

**SIGNIFICANT DATE: Sept. 8, 1957**  
**Toda's Declaration Against Nuclear Weapons**  
**How Do We Sensitize Ourselves Again?**

**By MATT LUCAS, Kent, Ohio, Correspondent**

On Sept. 8, 1957, 40 years ago this year, Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, made his declaration against nuclear weapons. He declared that all people have the right to live. This is the spirit of Buddhism; the Lotus Sutra, too, speaks for the people when it says, "Let us live out our lives."

I have not, however, given the subject of nuclear war much thought in the past couple of years. With the anniversary of Sept. 8 coming up, I, the eternal pack rat, searched through my files both mental and physical to try to revive the dormant feelings, to somehow reawaken to the horror that at present we are still on the brink of world destruction — even though we are no longer in the Cold War. I believe that many people are in the same boat; we are at this point desensitized to so many things that the prospect of another World War, though frightening, becomes as trivial as a *Jeopardy* question. How do we sensitize ourselves once again?

In my cache, I came across an interview with Joe O'Donnell, a photojournalist for more than 45 years (interview by Randy Sarvis, summer 1995 *The Link*, published by the Wilmington College students). As a youth, when he heard FDR announce the attack on Pearl Harbor, he enlisted in the military. O'Donnell says he "wanted to be a paratrooper, but the Marines made me a photographer," and that "I accepted the fact that I would never aim anything at a Japanese but a camera — so I was determined to become the best photographer I could be."

Immediately following the atomic bombings, his final military assignment was to photograph the American landing on the Japanese mainland. Dropped off in advance of the troops, a bizarre thing occurred: "A Japanese officer surrendered to me and asked me for a cigarette," he says. As he walked inland, though, the feeling of euphoria at being surrendered to dissolved as he became the first American to see the ghastly view of atomic destruction. "In every direction, buildings were leveled and everything wiped out," he says.

ENEMY, PLEASE KILL ME — these were the words of "a man with no ears, no nose nor skin who signaled me to come closer," O'Donnell continues. "I put my head in my hands and prayed that God be merciful and relieve this man's suffering. That man tapped me on the head and I looked up to see tears running down a face with no skin. That man died the very next day." More than 50 years later, O'Donnell says, he still cannot forget.

This is only one story of nuclear warfare. I realize my thoughts or feelings about nuclear war are infinitesimal compared to the suffering of those whose lives were not spared, whose stories and lives can only now be shared by all humankind. Through our sharing their stories their lives gain more meaning — and we can resensitize ourselves. I hope many more stories like this are uncovered in our discussion meetings and through daily dialogue so as to work toward preventing the occurrence of nuclear war again.

Nichiren Daishonin says in "The Gift of Rice" that "life itself is the most precious of all treasures" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 267). President Toda, who had seen the repercussions of nuclear war firsthand, made his declaration against nuclear weapons to protect the lives of the people. Reminding ourselves of the human tragedy that accompanies nuclear war is one way we can continue his efforts.

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