

SGI President Ikeda's Essay
When Disaster Strikes
By HO GOKU

Jan. 17 approaches. The Great Hanshin Earthquake's anniversary is near. In the three years that have passed, I have never forgotten, even for a day, our friends in the stricken Kobe, Osaka and Awaji regions. Day after day, I have prayed for the earliest possible reconstruction of the disaster areas, for the welfare and happiness of the victims, and for the peace of those who died.



When I heard the news that day, that a great earthquake had happened in Kansai, I immediately called on the top Soka Gakkai leaders to make an all-out effort in sending aid and assistance to the area. We set up crisis-management centers in both Kansai and Tokyo. We opened our community centers in the affected area as shelters for those left homeless. We rallied assistance nationwide and sent members of our doctors and nurses divisions to the scene.

I was scheduled to give a lecture at Hawaii's East-West Center, but I delayed my departure to the last moment, until I was certain that our aid efforts were on track. As I left Japan, I continued to send daimoku to all our friends in the stricken area. When I had finished my major commitments in Hawaii, I flew back directly to Kansai.



Once in Kansai, when I heard firsthand reports of the members' dedicated relief activities, I was deeply moved and filled with humble appreciation for them. A motorbike brigade of some 3,000 youth division members, with 900 motorbikes at their disposal, had been working day and night to deliver — over streets and roads rendered impassable to cars and trucks — much-needed relief supplies to victims.

Some of our members had been injured themselves, yet they continued to assist others who were injured. Numberless members, their homes destroyed by the earthquake or the fires that broke out in its wake, put their loss aside to visit other victims, bringing comfort, help and encouragement.

The women's division members were indispensable in searching for victims in the rubble. Because they prayed for the welfare of their neighbors every day and were involved in activities to promote friendship in the local community, they knew better than anyone just how many people lived in each destroyed building and apartment.

The media around the world reported on the Soka Gakkai's rescue and relief efforts and praised the organization unstintingly.

It is easy to pay lip service to the sanctity of life. It is a simple matter to talk about contributing to society and working for peace. But what really counts is how an individual, how a group, responds when people's lives are in danger — when disaster strikes.



Our first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, also took the lead in relief efforts during a natural disaster. When the Great Tokyo Earthquake occurred in 1923, he was principal of the Shirogane Elementary School. He organized his sixth-grade students into a group,

which he named the Little Good Deed Club, to collect aid for earthquake victims. No doubt he chose this name because he wanted to tell his students that, young as they were, they could do their part.

The children, pulling small handcarts, visited the undamaged houses in the area, saying to each resident: “We’re from the Shirogane Elementary School. If you have anything you can spare, please donate it to the earthquake victims.” Though at first they felt shy, as they made their rounds their faces began to glow with pride.

Not to stand idly by when you see someone in trouble but to reach out a helping hand — this is the essence of true humanity and the spirit of Buddhism.

Five years later, in 1928, Mr. Makiguchi converted to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and began to walk the path of great good deeds.



In the final chapter of volume seven of *The New Human Revolution* [not yet translated into English], I related the story of a large group of our Niigata members who, on the way home from a pilgrimage to the head temple by chartered train, ran into a terrible snowstorm and were stranded for several days near Nagaoka. I wrote of this incident because I wanted to leave a record of the Soka Gakkai spirit demonstrated by the Nagaoka members, who made valiant efforts to the aid their stranded fellow members.

While that chapter was being serialized in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, I received word that the stationmaster of Miyauchi Station, where the drama unfolded, was still alive and well. He had worked hard to assist the passengers that time. Today he is 89.

The considerate, selfless actions of the Soka Gakkai members he witnessed during the crisis left him with a positive impression of our organization, and four years ago he became a member himself. I asked his local leader to deliver a message of thanks from me with a Soka Gakkai gold pin.



In this age wracked with egoistic rivalries and a pervasive alienation of individuals from one another, we in the Soka Gakkai are bringing happiness to others, serving the people and society, and creating a network of caring and concern.

We have a name for our effort: We call it kosen-rufu.

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