

If Even One Person Stands Up

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at a future division meeting on May 5, Soka Gakkai Successors Day, held jointly with the conferral of an honorary doctorate of letters on President Ikeda by Sri Lanka's University of Kelaniya, at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo.

Vice Chancellor Costa and Mrs. Costa, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen:

It is with profound humility that I accept this distinguished honorary doctorate of letters from the University of Kelaniya, a world-famous center for Buddhist studies with a proud tradition of public service.

Sri Lanka is a great benefactor of Japan. Our debt to you can never be forgotten. During World War II, in an act of hideous cruelty, Japan bombed your beautiful country. Yet at the San Francisco Conference [where the Japanese peace treaty was signed] after the war, Sri Lanka [then known as Ceylon], out of its Buddhist spirit of compassion, took the bold step of foregoing its right to seek war reparations.

That was in 1951, the year that my mentor, Josei Toda, became the second Soka Gakkai president. At that same conference, Sri Lanka also staunchly protected Japan by firmly opposing attempts to partition it as Germany had been divided into East and West.

It may be that many Japanese have forgotten these historical facts. But as a young man, I made a solemn pledge that one day I would repay this great debt without fail. With this in mind, I visited Sri Lanka [1961] soon after becoming the third Soka Gakkai president. The boys and girls whom I encountered on that trip, with schoolbooks under their arms, exuded a lively enthusiasm for learning. Seeing their happy, hope-filled faces, my instinct was: This country is channeling its energy into education. A bright, promising future lies ahead of it.

The Grand Drama of Succession

For the Soka Gakkai and the SGI, today is the deeply significant Successors Day.

Speaking of successors, the University of Kelaniya is carrying on the vital spirit of Shakyamuni, the teacher of all humankind. I am struck by this grand drama of succession — the humanistic philosophy of Buddhism has been handed down from one person to the next, from one heart to another, over thousands of years, in an unbroken chain extending across mountains and oceans.

Shakyamuni was a great pioneer of humanistic education who drew forth boundless wisdom, courage and compassion from all people. And yet he was afflicted with hardships, like the so-called nine great ordeals. People heaped abuse on him out of malice and envy; there were numerous attempts on his life by scheming traitors; false accusations were leveled against him and totally ludicrous incidents were fabricated about him. This pattern of persecution is the same in any age.

While bearing the full brunt of the attacks, Shakyamuni continued to go about his activities with no thought of the personal risk. There were many shiftless adults who merely stood by and watched. Their only thought was that no harm come to them. All their attention went to skillful dodging so as not to get involved in any way. Such an attitude betrays a mean, cowardly spirit.

Those base priests and spineless leaders who stood by without lifting a finger to save Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president — who was persecuted for

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opposing Japan's war of aggression in Asia and died in prison — were exactly the same. Far from trying to protect Makiguchi, afraid of implication by association, they bent over backwards to ingratiate themselves with the authorities.

Similarly, there were many who, when they saw Shakyamuni, would turn away, close their doors or shut their windows.

One's Heart Matters Most

In contrast to such adults there was a child, named Tokusho Doji, who with utmost sincerity and reverence, presented Shakyamuni with an offering of a mud-pie. Tokusho Doji is like the future division members today.

"I am incapable of offering anything significant to this great person of truth right now. But I want to show my support!" — such a spirit is truly noble. What matters most is one's heart.

If disciples are soft and dependent, looking ever to their mentor to do them some favor or to protect them from harm, then they will accomplish nothing, however vast their number.

But if even one disciple stands up with the heart of a lion, burning with the determination: "I will protect my mentor without fail!" "I will undergo persecution and struggle alongside my mentor!" then everything will be accomplished. This is the path of mentor and disciple in Buddhism.

When President Makiguchi underwent great persecution, Mr. Toda stood alone with him. When President Toda underwent great persecution, I stood up and resolutely protected him.

The Buddhist sutras relate that Tokusho Doji accumulated immeasurable good fortune and benefit, as a result of his admirable spirit and devotion to Shakyamuni. And that 100 years later he was reborn as Ashoka, a king whose name shines in the annals of world history.

Without discussing the eternity of life here, it is a fact that King Ashoka encountered Buddhism and resolved to carry on Shakyamuni's spirit. Until then the ideal society that Shakyamuni had envisioned and begun to build had never been fully actualized. Indeed, during his later years, Shakyamuni's tribe, the Shakyas, was massacred at the hands of the king of Kosala.

King Ashoka fought against the devilish nature of power and showed the world actual proof of Buddhism's validity for realizing peace and of Shakyamuni's greatness. As the third ruler of the great Mauryan dynasty, his was an eternal achievement. Several leading scholars with whom I have spoken have cited King Ashoka as a figure they particularly admire.

Based on Buddhist compassion, Ashoka renounced war and directed government to serve the people, to promote their welfare. Also, he is famous for treasuring diversity and strictly protecting freedom of belief.

In addition, Ashoka dispatched "peace missions" to countries as distant as Egypt and Greece, embarking on wide exchange among the citizens of different lands. Not only people benefited from King Ashoka's compassion — he also established veterinary clinics for animals, and even undertook environmental protection by planting trees over vast regions.

Vice Chancellor Costa is a renowned zoologist. Also, he is working to solve global environmental problems.

King Ashoka ruled for a long time — 37 years, according to one source. To the end of his reign, he burned with unquenchable energy and the commitment to work tirelessly until every last person had become happy. Such was the resolve that drove him.

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On a different level, it is now 37 years since I assumed the Soka Gakkai presidency. All the while, I have continued carrying out the demanding responsibility of leading the kosen-rufu movement that even President Toda undertook for only seven years. And after me, it is you, the future division members, who must carry on this task. To you, I entrust everything.

What did King Ashoka hope for in his children? That they would carry on the teaching of Buddhism. His son and daughter, responding to their father's expectations, proudly devoted themselves to their mission. To Sri Lanka they traveled.

The prince boldly determined to inherit the words of Shakyamuni and cause Buddhism to flourish in Sri Lanka, whose people he found to be most discerning and intelligent. It is also related that the princess brought a cutting of the bodhi tree under which Shakyamuni is supposed to have attained enlightenment to plant there. I will never forget how I once received a gift of a leaf from that same bodhi tree from the Sri Lankan minister of culture.

Importance of the Organization

President Toda always gave us strict guidance: A great life is not one of authority or celebrity. To become a leader in the Soka Gakkai and to work for kosen-rufu is the highest, most enduring honor in life. Getting a Ph.D. or becoming a physician, studying abroad, getting elected to public office — such things alone do not constitute human greatness. Far more noble and praiseworthy are the lives of those who strive earnestly in the organization for the sake of people's happiness and a peaceful world.

This is what I hope to communicate to you today, my young friends, heirs of the Soka legacy: Live out your lives together with the SGI, an organization fulfilling the Buddha's decree! Our activities in the organization of faith constitute our Buddhist practice, lead to the realization of kosen-rufu and enable us to carry out our human revolution. To selfishly think, "I'll just practice on my own and however I like," cannot be called correct faith. Such people are Buddhist in name only; they are not true practitioners.

You might feel that you don't like organizations, but the human body itself is an organization — a living organism comprised of many component parts working together in harmony. So is a school, a society, the universe. Nothing exists on its own.

Also, both Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin created organizations — communities or networks of Buddhist believers — and encouraged their followers to practice together. The organization of faith is not something that holds you back or restricts you. Rather, it is a springboard that enables you to develop yourself to the utmost, to lead the most dynamic existence. It is the most precious place for carrying out your Buddhist practice.

Please deeply reflect on why President Toda described the Soka Gakkai as "the organization for kosen-rufu more precious than my life."

Listen With Tolerance

I also want to say that it is only natural that there be differences of opinion between you and your parents. You are of different generations. Given the gap of a couple of decades or so between you, society and the times have changed greatly since your parents were young. So it's unrealistic to expect that you will see eye to eye on everything.

The smart thing to do is listen tolerantly to what your parents have to say — and for parents to return the same courtesy to their children. President Toda often said, "There's nothing more foolish than quarrels between parents and children." This might seem like a simple thing, but it is extremely important.

When you go home, I hope you will pay attention to what your parents are saying. Hearing them out is a sign of maturity and wisdom as well as your love and appreciation for them.

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Never Give Up!

I visited Sri Lanka for a second time in 1964, the year of the Tokyo Olympics.

The 10,000-meter race is a grueling event, entailing 25 laps around a 400-meter track, lasting more than 30 minutes. In the 1964 Olympics, a Sri Lankan athlete qualified for the final, but fell ill a week earlier and on the day of the race was in terrible condition. About 10 athletes dropped out of the race without finishing, but not the runner from Sri Lanka — even though he was four laps behind the leaders. Eventually a passionate struggle for the lead ensued among the front runners. After they all crossed the finishing line, the only person left running was the Sri Lankan.

At first, spectators jeered and heckled. Unconcerned, he continued running with single-minded intensity. All alone, he ran lap after lap. The audience of 70,000 that packed the stadium, moved by his earnestness and determination, embraced him in a thunderous outpouring of cheers and applause. When this Sri Lankan runner finally crossed the finish, the crowd gave him a tumultuous ovation — as if he had just won the gold medal. This is one of the indelible dramas engraved in Olympic history.

No matter what happens, my young friends, I hope that, like this Sri Lankan youth, you will never give up. Please continue running along the path of your mission to the very end — courageously and cheerfully, with iron endurance and tenacity, always in a manner true to yourself.

In closing, I want to express my heartfelt prayers for the successful endeavors and achievements of the University of Kelaniya and the shining nation of Sri Lanka in the 21st century.

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