

**SGI President Ikeda's Essay**  
**A Love of Nature: the Soka Gakkai Tradition**  
**By HO GOKU**

A snow-blanketed scene purifies the heart. Swans glide serenely on the lake. It is a beautiful sight to behold as they spread their wings in joy, lifting gracefully into the skies.

Lake Hyo in Niigata Prefecture is famous as the Lake of the Swans. This year some 5,000 swans are wintering there.

In May 1971, I stood on the shores of the lake with a group of friends. Most of the swans had already flown north, but one female swan was shepherding her cygnets quietly across the lake's surface.

Instinctively, I aimed my camera at them, filled with the wish to preserve for all time these swans, this beautiful natural environment.



Some members of our Swan Headquarters in the town of Suibara — many of them youth division members — responded to my wish to found the Lake Hyo Protection Group. Throughout the four seasons, they clean the area around the lake and engage in projects to protect the environment. The local people speak highly of them and appreciate their efforts. And last Nov. 3, Culture Day, Suibara presented them with an official letter of thanks.

Life is hard in the snow country. We mustn't forget the hardships of those who live there. But at the same time, when we see those white wings lifting, the poet's heart is carried away to the land of dreams. My children's story *The Snow Country Prince* was inspired by such scenes.

I have visited Lake Hyo three times, and I have contributed a shelter for the care of sick swans and an island where they can rest.



My mentor, Josei Toda, spent his childhood and early youth in Hokkaido. In one corner of that northern island, there is a protected wilderness area called the Kushiro Japanese Crane Natural Park, or Crane Park, as it is called by locals. It opened in 1958; it celebrates its 40th anniversary this year. A year before its opening, there was a fund drive for the new park and its planned efforts to protect the Japanese crane, which had been designated an endangered species.

When he heard of the fund drive, Mr. Toda said: "This is important. People may think they rule this planet, but they will wind up in big trouble if they destroy their natural environment. Protecting the environment is protecting humanity, too." These words expressed his firm conviction as a Buddhist that people and their environment are one.

Mr. Toda was one of the first to respond to the fund drive. He donated •500,000 — at a time when the average starting salary for a public servant was less than •10,000 a month.

On the brink of extinction when the park first opened, some 600 cranes now make their home in the eastern part of Hokkaido during the winter months, delighting people with their beauty and grace.



The Soka Gakkai's founding president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, wrote about the intimate relationship between humanity and the natural world in his great work *The Geography of Human Life*.

The ideas of the oneness of humanity and nature, their interdependence and symbiosis, shine through his writings. A love of nature and taking action to protect and preserve it are part of the Soka Gakkai tradition.

On my first guidance trip abroad in 1960, I visited Brazil. This Soka Gakkai tradition I speak of has been passed on to our members there. In 1992, SGI-Brazil established the Amazon Ecological Research Center, which has for several years been engaged in a joint research project for the reforestation of the Amazon rain forest with Soka University's Brazilian Institute for the Natural Environment and the State of Amazonas' Department of Environmental Science and Technology of the Amazon. Our SGI members are actively involved in these and many other projects to protect the environment, including awareness-raising exhibitions that have traveled in Brazil and throughout South America and reaped a positive response. The SGI has received awards and commendations for these efforts from several city and town assemblies, including Manaus, São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

I know that Mr. Toda, who loved nature with all his heart, is rejoicing in these honors, wonderful symbols of the importance we place on environmentalism, which our members have received as exemplary world citizens.



The love and protection of our beautiful natural environment is a fertile ground for the cultivation of spiritual richness. And the purification of the human heart makes us appreciate the infinite beauty of birds, trees and all of nature even more.

When the snows finally melt, pairs of cranes will also dance in the marshland that we have preserved at our Hokkaido Training Center in Bekkai.

Spring approaches. The heart of the poet dances.

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