

## **SIGNIFICANT DATE: SGI President Ikeda Joins the Soka Gakkai — Aug. 24 You Never Know Who**

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Introducing people to Buddhism is such a precious practice. It can be done in many different ways with varying effects.

Aug. 24, 1997, marks the 50th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's introduction to the Soka Gakkai. At that time he was only 19. Before he learned of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, young Ikeda had no knowledge of Buddhism and no notable philosophy in his life. But he was a lover of philosophy and literature. He spent his days reading and discussing literature with his club members.

This club, the Kyoyu-kai, had many dialogues about the main issues of the day: patriotism and how to live in the most meaningful way. Their hearts were pure; they were open-minded. The Kyoyu-kai felt a burning impatience to find an infallible philosophy that would offer solutions to any problem facing any individual.

Ikeda had two schoolmates who were Soka Gakkai members. The two made a point of visiting all their friends whose homes had not been burned down during the war. One of those friends was Ikeda. While at his house they noticed how interested in philosophy he was, so they invited him to a lecture where Josei Toda would be teaching what they called "a philosophy that clarifies the essence of life." Ikeda agreed to go, even though he felt ill that night because of tuberculosis.

At the lecture, he grew more and more impressed. He noticed how clear and confidently Toda spoke, with conviction, his words easy to understand. Immediately, there was a connection between the two: Ikeda noticed that Toda was paying special attention to him. When they were introduced, Toda asked, "How old are you now?" President Ikeda writes in *The Human Revolution*, vol. 2, that "instead of saying simply 'How old are you?' Toda asked, 'How old are you now?' Although it was their first meeting, he spoke as if he were talking to someone he already knew."

Ikeda began asking Toda questions like "What is the correct way to live?" and "What is a true patriot?" Toda answered him frankly and precisely. By the end of the lecture, Ikeda knew that he wanted to study Buddhism and asked if he could study under Toda. To show his appreciation, Ikeda also recited an impromptu poem.

I am sure that the two schoolmates who introduced the young Ikeda to the Soka Gakkai didn't know that the friend they were helping to start practice was the future SGI president. This shows me that one never knows what contribution a person can bring to our movement for world peace.

I enjoy explaining Buddhism to my friends — they say: "So, that is what is different about you. I couldn't put my finger on it!" They always seem to have a positive response. I had a friend who would say, "Crystal, when are you going to chant?" He loved to listen to me do gongyo and chant daimoku. I wonder what contribution my friends may one day make.

With President Ikeda's 50th anniversary of practicing Buddhism approaching, I also wonder what my life will be like when I celebrate my 50th anniversary — or my 75th! It is amazing to imagine what types of accomplishments I will have made, especially when thinking of all the benefits and fortune I have accumulated within a span of just 15 years of practice.

**WT**