

STORMY APRIL 24

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

In this essay, SGI President Ikeda remembers April 24, 1979, the day he resigned as Soka Gakkai president. A conspiracy of priests and traitors was pushing him out, and the top leaders were too weak to protect him. He was left to wonder, Where was the Gakkai spirit that they should have allowed themselves to be so overcome by circumstances? This essay originally appeared in the May 14, 1999, World Tribune.

Recently, I received a kind message of support from a well-known scholar. He said: “With the phenomenal growth the Soka Gakkai has achieved today, I am sure you face many challenges and difficulties. It is truly impressive that the Soka Gakkai has become one of the prime movers of Japan.

“Knowing you suffered from a weak constitution in your youth, I worried for your health. But watching you over the decades, as you have tirelessly proceeded to complete one momentous undertaking after another, I have only the greatest respect and admiration for you.”

Another very well-known figure also wrote me a letter of encouragement: “I applaud your unrivaled achievement of building a great force for peace. No one, either before or after World War II, has accomplished anything of this importance. “You have achieved what you have as an ordinary citizen, not as a political leader or a person of privileged background. Even taking into account the fact that you had a great mentor like Josei Toda, what you have achieved is truly without precedent. Moreover, you have endured unending criticism and insult, and you have repulsed the plots and attacks of your opponents.

“You have not limited yourself to the narrow confines of Japan but have made the world the stage for your activities. Your global endeavors, your broad vision and your initiatives for peace will without a doubt go down in history.” And a distinguished person whom I have been friends with for many years also wrote me: “It can only be a miracle. The towering work of art — the great and unprecedented achievement — which you have accomplished, while enduring envy and scorn and receiving not a word of praise, would have been lauded by Napoleon and Hugo.”

April 24, 1979. That was the day I stepped down as third Soka Gakkai president, a position I had held for 19 years, and became honorary president. When they heard the announcement, members all across Japan — indeed, all around the world — were left stunned and speechless.

Behind my sudden resignation were the insidious tyranny of Nichiren Shoshu and a plethora of attacks on the Gakkai by traitorous members, who had renounced their faith and joined forces with scheming priests at the head temple. They contrived plots and persecutions for my destruction beyond the power of words to describe. These morally bankrupt individuals, who had completely abandoned all that is good and just, continue to this day to devise foul schemes against me, hoping to vent their twisted rage. I'm sure this is something all of you know.

Nichiren Daishonin often cites the Lotus Sutra passage “There will be many ignorant people / who will curse and speak ill of us” (*Lotus Sutra*, p. 193). Being the object of such curses because of one's efforts for kosen-rufu is proof that one is a true practitioner of the Lotus Sutra. In “Letter from Sado,” the Daishonin writes, “Worthies and sages are tested by abuse” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 301). Refusing to be deterred by abuse, false accusations and scorn is the very mark of a person of true faith and practice.

Each time I heard of the suffering, anguish and indignation caused my dear comrades by the cruel oppression of bestial priests, my heart bled. Many nights, the pain in my heart was so intense that I could not sleep.

To protect my sincere fellow members, I sought with all my being to find a way to forge harmonious unity between the priesthood and lay believers. But all my efforts looked as if they would come to naught when a top Soka Gakkai leader — who later quit and renounced his faith — made inappropriate remarks. The Gakkai's enemies, who were waiting all along to destroy us, pounced eagerly. The priests raised an uproar and demanded that I take responsibility for this person's words. I agonized over the situation. I knew I had

to prevent further suffering from being inflicted on our members and to protect them from the persecution of the priests. Mr. Toda had said that the Soka Gakkai was more precious to him than his own life. The Gakkai is an organization that follows the Buddha's intent and decree to the letter; it is dedicated to the happiness of the people, the propagation of Buddhism and world peace. My resolve to take all the blame upon myself and to resign the presidency gradually grew firm within me. For several years, I had already been thinking that I should make way for a successor.

One day, I asked the top leaders of the Soka Gakkai, "Do you think my resignation would settle the problem?" There was a painful silence. Then someone spoke: "You can't go against the flow of the times." The atmosphere of the room froze. A sharp pain tore through my heart.

Even if all our members urged me not to, I was willing to bow in apology, if it would bring an end to the turmoil. And in fact, my resignation may have been unavoidable. I also knew how exhausted everyone was, due to the long, defensive battle in which they had all fought so hard.

But "flow of the times"? It was the attitude, the state of mind underlying that utterance that so disturbed me. I could detect no trace of the fighting spirit to protect the Soka Gakkai with one's life or the willingness to fight together with me, no matter the times or circumstances.

The priesthood put pressure on the Soka Gakkai with the secret aim of disbanding it as a religious organization. Corrupt, evil individuals, including a treacherous Gakkai attorney, had suggested this to them. Whether or not the Soka Gakkai's leaders knew it at the time, they had allowed themselves to become entrapped by the nefarious strategies of the priests and members who had renounced their faith and betrayed the organization. It was pitiful. I was completely at a loss for words.

Mr. Toda had told us all: "Protect the third president! Protect him as long as you live! If you do so, you will definitely be able to achieve kosen-rufu!" Had the top leaders of the Soka Gakkai forgotten the spirit of their beloved mentor? How pathetically they had let themselves be defeated! Where was the Gakkai spirit that they should have allowed themselves to be so overcome by circumstances?

In the midst of all this, on April 12, I met Madame Deng Yingchao, the widow of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, at the State Guesthouse in Tokyo. As we parted, I told her that I had decided to resign. "You mustn't!" she said, the smiling face of this great mother of the people suddenly growing stern. "You are too young to resign. Above all, you have the support of the people. As long as you have their support, you must not resign. You must not retreat even a single step!" Those were the resolute words of a person who had lived through death-defying challenges and danger.



Madam Deng Yingchao (foreground, 2nd from right) meets with Mr. Ikeda (foreground, 3rd from left) and Mrs. Ikeda (2nd from left) in the State Guesthouse, Tokyo, April 12, 1979.

That dark day, April 24, arrived. It was a Tuesday. Representative leaders from all over Japan had joyfully gathered at the Shinjuku Culture Center. But what should have been a momentous meeting marking a fresh departure and the end of the first Seven Bells—seven seven-year periods of the Gakkai's development

from its founding in 1930 — became instead the announcement of my resignation and the appointment of a new president.

This news came as a complete surprise to the majority of leaders. I entered the hall halfway through the meeting, and cries rose from the audience: "Sensei, don't resign!" "Sensei, remain as our president!" "All our members are waiting for you!" Their faces were clouded with anxiety. Afterward, people who attended the meeting declared angrily that there had never been a darker, more cheerless Soka Gakkai meeting. I said with firm conviction: "I won't change in the least. Do not worry! I am Mr. Toda's direct disciple! Right will win out in the end!"

*This far, far too bitter day
I will never forget
The dusk presses in
And I walk alone*

This is a poem I recorded in my diary that day, April 24. When I got home and told my wife that I had resigned, she greeted me with a smile, just as she always did, without asking a single question. With her usual, imperturbable composure, she said: "Is that so? Thank you for all your hard work."