

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JAN. 12 ADDRESS—PART 1 STAYING THE COURSE OF FAITH

Part 1 of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's address at the Kanagawa and Shizuoka Joint Conference, Yokohama, Japan, Jan. 12.

On May 3, 1979, I attended the Soka Gakkai general meeting commemorating Soka Gakkai Day, held at the Soka University gymnasium. When it was over, I came directly here to the Kanagawa Culture Center. My wife and I arrived here just before 7 p.m. A large crowd of Kanagawa members were waiting to greet us. They also packed the wide staircase in front of the center leading from the first to the second floor. Everyone welcomed us with warm applause.

Why did I come to Kanagawa at that time? To focus on the future. I didn't go to the Soka Gakkai Headquarters or some other place in Tokyo. I was resolved that from here at the Kanagawa Culture Center, overlooking the sea, I would embark on a new struggle for worldwide kosen-rufu. Instead of limiting myself to one tiny, petty, insular country that resented anyone who tried to make a difference, I would take the lead for kosen-rufu throughout the entire globe. I came to Kanagawa with my sights turned toward the world. Across the sea lay the Americas, Europe, Africa, Asia and Oceania. Every time I looked out at the water, my vision expanded.

Back in those days, a whirlpool of envy and jealousy, of plotting, scheming and spite swirled around me—all because the Soka Gakkai had been so successful. A group of corrupt and wayward Nichiren Shoshu priests, who were antagonistic toward the Soka Gakkai, was causing some commotion. While all this was taking place, I was looking at the world from a much higher plane. *The time was opportune*, I thought. Now I could set to work in earnest on laying a solid foundation for global kosen-rufu.

In the decades since, the Soka Gakkai's movement for peace and culture has spread to embrace 190 countries and territories. My leadership and my actions were correct. If the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, were still alive, I know he would rejoice and applaud at what I have achieved. How sad I am that he is not here to see it.

Have a bright, optimistic heart.

I stepped down as the third president of the Soka Gakkai on April 24, 1979. At the time, some deeply concerned Kansai members rushed to Tokyo to see me, wanting to know why I should have to resign when it was my leadership that had been responsible for the dynamic development of the Soka Gakkai and Nichiren Shoshu. Their eyes flashed and their whole demeanor radiated their powerful commitment to protect their mentor. Today they are all courageously leading Kansai toward unprecedented victory. But then, they wept hot tears of anger. I will never forget that sight.

I said: "I'm going to open a new age. I want you to join me in that endeavor. Years from now everyone will be amazed by what we've accomplished." No doubt the corrupt and ungrateful priesthood who had oppressed the Soka Gakkai thought it had put me out of action for good. Some of the Soka Gakkai's top leaders had abandoned their convictions at that time, though later a number of them deeply regretted it and came to apologize to me for what they had done.

But Kansai rose up, followed by members from Saitama, who spoke out vigorously: "Why have the priesthood and the Soka Gakkai leadership forced a president who has achieved so much for kosen-rufu to quit? You may call it an 'honorable resignation,' but

the fact is that you just kicked him out! What future does the Soka Gakkai have without President Ikeda? The organization will disintegrate!” These were their concerns.

My mentor and predecessor Mr. Toda had left the injunction: “Protect the third president! If you do, you will definitely be able to achieve kosen-rufu!” This was something that all the Soka Gakkai’s top leaders knew. Moreover, Nichiren Daishonin teaches that persecutions and hardships are an honor and should be regarded as peace and comfort.

I will forever remain true to the vow I made to my mentor, no matter how stormy the times ahead. I will forever walk the path of peace, hope and kosen-rufu with a bright, optimistic heart.

‘Not advancing is retreating.’

The essence of Nichiren Buddhism is the credo “Not advancing is retreating.” Leaders must give constant thought to how to keep the forward momentum of kosen-rufu going. They must ceaselessly take action when and where necessary.

Both the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and President Toda were, in a certain sense, very strict and demanding. They gave minute attention to the smallest details, often to the surprise of those around them.

Remaining true to the basics in the realm of faith is the way to protect the fine traditions of the Soka Gakkai. If we grow lax or casual about the basics, problems will inevitably arise later. Everything will fall apart. When the good traditions of the Soka Gakkai are upheld, everyone will feel confident and assured, and proper leadership will be maintained. In the educational realm, too, the best schools are the ones that cherish fine traditions. I hope that our leaders will value the Soka Gakkai’s traditions and continue to strive for solid growth.

Let’s unite in spirit with our Shikoku members as we proceed with our conference here today.

This year, the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper, celebrates its 55th anniversary. I am deeply grateful for the tireless efforts of our members in Kanagawa and Shizuoka, as well as in Shikoku, to expand the paper’s readership.

An article featured in the “Readers’ Voices” column of the Jan. 10 issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun* reminisced about an incident that holds truly fond and happy memories for me. On Jan. 14, 1980, close to a thousand Shikoku members sailed across the rough winter seas to visit me here at the Kanagawa Culture Center.

That was 26 years ago. With that event as their point of reference and with the vow of mentor and disciple as their driving force, the Shikoku members have overcome numerous obstacles and hardships and contributed greatly to the development of kosen-rufu. The article in the “Readers’ Voices” column outlined this history in very moving fashion, and it prompted an immense response from readers.

January 1980 marked my first New Year after having stepped down as president. On Jan. 13, I was working at the Kanagawa Culture Center when, a little after 1 p.m., the first shipboard report from the Shikoku members reached me. It said that the group of a thousand members were on their way to Yokohama Harbor, which stretches out in front of the Kanagawa Culture Center. They were traveling aboard the gleaming white passenger ferry, the *Sunflower 7*.

My wife and I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo earnestly for the Shikoku members’ safe journey. We prayed that no one would suffer from seasickness. That day, it was cold and snowing in Yokohama. A low pressure system had formed off the eastern coast of Japan, and rough seas were expected. The Soka Gakkai Headquarters had sent a message to the travelers suggesting they cancel their voyage, but it arrived just as the ship’s horn was signaling the time for their departure. The members thus set sail, deciding to entrust themselves to the captain’s expertise.

It was a profoundly meaningful time.

At the shipboard leaders meeting they conducted en route, the Shikoku leaders spiritedly addressed their fellow members. They lamented the fact that the membership couldn't joyously celebrate the Soka Gakkai's 50th anniversary that year under my leadership. This was unjust, they asserted, given that the Soka Gakkai had been built by the first three presidents. They were indignant that I could not act freely and that they couldn't even invite me to Shikoku. Since that was the case, they declared, they would be the first in Japan to visit me and celebrate the 50th anniversary with me. Wherever I was, they insisted, was the center and the front line of kosen-rufu.

I later viewed a written record of their sea voyage, and I wept silent tears in my heart at their sincerity.

The Shikoku members who remained back home chanted continuously for the voyagers — for their safety and the success of their journey.

The members' actions sparkled with the indestructible unity characterized by the spirit of "many in body, one in mind" — a force against which the jealous priesthood could never hope to prevail.

Making their way across the churning seas, the Shikoku members aboard the ferry finally arrived at Osanbashi Pier in Yokohama a little before 1 p.m. the following day, Jan. 14. In complete contrast to the previous day, it was warm and sunny.

The Lotus Sutra states, "If you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 324). Nichiren went so far as to call this passage "the foremost point he wished to convey to us" (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 192). I stood waiting at Osanbashi Pier holding a bouquet of flowers to greet these friends who had made such a long journey.

I will never forget the faces of the many sincere Kanagawa members who, in the same spirit, had assembled on the pier from all over the prefecture to greet the arriving Shikoku members. The music corps had also turned out in force to welcome the travelers with rousing performances of Soka Gakkai songs. Soon after they arrived, the Shikoku members had an exchange meeting with the Kanagawa members who had warmly welcomed them.

I played several songs for them on the piano. Deep, strong heart-to-heart bonds were forged among all present. It was a golden, profoundly meaningful time.

I later heard that the ferry captain had said: "It was the first time I carried Soka Gakkai members. I can't put it into words, but it was a very refreshing experience. I navigated very carefully, determined to prevent even one of my passengers from becoming seasick."

The *Seikyo Shimbun*, fearing the reaction of the priesthood, had reported on an exchange being held, but it hadn't written a word about my meeting with the Shikoku members. In spite of that, however, the members and I had shared a magnificent drama of mentor and disciple that no one could ever take away.

Live undaunted by hardships.

The American steel magnate and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie said: "There are times in most men's lives that test whether they be dross or pure gold. It is the decision made in the crisis which proves the man." The truly capable shine in times of difficulty.

The ancient Roman poet Lucretius wrote, "Thus it is more useful to scrutinize a man in danger or peril, and to discern in adversity what manner of man he is: for only then are the

words of truth drawn up from the very heart, the mask is torn off, the man remains.” How true this is.

In Plutarch’s *Parallel Lives*, we find the observation, “But the truly noble and resolved spirit raises itself, and becomes more conspicuous in times of disaster and ill fortune.” Standing ready to confront hardships — that is the Soka Gakkai spirit. As Nichiren writes, “The greater the hardships befalling him [the votary of the Lotus Sutra], the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 33).

The noble Shikoku members who visited me back then are indelibly engraved in the depths of my being for all time. I will never forget those who stood up to fight courageously amid the most painful and difficult times. Those members who traveled to Kanagawa are now the core leaders of our organization in Shikoku, spearheading the way to kosen-rufu. I am overjoyed to observe their fearless leadership. I also chant every day for those among them who have died.

The children, grandchildren and fellow members of all these noble Shikoku members are following in their footsteps with respect, gratitude and pride, saluting them as pioneers who embody the spirit of mentor and disciple and were part of that famous journey aboard the *Sunflower 7*.

Those who stay on the course of mentor and disciple, the course of kosen-rufu, throughout the voyage of life will shine forever with pride and glory.

Praise those of earnest seeking spirit.

Nichiren Daishonin wholeheartedly praised his lay disciples who maintained courageous faith and steadfast seeking spirit, conferring titles of great respect on them such as “sage,” “honorable” and “worthy.” He gave one of his female followers the title of the Sage Nichimyo. He lauded her strong seeking spirit toward the Mystic Law, which had prompted her to journey to Sado Island to see him. In a letter to her, he writes: “Setting aside the adherents of the Nembutsu and other schools, while I was in Kamakura, I had no way of determining whether the faith of individual believers in the Lotus Sutra was deep or shallow. This I came to know only after I had incurred the wrath of the authorities and had been exiled to the island of Sado. Though no one else came to visit me, you, a woman, not only sent me various offerings, but personally made the journey to see me. It was almost too amazing to be true” (WND, 614).

The journey to Sado was long and dangerous. That was proof of the power of this disciple’s faith. Genuine faith reveals itself at a crucial moment.

Nichiren also assures her: “Since you revere the Lotus Sutra, you are a woman who is certain to become a Buddha. . . . I, Nichiren, have been exiled here for a reason. The fact that you, a woman, have traveled all this way makes me think that my exile may have been destined so that you may reveal your profound seeking spirit in faith. When I think of this, I feel a deep sense of gratitude” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1222).

This is how unreservedly Nichiren praises the earnest seeking spirit of his disciples.

I hope all of you as leaders will likewise praise and encourage your fellow members. Words can impart strength and inspiration; they convey our hearts and our concern. Leaders need to talk and reach out to others. Don’t remain silent. Express your gratitude to hardworking members. And, of course, the better you know others, the easier it is to converse with them. That’s why you must make a serious effort to get to know people. When you’ve done that, just converse sincerely with them in the way that comes naturally to you.

I have engaged in dialogue with all kinds of people: Britain's Prince Charles and Princess Anne, former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Cuban President Fidel Castro, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, former Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai and many, many others.

We are all human beings, whatever our positions. If we open our hearts and speak with sincerity, we can communicate and touch others on the deepest level. That has been the starting point of all my earnest efforts to build bridges of friendship and lay the foundations for peace. World peace starts with trust between one individual and another. That is my unchanging belief.

Over the years, interpreters in a multitude of languages have been of invaluable assistance to me. Today, one of our official SGI interpreters is with us. I am deeply grateful to all of the interpreters who have fought earnestly at my side for the sake of kosen-rufu.

The unity of mentor and disciple is decisive.

In a letter to Shijo Kingo, the Daishonin writes: "Over and over I recall the moment, unforgettable even now, when I was about to be beheaded and you accompanied me, holding the reins of my horse and weeping tears of grief. Nor could I ever forget it in any lifetime to come. If you should fall into hell for some grave offense, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you. For if you and I should fall into hell together, we would find Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra there. It would be as if the moon were illuminating the darkness, as if cold water were pouring into hot, as if fire were melting ice, or as if the sun were dispelling the darkness" (WND, 850).

The Soka Gakkai is the harmonious body of believers united in the spirit of "many in body, one in mind" and has been built through our members directly connecting with the heart of Nichiren. The unity of mentor and disciple dedicated to kosen-rufu demonstrated by the first three presidents is why the Soka Gakkai has surmounted and triumphed over all onslaughts of the three obstacles and four devils as well as attacks by the three powerful enemies. It is also the reason we have extended kosen-rufu to 190 countries and territories throughout the world, in precise accord with the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's writings.

Soon, another Jan. 14 will be here — the unforgettable anniversary of the day that the Kanagawa members and I greeted our friends from Shikoku. I want to see to it that the names of the noble members who gathered on that occasion are handed down for all time. I also propose that an engraved plaque commemorating the event be installed here at the Kanagawa Culture Center.

'The Lotus Sutra is like the full moon.'

It was fine and sunny today (Jan. 12), and now a beautiful moon is shining in the night sky. Jan. 14 will be a full moon. Nichiren writes: "The Lotus Sutra is like the moon. For those who have faith in the Lotus Sutra, but whose faith is not deep, it is as though a half moon were lighting the darkness. But for those who have profound faith, it is as though a full moon were illuminating the night" (WND, 94).

I am chanting sincerely that all our dedicated members will bring their faith to shine like a beautiful full moon and lead brilliant lives of complete fulfillment.

To be continued in an upcoming issue.

FOR DISCUSSION

From this address:

Genuine faith reveals itself at a crucial moment.

- 1) Describe a crucial moment during which your Buddhist practice became stronger.
- 2) How do you maintain that strength of faith during less trying times?