

## Read the Goshō! Take Action!

*SGI President gave the following speech at the 3rd Nationwide Young Men's and Young Women's Division Leaders Meeting, at the Soka International Friendship Hall in Sendagaya, Tokyo, March 24.*

Brass Band members, thanks for your wonderful performance!

*The Tokyo Wind Orchestra performed Edward Elgar's march "Pomp and Circumstance" op. 39 and the Soka Gakkai song "Ifu Dodo no Uta" (Song of Indomitable Dignity).*

We are graced with a wonderful full moon tonight. We could call this the Full Moon Leaders Meeting!

The essential phase of youth division activities has now begun. The youth division members have grown tremendously. The bright, golden moon above seems to be smiling upon us, delighting at the solid future that lies ahead for the SGI in the 21st century.

As you make your way home tonight, my young friends, pause to gaze up at the night sky and let your heart communicate with the moon in wordless dialogue. Perhaps you might compose a poem as your journal entry for today. I want you to possess such a poetic spirit.

### **The Buddha and the Devil**

A Buddhist text describes an episode that took place when Shakyamuni was at the Bamboo Grove Monastery.<sup>1</sup> In Buddhism, a monastery is for engaging in Buddhist practice. In modern terms, it would correspond to our SGI community centers and training centers. We might dub this hall tonight the Full Moon Monastery.

Shakyamuni addresses practitioners at the Bamboo Grove Monastery as follows:

Brief...is the life of men — a matter of flitting hence, having its sequel elsewhere. To be wrought is the good; to be lived is the holy life. To him that is born there is no not-dying. He...who lives long, lives but a hundred years or but little longer.<sup>2</sup>

Human life is brief — sooner or later we all die. Therefore, Shakyamuni urges, we should value our time, using it to accomplish good and advance in Buddhist practice.

Barely are these words out of his mouth when Mara — the personification of all evil — appears and proceeds to contradict everything that Shakyamuni has just said. When a Buddha appears, someone is sure to appear in opposition. Buddhism, after all, is a struggle between the Buddha and the devil, the negative functions inherent in life itself. Had it not been for Devadatta, an evil monk who abandoned his practice, turned against his teacher, Shakyamuni, and severely persecuted him, Shakyamuni could not be called a Buddha.

Buddhism is concerned with winning. When we battle a powerful enemy, either we will triumph or be defeated — there is no middle ground. Battling life's negative functions is an essential part of Buddhism. By being victorious in this struggle, we become Buddhas. So we have to win. Moreover, Buddhism ensures that we can definitely do so.

Deception, cunning and tactics, which are so prevalent in the world, are completely ineffectual in this vital struggle against negativity. That is because this struggle is governed by the strict law of cause and effect.

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## Recognize the Devil

Mara the evil one speaks in verse as follows:

*Long time have sons of men on earth to live.  
Let the good man herein no trouble take.  
As babe with milk replete, so let him act.  
There is no present coming on of death.*<sup>3</sup>

Mara's argument is that because life is long, we need not be careful with our time. We should use our abundance of years to avidly pursue life's enjoyments. He says that because death will not come, we ought to conduct ourselves with the leisure and contentment of a sleeping baby who has plenty of milk. This is the exact opposite of what Shakyamuni has just taught.

Some among Shakyamuni's followers may have been swayed by these words. Human beings tend to be foolishly susceptible to the snares of negative influences. Certainly, young people have a tendency to believe they will be forever young, just as Mara tries to assert. They give little, if any, thought to their mortality. They feel secure that they have their whole lives ahead of them.

In response to Mara's seductive whisperings, Shakyamuni says:

*Brief time have sons of men on earth to live.  
Let the good man herein much trouble take.  
Acting as were his turban all a-blaze.  
There is no man to whom death cometh not.*<sup>4</sup>

Human life is short, he says. Therefore, all upright people should regard time as precious and devote themselves earnestly to Buddhist practice. In other words, they should value the Law more than their lives. They should practice with the spirit of not begrudging one's life.

Shakyamuni urges his followers to strive passionately — desperately almost, like someone whose head is on fire — because life passes by in an instant. He exhorts them to do good, to create good causes, reminding them that death is inescapable.

When Mara hears this, he realizes that Shakyamuni has recognized him. Crestfallen, he retreats in disappointment. Mara is no match for reason.

Once you see a devilish function for what it is, you can defeat it. On the other hand, if you react with fear, if you are swayed, its negative force will only grow stronger.

## A Weak Self and a Strong Self

Mara represents our inner weakness and negativity, which function to obstruct our Buddhist practice. We have both a weak self and a strong self — and the two are completely different. If we allow our weak side to dominate, we will be defeated. The thought "I am still young and have a lot of time, so I can relax and take life easy" is the seductive whispering of Mara, a function of our weakness.

Both the Buddha and the devil exist within our lives. Ultimately, our battle is with ourselves. Whether in our Buddhist practice or in our activities in society, whether in history, politics or the economy, everything boils down to a struggle between positive and negative forces. These are all manifestations of the Mystic Law, or *myoho* — *myo* representing Buddhahood, and *ho*, the nine worlds. The Mystic Law embodies the mutual possession of the ten worlds, or the truth that Buddhahood contains the nine worlds and

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that the nine worlds contain Buddhahood.

All phenomena are functions or manifestations of the principles of the mutual possession of the ten worlds, the principle of the hundred worlds and thousand factors, and the principle of a single life-moment possessing 3,000 realms. Everything reflects the causality of the ten worlds. It is a struggle between good and evil. It is a desperate tug of war between happiness and misery, between progress and decline.

Many things happen in life. There are joyous days and times of suffering. Sometimes unpleasant things occur. But that's what makes life interesting.

The dramas we encounter are part and parcel of being human. If we experienced no change or drama in our lives, if nothing unexpected ever happened, we would merely be automatons, our lives unbearably monotonous and dull.

Please develop a strong self so that you can enact your drama with confidence and poise in the face of whatever vicissitudes you may encounter.

### **Reading the Goshō Each Day**

One thing I especially want to say tonight is, "Let's read the Goshō regularly!" Even just a little is fine. Even a single sentence. Just opening the Goshō is a start. At any rate, let's strive to read the Daishōnin's writings. Get into the habit of turning to the Goshō while you are young.

The Goshō is filled with illumination. When we open its pages, we are bathed in the sun of life and its rays of philosophy. The Goshō is Nichiren Daishōnin's voice. It is the collection of his golden words and teachings.

So it's important to have the spirit to study the Goshō, to open it up. Even if you forget what you've read, something profound will be engraved in the depths of your life.

Treasuring the Goshō doesn't mean never touching it, leaving it closed all the time! The Daishōnin teaches that embracing the Gohonzon is itself enlightenment. Having faith in the Gohonzon is fundamental. And, in fact, only through strong faith, seamlessly fused with Goshō study, can we truly be enlightened and accomplish our human revolution.

From today, I want you, the youth division members, to challenge yourselves to read the Goshō a little each day, even just one or two lines.

### **Become a Person of Great Good**

It is important to live with the awareness that death will certainly come to us one day. To die is part of the natural order of things. If people did not die, the population would increase endlessly, with dire consequences. Pretty soon, there'd be nothing left to eat! It is not a question of whether, but of how, one will die.

Shakyamuni once said:

*Just as family and friends  
Sing out for joy when they see  
A long lost exiled relative  
Coming without mishap from afar,  
So those who have merit feel joy  
As for a relative, at the approach  
Of people who have made merits  
As they go through this world.*

*So collect together merit  
For what lies beyond this world;*

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*Beyond this world merits become  
The ground of every living being.*<sup>5</sup>

The state of mind with which we meet death will greatly influence the course of our lives over eternity. The cornerstone of Buddhism is the solution it offers to the problems of life and death. Granted, if one is unconcerned about how one dies, or dismisses any connection between this existence and the next, then there probably isn't any need to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism. But the truth is that life is eternal, that our existence continues after we die. Moreover, during the latent stage of death before rebirth, we cannot change our lives' essence; we cannot carry out Buddhist practice. Only while we are alive can we practice Buddhism. Therefore, Shakyamuni urges us to wholeheartedly exert ourselves in this lifetime.

A beautiful sunset coloring the Western sky in brilliant hues of pink and crimson is supposed to indicate clear skies the following day. Similarly, a person whose life glows brilliantly in the final years will go on to a bright, sunny future existence. That is why it's so important to strive to accumulate enduring good fortune and benefit while we are alive.

To accumulate good fortune, we have to do good. What, then, is good? What, for that matter, is evil? In the Latter Day of the Law — the age in which we live — great confusion surrounds these questions, when there are no firm standards for judging good and evil. Even now, there are those who argue that war is good, and who, even in the event of defeat, see evil as residing wholly in the enemy.

In recent years, values have become increasingly disordered in Japanese society. The same may be true of the world in general. The first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, proclaimed this erosion of values to be a symptom of "higher psychosis."

*Makiguchi wrote: "Corrupt people differ from decent people in that the former fail to recognize their own dark nature.... Especially when vested interests concerning personal profit and prestige are at stake, such individuals will manifest an unexpected ferocity; we see their abnormality in their complete disregard for the impropriety and indecency of their conduct.... It might be suitable to characterize such individuals as victims of 'higher psychosis.'"*<sup>6</sup>

Such people think only of their own interests. Their sole preoccupation is personal advancement and prestige. They do not care in the least about the future of their country, nor have they the slightest interest in working for the people's sake.

Makiguchi divided good into three categories: minor good, medium good and great good.

In the rapidly moving and changing society of today, acts of minor and medium good are all too easily swept away and obliterated, leaving no lasting or appreciable impact. For example, money given to the needy will not necessarily be good. Rather than helping them, it might actually cause them to become further entrenched in their downward spiral.

It's vital, therefore, to do great good — the most fundamental, important kind of good.

*According to Makiguchi, great good endures for decades or centuries, and is beneficial to all people.*

A Buddha is committed to teaching people what is the foremost great good.

Nichiren Daishonin explains that there is no greater good than chanting daimoku and teaching others about the Mystic Law. Makiguchi, too, said that chanting and propagating

the Mystic Law alone represent the supreme good.

When we fundamentally change our lives through the great good of the Mystic Law and enable others to do the same, even acts of medium and minor good will all come to have significant effect and value. In this sense, the Soka Gakkai is the only hope for healing Japanese society, which has lost all standards of right and wrong. Everything depends on your efforts, my young friends.

### **Complete, Total Freedom**

A member who had avoided SGI activities for many years admitted a short time before dying: “I wish I’d chanted harder. I wish I’d done more activities. Now it’s too late, and I am filled with overwhelming regret.” These are haunting words.

You, the youth division members, are still young. You can chant daimoku to your heart’s content and accumulate unlimited good fortune. This is truly a wonderful thing. You are tremendously fortunate.

Since the age of 19, I have followed the guidance of my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, and single-mindedly dedicated my life to kosen-rufu. Therefore, I am confident that in lifetime after lifetime I will enjoy a state of life pervaded by inexhaustible good fortune and benefit.

The good causes you accumulate through Buddhist practice will manifest without fail in this existence. You will develop a totally unrestricted, magnificent state of life in exact accord with your inner determination. After death, moreover, your life will go on.

To borrow an analogy used by one leader, a person who has accumulated good fortune in this lifetime is like a rocket with a full tank of fuel.

In this lifetime and after death, such a person can joyfully, freely traverse the universe. There are more than a billion planets like the Earth in the universe. Those whose lives overflow with good fortune and benefit can be born anywhere in accordance with their desires and mission — they enjoy complete, total freedom.

The Hale-Bopp comet is presently visible. What makes a comet shine? Very simply, as the comet approaches the sun, icy material in its main mass vaporizes to envelop it in a hazy cloud of gas and dust. It combines to form the comet’s beautiful tail, brilliantly illuminated by the sun’s light. The nearer a comet draws to the sun, the brighter it becomes.

In our Buddhist practice, the Gohonzon, faith and SGI meetings are our sun. Plants and trees need sunlight to grow, and so do we. If we fail to attend meetings, then we deprive ourselves of the warm sunlight of faith and, like plants kept in the shade all the time, our lives will gradually wither.

The Daishonin urges us to earnestly chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, even just once or twice, stressing that we will then definitely attain enlightenment. Now, some might immediately think: “All right! I’ll just put faith aside and take it easy, then embrace it seriously a year before I die.” But the Daishonin’s words are meant to spur his followers to greater efforts in their Buddhist practice, emphasizing the beneficial power of chanting even a single daimoku. He is drawing attention to what a great benefit it is to chant such amazing daimoku every day. This is how we should take the Daishonin’s words, resolving to exert ourselves even harder. The correct way to read the Goshō is to always interpret the Daishonin’s words from the standpoint of strengthening our faith.

Again, Buddhism is concerned with winning. President Toda said: Society is concerned with reputation; government is concerned with meting out justice; and Buddhism is concerned with victory.<sup>7</sup> Reputation in society is as capricious as the wind. A country’s laws are judged by the people and change with the times. But the Buddhist law of cause and effect is absolute. Pretense and deceit are futile in Buddhism’s win-or-lose struggle.

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Life passes by in an instant. Therefore, be people who can say confidently at the end of your lives: “I have won! I have done my very best!” How fortunate you are, now when you are young, to participate freely in SGI activities.

## **A Season of Fresh Beginnings**

April is just around the corner, and spring, that season of hope-filled, fresh beginnings, is once again upon us.

Speaking of spring, former Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev said something to me that I will never forget. During our first meeting at the Kremlin [July 1990], I told the Soviet leader that I eagerly looked forward to welcoming him to Japan. He smiled broadly and replied, “If possible, I want to visit Japan in the springtime — spring is my trademark.”

*Gorbachev was born in March 1931, became general-secretary of the Communist Party in March 1985, and president of the Soviet Union in March 1990. His first visit to Japan was in fact realized in April 1991.*

In Japan, April is a month of great activity and change. Many people start new jobs, move to new areas or assume new positions in the organization.

Konosuke Matsushita (1894– 1989) was a noted Japanese industrialist and founder of the Matsushita electric companies. We enjoyed many long conversations, and a collection of our dialogues has been published.

*Their dialogue, Jinsei Mondo (Questions and Answers on Life), has been published in Japanese in two volumes.*

Mr. Matsushita often used to advise young people entering the workforce. He would ask rhetorically: As new employees, what will you report to your families when you return home from your first day on the job? Will you express disappointment, saying something like “It wasn’t anything special” or “It was a letdown”? Or will you say with delight, “It was even better than I’d hoped” or “I’m really glad I got hired!” He declared that their attitude on that first day would be the point of departure for their future.

Mr. Matsushita said, of course, that he hoped their reaction would be the latter kind. But this was not because he wanted the young people to simply resign or content themselves with their lot. He wanted them to understand that you cannot expect everything to be exactly as you want from the outset. Saying something upbeat and cheerful like: “It’s a good workplace! I think it will be really challenging and interesting! I will give it my best!” will help you solidify your determination to do just that, setting your mind in the right direction to do a fine job.

Such optimistic, confident words will also reassure your family and put the minds of those around you at ease; everyone will feel good. Young people who show such consideration, who are sincere and enthusiastic, Mr. Matsushita asserted, will become people who can shoulder responsibility, who are indispensable wherever they are. This was the conclusion he reached based on the many people he observed in his companies over the years.

## **Subtle Workings of the Mind**

Even if deep down you should feel a little disappointed with your job, if you venture to tell yourself and others “It’s a wonderful place” or “My job is a golden opportunity,” your inner resolve will change accordingly.

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When your determination changes, everything else begins to move in the direction you desire. The moment you resolve to be victorious, every nerve and fiber in your being immediately orient themselves toward your success. On the other hand, if you think, “This is never going to work out,” at that instant, every cell in your being will be deflated, giving up the fight. Everything then will move in the direction of failure.

I want you to understand the subtle workings of the mind. How you orient your mind, the kind of attitude you have, greatly influences both yourself and your environment. The Buddhist principle of a single life-moment possessing 3,000 realms completely elucidates the true aspect of life’s inner workings. Through the power of strong inner resolve, we can transform ourselves, those around us and the land where we live. Each of you has this tool, this “secret weapon.” There is no greater treasure.

Of course, effecting change is hard work. But it is natural to work hard during one’s youth. You cannot, for instance, become an Olympic athlete or an outstanding baseball player without tremendous effort and training. Likewise, without making effort, you cannot hope to create value.

If someone rises to a position of high standing without having struggled hard and overcome difficulties, those under him or her will suffer. Matsushita said with feeling, “Mr. Ikeda, how true it is that people ought to struggle during their youth — and even deliberately seek out hard work!”

Presidents Toda and Makiguchi were of the same opinion, as invariably are most of those who achieve true excellence in life. During your youth, you should seek out hard work. You should try to gain thorough training. All of your efforts will eventually become invaluable assets.

Nichiren Daishonin says, “Do not expect good times, but take the bad times for granted” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 242). If you engrave this in your life, you will have nothing to fear, nor will you ever become deadlocked.

Everything depends on our attitude or inner resolve, on the kind of philosophy and convictions that we cherish. Our environment or circumstances are not the determining factors. When we advance resolutely based on this admonition, then all the hardships we experience will pave the golden path of our mission.

## **Back to the Basics**

Our workplace, community and local organization comprise the home base for our daily activities — the place for carrying out our Buddhist practice. In terms of the three realms,<sup>9</sup> they correspond to the realm of the environment. On this home ground, we can carry out our mission fully, creating the greatest possible value while fostering capable people. Recognizing that where we are is our True Land, the place of our mission, let us work to expand a network of humanism, to create a history of kosen-rufu that will shine forever.

Strong are those who plant firm roots, tirelessly exert themselves, and create an unshakable foundation wherever they go. Such people are creating their eternal foundation of good fortune and benefit.

I pray for the youth division’s successful activities during April, the month of spring.

## **‘Be Not Like Dumb, Driven Cattle!’**

One hundred and fifteen years ago today, on March 24, 1882, the great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807–82) died. “A Psalm of Life” is one of his most celebrated poems. In one stanza, he writes:

*In the world’s broad field of battle,*

*In the bivouac of Life,  
Be not like dumb, driven cattle!  
Be a hero in the strife!*<sup>10</sup>

He is saying in effect: Do not allow yourself to become like a domesticated beast without freedom! Don't be defeated; stand up!

*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints on the sands of time.*

Our great predecessors teach that we can lead sublime lives, that we can leave behind a lasting legacy, Longfellow says. A life devoted to kosen-rufu is truly sublime. Someone who thinks only about immediate circumstances is base and ignoble. However, your lives, without a doubt, are noble and sublime.

*Footprints, that, perhaps another,  
Sailing o'er life's solemn main,  
A forlorn and shipwreck'd brother,  
Seeing, shall take heart again.*

Develop yourself so that just the sight of you will hearten and inspire those shipwrecked on life's voyage. Leave behind great achievements that will encourage all those who follow!

*Let us, then, be up and doing,  
With a heart for any fate;  
Still achieving, still pursuing,  
Learn to labor and to wait.*

Please perform an exultant paean to life and humanity as you make your way toward victory in the 21st century.

Incidentally, a valuable handwritten manuscript of one of Longfellow's poems is among the treasures of Soka University of America. The poem is titled "Excelsior," which in Latin means "higher."

### **His Motto Was 'Laboremus'**

It is now precisely a quarter-century since I held my dialogue with British historian Arnold Toynbee (1889–1975). Dr. Toynbee and I held intensive discussions over a 10-day period. I have many fond memories of that time. Our dialogue, *Choose Life*, has been translated into 19 languages.

Dr. Toynbee at one point told me that his motto was *Laboremus*, Latin for "Let's get to work!" Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism focuses on the present and future — it is infused with this spirit. We practice for the present and future. It is important not to become trapped in the past; we have to put it behind us. The Buddhism of true cause is always based on the present. It is always from this moment on.

In one place the Daishonin says, "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month" (MW-1, 241–42). Those who strengthen their faith this way are genuine practitioners. Our daily practice of gongyo, therefore, is important, as well as attending

meetings every month. We must not let our faith grow weak. Make it stronger today than yesterday, stronger this month than last. Buddhist practice is a succession of such untiring efforts, the ultimate goal of which is attaining the summit of Buddhahood.

Therefore, I present the mottoes “Excelsior” (Higher) and “*Laboremus*” (Let’s get to work) to my dear, noble friends. And as I do so, I urge you again to read even a page or line of the Goshō each day.

Finally, a special thank you to all who traveled long distances to join us tonight.

Let’s meet again soon! I earnestly send you daimoku.

Thank you!

**WT**

1. Bamboo Grove Monastery: situated in the northern part of Rajagriha in Magadha, built by King Bimbisara as an offering to Shakyamuni Buddha. Together with the Jetavana Monastery in Shravasti, it was one of the major centers of Shakyamuni’s preaching.

2. “The Mara Suttas,” *The Book of the Kindred Sayings (Sanyutta-Nikaya) or Grouped Suttas: Part I*, trans. Mrs. Rhys Davids (Oxford: Pali Text Society, 1993), p. 135.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

4. *Ibid.*

5. Dharmatrata, comp., *The Tibetan Dhammapada — Sayings of the Buddha: A Translation of the Tibetan Version of the Udanavarga*, trans. Gareth Sparham (London: Wisdom Publications, 1986), p. 58.

6. *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisan Bummeisha, 1987), vol. 10, pp. 38–39.

7. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (The Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, p. 103.

8. Konosuke Matsushita, *Wakasa ni Okuru* (Advice to Youth) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1966), pp. 100–03.

9. Three realms of existence: the realm of the five components (form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness), the realm of living beings and the realm of the environment.

10. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Poetical Works* (Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1904), vol. 1, pp. 19–20.

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