

Advancing Together on the Front Lines

The following is SGI President Ikeda's message to the Tokyo Chapter Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, Tokyo, March 8.

To all of you, praiseworthy chapter chiefs and chapter women's division chiefs who are the mainstays and driving force of our great organization in Tokyo, I express my deepest and most heartfelt appreciation for your constant efforts.

I know being chosen to fulfill the important leadership responsibilities for the chapters in your respective areas at this crucial time is a great and daunting challenge. Yet at the same time it is a source of joy and pride that surely nothing else can match. All of your devoted efforts will become a golden history for you and your families and the cause for boundless good fortune throughout eternity. Please continue to advance with untiring good cheer and in high spirits.

In honor of today's meeting, I would like to share with you a historical anecdote about leadership.

Long ago, during the period of feudal warfare known as the Warring States period (1467–1568), Edo (now Tokyo) was not the most important city of eastern Japan. That distinction fell to Odawara (in present-day Kanagawa Prefecture).

Until Odawara fell to the invading warlord Toyotomi Hideyoshi, it enjoyed great prosperity. Its first ruler of that period was Hojo Soun, followed by Hojo Ujitsuna and Hojo Ujiyasu in succession. During their rule, Odawara was more bustling and prosperous than Kyoto, the imperial capital. Culture and the arts flourished, and entertainers and artists from all over Japan flocked to Odawara. It was also an active trade center, with a substantial Chinese community.

Judging the Ability of Others

But the third Hojo ruler of Odawara, Ujiyasu, was not optimistic about his domain's future. There is a story that illuminates Ujiyasu's views.¹ One day, he was eating with his son, Ujimasa, who would succeed him as the fourth Hojo ruler. Suddenly Ujiyasu put down his chopsticks and lamented in a voice choked with tears: "Ah! The Hojo dynasty will end with me!"

The others in the room were taken aback. What did he mean? Ujiyasu replied: "My son just poured soup over his rice twice. He poured it once and ate some, then poured it again, saying 'Not enough soup.' Why didn't he know from the start just how much soup he should pour on his rice?"

"He eats it twice a day, and still he doesn't know the proper amount of soup to pour on his rice. How pitiful! How can such a person properly judge people's capacity, something that requires a great deal more discernment? Will he know which person is best in what role? In our age of warring states, one cannot survive without superior personnel.

"If I were to die tomorrow, this domain would certainly be invaded by some shrewd general from another territory."

The way someone eats his or her dinner may seem insignificant, but a master warrior can grasp the character and ability of others from just such details. This is because such an individual lives each day in utter earnestness, never wasting a single word or gesture, honing his or her entire being into the greatest asset for victory.

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The Legacy of the Pioneering SGI Members

Just as Ujiyasu predicted, during the reigns of the fourth and fifth Hojo rulers, Ujimasa and Ujinao, Odawara fell to the forces of Toyotomi Hideyoshi. The last two Hojos were unable to read the current of their times and, overestimating their power, faced Hideyoshi head on and perished.

What was the crucial difference between father and son? Up to the third generation, the Hojo rulers had been severely tested by circumstances over which they triumphed. The first Hojo, Soun, arrived in Odawara, where he had no foothold or support, and fought to become ruler of Izu and Sagami. The second-generation Hojo (Ujitsuna) worked hard alongside Soun, establishing the foundation for the fief's government. The third-generation Hojo (Ujiyasu) was a brilliant warrior. He fought on the battlefield from the time he was 16, never losing any of the 36 battles in his lifetime. Though he was the general of his forces, he always rode in the vanguard and was covered with battle scars to prove it, including two large scars on his face. He was a brave warrior who never showed his back to the enemy.

But the fourth Hojo (Ujimasa) was raised from the start as the heir to a feudal lord. He was by no means unintelligent, and he was even said to be superior to the young heirs of other domains, thanks mainly to his father's rigorous training. But in spite of that, he had never really suffered or worked hard for anything. At the same time, the retainers of the Hojo clan had grown lazy and arrogant, proud that they were part of the wealthy Odawara domain.

This story shows that the leaders who laid the foundations fought valiantly on the front lines with their forces, working together with them to achieve a shared goal.

In a sense, this is a manifestation of what in Buddhism we call the spirit of "true cause." It is the spirit of a leader uniting with the people and moving forward toward a shared aim — a future victory of "true effect."

Napoleon once said that a leader is one who delivers hope. A genuine leader is one who points to hope and leads people toward it.

Lead Versus Command

However, the nature of the Hojo leaders changed from the fourth generation on once the domain came to enjoy security and stability through the hard work of previous generations.

Although there were probably many other factors involved, I think we can say that there was a directional shift from leaders and followers facing in the same direction together to the leader facing in the direction of his followers. It is the difference between leading and commanding. In Buddhist terms, the latter is a state of attachment to true effect; one places oneself in the position of perfection, in contradistinction to others.

This can happen in any organization. The leaders no longer work in the spirit of doing things together with the members; instead, they stand above the members and order them around. They use others cleverly so as not to get hurt themselves. This will stop any organization from growing and developing.

This is a key underlying cause of the rise and fall of civilizations witnessed throughout human history. Great dramas have been set in motion by something as subtle as an individual's will.

The later Hojo rulers of Odawara are widely believed to have grown complacent and overconfident because of their past victories and the inviolability of their castle walls. They were also confident that if trouble arose they could rely on the support of Tokugawa Ieyasu and Date Masamune, two other powerful feudal lords of the day. Their information about Hideyoshi and his forces was far from sufficient. The Hojo clan's leading advisors in later

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generations were stubborn and conservative, which led to the clan's reliance on a passive defensive strategy. There are also accounts of Hojo clan retainers who switched their allegiance because of the fifth-generation ruler Ujinao's thoughtless remarks. In addition, rivalries among the clan's more accomplished retainers led to a lack of unity on the Hojo side.

The Future Awaits!

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of true cause. The mentor is the true effect and the disciples are the true cause. Based on this principle, mentor and disciples together eternally practice the Mystic Law of true cause.

Consequently, if one adopts the spirit of true effect, believing that one has already achieved everything necessary or that it's all right to leave the hard work up to others, then one can never hope to receive faith's true benefit. In his writings, we often find the Daishonin urging his followers to exert still greater effort. He would instruct even those of many decades of practice to strengthen their faith more than ever.

If leaders go among the members with the determination that they will henceforth apply themselves as never before to their Buddhist practice and advance together with the members while giving hope, benefit will well forth profusely in their lives. The SGI will also continue to develop and grow forever.

In particular, unity is going to be increasingly important from now on. I would like all of you to rigorously protect this one and only organization in the world dedicated to the realization of kosen-rufu, based on cooperation, bringing out each member's potential and working together harmoniously and in a spirit of warm camaraderie.

Faith of True Cause Brings Inexhaustible Benefits

In "The Life Span of the Thus Come One" (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, we find the passage, "single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha / not hesitating even if it costs them their lives" (LS16, 230).² Nichiren Daishonin says of this passage, "I, Nichiren, have called forth Buddhahood from within my life by living this sentence" (MW-2, 205). I will not discuss the most profound meaning of this passage now, but it tells us that when we followers of Nichiren Daishonin wish with all our hearts to see the Buddha, with a faith so strong that we don't begrudge our lives, the state of Buddhahood manifests itself within us.

There is no Buddhahood nor true benefit aside from the Buddhist practice of the true cause of "single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha." For us, that desire is our unwavering commitment in faith to widely spread Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, to make our own environment a Buddha land, to carry out our personal human revolution, and also help others become happy.

I hope that all our leaders of kosen-rufu will always be leaders who "single-mindedly desire to see the Buddha," leaders who embody the principle of true cause.

Having once been an acting chapter chief myself, I know how demanding and exhausting your responsibilities can be. I nevertheless hope that all of you, the chapter leaders of our great organization in Tokyo, will solidly unite to protect and assist our members and continue your tireless efforts to advance the kosen-rufu movement.

I will continue to pray even more earnestly for your good health. Please take care!

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1. This anecdote appears in the *Odawara Hojo-ki* (Chronicle of the Hojos of Odawara), trans. Masanao Kishi (into modern Japanese) (Tokyo: Kyoiku-sha, 1996), pp. 221–23.
2. *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). LS is followed by the chapter and page numbers.

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