

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA THE TRUE PURPOSE OF RELIGION

In 1979, the May 3 (Soka Gakkai Day) meeting was held a few days after President Ikeda had been pushed to resign. The priests were trying to take control of the membership, and 'it was a pitiful, profoundly sad situation,' President Ikeda remembers. 'The true purpose of religion is to enable people to become happy. How fundamentally wrong it is, then, to turn believers into slaves....'

It was a beautiful, sunny May day, not a cloud in the sky. The Musashino hills were blanketed with azalea blossoms, as if in brilliant tribute to life and the freshness of youth. Beyond the flowers, the fresh verdure of spring shone, emanating the silence of profound truth. Standing in the dazzling sunlight, my wife said to me, "The weather was exactly like this 19 years ago, wasn't it?"

Indeed, the day that I became the third Soka Gakkai president in 1960 was bright and sunny. I remember that night, at our house in Tokyo's Ota Ward, my wife and I gazing up at the sky together, remarking how the stars looked like sparkling fireflies.

My life-and-death struggle to break through the darkness of humanity's despair and build a great realm of everlasting peace had gone on for 19 years.

May 3, 1979. The 40th Soka Gakkai Headquarters General Meeting, at which we were to celebrate the successful completion of the Seven Bells — a vision of seven seven-year periods punctuating the organization's development from its inception — was about to begin in the Soka University gymnasium.

Under normal circumstances, I would have celebrated the Soka Gakkai's triumph with a speech outlining a new vision for kosen-rufu. It would have been a day of great joy, with our members burning with enthusiasm for the next, exciting goal, their hearts filled with the brilliant light of hope. It would have been a day on which these noble champions of kosen-rufu toasting each other with jeweled cups, a day on which they would freely ring the bell of resounding victory.

However, insanely jealous Nichiren Shoshu priests, joined by a number of corrupt and scheming Gakkai members who had discarded their faith and succumbed to the dark world of Anger, robbed our members of that jubilant celebration.

Shortly before the meeting, scheduled to begin at 2:00 p.m., the bus carrying these iniquitous priests pulled up to the university. I stood at the bus door and bowed, greeting them politely, but they refused to return my greeting with even a word or a nod. They stalked arrogantly past me with cold, emotionless expressions.

That day the Headquarters General Meeting, a grand tradition of our organization, had none of the Gakkai's usual effervescent joy and dynamism. Instead, an unholy atmosphere pervaded. It was as if everything were under the control and supervision of the "authority of the cloth" — the priesthood.

One leader later said that the atmosphere was so frosty, it was as if the members had been made to sit on cold gravestones. Many were angered by what took place that day.

The applause for me was restrained. The top Soka Gakkai leaders who took the podium — individuals who had referred to me as “Ikeda Sensei” quite naturally at meetings just a few days earlier — did not say a word about me. Apparently, they feared reprisals from the priesthood.

I didn’t care what they might do to me. But their actions constituted a betrayal of the sincere faith of the members, who were linked together by strong ties of mentor and disciple that spanned the three existences of past, present and future.

A women’s division member at the gathering commented angrily later: “Why didn’t the leaders have the courage to proudly declare that the phenomenal development of the kosen-rufu movement was all due to President Ikeda?!”

When I left the meeting, the applause again was hesitant. I had heard that one of the top youth division leaders had told members not to applaud very much at the meeting for it would antagonize the priests — and, in particular, not to applaud at all for me. He had been poisoned by the frightening evil of the priesthood. He had turned cowardly in the face of those bellicose *asuras*.

The eyes of the members as they watched me on stage were earnest, filled with concern. I keenly felt the tremendous effort they were making to control their urge to call out to me.

Leaving the gymnasium, I was walking along a pathway leading to another building, when a group of stalwart women’s division members came running up to me. I will never forget that encounter; it is deeply engraved in my heart.

In a special reception room after the meeting, I once again courteously greeted the priests, but again they coldly ignored me. Their blatant rudeness made me question their humanity. They will most certainly be judged harshly, in accord with the strict Buddhist law of cause and effect, which operates in the depths of life.

I thought at the time that those unscrupulous operators who had allied themselves with the priests and caused such trouble in the Gakkai were no doubt convinced that they had succeeded. They were thinking that their strategy of destruction had gone according to plan. They were filled with conceit, believing victory theirs.

I could see their treachery and arrogance as clear as day. Their actions revealed them for the sly, duplicitous people that they were.

We must never, never allow ourselves to follow such perfidious, scheming individuals. Whatever oppressive measures they may take, we must remember that faith means endurance. We of the Soka Gakkai are practicing in complete accord with the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. We are devoting ourselves selflessly to propagating the Mystic Law. We should always wear the gentle armor of endurance.

Those self-serving priests who bore hostility toward the Soka Gakkai, borrowing the guise of the Daishonin, sought to turn the true emissaries of the Buddha — the Gakkai members — into pawns, exploiting them and finally destroying the Soka Gakkai. We were confronted with an insane rampage of the terrible, insidious nature of authority.

It was a pitiful, profoundly sad situation. The true purpose of religion is to enable people to become happy. How fundamentally wrong it is, then, to turn believers into slaves of the priests and into servants of the temples and halls that symbolize priestly authority.

With the feeling of an even heavier burden on my shoulders, I left the campus and, without even stopping at home, went directly to the Kanagawa Culture Center in Yokohama.

At the center, one of the leaders, a close aide, told me that my name had appeared in the

newspaper that morning. The May 3 *Yomiuri Shimbun* carried an article featuring the results of a U.S.–Japan opinion poll. One of the survey’s questions was “Who do you admire?” On a list of the 20 most admired people among the Japanese respondents, my name was No. 6.

Long-serving postwar prime minister Shigeru Yoshida (1878–1967) was first, followed by bacteriologist Hideyo Noguchi (1876–1928), agricultural technologist Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), educator and writer Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901) and Emperor Showa (1901–89). Then came me.

I felt something deeply mystic in that such an article was published on May 3, just a few days after my resignation as Soka Gakkai president. I felt as if my fellow members were warmly supporting me, encouraging me, in this time of adversity.

A few days after that, I received a letter from a leading intellectual, who expressed his surprise at the results of the poll and concluded that “in the category of living ordinary citizens, you are actually No. 1. You are also the only person chosen from the sphere of Japanese religion. This confirms that you really are the king of the religious world. How happy Mr. Toda would be!”

The Daishonin asserts with absolute certainty: “Great events do not have small omens. When great evil occurs, great good will follow. Since the worst slander already prevails throughout the country, the supreme True Law will spread without fail” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin*, vol. 5, p. 161)

I decided that, no matter what others might say, I would triumph by holding fast to my convictions. And so I began my struggle, all alone, cherishing an even grander vision for our movement than I had before.

Mr. Toda often used to say to me, “The lion seeks no companion.” I firmly believed that, though I was alone, true companions would one day naturally join me again, without my saying a word. We would unite in the oneness of mentor and disciple to strive, to soar, to advance, to triumph together, without limit. I was waiting for the new companions of a new era to appear.

Kanagawa — specifically, the port of Yokohama, of which the Kanagawa Culture Center commands a view — is a gateway to the world. It was there that I renewed my commitment to carry out the Daishonin’s injunction to propagate the Mystic Law throughout the entire world. And it was there that I took up my calligraphy brush and wrote the single word *justice* in Chinese characters. I entrusted the small group of disciples at my side with the mission of passing on and conveying to later generations the spirit with which I wrote that word.

That was May 5.

Having returned for a short time to Tokyo, I then headed to the Tachikawa Culture Center, the base for our activities in Tokyo’s outlying areas.

It was close to dusk as I made my way there by car. For a long while, I soaked up the otherworldly beauty of the setting sun, as it gradually sank beyond the horizon.

When I arrived in Tachikawa, night had fallen, and the moon appeared in the sky — its countenance so pure and lovely that I wanted to lay my cheek against it. I composed a poem:

In the west, the majestic setting sun,

*In the east, the full moon glows radiant,
Dusk delightfully colors the heavens,
The serenity of this moment —
Together creating a magnificent painting
Of life without beginning.
My state of mind, too,
Is free and unfettered.*

This is the poem I wrote in my diary on May 11.

The SGI is like the sun. With the same vital force as the sun, it will continue ever spreading the Daishonin's teaching, advancing without rest! And it will continue just as surely to triumph!