

Our Evolving Selves: Embracing Change

THESE past few months, you may have noticed that I have focused on SGI President Ikeda's 1997 peace proposal, which was published in the April issue of *Living Buddhism*. Each time I read it, I find more ideas that are relevant to our movement of peace, culture and education, not just intellectually, but on a practical, day-to-day level. For instance, I can think of few subjects as difficult to embrace as the idea of change. Moving from the familiar and comfortable to a new concept or way of doing things is, for many, one of the most difficult things in the world. But, as we know, change is as inevitable as each day moving seamlessly into the next.

In looking at the evolution of our organization, we have witnessed many changes these past several years—from weekly discussion meetings to meetings held monthly in many places I've visited; from having to travel long distances for gatherings to just "walking down the block" (as we gradually implement the neighborhood system); from countless individuals involved in collecting our SGI-USA publications subscriptions to the current direct-mail system employed nationwide, and so on.

As I've listened to your voices throughout my travels across the country, I find that many of you look forward to and embrace these changes with enthusiasm, while others find them somewhat uncomfortable. In examining the changes my own life has undergone over the last fifty-odd years, I realize that when I was younger I anticipated and accepted change readily; as a youth, in general, I couldn't wait to "grow up." I relished exploration and discovery, learning new ways of doing things. My heart and mind were open and active.

I like to think that I'm still that way.

However, sometimes when I think I'm being very flexible, I am actually expressing my conviction that things should always be as I've known them to be. As an old saying goes, "When you're in a warm bath, you never want to get out." But all I need do is listen to my sons and daughter, who are now in their 20s. How quickly they can see beneath the obvious and find an unheard-of way to achieve an outcome. While I use words like *diversity* and *inclusiveness* and *equality*, as if they were somehow new concepts that we'll get to someday if we but work hard enough, I find that my children have been living those concepts for years; that they're fully integrated into their worldview. In other words, what I'm learning from my children is that rejecting change is an indication of inflexibility, which, to me, is the loss of a youthful spirit—no matter what our age. But where to begin to learn true flexibility?

In his 1997 peace proposal, President Ikeda writes:

The twentieth century has thus far been a time of obsessive and reckless pursuit above all of solutions to contradictions through social reform, that is, through remodeling of "external forms." Now the primary task we cannot avoid as we enter the twenty-first century is to attend to the revolution within ourselves, what I described [in his 1970 poem to youth] as "a sound revolution carried out within ... gradually and in an atmosphere of peace." I entrusted to this poem my strong belief that the point of departure for everything we attempt from now on must be the redirection of our primary goal. (April 1997 *Living Buddhism*, pp. 10–11)

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The answer to how to deal with change can be found in “a sound revolution carried out within.” Our determination to change from within—challenging our human revolution in a manner that is true to ourselves—as the key to changing the world outside is crucial to the tasks at hand, for, as novelist Chingiz Aitmatov of the former Soviet Union says: “Evolution demands more time and patience, more compromises than revolution. It requires the building and cultivating of happiness....” (Ibid., p. 11).

By giving sincere consideration to the diverse opinions of our membership in ever-improving our organization, we can develop a broad, flexible outlook and make stable progress toward construction and growth. For in practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we learn that the important thing is not how much knowledge of Buddhism we can accumulate, but how we can practice and make changes for the better in our daily lives and in the lives of others.

During his 1990 visit to the United States, President Ikeda told us:

Change, unceasing change, is one of the distinguishing characteristics of America. Change occurs more rapidly here than it does elsewhere. This could be said to be an indication of the vitality that this country possesses.

The late U.S. statesman Adlai Stevenson (1900–65) once said: “There is a New America every morning when I wake up. It is upon us whether we will it or not.”

Similarly, Buddhism holds that everything is in a constant state of flux. Thus, the question is whether we are to accept change passively and be swept away by it, or whether we are to take the lead and create positive changes on our own initiative. While conservatism and self-protection might be likened to winter, night and death, the spirit of pioneering and attempting to realize ideals evokes images of spring, morning and birth....In other words, we advance with hope and youthful vitality—the vital energy of spring, morning and life—throughout our entire existence. It is in enabling us to realize this limitless improvement in our lives that the greatness and brilliance of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism lies. (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 52)

The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, encouraged members attending a New Year’s gathering in 1948, saying:

Everything in the universe, from the heavenly bodies to the smallest creature, constantly changes. Nothing can be just as it was even a moment before. It is an illusion to think that you can remain the same. This being the case, what is most important is how you change, for better or for worse. If you do not constantly consider this fact, then you are practicing merely from habit and you have become completely indifferent to whether you are changing for better or for worse....

Faith is a practical activity to help you change rapidly for the better. The basic power to reform all phenomena in the universe is called Buddha.... Nichiren Daishonin further defined this power as Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and materialized this profound Law as the fundamental object of worship in the form of the Gohonzon for the sake of all posterity. (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 3, no. 5, p. 6)

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As our organization continues to evolve, with everyone's support I believe we can progress toward fulfilling our dream to make it the best it can be.

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