). It was at such a time of adversity that Hyoe Shichiro abandoned his Nembutsu practice and became the Daishonin’s disciple.

Moreover, as noted earlier, Hyoe Shichiro was a retainer of the Kamakura government and held a fief in Suruga Province, where influential members of the ruling Hojo clan held large estates. When he accepted the Daishonin’s teachings, not only his family and relatives, but all who knew him must have reacted with surprise and opposition. As the lone practitioner in his family, he most certainly would have felt conflicted and faced many trials. However, with the thoughtful guidance and encouragement of the Daishonin, he remained steadfast in faith until his death in March 1265.

The Daishonin personally visited Hyoe Shichiro’s grave. In a subsequent letter [“Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light”] addressed to his widow—the lay nun Ueno and mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu—the Daishonin writes: “Since your deceased husband was a votary of this [Lotus] sutra, he doubtless attained Buddhahood just as

he was” (WND-1, 458). And in another letter [“On the Offering of a Mud Pie”] addressed to Tokimitsu, he writes: “Although your late father was a [samurai] warrior, he had an abiding faith in the Lotus Sutra, and thus . . . I know that he ended his life in the frame of mind of a true believer [lit. had a correct and steadfast mind at the moment of death]” (WND-2, 499).

Tokimitsu was only around six years old when his father died, but his father’s example of persevering in Buddhist practice until the end of his life was etched in his young heart. Kuro Taro, as a relative of the Nanjos, was also likely aware of the peaceful passing of Hyoe Shichiro.

In this letter “Daimoku as the Seed of Buddhahood,” the Daishonin tells Kuro Taro: “You are all his [Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro’s] kin and therefore I am certain you will be able to carry out this resolve” (WND-2, 804). He is expressing his hopes and trust that Kuro Taro, as a relative, would carry on in Hyoe Shichiro’s footsteps on the path of faith.

Bonds based on a shared resolve to dedicate one’s life to the great vow of propagating the Lotus Sutra are beautiful, noble, and honorable. This resolve or commitment must not stop with one individual or one generation. The burning commitment to faith is passed on from one person to another and transmitted from one generation to another into the future, respectively forming the horizontal and vertical threads of the beautiful tapestry of hope that is kosen-rufu.

When I read these passages, the faces of so many unforgettable pioneering members from the early days of our movement, who struggled together with me through thick or thin, come to mind. They will be with me as long as I live, and indeed, throughout all eternity. And today their children, grandchildren, and other young successors in our organization are carrying on the commitment of these dedicated men and women and steadfastly following in their footsteps.

Nothing makes me happier than to learn of the continued health and vitality of our pioneering members of

those early days. On such occasions, I lose no time in sending them messages and warmly encouraging them. I also pray sincerely for all their family members, friends, and loved ones to enjoy good fortune, benefit, and long, fulfilling lives.

Living Out One’s Life Based on the Fundamental Law of the Universe

Referring to some well-known Eastern proverbs, the Daishonin encourages Kuro Taro as follows: “Is

this not what is meant by the sayings that a mite clinging to a fleet horse flies a thousand miles, and that the ivy winding around the pine tree soars a thousand feet?” (WND-2, 804–5).

This may bring to mind a similar, more well-known, passage in the Daishonin’s treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land”: “A blue fly, if it clings to the tail of a thoroughbred horse, can travel ten thousand miles, and the green ivy that twines around the tall pine can grow to a thousand feet” (WND-1, 17). Many members can personally relate to these sayings because of their own experiences of becoming happier than they ever imagined possible through their practice of Nichiren Buddhism and working to realize the great vow for kosen-rufu together with the SGI, the organization faithful to the Buddha’s intent and decree.

The words “Each of you possesses the same heart as the late Ueno” (WND-2, 805) mean that Kuro Taro and other family members and relatives of Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro who are practicing the Daishonin’s teachings are carrying on in faith with the same resolve and commitment as the deceased.

Next, the line, “A man who offered a mud pie to the Buddha was reborn as a king” (WND-2, 805), refers to the Buddhist story about the boy Virtue Victorious who, as a result of

¹⁵ This refers to the boy Virtue Victorious who offered a mud pie to Shakyamuni Buddha. According to *The Story of King Ashoka*, as a result of this offering, a hundred years after the Buddha’s death the boy Virtue Victorious was reborn as King Ashoka.

offering a mud pie to Shakyamuni, is said to have later been reborn as King Ashoka.¹⁶ No doubt the Daishonin saw in Kuro Taro's spirit of making offerings to him a sincerity comparable to that of the boy Virtue Victorious.

To make offerings to Nichiren Daishonin—the votary of the Lotus Sutra who propagated the sutra without begrudging his life—is to make offerings to the Mystic Law, the seed or cause for the enlightenment of all Buddhas.

The Daishonin praises Kuro Taro highly, saying: “Having made offerings to it [the Lotus Sutra], how could you possibly fail to both enjoy benefit in this lifetime and attain Buddhahood in the next?” (WND-2, 805).

Moreover, since you are poor, you have no servants. There are obstacles at mountains and rivers. Even if you have a firm resolve, it may be difficult to act upon. But judging from the resolve you are displaying now, I see that yours is hardly ordinary. There can be no doubt that the ten demon daughters¹⁷ of the Lotus Sutra will protect you. How reassuring it is to think so! It is impossible to say all that I wish.

*With my deep respect,
Nichiren
(WND-2, 805)*

Putting Our Resolve into Action

It would seem from the Daishonin's words that Kuro Taro was suffering economic hardship. Perhaps

he was only barely able to support his family. The fact that he decided to make an offering to the Daishonin, and then arranged to have it delivered all the way to Mount Minobu, is truly remarkable under such circumstances.

In any situation, deciding and then acting to implement one's decision may seem simple, but is actually quite difficult. Human beings are weak. We often decide to do things, but are unable to follow through. We find all sorts of excuses and reasons to delay and, in the end, fail in our resolve, never putting it into action.

How much more difficult it was, then, in those days, to make offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra and support the great work of kosen-rufu. Yet, Kuro Taro did just that. The Daishonin writes: “Even if you have a firm resolve, it may be difficult to act upon. But judging from the resolve you are displaying now [in having sent heartfelt offerings here to Minobu], I see that yours is hardly ordinary. There can be no doubt that the ten demon daughters of the Lotus Sutra will protect you. How reassuring it is to think so!” (WND-2, 805).

Resolving to support the Daishonin, Kuro Taro overcame every obstacle to have offerings delivered to him on Mount Minobu. The Daishonin recognized what a challenging undertaking this had been, and sincerely praised Kuro Taro, saying that his resolve is “hardly ordinary” (WND-2, 805). He further tells Kuro Taro to rest assured that the benevolent forces of the universe will protect him without fail.

I can't help but feel that the Daishonin's words “hardly ordinary” also perfectly describe the dedicated efforts of our SGI members today. They are also demonstrating unflagging resolve, working tirelessly for kosen-rufu, in sun, wind, and rain. I am certain that the Daishonin is aware of all our hard work.

Striving Tenaciously in Faith

On July 17, 1957, after being released from the Osaka Detention Center, I attended the Osaka Rally at the Nakanoshima Civic Hall. There, I declared to those present: “Let us rise to this challenge with the conviction that the correct teaching and those who strive tenaciously in faith, steadfastly upholding the Gohonzon, will definitely emerge victorious!” This was my personal vow and certainty and, at the same time I am sure, the ardent resolve of all those at the meeting.

All human beings have the right to become happy, whether they are unheralded by the world, or poor, or dealing with suffering and hardship in some form or another. Indeed, each person inherently possesses the fundamental power of the Buddha with which they can boldly open the way to happiness for themselves and others. This is not something that the authorities can crush or destroy. In the early days of our movement, we of the Soka Gakkai stood up and faced the storm to build such an age, in which every individual could shine. I recorded my resolve in my diary at the time: “We will by all means create a time when truth will win over all.”¹⁸

Forever united in our shared commitment in faith to realize the great vow of kosen-rufu, for the sake of the happiness and victory of the people—this is the true essence of Soka mentors and disciples.

Commitment is passed on. We have kept the flame of commitment to kosen-rufu alive by courageously reaching out to others, expanding dialogue, and helping one person after another form a connection with the Daishonin's Buddhism. Today, this flame has spread to 192 countries and territories, creating a vast network of respect for the dignity of life uniting people across the globe.

¹⁶ According to *The Story of King Ashoka*, a work translated into Chinese by An Fa-ch'in in the early fourth century, one day when the Buddha was begging for alms in Rajagriha, he came upon two boys, Virtue Victorious and Invincible, while they were playing. The two boys wished to present an offering to the Buddha but had nothing to give, so Virtue Victorious hastily fashioned a mud pie and placed it in the Buddha's begging bowl, while Invincible pressed his palms together in reverence. Because of the blessings from this offering, a hundred years after the Buddha's death, Virtue Victorious was reborn as King Ashoka and Invincible as his consort.

¹⁷ Ten demon daughters: The ten female protective deities who appear in the “Dharani” (26th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra as the “daughters of rakshasa demons” or the “ten rakshasa daughters.” They vow to the Buddha to guard and protect the sutra's votaries, saying that they will inflict punishment on any who trouble these votaries.

¹⁸ Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary: One Man's Journey from the Beginning of Faith to Worldwide Leadership for Peace* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2000), p. 336.

The resonant chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, imbued with sincere prayers for the peace of all humanity, now reverberates all over the world, 24 hours a day, without cease. Our fellow Bodhisattvas of the Earth are exerting themselves with noble dedication and pride to fulfill their respective missions and contribute to the happiness of others. What a vast, growing movement their lofty resolve and commitment is

building! What a grand and noble endeavor!

History is certain to see our great movement devoted to the promotion of peace, culture, and education as a brilliant beacon of hope, and applaud it vigorously. Above all, I am absolutely confident that Nichiren Daishonin would praise our movement, declaring, too, that it is “hardly ordinary” (WND-2, 805).

Let us hold high the invincible banner of humanism and do our utmost to build a century of life in which the full potential of each individual can shine its brightest. I am firmly convinced that my youthful successors will inherit and carry on this commitment forever.

(Translated from the July 2013 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal)

NSGI NEWS

As it happens

Niva Shakya

On January 20th, 21 youths of Nepal SGI hiked to the top of Shivapuri hill at 2700m. The youth members joined from Jugal, Dhaulagiri, Kanchanjunga, Himchuli and Manaslu districts. There were some student division members as well as few new friends who joined in the hike as well. This hiking was organized with an aim to bring together the youth members, have fun and bind the spirit of unity for celebration of March 16. The youth members gathered at the gate of Shivapuri National park at 8:00am. After light breakfast, the team started the walk at 8:40am. The young members escalated the hills and climbed the stairs with energy. There were photoshoots, tree climbing, playing with water falls, short breaks for snacks along the way. As the climb continued many started to feel exhausted and tired. But one member encouraged another and they got back to their feet and started walking. The first station was Bagdwar where we saw the source of Bagmati River. Again there was phototaking and playing with water! After short rest, we ascended again to the summit of Shivapuri peak. Lastly after 5 hours of hiking we reached at the top of the mountain. As all the members were fatigued, we all rested for a while and ate our lunch. Every one had brought their own lunch and we all ate sharing it like in a picnic. Then we sat in a circle and shared guidance of Sensei to youth. The significance of March 16 and determination to celebrate March 16 was shared. Again there was photoshoot at the top. At 2:40 we started to descend the hill. Coming down was more difficult than climbing up. The members supported each other and walked downhill slowly. After 3 hours we reached back to the gate of National park and then took our bus to home. Hence it was a successful event with lots of fun and certainly many memories.



HIKING
DAY

SHIVAPURI NATIONAL PARK
20TH JANUARY 2018

THE NEW HUMAN REVOLUTION

- Daisaku Ikeda

Atsuta

Volume 26, Chapter 1, Installments: 12-22

Shin'ichi's emphatic voice, filled with joy, rang throughout the large tatami-floored room.

"Mr. Toda's comment that he wanted to find a place where he could peacefully rest with his fellow members meant that, in the light of the principle of oneness of life and death, he wanted to be reborn and once again strive together with his comrades for kosen-rufu.

"This cemetery park is the symbol of that eternal journey of kosen-rufu, that journey of mentor and disciple.

"We disciples, joyfully assembled here in this place that represents a new start for the Soka Gakkai, have been favored with such fine weather on this day of celebration. I am certain that this is a sign of the Gohonzon's praise. I cannot help but think how happy Mr. Toda would be.

"In the 17 and a half years that I have been president of the Soka Gakkai, I have celebrated numerous festive occasions, but today I am



especially overjoyed. This is a truly glorious event."

This was Shin'ichi's true feeling.

He then proudly declared: "It is no exaggeration to say that, with this, the foundation of the Soka Gakkai has been solidly established.

"Atsuta, a place with deep connections to my mentor, is my spiritual hometown. I wish to visit here again and again, protect our members all my life and, honoring the memory of my mentor, create a record of the pioneering of kosen-rufu.

"Whenever you are going through difficult times or find yourself facing an impasse, please visit this place, pay your respects, chant daimoku and, taking Mr. Toda's spirit as your own, return to your everyday life revived and restored. Filled with the spirit to strive for kosen-rufu, please embark on the journey of mentor and disciple, transcending life and death."

As this was the festive occasion of the Toda Auditorium's grand opening ceremony, Shin'ichi had planned to just bring his talk to an end here without speaking of the serious struggles that would await them. But the path of kosen-rufu is always fraught with difficulty. The reality is that whenever know what lies ahead. Recognizing that, Shin'ichi felt he had to remind the members to be prepared.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto continued speaking in a commanding voice: "I'd like to share with you today a passage from Nichiren Daishonin's writing 'On Losing Faith and Falling into Evil': 'Shakyamuni Buddha had all the thirty-two auspicious features, his body a golden color, his face like the full moon. And yet when evil persons looked at him, some saw his color as ashen, some saw him as sooty, and some saw him as an enemy' (WND-2, 1079).

"Shakyamuni was born in Nepal with these thirty-two superior physical characteristics that distinguished him as a great man. He was respected and revered by the people as the Buddha. Yet when people with impure hearts looked at him they saw him as lowly or tainted, and some saw him as an enemy.

"In contrast to Shakyamuni, Nichiren Daishonin was born as an ordinary being in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law. As such, it was only to be expected that he would encounter hostility and opposition in propagating his teaching.



"For our part, we are ordinary people, followers of Nichiren Daishonin. We are making kosen-rufu a reality exactly as the Daishonin instructs. Though we are unexceptional beings who have been disparaged by others, we are carrying out the noblest of missions. It is inevitable that we, too, will encounter all sorts of trials and hardships.

"That is why Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda were jailed for their beliefs, and Mr. Makiguchi ultimately died in prison. I have also faced continual opposition throughout my life. In the light of the teachings of the Goshu, the Soka Gakkai will continue to face harsh obstacles.

"But we mustn't allow ourselves to be defeated. We must not flinch. I hope that you, the Hokkaido

members, will have a firm resolve and, departing energetically from this new landmark, will strive your hardest for the sake of kosen-rufu in Hokkaido and for your own attainment of Buddhahood in this lifetime. Then, let us return here and continue on our bold and courageous journey of kosen-rufu throughout the three existences.”

Having a firm resolve essentially means dispelling illusions and opening our eyes to the right path. The path of upholding the correct teachings is always fraught with great difficulties—it is unflinching faith that awakens us to this truth.

The commemorative gongyo meeting for the opening of the Toda Auditorium closed with a choral rendition of the song “Atsuta Village,” the lyrics of which were based on a poem written by Shin’ichi.

After that Shin’ichi sat for a group photograph in front of the auditorium with pioneer members who had made outstanding contributions to kosen-rufu in Hokkaido, and attended a ceremony in the plaza in front of the memorial park caretaker’s center.

He greeted all the memorial park staff, shook hands with them, and engaged them in conversation.

Memorial park manager Junji Ito, his eyes wet with tears, said to Shin’ichi: “It’s like a dream come true that such a wonderful memorial park has been completed here in Atsuta. This would have been unimaginable 20 years ago.”

Shin’ichi smiled warmly and said: “Atsuta has reached this degree of success through your tenacious efforts. Thank you!”

Tears fell from Ito’s eyes. He had joined the Soka Gakkai in the summer of 1954. He ran a hair salon in Otaru with his wife Sadako, and by creating relationships of trust throughout



the area, he had played a major role in promoting kosen-rufu in Hokkaido.

On March 11, 1955, seven months after he started practicing Buddhism, the Otaru Debate was held. Though it was supposed to be a debate between representatives of Nichiren Shu (the Minobu School of Nichiren Buddhism) and Nichiren Shoshu priests, in the end Soka Gakkai members defended the teachings of Nichiren Shoshu, when its priests failed to appear. Ito, as the person in charge of the Otaru Group’s general affairs, had played a role in organizing the debate.

University professors who were also registered priests represented Nichiren Shu at the debate. The Soka Gakkai members representing Nichiren Shoshu were neither priests nor Buddhist scholars.

Ito was worried right up to the beginning of the debate about whether the Soka Gakkai side could win or not.

Seeing Ito’s concern, Shin’ichi, who was acting as Soka Gakkai’s emcee, said firmly in a confident voice: “Don’t worry. We are certain to win!”

The Soka Gakkai had faithfully upheld the true teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. In addition, many followers of Nichiren Shu were joining the Soka Gakkai due to the members’ efforts to reveal the errors of the Nichiren Shu doctrines to them. That’s why Shin’ichi was able to speak with such confidence. Truth is the mother of confidence.

The Otaru Debate opened with Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s powerful and fearless statement as emcee for the Soka Gakkai side. And just as he had confidently asserted, they won a clear victory in the debate.

Junji Ito was profoundly moved. Deeply convinced of the justness of their cause, he resolved to live out his life with the Gakkai.

In August 1955, a Soka Gakkai district was established in Otaru, and Ito was appointed district leader. Having been personally encouraged by President Toda who was in Hokkaido at that time, Ito pledged to dedicate himself to the development of kosen-rufu in Atsuta, Toda’s hometown.



In December, a group of Otaru leaders visited Atsuta and introduced Nichiren Buddhism to several households. Among those who started practicing at that time was Etsuro Yamauchi, who would later play a central role in the kosen-rufu movement in Atsuta.

Staying in contact with Yamauchi, Ito began to make monthly overnight visits to Atsuta. To attend an evening discussion meeting in Atsuta he would leave his house in Otaru early in the morning. He would then take a train to Sapporo, and from there, a bus to the ferry terminal on the Ishikari River. After crossing the river by ferry, he would walk about 20 kilometers (12 miles) to the Atsuta member’s house where the discussion meeting would be held.

In winter, the journey to Atsuta was hazardous; it was like practicing austerities. Up to the point of crossing the Ishikari River, it was the same as always, but from there on, Ito had to walk through deep snow that often went up to his waist. When there was a blizzard, it was hard to see where he was going, and he had to take each step forward very carefully, making the trip take up to ten hours. Even when the sky was clear, if the wind was strong it caused drifting snow and made it hard to see one’s way.

On one occasion, Ito and some of the other Otaru members with whom he was traveling were able to hitch a ride on a horse-drawn sledge. But along the way the horse suddenly began to gallop, and Ito was thrown off the sledge. He would never forget having to run after the speeding sledge calling out with all his might.

What Ito always bore in mind was that Atsuta was President Toda’s hometown and the place where Chief of Staff Yamamoto had made his vow for global kosen-rufu. For this reason, he was determined to illuminate Atsuta

with the light of Nichiren Buddhism. When he resolved to accomplish something to support his mentor, he found he could bring forth infinite power and the courage to take on any challenge.

When a single champion for kosen-rufu stands up, the fire of their spirit ignites the hearts of one person after another until it brightly illuminates the darkness with its glow. Stand up as an individual! Everything starts from just one person; everything starts from oneself.

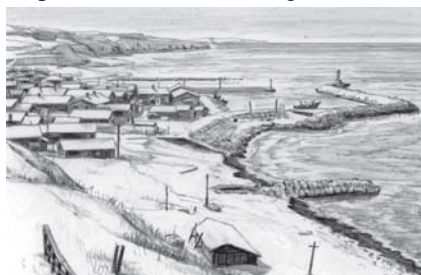
As the great Russian author Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) said: “A flame can only give light and warmth to its surroundings if it burns brightly itself.”

Through the assiduous efforts of Junji Ito alongside Etsuro Yamauchi and other local members, the membership had grown and developed remarkably in Atsuta.

In March 1958, Ito, by then leader of Otaru Chapter, took part in the pilgrimage to the head temple Taiseki-ji in Shizuoka to commemorate the completion of the Grand Lecture Hall, which had been built through the contributions of Soka Gakkai members. While at Taiseki-ji, he visited President Toda, who was staying in the Rikyo-bo lodging on the temple grounds.

By this time, Toda was already extremely frail, and he spent most of his time in bed. Even so, Toda invited Ito to his room to report on Otaru’s current situation. With evident exertion, Toda said: “I hear that kosen-rufu is advancing steadily in Otaru and Atsuta. Thank you. I’d like to go to Atsuta again. I’m counting on you. Do your best in Atsuta!”

Looking intently at Ito, he continued: “Mr. Ito, life is full of surprises. All sorts of things are bound



to happen in the Soka Gakkai, too. No doubt there will be unpleasant, or painful, or sad events. Life is really nothing but a series of such things. Completely unexpected difficulties or obstacles may arise. Buddhist practice is a constant, moment-by-moment struggle against devilish functions.

“But no matter what, never be daunted and never abandon your faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism or quit the Soka Gakkai. If you leave the Soka Gakkai, you may find all you’re left with is regret. The realm of Buddhism is strict. But if you persevere in faith and practice throughout your life, you are certain to triumph in the end. Even though you may face various challenges in the process, you’ll be able to say that you have attained a state of absolute happiness.

“Having fellow members to whom we can turn for support is also important in remaining steadfast in our practice. The higher a person rises in leadership position, the fewer people there will be from whom they can seek guidance, often causing them to become deadlocked. This can be a dangerous thing.”

When central leaders have a strong seeking spirit and continue to grow as individuals, their members will also grow, and the organization will keep growing and developing. That’s why it is important for leaders, too, to have someone they can turn to for inspiration in faith. The prime person we can rely on for such inspiration is the mentor.

Toda continued speaking to Junji Ito: “I want you to strive alongside Shin’ichi Yamamoto. Always stick by him. In so doing, you will be able to lead an unsurpassed life. Shin’ichi is the one who really knows my heart.”

Ito didn’t understand why Toda told him to work alongside Shin’ichi, and not himself. But he soon realized that Toda was speaking based on having deeply considered the future. He sensed Toda’s complete trust in Shin’ichi. He also felt he had caught a glimpse of their strong bond as mentor and disciple.

Toda spoke again, as if emphasizing his message: “There are



many different leaders, and they’ll all say many different things, no doubt, but you need to follow Shin’ichi. Regardless of what others are saying, please always advance with trust in Shin’ichi.”

Ito listened to Toda’s words as if they were his last testament, and responded energetically, with tears in his eyes: “I understand! I’ll wholeheartedly support Chief of Staff Yamamoto throughout my life!”

“Well, then I know Otaru and Atsuta will be fine, too,” Toda said with a smile.

Two years after that conversation, on May 3, 1960, Shin’ichi was inaugurated as the third Soka Gakkai president. At that time, Ito thought: “Mr. Toda gave me that guidance already convinced that this would be the outcome.”

Ito engraved Toda’s words deep in his heart, and he stood up alongside Shin’ichi. Then, in October 1970, he was appointed Hokkaido Region leader. He threw himself unstintingly into the struggle to bring the spirit of Soka mentor and disciple to life throughout the northernmost prefecture of Japan.

However, in the spring of 1973, while in Tokyo to attend a Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, Ito vomited blood and collapsed at his lodgings, leading him to be rushed into hospital.

The doctors at the hospital in Tokyo told Junji Ito that he had a gastric ulcer and also a duodenal ulcer. Lying in his hospital bed, he wondered why, when he was so dedicated in his Buddhist faith, this should have happened to him.

Soka Gakkai Vice President Kazumasa Morikawa visited Ito at the



hospital, bringing flowers from Shin'ichi Yamamoto.

Morikawa said: "Mr. Ito, President Yamamoto asked me to give you this message: 'It seems that your many years of hard work have taken their toll on your health, so please rest and recuperate fully.'

"Buddhism teaches that there are six reasons why illness occurs. President Yamamoto said: 'In Mr. Ito's case, it is the appearance of obstacles, the working of devilish functions, in response to his devoted efforts as region leader, bringing about great advances in kosen-rufu in Hokkaido.'

"He added: 'Don't let these devilish functions defeat you. If you can see them for what they are, you can vanquish them. Open the way to victory through daimoku. I am also chanting earnestly for you every day.' He's really chanting for you with a powerful intensity. His daimoku is filled with the impassioned determination not to allow you, a dear fellow member, to be overtaken by devilish functions, not to let you be defeated."

When he heard that, Ito wept out of gratitude to Shin'ichi, and regret for causing him so much concern.

Several days later he had surgery. His recovery, however, was not as smooth as hoped.

Top Soka Gakkai leaders visited him in his hospital room several times, bearing messages from Shin'ichi. One of the messages said: "Please get well soon and let's go together to encourage our fellow members in Hokkaido. They're all waiting for you."

Ito felt as if he had awakened.

"Yes. I have members I should be encouraging! I have the incredibly important mission of working for kosen-rufu. I can't be defeated!"

At that instant, he felt a surge of strength course through his veins.

The great life-state of the Buddha, of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, pulses in the determination to dedicate one's life to kosen-rufu.

Junji Ito got better day by day. Two months later he was able to leave the hospital.

When Ito returned home, Shin'ichi Yamamoto sent him a gift of a metal flower vase along with the message: "Congratulations! I'm so happy to hear of your recovery. Please become as strong as iron." Ito was deeply moved by Shin'ichi's care.

Ito was later appointed to the advisory position of guidance leader for Hokkaido Region. This change in leadership was to make way for younger capable people to take on central roles for the sake of the future, but at the same time, it was made out of Shin'ichi's wish to take some of the strain off of Ito.

Eventually, Ito recovered completely. When it was decided to open a cemetery park in Atsuta Village, no one was happier than Ito.

Meanwhile, from the time the project became a reality, Shin'ichi had thought that Ito would be the perfect choice for the cemetery park's manager, and he recommended him for the post.

Ito, wanting to live up to Shin'ichi's expectations, worked hard at preparations for the memorial park's opening.

At the ceremony, Shin'ichi shook Ito's hand and said: "You are the first manager of the first Soka Gakkai memorial park. All of your efforts and hard work will become an important part of history. This is the struggle of a pioneer. Please do your best."

"Yes, I will!" Ito firmly grasped Shin'ichi's hand.

Then Shin'ichi approached some of the youth division representatives who were serving as staff members for the celebration.

"Thank you for your efforts! What do you think of the memorial park?"

One of the youths replied energetically: "It's really grand, and set in such magnificent natural

surroundings. I think it's revolutionary and gives a whole new image of Japanese cemeteries."

Another said, "It doesn't have the usual gloominess of a cemetery. It's bright and fills you with hope. It's a perfect expression of Nichiren Daishonin's view of life and death."

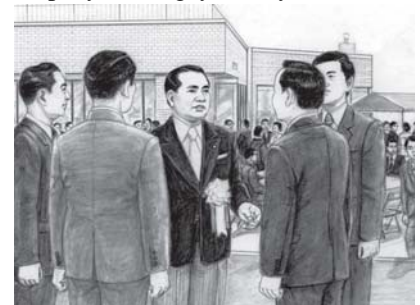
A third added, "The cemetery's memorial stones commemorating past presidents make you feel that when you are laid to rest here you will be walking the path of kosen-rufu together with your mentors forever."

After listening to the youth members' impressions of the cemetery park, Shin'ichi said emphatically: "All of you are young successors who will also inherit this cemetery park. Youth are the treasure of the Soka Gakkai, because they are the ones who will advance with courage, pure-heartedly cherishing the great hope and desire for kosen-rufu to the last.

"The Soka Gakkai has entered a period of stability. As a result, there are bound to appear self-serving individuals who have lost sight of kosen-rufu—the true mission and purpose of the Soka Gakkai.

"If that happens, the organization will stagnate and become conservative and bureaucratic. The only way I can prevent that is to entrust everything to the youth who share my convictions and determination to continue in the struggle for global kosen-rufu and the happiness and peace of humanity."

Then Shin'ichi said softly, looking into the distance: "It was the night before the establishment of the young men's division in July 1951. At the office of the Daito Commerce Company in Ichigaya, Tokyo, Mr. Toda



said to me: “Tomorrow is the day of the ceremony establishing the young men’s division. I will entrust kosen-rufu to the youth. In concrete terms, this means that the youth must take full responsibility for achieving the goal of 750,000 member households that I announced at my inauguration as president. Can you do it, Shin’ichi?”

“I looked intently at Mr. Toda’s face. I was ready to rise to the challenge, but I was also surprised by the request he was making of me. Not only were there prominent leaders in the Gakkai who had joined during Mr. Makiguchi’s time, but also at the establishment ceremony I would be appointed as a group leader on the front lines of the organization, not a top leader of the young men’s division.”

As if he completely understood what was going on in Shin’ichi’s mind, Mr. Toda said: “I will not ask the disciples of President Makiguchi to carry out kosen-rufu. The next president will not be one of his disciples, either; he will be from the youth division, because only those who have the firm resolve to give their very lives for the sake of Buddhism can carry out the struggle for kosen-rufu. That’s why I place my hopes in the youth.”

Josei Toda was unable to forget the disappointment, anger, and sorrow he had felt when almost all of President Makiguchi’s disciples had renounced their faith under pressure from the Japanese militarist authorities during the war. From bitter experience, he knew only too well how quickly self-serving individuals could abandon their ideals when faced with persecution.

Toda said to Shin’ichi Yamamoto: “The journey of kosen-rufu is long. I want to foster people who will dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu into their 30s and 40s, even when they reach their 70s or 80s, in fact for as long as they live.



“I want to raise individuals from the youth division who, like President Makiguchi, are not driven by self-interest, personal gain, or desire for fame and fortune, but will faithfully uphold the correct teachings of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism throughout their lives and work for the happiness of all. They will be people who will always be proud to be my disciples, and strive to the last for the actualization of the great ideal of kosen-rufu.

“No matter how much the membership of the Soka Gakkai increases in the future, if the pride of walking the path of Soka mentor and disciple and the determination to devote one’s life to kosen-rufu weaken, the Soka Gakkai will have no future. If that happens, members will lose the awareness that they are Bodhisattvas of the Earth and lose sight of the path to true happiness. It is the youth who must stand up to prevent that from happening.

“Shin’ichi! Please become the actual driving force for the youth division. Become an eternal role model! Start your struggle as a group leader on the frontlines, and lead our organization toward the realization of kosen-rufu! All right? Can you do that?”

“Yes!” said Shin’ichi, in a determined voice.

Toda looked sharply at Shin’ichi. When he saw his disciple’s expression of unshakeable commitment, Toda smiled.

“I’m counting on you! Work for the happiness of all humanity! To achieve that, it is important the Soka Gakkai continue to exert itself, generation after generation, for kosen-rufu and the establishment of the correct teaching for the peace of the land.

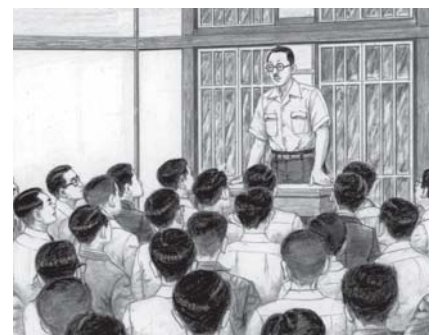
“Our conversation tonight is the actual inaugural ceremony of the young men’s division.”

The day after he spoke with Shin’ichi, Toda attended the ceremony establishing the young men’s division at the old Soka Gakkai Headquarters building in Nishi-Kanda, Tokyo. Toda rose and began to speak with firm conviction: “The next president of the Soka Gakkai will without doubt appear from among those present here today.”

He then went on to powerfully affirm that he had taken kosen-rufu as his personal mission and that he was absolutely committed to fulfilling it. He called on the young men there to stand up with the same commitment, saying: “My sole wish is that you will unflinchingly accomplish this great and noble mission.”

Then he said that the aim of the Soka Gakkai was to transmit the Mystic Law not only in Japan but throughout the world, concluding: “I take this opportunity today to salute the next president and to offer my heartfelt congratulations on the establishment of this corps of young men.”

At the opening of the Toda Memorial Cemetery Park, Shin’ichi recounted to the young men serving as event staff the conversation that took place between him and Mr. Toda the night before the establishment of the young men’s division. He then urged them: “Youth must always have a great vow for kosen-rufu. Standing with your feet solidly planted in reality, please spread the Buddhist teaching of respect for life and the philosophy of humanism in your communities and in society. I would like you to build such an indomitable network of youth here in Hokkaido, the place where both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda grew up.”



Then, looking at the neatly aligned gravestones, Shin’ichi said: “This cemetery park symbolizes the eternal bond of mentors and disciples of kosen-rufu. I can just imagine how happy Mr. Toda would be at the opening of this cemetery park.

“I engaged in much discussion and deliberation with other leaders, considering every aspect of our vision for Soka Gakkai cemetery parks.

“A cemetery expresses a view of life and death, and an underlying philosophy.” ***