

YOUNG DAISAKU (1)
A Life of Hardship Leads to a Life of Conviction
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Daisaku Ikeda was born during one of the most turbulent periods in Japan's history, when that nation was in the midst of rapid industrial development and its transformation into a modern power. Throughout the early 20th century, Japan pursued a course of rapid industrialization and political westernization in hopes of attaining a status similar to the Western nations.

By the end of World War I, Japan was realizing its ambitions, and its sphere of influence throughout the Pacific was significant. Furthermore, the fragmentation of political authority in China was proving irresistible to Japanese imperialists. By the late 1920s, the government was pursuing an even more aggressive agenda in China.

Daisaku Ikeda was born on Jan. 2, 1928, as Japan was well on its way toward war. At the time of Daisaku's birth his father, Nenokichi, was 41 and his mother, Ichi, 33. He was their fifth child (the family would eventually have eight children — seven sons and one daughter).

The family cultivated and processed *nori*, an edible form of seaweed. Even at this point, just prior to the Great Depression and before Japanese imperialism took its heavy toll, life was very difficult for the family. Merely surviving meant that the entire family had to work hard at its business.

After World War II began, Ikeda's family, along with most Japanese people, lost almost all its material resources and was plunged into poverty without the means to provide for itself. The family was, for a time, even homeless.

In general today, young people in Japan and other affluent nations enjoy much more privileged and peaceful lives. It would be nice to be able to say that the horrors of violence and poverty no longer plague the world, but it is a sad truth that the hardships Ikeda endured — growing up in illness, in poverty and during a major war — resemble the hardships many young people still experience. In the '90s, violence and destruction are commonplace in far too many neighborhoods. And the struggles of absolute destitution and virtual homelessness touch the lives of far too many people, even in our privileged and peaceful society.

President Ikeda has urged us to learn from the lives of great women and men, to make lessons of their lives. He has also said that "the way in which a person spends his or her youth will in large part determine the course of the rest of his or her life." Descriptions of this early period of his life are available in essays Ikeda wrote under the English titles *My Recollections* and *Glass Children*. Further descriptions are available in his novelized account of the Soka Gakkai's history, *The Human Revolution* and *The New Human Revolution*.

In the coming months, I will be drawing from these sources to discuss more fully the circumstances of Ikeda's youth. In this series I want to think about how the severe hardships of his youth were a crucible to form his great character and conviction.

Great people are above all real people. Their greatness is not in their distance from humanity but in the decisions they made and the actions they took as human beings. I hope that we can glean valuable lessons and gain powerful inspiration from the youth of a great man of conviction whose experiences with the worst in life led him to seek the best, a great man of faith who, faced with experiences that ought to have driven him to despair, instead drove him to belief.

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