

Take Responsibility for Your Life

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the 1st Okinawa Executive Conference, held at the Okinawa Training Center, Onnason, Japan, Feb. 23.

First of all, I am happy to report that all activities and events during my stay in Hong Kong this past week were a great success. I express my deepest gratitude for the support and prayers of SGI members around the world during this visit.

On arriving in Okinawa, our group was welcomed by a brilliant full moon. The entire night sky was illuminated. Standing in the soft glow of the moonlight, I prayed for the safety and happiness of all who are struggling day and night for kosen-rufu.

Although this is a small gathering, I will say a few words as encouragement for our comrades in each region who are working so earnestly to spread Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Always in Excellent Spirits

I recently received a priceless, 90-volume set of the complete works of Tolstoy from Moscow State University. Work on this edition of Tolstoy's writings began the year I was born [1928, the centennial of Tolstoy's birth] and took 30 years to complete. It was an undertaking of such magnitude that it has been described as "a feat that could never be repeated."

Many have the image of Tolstoy as always wearing a dour, serious expression, but in fact he smiled and laughed a great deal. Mahatma Gandhi, too, who carried on a correspondence with Tolstoy, was known for his joviality, greeting all with his toothless grin. People of outstanding character, I have invariably found, always tend to be in excellent spirits.

'It's the Builder's Fault!'

There is an episode involving one of Tolstoy's sons, Ilya, when he was young. One day, the boy was given a cup and saucer that he had wanted for a long time. Overjoyed, he wished to show it to everyone. He rushed around the house almost beside himself with excitement. But between one room and the next there was a high doorsill. Ilya tripped over it; the cup went flying and was smashed to pieces.

The boy broke into loud sobs. When his mother scolded him, telling him that it was his fault for being careless, he got angry and tearfully retorted: "It's not my fault. It's the builder's fault! Why did he put a doorsill there?" Tolstoy, who overheard, roared with laughter. He never forgot these words.

From then on, whenever members of his family tried to justify themselves by blaming their mistakes on others, Tolstoy would grin and ask, "It's the builder's fault, right?"

For example, when one of his children tried to explain away poor grades by pointing at a hopeless teacher, Tolstoy shot back: "I see. It's the builder's fault."

When a child grumbled after accidentally plunging his horse into a swamp while riding in the woods, "No one ever told me there was a swamp there!" or when a child fell from a horse and complained, "The groom didn't fasten the saddle securely enough," Tolstoy chuckled and remarked: "That's right. No doubt it's the builder's fault." Whenever he said this, his children would turn bright red and look sheepishly at their feet.¹

Blaming Others Leads to Defeat

I'm sure most people would be amused by this anecdote about stumbling over a doorsill. But in fact, adults are apt to react in much the same way to failures or setbacks. For example, a merchant whose business is not doing well might say, "It's all because so-and-so wouldn't lend me any money." Or when kosen-rufu activities may have grown stagnant someone might blame this on the laziness of a particular leader. Or a person in a relationship punctuated by constant bickering and quarreling might think, "If only my partner were more understanding, I would try harder," while the other person thinks, "If only my partner would try harder, I would be more understanding."

There are also malicious people who not only put the blame for their mistakes on others, but who viciously attack and try to discredit others in a desperate attempt to camouflage their own actions or justify themselves. This is typical of many who abandoned faith and turned against former comrades.

Those who go through life constantly blaming their troubles on others will always be controlled and buffeted about by their environment. They will never achieve victory.

Those Who Do Their Best Need No Excuses

Buddhism expounds the principle of a life-moment possessing 3,000 realms. Fundamentally, everything that happens is a manifestation of our inner state of being or mind at each moment. This is perhaps the point that Tolstoy was trying to make.

In other words, don't make excuses. Take responsibility for your life — resolve to be victorious. If you allow yourself to be defeated, all the excuses in the world will get you nowhere. Defeat is defeat no matter how eloquently you try to justify yourself.

The important thing is to win where you are right now, to achieve victory without fail.

This is the way of life taught in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which expounds that the state of Buddhahood is eternal and inherent in our lives. This means holding fast to our faith and convictions to the end of our lives and fighting resolutely for truth and justice wherever we are, even in such dire adversity as being imprisoned for our beliefs.

Steadfast Daimoku Is the Key

No matter what obstacles we face, it is crucial that we transform the situation and realize victory right where we are. This is the way of a votary of the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Daishonin first began inscribing the Gohonzon for his followers when he was exiled to Sado Island. The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, attained a profound awakening to life's essence while in prison. They each transformed a place of great hardship and adversity into a place of supreme achievement and triumph. Right where they were, they lived true to their convictions and realized victory.

The Gohonzon, which actualizes the principle of a life-moment possessing 3,000 realms, enables us to fulfill our prayers. The power of daimoku is invincible. Through daimoku, there is no situation we cannot change, no obstacle we cannot surmount, no battle in kosen-rufu or daily life we cannot win. As long as we possess strong faith, we can, at every moment, change wherever we are into a Land of Tranquil Light.

With continuing economic recession afflicting many parts of the world, in this crucial phase of our movement approaching the 21st century, it is vital that we resolve firmly to be victorious in every aspect of our lives, to win through faith.

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Evidence of a ‘Defiled Time’

To get an idea of the Daishonin’s frame of mind while he was enduring severe persecution on Sado, I will read a passage from “The Birth of Kyo’o.”² The daughter of Shijo Kingo, Kyo’o Gozen is thought to have been named by Nichiren Daishonin. Her name means “king of the sutras,” a synonym for the Lotus Sutra.

In this Goshō, addressed to his trusted follower Shijo Kingo, the Daishonin writes:

Ours is called a defiled time, a troubled age. Moreover, there is clear evidence all around us of how disordered society is. As a result, in this present existence, people are destined to suffer the disaster of warfare and fall into the path of Anger and in their future lives fall into the evil paths [of Hell, Hunger and Animality]. There is no doubt about this. It is written, however, that those who believe in the Lotus Sutra will definitely attain Buddhahood.

As you know, the sutras predict that such disasters [as foreign invasion, internal strife and so on] are bound to occur. Hence I have continually warned people of this day and night. Not that they would heed my warning, however. There is no reason why I should have incurred punishment for doing so. But regardless of the age, it is typical of those headed for ruin to refuse to take good advice. Ultimately, therefore, my words will continue to be disregarded and society will hurtle toward collapse. It is solely because the country has persecuted the emissary of the Lotus Sutra and Shakyamuni Buddha that it now incurs the onslaughts of Bonten, Taishaku, the gods of the sun and moon, the four heavenly kings and other heavenly deities.

Even though society may fall into ruin, there will come a time when people throughout Japan will chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Therefore, you should exert even greater efforts to talk with those who disparage [the Mystic Law], however disinclined they may be to pronounce [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra]. Should you manage to survive these times, be sure to watch and see what happens.

Nevertheless, no matter how much people may chant [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo], if they are hostile to Nichiren they are destined first to fall into the hell of incessant suffering. Then, after a lapse of countless *kalpas* [spent atoning for their slanderous acts], they will become Nichiren’s disciples and attain Buddhahood. (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 1123)

The Goshō is a clear mirror reflecting the essence of life and society. A society that persecutes the Buddha’s emissaries, Nichiren Daishonin declares, is sure to “anger the Buddhist gods” — to disrupt the protective functions of the universe — and as a result decline. He also indicates that no matter how corrupt the age, even if society is plunged into turmoil and confusion, the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law will be accomplished without fail. He stresses that this is precisely the time to exert greater efforts to tell people about the Mystic Law.

Our ‘Only Memory of This World’

The world today is certainly in a state of disarray. Society has lost all standards, all vision, all hope. People have lost perspective on what happiness and misery mean. The only absolute thing in this turbulent world is the eternal, unchanging law of Buddhism. Those who tenaciously persevere in faith will definitely succeed in establishing happy lives.

We can transform all our hardships and sufferings into causes for happiness, changing poison into medicine. All our efforts will become the fuel that propels us toward a state of life in which we enjoy unsurpassed happiness lifetime after lifetime. They will become

joyful memories of our existence in this world.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “Single-mindedly chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and urge others to do the same; that will remain as the only memory of your present life in this human world” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 38). As emissaries of the original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, let us redouble our efforts in faith. Let us advance with great joy and jubilation along the noble path of life’s supreme victory.

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1. This episode is from *Torusutoi — Tamashii no Sho* (Tolstoy — Book of the Heart), compiled and translated into Japanese by Toshio Yazumi (Tokyo: Kawano Seikokan, 1938), pp. 45–46.
2. This Goshō was written by Nichiren Daishonin at age 51, in 1272, on Sado Island. It was sent to Shijō Kingo in reply to a letter he wrote informing the Daishonin of the birth of his daughter Kyo’o.