

**Young Daisaku (6): To Cross the Rubicon**  
**By KEN SARAGOSA**  
**Phila. High School Division Chief**

Daisaku Ikeda formally joined the Soka Gakkai on Aug. 24, 1947. In retrospect, he feels that with his decision to follow Toda he “crossed the Rubicon.” For him, religion was not of much interest; Daisaku sought much more than a form of worship. He sought a philosophy and some way of life that would enable him to create value out of the desperate circumstances of his life and the desolation of his society.

Consequently, the decision to join the organization Toda led, to take Toda as his mentor, was, he felt, a decision that would fundamentally alter the direction of his life. For Ikeda, at that point in his life, there was no alternative, although it was agonizing. “Swinging back and forth like a pendulum,” he recalls, “I agonized over actual Buddhist doctrines and how to put them into practice.”

The early days of his practice certainly were not easy. Before joining the Soka Gakkai, he felt spiritually alone, without friends who could understand his intense inner struggle. After joining, though, Daisaku’s loneliness did not abate much. He worked as a clerk in a printing plant and occasionally attended Soka Gakkai discussion meetings. His tuberculosis seemed to affect him more intensely in the months following his conversion, and it was often all he could do to work each day amidst his fever and chills.

He recalls that on most days he would “enter his apartment without a word, lie down, open a book, or just rest to relieve the congestion of blood.” Regardless, though, Ikeda’s intellectual appetite was unquenchable. Despite his illness, he would study late into the night.

Ikeda also made the time, whenever he could, to attend Josei Toda’s lectures on Buddhism. Each time he attended, he was convinced anew that Toda was a man of great character and conviction, and he began to appreciate what deeply profound insight Buddhism offered into the seeming chaos of the world.

As his understanding of Buddhism grew, so too did his awareness that the ideals of this organization were lofty, and that Toda’s vision for the future was great. While inspiring, this understanding also left Ikeda wondering what he, beset with illness and lacking education, could really contribute. Fully committing himself to the Soka Gakkai under Toda “would require boundless effort in the future because the objective was so great,” he thought. And he didn’t want to pursue such an objective only to fail because of his personal limitations. “If I am to escape,” he thought, “now is the time, for afterward no repentance will mend matters.”

As Daisaku agonized over his practice, though, a glimmer of hope began to shine in his life. The principles of Buddhism taught him that there was no problem that could not be solved, and through his daily efforts in Buddhist practice he began to understand this as a reality in his life.

Unbeknownst to Daisaku, Toda was quietly observing the sincerity and seriousness with which Ikeda approached his practice. He seemed to understand that Ikeda was not simply experimenting with Buddhism, and he observed patiently as Ikeda came to his determination to pursue a profound way of life.

**WT**