

SGI DEPUTY PRESIDENT EINOSUKE AKIYA'S GUIDANCE Illuminate the Lives of All Those Around Us

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Nichiren Daishonin says, “The various sufferings of all humankind are the sufferings of the one person Nichiren” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 758). A Buddha faithfully tries to take on the sufferings of others as if they were his or her own. This is the Buddha’s compassionate way.

SGI President Ikeda has often stressed how important it is for leaders to understand the subtle inner workings of the human heart. The capacity to cherish others, to share their sorrows and pains, and to instill hope and courage is based on the depth of your understanding. This is an essential component of leadership.

When it comes to empathy, it is crucial to remember that the first thing people want from others is a genuine understanding, not of their happiness but of their suffering. Nothing can match the warmth and compassion you feel when someone helps shoulder the weight of your sufferings — sufferings no one else could relate to — and offers heartfelt encouragement.

Only if we have fallen ill ourselves can we truly sympathize with a person’s struggle against health problems. And only if we have experienced the bitterness of poverty firsthand can we relate to the poor’s hopelessness and anguish.

Simply experiencing hardship and suffering, however, does not ensure that you’ll forge great character. Even if you have confronted formidable difficulties, if you are egotistical and self-centered, you might actually take cruel delight in trampling on the feelings of others.

The key, then, is to have concern for others, to regard others’ sufferings as your own and be willing to do everything in your power to help alleviate those sufferings. This desire to remove sufferings and impart joy is Buddhist compassion; leaders of kosen-rufu must have the capacity to put this spirit into practice.

In 1952, Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, formed a youth division training group called the Suiko-kai [literally, Water Margin Group]. It met twice a month to discuss the Chinese epic *The Water Margin*¹ and other great works of world literature. Once, when the group was studying *The Water Margin*, President Toda focused on the protagonist Song Jiang, who emerges as the leader of a group of daring heroes.

Song Jiang is described as a man of medium height and build and dark complexion. Having no outstanding talent in either literary or military arts and prone to indecision, he appears to be an ordinary person. Why, then, do so many heroes gather around him? President Toda suggested that it was because of Song Jiang’s special ability to see into the very depths of people’s hearts. He was honored for his knack in recognizing talent in others and for his wholehearted love and respect for each person.

In his profound understanding of others, Song Jiang was second to none. There is a saying, “A man is ready to die for one who appreciates him.” Nothing is more inspiring than struggling alongside someone who truly appreciates and values you.

Nichiren Daishonin clearly perceived both the strengths and weaknesses of each of his followers and encouraged them accordingly. For example, he cautions Shijo Kingo in great detail about controlling his temper. By contrast, in many letters to Nanjo Tokimitsu, rather than offer meticulous warnings, he encourages the youth to fully and freely exert himself in faith. The Daishonin was a leader of great compassion who completely understood the

subtleties of the human heart.

In the Goshō, the Daishōnin writes: “When praised, one does not consider his personal risk, and when criticized, he can recklessly cause his own ruin. Such is the way of common mortals” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1, p. 92). To be a great leader, one must thoroughly believe in people and praise their strengths. Though others’ faults and weaknesses may be immediately apparent, if we endlessly point these out, we will most likely end up hurting one another.

A true leader always strives to raise capable people by bringing out their strengths. By praising people’s strong points, you can open their hearts, and they can develop self-confidence and advance.

In short, leaders’ success in raising capable people depends entirely on their own state of life. The branches of a great tree will flourish only to the extent that the tree can sink its roots into the earth. Similarly, we can only develop the towering character to raise capable people if we personally cultivate deep roots of the heart.

April is the time to make a fresh start. With the radiance of the Mystic Law let us continually strive to become leaders with the abundant compassion to illuminate the lives of all those around us.

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1. *The Water Margin* (Shui-hu chuan; Jpn Suiko-den): a romantic tale dating from the Northern Sung dynasty (960– 1127) about the folk hero Song Jiang and the group of bandits that he leads. Many Chinese versions of the story exist. One has been published in English under the title *Outlaws of the Marsh*, trans. Sidney Shapiro (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1993). Another English edition is titled *All Men Are Brothers*.