

A Revolution in Our Leadership

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the Soka Schools Alumni Gathering held at the Soka University Auditorium in Hachioji, Tokyo, Nov. 3.

I am so happy to see all of you again after so long! Congratulations on your wonderful celebration under these fine skies. Please relax and enjoy yourselves here again at your alma mater.

We have just presented awards to several representatives. I remember how, in my 20s, I received a silver medal from my mentor, Josei Toda. It was a small medal, but to me it was the most significant award, the best award there could be. I believe that the deep appreciation I felt on receiving that commendation was one of the causes leading to the many awards and honors that have been bestowed upon me from institutions around the world over the years. Everything in life is determined by one's sincerity, by one's heart.

In the Spirit of Gandhi

When I visited India in October, I had friendly talks with India's President Kocheril Raman Narayanan and First Lady Usha Narayanan as well as with Prime Minister Inder Kumar Gujral and his wife, Shiela Gujral. They kindly took time out of their extremely busy schedules to meet with me. My meeting with President Narayanan took place on the evening of the day he had made a very difficult yet fair decision concerning serious political turmoil in one of India's state legislatures. The day after his decision, the newspapers trumpeted his achievement as epoch-making and praised him for saving Indian democracy. My meeting with Prime Minister Gujral, meanwhile, took place on the eve of his scheduled departure for a Commonwealth summit in Edinburgh, Scotland.

President Narayanan and Prime Minister Gujral have bravely taken up the leadership of India's 950 million people in the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi. A person with mentors is indeed fortunate. Without mentors from whom we can learn, it can be easy to lack solid guidelines and fall prey to self-centeredness, grow arrogant and bring unhappiness to others. Prime Minister Gujral said that my visit to his country was a reminder to the Indian people of their mission to spread the practice of Gandhi's spirit throughout the world. I found myself deeply humbled by Mr. Gujral's profound humility.

As I said in my address in India, I firmly believe that in the coming century, India, the United States and China will be the three nations that lead the world.

Treasured Encounters

President Narayanan treasures a meeting he had with Gandhi during his youth as one of the greatest moments of his life. Similarly, I remember each moment I spent with Mr. Toda as clearly as if it were a scene from a film unfolding in my mind; I will never forget a single word he said to me. As a newspaper reporter, the young Mr. Narayanan had gone to interview Gandhi. He was 24 — the age of many of you gathered here today. Gandhi was 76.

When the cub reporter visited the father of his nation, he was understandably nervous. To make matters worse, he arrived while Gandhi was having lunch, and most of the leaders of India were sitting around him. Further complicating things, Gandhi was observing a day of silence. Despite all this, Gandhi patiently and kindly answered all his questions by scribbling replies on a piece of paper.

It is important to treat young people with respect. Those who fail to do so are dominated by Animality, demonstrating their shortsightedness and lack of character. I will never

forget how the late Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai addressed me, 30 years his junior, as “His Excellency.” Leaders who look down on students and other young people and fail to address them courteously are arrogant. One of the great failings of Japanese people today is an inability to show proper respect to other human beings.

Thoughtfulness

When the young Mr. Narayanan concluded his interview, he made to leave the room, but someone stopped him and told him that the Mahatma had given instructions that he be given lunch before departing. Thoughtfulness of this kind is the very heart of humanity. Mr. Narayanan was deeply moved that Gandhi, the esteemed father of his nation, should demonstrate such kindness and compassion for an unknown youth. He knew he would never forget Gandhi as long as he lived. Recalling that experience, Mr. Narayanan wrote (in his book *Images and Insights*):

What exquisite thoughtfulness and consideration! Gandhi must have felt bad to have a lean and famished-looking young man ask him questions while he was eating his lunch. In fact, what captivated me was his magnetism and human generosity even more than the answers he gave me. Indeed Gandhi’s appeal was to the heart. Perhaps the Indian people can be won over more by an appeal to the heart than by logic or power.

To appeal to people’s hearts — surely this has been the gift of all true leaders, East and West, yesterday and today. Premier Zhou Enlai also won the hearts of the people. The fundamental qualification for any leader is this ability to reach people’s hearts, near and far, not in the form of some sort of shallow popularity contest but with great sincerity and earnestness. The SGI’s grass-roots movement can also progress enormously, exponentially, if every one of our leaders makes an effort to cultivate and demonstrate this genuine human power. The crucial issue, first and last, is the growth of our leaders. What we need today is a revolution in our leadership.

It Happened One Night

In response to the question “What has been the most constructive experience in your life?” Gandhi recounted an incident that happened when he was only 24. It was a night of insult and discrimination that he experienced in South Africa, where he was a young attorney. He was treated unfairly because of the color of his skin, subjected to verbal abuse and tossed off a night train for refusing to leave the first-class section at the conductor’s order. Though Gandhi had a first-class ticket, only whites were permitted to travel in first-class cars.

Sitting up all night in a small dark railway station, shivering without a coat, Gandhi thought long and hard. He asked himself whether he should give up and return to India, his homeland, or whether he should stay put and fight for the human rights of all those suffering the same indignities (see Louis Fischer’s *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*).

If Gandhi had given up that night, history would have been very different than it is today. But the young man cast off the shackles of fear, and he decided to march forward; he decided to fight. That is what it means to be young. I hope you and all the Soka Schools alumni will follow Gandhi’s example.

Up until this incident, the young Gandhi had been a shy person, unable to speak confidently before others. But from that night on, he allowed the boiling magma of courage that lay deep at the core of his being to gush forth. After that long, cold night, Gandhi made his first public speech, calling on his comrades to rise up and fight for their rights as human beings. This one incident was the beginning of Gandhi’s struggle for human rights in South Africa, a struggle that he would carry on there for two decades.

Gandhi fought where he was. Perhaps many of you are drawn to the big cities, looking with longing at the exciting life you think goes on there. But that is nothing but an illusion.

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The battleground is where you are. Those who win where they are — they are the true victors.

If you are faced with the evils of oppression and discrimination and you aren't angered, don't speak out, don't act, you are like a dead volcano. Young people must be like active volcanoes, erupting when their strength and power are needed; they must speak up and fight for truth and justice.

You cannot hope to write a magnificent personal history if you content yourself with a life of ease and comfort. What is life for, after all? You have a voice, you have ears, you have a mouth, you have a brain. You can only reveal your true potential as a human being when you put all of your capacities to the fullest and best possible use.

Live or Die

In Gandhi's last years, just before Indian independence was achieved, he faced one of his most difficult and bitter struggles: to reconcile the Hindus and Muslims of his country. Tensions between the two groups were high, and violence was frequent. But Gandhi threw himself into the very midst of the struggle. He was attacked by Hindus and Muslims alike for his efforts, but Gandhi was determined to achieve peace. He knew it was a do-or-die situation, and he cared nothing about the criticism and jeers directed at him.

Gandhi even sent his followers to live in villages in the troubled regions to try to assuage the religious tensions and open a way to a solution. One of his followers fell ill with malaria in the village he had been sent to, and he wrote a letter to Gandhi asking him to send a nurse to care for him. Gandhi, of course, cared for all his followers deeply. In most situations, he would have rushed to the person's side and cared for him himself. But in this crucial struggle, things were different.

Gandhi sent a compassionate yet strict letter reprimanding his follower. "Those who go to the villages," he wrote, "have to go there with a determination to live or die there. If they must fall ill they have to get well there or die there. Then alone could the going have any meaning" (see Louis Fischer's *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi*).

Only because Gandhi knew that revolution was a do-or-die proposition, only because of his willingness to put his life on the line, was Indian independence achieved. And because his followers carried on his work with the same selfless commitment, India has achieved the prosperity we see today. Both the president and the prime minister of India are disciples of Gandhi, and both of them remain dedicated to the struggle.

The Soka Schools alumni, who have inherited the indomitable spirit of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founder of *soka* education and a selfless crusader for justice who fought and died for his beliefs, must strive to be just as courageous and heroic as he.

Burning Fiercely

Today, many Soka Schools alumni are playing active roles in various spheres all over the world. One Soka University graduate is working as a teacher at a Japanese school in Paraguay, where an SGI-sponsored exhibition titled "Coexistence and Hope — The Amazon's Environment and Development" was held recently [September 1997] in the city of Asunción. The leading Paraguayan author Augusto Roa Bastos was kind enough to attend the opening. He related to one of the event staff that he has read my dialogue with Dr. Arnold Toynbee, *Choose Life*, and felt a deep resonance with the issues we discussed therein. The 80-year-old Mr. Roa Bastos has always, in his long career, championed the Paraguayan people, as an invincible fighter who has endured more than 40 years of exile from his beloved homeland. He is a literary hero, who declares it his purpose to portray people's rebellion against all that suppresses human rights and jeopardizes the inherent dignity of life.

In one of his novels, he says that to live means keeping the flame within burning

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fiercely, to strive beyond what seems possible, to persist until the very end, to overcome hopelessness and despair, never faltering in determination (*Hijo de Hombre*). I hope all of you will make your way through life with an ever-brightly burning spirit. Those who possess energy, tenacity and strong life force will be the ultimate victors in life.

Zentaro Slope

Carrying on the wonderful tradition of their predecessors, students of Soka University and Soka Women's College are now holding their lively annual open-day festivals. I came to the Soka University campus [where both schools are located] three days before the events began to watch over the students' preparations and make sure that both festivals were a total success with no accidents or mishaps. On the eve of the festivals' opening day, I made a round of the campus by car to see how everything was going and arranged some refreshments for all the students working so hard on last-minute preparations. As many of you probably remember from your own time here as students, the day before the festivals is always far busier than the actual opening day. I know what tremendous effort goes into making these festivals a success.

Those of you who were students here are all familiar, I'm sure, with the hill right next to our campus, affectionately known as Zentaro Slope. It rises from the former site of Takiyama Castle to the Gate of Glory entrance to the campus. Whenever I drive up this hill or anywhere in the area, I always pray that our students will be safe from traffic accidents. How sad it would be to see a wonderful young life cut short by something so unnecessary and avoidable. Please, be very aware of safety.

Have you ever wondered where the hill got its name? Apparently it was named after an artist, Zentaro Kojima (1892– 1984), who lived in nearby Tangicho. Mr. Kojima was a Western-style painter, and he was one of the founding members of the Independent Art Association. He received several important prizes for his work, including the prestigious Nika Prize, and was a very well-known and successful painter.

Following the footsteps of such French painters as Jean-François Millet (1814–75) and Jean-Baptiste-Camille Corot (1796–1875) who belonged to the 1830 Society, Mr. Kojima and a number of other Japanese painters who had also studied art in France formed the 1930 Society.

The year 1930, incidentally, is the year when the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai [Society of Value- Creation Education] was first formed.

Mr. Kojima lived here in Hachioji from 1932 to 1971. During those nearly four decades, he painted many beautiful works of art, including *The View from Takiyama*, *Spring in Kasumi Village* and *Village Children*.

Hope Is Always Reborn

At one point in his youth, while enrolled at art school in Japan, Mr. Kojima hit a slump where he found himself unable to paint the way he wished. He lost confidence and grew deeply discouraged. Then, within the space of a few years from the age of 18 to his early 20s, he suffered the successive deaths of his parents and younger sister, and then fell seriously ill himself with acute appendicitis.

As the Lotus Sutra states, "There is no safety in the threefold world; / it is like a burning house" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 69). Suffering and pain are unavoidable parts of life. Happiness must be won by battling with suffering and emerging victorious.

After leaving the hospital, he went to live with an aunt in Hachioji to recuperate, taking a break from art school. During that period, Hachioji became a second hometown to the youthful Mr. Kojima, a place where he could take stock and decide what he wanted to do with his life. The beautiful skies of Hachioji, the white clouds, the green trees and the scarlet sunsets were a soothing balm to Mr. Kojima, helping heal his pain and grief.

No matter how hopeless or bleak things appear, the moment always comes when suddenly the spirit is revived and hope reborn. That is why one must never give up and certainly never attempt anything as drastic as suicide.

Mr. Kojima made a decision. He would not try to escape from reality. “Life’s precious treasures can only be discovered through painstaking effort and hard work.... Isn’t that also what learning to paint is all about? One can never learn to paint only looking at what one likes.... I will return to school. I will see it through. That must be the ‘place of practice’ where I establish myself,” he wrote in his book *Wakai hi no Jigazo* (Self Portrait in Youth). Revitalized by his rest in Hachioji, he returned to school to meet once again the challenge he had set himself to.

We all need a place of practice where we can train and forge ourselves. Without such a place, we will never become a master in any field. We will never be the best we can. We will never achieve greatness.

Everywhere We Are

Nichiren Daishonin teaches us that our place of practice is the here and now: “[There is no need] to leave here and go to some other place” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 781). When we know what we have to do and decide to do it, our place of work, our community, everywhere we are becomes the most meaningful place of practice there can be, the place where we will triumph. Mr. Toda once said:

No matter how big or small a company or organization, there will always be some people who are unpleasant or spiteful. Problems are an inevitable part of life. Even supposing that there was some perfect, problem-free place, then — in accord with the cycle of formation, continuance, decline and disintegration — a downhill descent would be all one could look forward to.

In other words, difficulties make us strong. The presence of nasty people helps us develop our character and own state of life. Realizing that, we must live with strength and courage, facing all challenges with a positive attitude.

We grow by struggling with problems and difficulties. This is as true of nations as it is of individuals. China became a great nation because it had so many challenges to face. Japan, on the other hand, became rich, and then, failing to find a new challenge, lost its way and began to decline.

Mr. Kojima lived to be 91. Until just before his death, he would paint for eight hours every day, continuing his voyage of creative self-discovery without interruption or pause. I want all of you also to live long, healthy and fulfilled lives. It is my most earnest wish. Shortly before his 90th birthday, Mr. Kojima said: “Character is the secret to painting. You must gain a certain maturity before you can paint successfully. It took me a very long time to realize that” (from an interview published in the Oct. 25, 1982, *Mainichi Shimbun*). Goethe said, “All depends upon this; one must be something in order to do something” (from Johann Peter Eckermann’s *Words of Goethe: Being the Conversations of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*).

Our practice to develop ourselves and realize our potential continues as long as we live. Mr. Toda said that true victory belongs to those who win in the end. When I was 25, about the same age as many of you here, I wrote in my diary, “The person who continues fighting every obstacle to the very last is the ultimate victor.” And the last words my mother spoke on her deathbed were, “I have won.”

We have a choice: Will we take on the ascent and reach life’s summit or will we slide miserably down life’s slope?

When you climb Zentaro Slope, you reach the entrance to Soka University, the Gate of Glory. In the same way, I hope all of you will climb surely and steadily, a step at a time, the

long hill of your life, at your own pace, with perseverance and with joy. And may each of you reach life's final and supreme gate of glory, proud in the knowledge that you have fought to the end, have no regrets, and have triumphed.

Celebrating the New Century

Before I close, I would like to make a suggestion. Yesterday [Nov. 2], we held the ground-breaking ceremony for Soka University's new main building. The structure is scheduled to be completed in May 1999. The year after that, 2000, the Orange County Campus of Soka University of America will be completed. It will open on May 3, 2001. While Soka University in Japan was founded in 1971 on the centennial of Mr. Makiguchi's birth, SUA's Orange Country Campus will be completed on the centennial of Mr. Toda's birth.

In the year 2000, let us all reunite: the alumni of Soka University, Soka Women's College and, indeed, all the Soka Schools. Let us get together to celebrate the dawning of the new century! By that time, your numbers will be some 50,000 strong. Let us hold a glorious gathering of all alumni of Soka education!

I am always praying for your safety, health and long life. I am always thinking of you. Thank you for coming from so far away!

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