

Stand Up! Speak Out!

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech to representatives from Kanagawa Prefecture and SGI organizations around the world at the Kanagawa Culture Center in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture, Japan, Sept. 15.

Congratulations on the great success of yesterday's World Youth Peace Music Festival in Kanagawa! This festival had unimaginably profound significance in terms of peace and culture. Our guests were deeply moved by the performances.

I have composed a poem expressing my heartfelt gratitude to all who worked so hard to make the event a wonderful success:

*A grand music festival —
the lofty strains
of peace and culture
reach even the heavens*

All I wish to say to the Kanagawa members today is essentially "Stand up! Speak out!"

Kanagawa is where Nichiren Daishonin waged virtually all his most momentous struggles for kosen-rufu.¹ The reason that I came to Kanagawa straight after I formally stepped down as Soka Gakkai president [May 3, 1979] was that I wanted to reflect on the significance of the Daishonin's struggles here. I want you to understand this.

Here the three obstacles and four devils and the three powerful enemies banded together and singled out Nichiren Daishonin for their relentless assault. All the enemies of Buddhism knew if they could just topple this one person, kosen-rufu would never be accomplished. In a sense, it was his enemies, even more than his allies, who understood his true greatness. And that was why they feared him.

Kanagawa is where the Daishonin, with the spirit of a lion king, battled alone amid great persecution. That's why Kanagawa holds a special place in my heart, and why I have always had great confidence and faith in my fellow Kanagawa members and expected them to undertake a struggle worthy of true disciples of Nichiren Daishonin.

Who in this day and age is advancing kosen-rufu — the movement dedicated to realizing world peace and human happiness — to all corners of the globe in accord with the Daishonin's wishes? The members of the Soka Gakkai and SGI, and I, myself.

Because I am spearheading these efforts, I continually bear the brunt of the unremitting onslaughts of the three obstacles and four devils and the three powerful enemies, which the Goshō clearly states will harass the votary of the Lotus Sutra. The Kanagawa members, as befits true disciples of Nichiren Daishonin, know exactly how to distinguish themselves in our struggle.

You Cannot Simply Ignore It

The Daishonin repeatedly cites the Nirvana Sutra passage that says if a Buddhist practitioner sees people destroying the teaching and disregards them, failing to reproach them, to oust or punish them for their offense, then he or she is betraying the Buddha's teaching (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 186). In other words, if you see someone twisting or negating the Daishonin's teaching or trying to sabotage our movement to spread the Mystic Law, you cannot simply ignore it.

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Someone who sees such destructive activities but fails to do anything is an enemy of Buddhism. The Daishonin teaches us to strenuously oppose and defeat negative forces.

For example, if we vociferously repudiate malicious lies as soon as they circulate, we can crush the designs of evil-intentioned people. If we remain silent, we play right into their hands. Our timidity only makes them bolder.

Unless we speak out to set the record straight and ensure that truth prevails, we will not achieve kosen-rufu. The Soka Gakkai spirit lies in fearlessly stating the truth. This was the Soka Gakkai's strength in its early days; this is the reason we have succeeded in developing the kosen-rufu movement to the extent that we have. This spirit is needed now more than ever before.

The Daishonin also cites the words of Chang-an: "If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy.... One who rids the offender of evil is acting as his parent" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 186). Please engrave these words in your heart.

Cowardice is harmful. It delights the enemies of Buddhism and obstructs the advance of kosen-rufu. The fainthearted cannot savor the true benefit of faith — their ability to tap the power of the Buddha and the power of the Law is enfeebled.

What Will Happen to the Future of Kosen-rufu?

Nichiren Daishonin underwent great persecution solely for the sake of ordinary people like us. Hence, the Daishonin writes:

Thoughtful persons should...realize that I have met these trials for their sake. If they were people who understood their obligations or who were capable of reason, then out of two blows that fall upon me, they would receive one in my stead. (MW-6, 233)

No matter what difficulties arise, I will absolutely never be defeated. I believe myself to be the foremost disciple of Josei Toda. I have also faithfully carried on the legacy of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, our founding president. To protect my sincere fellow members, I will endure every hardship and battle every persecution.

However, though I wage such a struggle, if my disciples are cowardly and unreliable, what will happen to the future of our kosen-rufu movement? According to the Gosho, those who fail to exert themselves at a crucial moment are actually enemies of Buddhism.

Since such an eventuality would be deeply distressing, I urge you now, Kanagawa members: "Stand up! Speak out!" I want you to generate a powerful momentum that will spread to Tokyo, throughout Japan and around the world.

A Buddhist must have a spirit as indomitable as a wall of solid rock. Weakness is malignant and injurious to our cause. We must have the heart of a lion and a spirit as strong as steel.

At What Age Do We Start To Decline?

Today is Respect-for-the-Aged Day in Japan. With the sincere wish that each of you, without exception, may enjoy a rich and rewarding third stage of life, I will say a few words about old age today.

"You are...as young as your hope, as old as your despair"² — these words are from an ode to youth of which General Douglas MacArthur was particularly fond. To have hope — that is the key. As SGI members, we cherish throughout our lives and for all eternity the brilliant hope of achieving kosen-rufu.

All who steadfastly dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu naturally come to possess abundant energy and life force. The essentials for a long-lived society, one in which

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everyone leads an active, fulfilling life, can be found in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI. In the world of the SGI, the venerable Many Treasures Group members are playing vital roles.

There's much speculation about when a person's mental and physical abilities begin to decline. Is it at 50? At 60? The truth of the matter, I suspect, is that we can't peg a particular age. Someone once satirically proffered the hypothesis that "efficiency declines at the age of R [Retirement] minus 3, irrespective of the age at which R has been fixed."³

If so, it would seem that people's energy, stamina and mental powers begin to drop off three years before retirement. In driving a car, this might be compared to the way we would slow down if we see the road ahead leads toward a cliff's edge.

In faith, however, there is no such thing as retirement age.

We Decide

The workings of the mind are truly subtle. Many scientists have noted that, despite what is commonly believed, our memories don't necessarily deteriorate as we get older. Even supposing a certain degree of decline is inevitable, our acceptance as fact of assertions that memory function deteriorates actually causes us to become more forgetful. In reality, we can keep learning at any age.

This is true not just of our memory. The moment we decide "It's no good. I can't do it," this becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. From that instant, we negate any chance of succeeding.

The ever-energetic, vigorous Many Treasures Group members are showing splendid proof of lifelong youthfulness.

The Common People Are Strong

In the summer of 1275, Ko Nyudo — an early forerunner of the Many Treasures Group members — undertook the long, arduous journey from Sado Island to visit Nichiren Daishonin in the distant province of Kai, present-day Yamanashi Prefecture. The Daishonin welcomed this sincere and intrepid follower with all his heart. And when the man returned to Sado, the Daishonin gave him a letter of warm encouragement for his wife, Ko-no-ama, who had stayed behind to take care of things in his absence.

The Daishonin always treated others with utmost fairness and impartiality. No matter how far away someone was, no matter how humble their station in life, he was in tune with even their smallest efforts and courageous struggles. I am confident that the Daishonin today most highly applauds our dedicated efforts as SGI members.

In the letter to Ko-no-ama, the Daishonin writes:

During the more than seven hundred years since the reign of Emperor Kimmei [when Buddhism was introduced to Japan], no one has ever been so universally hated as Nichiren on account of either secular or Buddhist matters.... I underwent this ordeal not because of any fault of my own but solely because of my desire to save all the people of Japan. (MW-4, 140–42)

By rights, the Daishonin, who had so wholeheartedly exerted himself for his country, ought to have been treated as a national treasure. But rather than receiving praise or accolades, he was persecuted and maligned — malicious schemes were devised to do away with him. That is how the Daishonin was treated in Japan.

Seven hundred years have passed. Today, it is the Soka Gakkai and the SGI that are being persecuted and attacked for their commitment to widely spread the Mystic Law. This

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is exactly what the Gosho states is awaiting Buddhist practitioners in the Latter Day of the Law. Those who steadfastly practice together with the SGI, both in times of suffering and joy, are leading lives of supreme honor. They are accumulating unsurpassed good fortune and benefit in their lives.

The Daishonin continues:

While I was in exile there [on Sado Island], you and your husband Ko Nyudo, avoiding the eyes of others, brought me food by night. You were both ready to give your lives for my sake without fearing punishment from the provincial officials. (MW-4, 142)

The common people are strong. It was ordinary people who protected the Daishonin, undaunted even by state brutality.

Riding the rapids of society toward the 21st century, the SGI is powerfully advancing toward victory through the strong solidarity of just such courageous, ordinary people.

In closing, the Daishonin tells Ko-no-ama, who is unable to meet him:

Whenever you yearn for me, Nichiren, look toward the sun which rises in the morning and the moon which appears in the evening. I will invariably be reflected in the sun and the moon. In the next life, let us meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak. (MW-4, 143)

We will always be together, he warmly reassures her — in lifetime after lifetime, we will advance side by side. The elderly couple was childless, and the Daishonin no doubt intuitively sensed their wistful loneliness, which prompted him to write these thoughtful words.

The Final Years

How can we make the third stage of our lives a time of fulfillment and satisfaction? In a rapidly graying society such as Japan's, this is an urgent question. According to a recent survey, 10 percent of Japan's population is now 70 or older; and 15.6 percent is over 65.4

President Toda often said that the final four or five years of one's life are decisive. No matter how good the preceding years have been, one's life ends in defeat and sadness if the final few are miserable. On the other hand, someone whose last four or five years are happy and filled with joy is a winner in life.

No matter what happens, even if we should fall sick, we must never grow discouraged or allow ourselves to be defeated. This is vital. As long as our spirits are undefeated, we are victors.

So it is important to live cheerfully. With a strong, optimistic spirit, we need to continually direct our minds in a bright, positive and beneficial direction — and help those around us to do the same. We should strive to develop a state of life where we feel joy no matter what happens.

Even famous or wealthy people, whom others might envy, have pain and anguish that they keep hidden. Contrary to their outward appearance of glamour or self-assurance, many celebrities and public figures nurse a hellish suffering in their hearts.

Please be assured that there is no greater happiness, no greater source of fulfillment, than living one's life in the harmonious world of the SGI.

It is now 40 years since President Toda made his Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons here in Kanagawa Prefecture. Again, I sense that Kanagawa is a place of immeasurably profound significance.

Please convey my best regards to all those whom I could not meet today.

Overseas members, thank you for your tremendous efforts!

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1. Kamakura, Matsubagayatsu and Tatsunokuchi are all in present-day Kanagawa Prefecture.
2. Samuel Ullman's "Youth." The only available source of this poem is a Japanese book in which the poem is included in English: Osamu Uno and Munehisa Sakuyama, *Seishun to iu Na no Shi* (A Poem Titled Youth) (Tokyo: Sangyo Noritsu Daigaku Shuppanbu, 1986), pp. 10–11.
3. C. Northcote Parkinson, *Parkinson's Law; and Other Studies in Administration* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1957), p. 101.
4. According to a survey conducted by Japan's Management and Coordination Agency, announced on Sept. 14.

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