

## No Mountain Is More Noble

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech on the first day of the All-Japan Representative Leaders Conference, Jan. 31.*

Nichiren Daishonin states, “I will be the pillar of Japan” and, “All other troubles are no more to me than dust before the wind” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 175 ). Our spiritual pillar is faith and the advancement of kosen-rufu. The ultimate crisis, therefore, would be the collapse of our movement. All other hardships that we might face pale by comparison; they are like “dust before the wind.”

There are many vast mountain ranges in the world. I have flown across the Alps of Europe, gazed upon the Himalayas of Asia, flown over the Rocky Mountains of North America and the Andes of South America on great expeditions to widely spread the Mystic Law throughout the entire world in accord with the Daishonin’s decree.

In August 1861, a young man, the 21-year-old English mountaineer Edward Whymper (1840–1911), challenged the towering Alpine peak known as the Matterhorn.

With the majesty of a colossal pyramid, the Matterhorn soars to a height of 14,692 feet. Since ancient times people had feared the mountain, believing it to be inhabited by demons. The common belief was that it could never be scaled. And of all the Alps’ many mountains, the treacherous peak of the Matterhorn continued to defy the best attempts of mountaineers to reach its summit.

The young Whymper boldly resolved to climb this mountain and succeed where no one had succeeded before. His first attempt failed. But he summoned forth a dauntless and invincible spirit, resolving not to give up until either he had conquered the mountain or the mountain had conquered him.

### **After Seven Attempts, Brilliant Victory**

Year after year, the young man courageously pitted himself against the formidable peak. On one attempt, he got within 1,420 feet of the summit but then lost his footing and fell 200 feet, sustaining severe injuries. Another time, he was thwarted by a rockfall and was forced to descend. He made seven attempts to climb the mountain, and seven times suffered bitter defeat. Still, Whymper did not give up.

By challenging an enormous goal head-on, youth can break through their limitations and realize tremendous growth.

On July 14, 1865, on his eighth attempt, Whymper finally made it to the summit, realizing his dream at long last. He and the six other members of his party stood victoriously on the peak. It was a moment of brilliant triumph: “We made it! We reached our goal!”

This was the glowing achievement of a young man of 25. I hope the youth of the SGI will leave behind many such records of victory for which they can feel a genuine sense of pride and satisfaction.

As a young men’s division member, I earnestly strove to fulfill my duties at each successive level of leadership, whether it was as a group chief or a district leader. Whatever my role, whatever my position, I always made it a point to fully carry out my responsibilities and realize victory.

Forty-five years ago, in January 1952, at age 24, I was appointed a chapter staff of Tokyo’s Kamata Chapter. At the time, propagation activities throughout Japan were not

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making much headway. “Accomplishing kosen-rufu will take thousands of years at this rate,” lamented the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda. Therefore, as his disciple, I took the lead in ascending the mountain of propagation, of sharing and teaching others about the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The first chapter chief and chapter women’s division chief of Kamata Chapter were Takashi Koizumi [later the Soka Gakkai’s general director] and Shizuko Shiraki, respectively. At the time of my appointment, I vowed to make Mr. Koizumi the greatest chapter chief in all of Japan.

I began by personally challenging myself to introduce people to the Daishonin’s Buddhism. I stood up and took action. I visited all my neighbors in the apartment house where I lived and talked to them about Buddhism. To this day, I continue to receive fond notes from people who began practicing at my urging at that time.

During February, the month after my appointment, Kamata Chapter set a new propagation record nationwide of 201 households in one month, breaking through the 100-household mark that had long been thought the maximum possible in a single month. This achievement inspired members around Japan and became the impetus toward accomplishing President Toda’s dream of a membership of 750,000 households.

The passion and power of youth are the eternal driving forces behind the Soka Gakkai and the SGI’s development.

As a leader, it is vital that you first take action yourself, that you challenge your personal targets. To urge others to make efforts while doing nothing yourself is deceitful and underhanded. You cannot attain Buddhahood.

Only to the extent that you yourself pray, tell others about Buddhism and spread the Mystic Law will you be protected by Bonten and Taishaku, the protective forces of the universe. Only to that extent will great life force, wisdom, benefit and compassion well forth from your life.

Returning to Edward Whymper and his comrades, on their descent, four of the seven-member party fell to their deaths. Later, looking back on this tragedy that struck so soon after their moment of glory, Whymper observed sorrowfully that “a momentary negligence may destroy the happiness of a lifetime.”<sup>1</sup>

It is doubly important that, as leaders of kosen-rufu responsible for protecting and watching over many irreplaceable children of the Buddha, we are never careless or negligent in any area.

## **Elevating All People’s Lives**

Please be confident that the more you work for the Law and for others in the spirit of “exerting a hundred million eons of effort in a single moment of life” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 790), the closer you are to reaching the summit of Buddhahood.

President Toda taught that kosen-rufu means to realize true happiness and peace in the world by elevating the life-condition of all humanity to the highest possible level. No peak is more grand or shines with more eternal glory and hope than the summit of kosen-rufu.

It is now 50 years since I first met President Toda. Countless are the perilous peaks I have ascended over this time. And I have not a single regret.

Now I call out to my disciples, “Scale the mountain of the new century!”

Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly declared that he was the mainstay and pillar of Japan. He boldly pronounced [to Hei no Saemon and the hundreds of warriors who had come to arrest him]: “Nichiren is the pillar of Japan! If you lose Nichiren, you will be toppling the pillar that supports Japan” (MW-4, 228), and [again addressing Hei no Saemon]: “Nichiren is the pillar and beam of Japan. If you lose me, you will be toppling the pillar of Japan!” (MW-3,

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171).

Seven hundred and twenty-six years ago [at the time of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution in 1271], Hei no Saemon, then one of the most powerful political figures in Japan, led a group of several hundred soldiers to arrest Nichiren Daishonin at his humble abode. Behind this development was the infamous priest Ryokan, who was bent on exacting revenge for the loss of prestige he had suffered because the Daishonin had exposed his evil nature and corrupt lifestyle. Ryokan had plaintively demanded of those in power that something be done about the Daishonin. The country's rulers had their own agenda in persecuting him: They could not bear to see this priest who had been so critical of them steadily gain more and more followers.

The Daishonin's prediction that the Mongols would launch an invasion against Japan had come true and, as a result, the Daishonin's following rapidly increased. Amid the fear and confusion that gripped the land, people must have felt that only the Daishonin could clarify the proper path for the country to take. However, at a time when the country's rulers should have humbly listened to the Daishonin's advice, they tried instead to do away with him.

The fact that Hei no Saemon brought with him a force of several hundred armed men to apprehend the Daishonin and his few companions betrays a psychology that can only be called deranged.

With complete composure, the Daishonin declared in a booming voice to the soldiers who had ransacked his hut: "See how insanely Hei no Saemon is acting! You all have just toppled the pillar of Japan!" (MW-1, 178) The soldiers reacted to his words with surprise and confusion and grew pale. The thought that they were perhaps making a terrible mistake undoubtedly crossed their minds.

*The Daishonin writes, "When they saw me standing before the fierce arm of the law unafraid, they must have realized that they were in the wrong, for the color drained from their faces" (MW-1, 178-79).*

It was not the Daishonin who grew pallid with fear. On the contrary, it was those who had come to arrest him! The lesson here is that justice must be accompanied by the courage to proclaim the truth.

True to the Daishonin's words, the Kamakura regime fell into rapid decline thereafter and eventually collapsed. Hei no Saemon was later executed and his family wiped out. Judging from his irrational behavior, we might conclude that Hei no Saemon had, by the time of the Daishonin's arrest, already reaped severe consequences for his actions against Buddhism. It is clear that he was no longer exercising sound judgment or reasoning.

## **The Hope of the World**

Exactly 600 years after these events [the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Sado Exile, and the Daishonin revealing his true identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day], Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, was born [in 1871] in Niigata Prefecture, which includes the island of Sado. Mr. Makiguchi established the Soka Gakkai, a wondrous organization that appeared in accord with the Buddha's will. In these events we see a mystic rhythm at work.

President Makiguchi said, "In the final analysis, unless we rebuild ourselves from the very core of our being through a religious revolution, there will never be any cure for society's ills." The Soka Gakkai, President Toda proclaimed, is the pillar of Japan. And now the SGI is the hope of the world.

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All of you who have pledged to live your lives together with this great organization, the SGI, are truly wondrous; you each possess an unfathomably profound mission.

Making this your greatest source of pride, please become people who are trusted and respected, and who can become models of outstanding leadership for others.

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1. Edward Whymper, *Scrambles Amongst the Alps* (London: John Murray, 1871), p. 334.

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