

## Opening the Way With Courage

*The following is SGI President Ikeda's message sent to the Okinawa Women's Division Executive Conference, held at the Okinawa Training Center in Onnason, Okinawa, Feb. 26.*

Our network for kosen-rufu continues to expand steadily throughout the world. And women — especially women's division members — are without a doubt the driving force behind this great momentum.

You, the women's division members of Okinawa, uniting together with division chiefs Tamae Nakama and Sadako Hisayama, have been working hard to contribute to human happiness and peace through the ideals of Buddhism. Through your tireless efforts — many of you travel long distances on foot to encourage members — you have forged a path of brilliant victory. Nichiren Daishonin surely knows of your sincere devotion. Boundless benefit and good fortune will pervade your lives throughout eternity. Your wonderful unity is truly a model for women's division members throughout Asia.

### **A Woman of Great Distinction**

Speaking of women in Asia, I will always remember my meeting with Varsha Das, an SGI chapter chief in India. Ms. Das, who holds the important post of editor in chief and joint director of India's National Book Trust, has shown tremendous actual proof in society.

Ms. Das is active in a variety of fields. She is a noted authority on the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941); a linguist fluent in many languages; a journalist and an art critic. Holding a doctorate in education, she has also written a number of children's books and worked to improve adult literacy.

On the same day that the Bharat Soka Gakkai General Meeting was held last November, *The Pioneer*, one of New Delhi's leading English-language newspapers, carried a feature titled, "She treads the middle path," about Ms. Das and her activities. In the article, Ms. Das joyfully spoke of the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

### **Help Those Who Have Suffered Most Become the Happiest**

On a visit to Japan last year, Ms. Das presented me with a precious gift: a handwritten letter by Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948). Her mother, Labhu Mehta, received the Feb. 21, 1933, letter from Gandhi while he was in prison. Gandhi was then 63 and Ms. Das' mother, 15.

The young Labhu's parents struggled together with Gandhi in the movement for Indian independence. When he wrote this letter, Gandhi was incarcerated in Yeravda Jail in Poona [also Pune, a city to the southeast of Bombay]. The authorities were intent on oppressing and hurting this noble champion of justice.

While in prison, however, Gandhi launched a new campaign that has been hailed as one of the greatest social reform movements in history. He founded an organization whose aim was the liberation of those most severely discriminated against under India's caste system, and he started a paper called *Harijan*. The word *harijan* means "children of God," and expresses his burning inner conviction that the most oppressed must be treasured most highly.

Gandhi, while at the very center of such a momentous historic struggle, took the time to write a letter of encouragement to the young Labhu Mehta. A genuine leader is ardently committed to raising youth, to planting seeds of future victory in their hearts.

In the letter, which is written in Gujarati [today one of India's 15 main languages],

Gandhi is extremely cordial, remarking, “A rural fellow like me finds your ordinary language so good.” And responding with sincerity to a point that the young woman had sought his advice on, he writes, “I cannot tell you anything about your choice, so I can only say that it can be praised after seeing the result.” These are strict words; but at the same time they are words of profound trust.

The important thing is to produce positive results. Once you set a goal, you have to produce results without fail. Gandhi did not dictate to the young woman but watched quietly and supportively over her activities and achievements.

### **Live Each Moment to the Fullest**

Gandhi also cautions in the letter, “Make good use of every moment and keep an account.” Life is precious and our time on earth limited. How can we put our time to the best possible use? How can we use it to create the greatest possible value? We must not miss opportunities or let time slip through our fingers.

Buddhism stresses the importance of a single life-moment (*ichinen*). The term “Thus Come One,” another name for Buddha, means “truth manifesting itself at each moment.” It signifies the dynamic activity of life from moment to moment. Everything depends on a single life-moment. The power of faith enables us to get the most out of every moment of our lives, to keep advancing, to create value from everything, and to steer everything in a positive direction.

Gandhi further offers the penetrating observation that “a real lioness” can always “find the straight way out even in the midst of her sufferings.” What wonderful words!

Engraving his message in her heart, the young woman struggled dauntlessly and led a life of splendid achievement.

“[My mother] chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo till the last moment of her life,” Ms. Das wrote to me. “Today, she will be very happy to see that precious letter [from Mahatma Gandhi] in your hands.” When I read these words, I pressed my palms together in deep respect and veneration.

Many thoughtful and conscientious people in India, a land with a rich spiritual heritage, look to the SGI with high expectations as an organization that is carrying on Gandhi’s spirit. Let us redouble our efforts to sincerely reply to this trust.

*Dr. B. N. Pande, a direct disciple of Mahatma Gandhi and vice chairman of the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti in New Delhi, has remarked that while Shakyamuni appealed to people to struggle with a spirit of nonviolence, it was Gandhi who actualized this ideal in the form of a broad popular movement. He added that now it is the SGI, under the leadership of President Ikeda, which is carrying on this “struggle of the spirit” and developing a nonviolent movement against the oppression of war. Noting that the SGI leader’s philosophy is reaching the hearts of many people throughout the world, Dr. Pande predicted that in the future many successors to Gandhi’s legacy would appear.<sup>1</sup>*

Along with the handwritten letter from Gandhi, Ms. Das presented me with a book of Gandhi’s quotations. Among them are two that I would like to share with you today in closing:

If one gives way to fear, even truth will have to be suppressed. The golden rule is to act fearlessly upon what one believes to be right.<sup>2</sup>

Our faith should be like an ever-burning lamp which not only gives us light but also illuminates the surroundings.<sup>3</sup>

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1. From Dr. Pande's speech on Dec. 9, 1993, at the symposium commemorating the publication of Dr. N. Radhakrishnan's book, *Daisaku Ikeda: In Pursuit of a New Humanity*, in New Delhi, India.
2. *Great Lives, Great Words — Mahatma Gandhi*, ed. R. P. Dhasmana (New Delhi: Publications Division of India's Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1994), p. 22.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 16.

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