

The Third Stage of Life Your Face Reveals Your Character

This is the second installment of a weekly discussion series featured in the Seikyo Shimbun, the Soka Gakkai daily newspaper. Participants in this installment are SGI President Ikeda, Seikyo Shimbun General Editorial Bureau Senior Director Osamu Matsuoka and Vice Director Katsusuke Sasaki.

IKEDA: In our later years, our faces reveal our true characters. The years have made their mark there, and we cannot hide them. Our eyes, in particular, eloquently reveal what kind of people we are. In the Goshō, Nichiren Daishōnin writes, “The spirit within one’s body may appear in just his face, and the spirit within his face may appear in just his eyes” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1, p. 222).

MATSUOKA: You have said that the face you most admire is that of the Russian author Tolstoy in his later years.

IKEDA: Yes. Tolstoy’s face in his later years was marvelous. The lofty essence of a great life was distilled in it. His clear eyes shone with a light from deep within, his gaze fixed on eternity and penetrating the truth of all phenomena. A long, gray beard graced his noble and mature countenance, which was filled with an expression of love for humanity. A face such as Tolstoy’s only comes from a life that has withstood the buffeting of the fiercest elements, a life of struggle for truth and justice.

SASAKI: I remember when you visited Tolstoy’s home, which has been preserved as the Tolstoy State Museum, in Moscow, 1981. There was a statue of Tolstoy as well as a portrait. You gazed intently at both of them. And I remember you asking the museum’s director many pointed questions about Tolstoy’s life as she showed us around the displays.

IKEDA: The home of that great writer was extremely simple and plain compared to the gorgeous luxury of the Kremlin, symbol of the czars’ power and authority in Tolstoy’s day. To the very end, surrounded by the Russian people whom he loved so dearly, Tolstoy dedicated his life to fighting against the authoritarianism of church and state.

MATSUOKA: Tolstoy died at 82.

IKEDA: According to the museum director, even in his last years Tolstoy kept to a strict and rigorous schedule, writing every day from 10:00 in the morning to 3:00 in the afternoon, even on holidays. On the last journey he made just before his death, he continued to seek the meaning of life and an end to the spiritual turmoil that wracked him. He collapsed in an isolated country village in the midst of his travels. On his deathbed, he is said to have wept and asked those gathered around why they worried about him and not all the other millions who were suffering. He wept not for himself but for unfortunate people everywhere.

The statue of Tolstoy that graces the main entrance of the Soka University Auditorium has been placed there out of the cherished hope that students of the university will emulate this great individual and continue to develop themselves and fight for the sake of the people to the very last day of their lives.

Title: Your Face Reveals Your Character
Subject: World Tribune 11/21/97 n.3166 p.12 WT971121p12
Author:
Keywords: Character Dialogue Face Guidance Health Life Reveals Stage Third Tribune World Your

Shape Your Happiness

SASAKI: The Nobel Prize–winning author Mikhail A. Sholokhov (1905–84), whom you met, was apparently from a Cossack region in Russia. He had an unusual inner strength and vitality. We were told that he was ill, but when you met him [in 1974], he was actually surprisingly well. I believe he was 69 at the time.

IKEDA: Yes, that’s right. He had very good color, and though he was white-haired and rather small-framed, there was a definite aura of the depth of spirit and mettle of a literary giant. He urged me again and again to share a drink of cognac with him. I can’t drink, and I kept trying to refuse politely. Finally, I pretended to take a drink and then passed the glass to you sitting behind me.

SASAKI: Yes. I drank it for you. It was delicious. Thank you very much.

IKEDA: At any rate, I distinctly remember his spirited nature. He said to the effect: “You can’t accomplish anything worthwhile if you don’t have a definite goal. We are all ‘blacksmiths’ who have to hammer and shape our own happiness. People of conviction, people who are spiritually strong, can exert a definite influence on the direction their lives take, even when fate takes an unexpected twist.” In short, he believed that we each build our happiness. He was a person of great energy and insight.

MATSUOKA: At that time, you were 46, but now you are 69 — the same age as Mr. Sholokhov when you first met. In the intervening years, you have faced challenge after challenge, growing in strength and dignity and offering a model for how we can all live the third stage of our lives to the fullest.

IKEDA: All who have devoted themselves earnestly to propagating the correct teachings of Nichiren Daishonin are models. It is wonderful and noble to take the lead in working to help others, to exert oneself tirelessly for others’ happiness. As it states in the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” “The heavenly deities manifest themselves as ordinary men and women” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 738). Those who work for kosen-rufu will enjoy the protection and support of all kinds of people in their environment.

SASAKI: At the beginning of 1975, you first met Dr. Henry Kissinger, former U.S. secretary of state, at the State Department in Washington, D.C. Snow had been falling lightly since morning, and the trees were blanketed beautifully in white.

IKEDA: I met with Dr. Kissinger on several occasions after that as well. We talked about many things, covering a broad range of topics from international crises to our philosophies of life. Eventually, our talks were published as a dialogue. When we broached the subjects of the meaning of death and how to spend our old age, something Dr. Kissinger said deeply impressed me. “I have always been impressed,” he said, “by something the German statesman Bismark said. Bismark had been married for 50 years when his wife died. At her bedside, he said, ‘It’s only just started and now it’s already over.’ I think that is the poignancy of life with which everyone has to come to grips.”

Title: Your Face Reveals Your Character

Subject: World Tribune 11/21/97 n.3166 p.12 WT971121p12

Author:

Keywords: Character Dialogue Face Guidance Health Life Reveals Stage Third Tribune World Your

45 Years of Marriage

MATSUOKA: Bismark was married for 50 years, and you and Mrs. Ikeda celebrated your 45th wedding anniversary on May 3 this year. In another five years, you'll have reached your golden anniversary.

IKEDA: Mr. Toda selected the day May 3 for our wedding. There actually should have been a big general meeting to celebrate the first anniversary of his presidency on that day, but he decided that it should be our wedding day. There was no Headquarters General Meeting that year as a result. I have never for a moment forgotten the deep love and warm support that Mr. Toda bestowed on us.

MATSUOKA: Eight years ago, you were interviewed by a Japanese women's magazine (*Shufu no Tomo* [Homemakers' Friend]) for its New Year's edition. One exchange I remember very well went as follows:

Interviewer: I have heard that you've been married for 37 years. Having met your wife, I can see what a warm and kind person she is. If, looking back on your years together, you were going to write her a letter expressing your gratitude, what would you say?

Ikeda: Now that's the toughest question you could have asked me! My wife is my dearest companion in life. She has been at times my nurse, my secretary, my mother, my sister, my daughter and, more than anything, my best and closest comrade in our struggle.

I don't really know what I'd say. If I were going to give her an award, I think it would be a "Smile Award".... My greatest hope is that we are both in good health to share our golden anniversary. Please allow me to make the content of my letter of appreciation my homework, due on that day.

SASAKI: But the interviewer persisted. She begged you to say something, even if it was brief and simple. You thought for a moment and said:

Hmmm. My wife knows the truth about me better than anyone else, and I think that I know her devotion and patience better than anyone else could. My marriage to her has been one of the greatest joys of my life.

So I think I would have to say, "When we are reborn, in the next life and the one after that, for all eternity: Please be there for me." But I suppose that's not a letter of appreciation — it's more like a job assignment!

IKEDA: The interviewer was so persistent that finally she cornered me!

MATSUOKA: I want to ask if we can invite various experts to join us in this series, depending upon the topic. And I want to suggest that for our last guest we invite Mrs. Ikeda.

IKEDA: Well, that's something you'll have to take up with her. But for now let's just see how the series proceeds and think about this later. Let's try to gauge what would be of interest and value to our readers; I'm sure there are many people and themes they want us to take up in our discussions.

SASAKI: Dear readers: Please give us all the support you can so that we can persuade Mrs.

Ikeda to join us later in this series!

‘Let’s Hear From Our Readers’

IKEDA: Speaking of the wishes and opinions of our readers, I’m sure that everyone has a different opinion about our aging society; everyone has a different way of dealing with old age, different problems and frustrations; and everyone faces different situations. I hope readers will contact us with their thoughts and experiences. Stories about people who are living productive, happy lives are fine, too. Let’s encourage readers to send their input, and then we’ll discuss those responses together.

SASAKI: After an article announcing this series appeared in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, we received more than 200 letters from readers.

MATSUOKA: And many telephone calls, too. I thank all those who responded.

By the way, after your final dialogue together, I remember, Dr. Arnold Toynbee handed to one of your assistants a list of names he had prepared of people he hoped you would meet and pursue discussions with in the future.

IKEDA: That’s right. He left the memo with my assistant, saying that he didn’t wish to seem presumptuous or to put me under any obligation. I am still grateful for his consideration in giving me that kind memo.

SASAKI: One of those on Dr. Toynbee’s list was Aurelio Peccei, co-founder and president of the Club of Rome. You first met him in Paris in 1975. It was May, when the first spring green had appeared, and you held your dialogue in the garden of the SGI community center in Paris.

IKEDA: The revolutions that humanity has experienced up to now — the industrial revolution, the scientific revolution — have all been external revolutions. We agreed that humanity’s next revolution must be an inner revolution, the human revolution.

SASAKI: You met Dr. Peccei several times after that as well: in Tokyo, in Florence and again in Paris. Dr. Peccei had just returned to his home in Rome from London the day before your Florence meeting, but he drove his car for four hours to be there.

IKEDA: Yes, and he was 72 at the time. He had a very youthful spirit. All of the leading figures I have met seemed to grow younger as they aged and threw themselves more energetically into their work in their later years. This is the mark of genuine greatness. It is important to maintain a vibrant, progressive spirit.

All too often people lose the drive to move ahead as they grow older. But the decision to draw back or to take a step forward hinges on only a slight difference in one’s attitude or resolve. In the final chapter of our lives, however, that slight difference can have momentous consequences.

WT