

SJI President Ikeda's Essay
My Love For Photography
By HO GOKU

Beauty unites humanity all around the world. Recently, the Val de Bièvres Photo Club in France presented me with a Diploma of Photographic Art and made me an honorary member. The club was founded in 1949 by André Fage and his father, Jean. It is a well-respected and prestigious international cultural organization whose aim is to create a worldwide network of amitié, or friendship, through the art of photography. I will regard it as an unsurpassed privilege if I am able, in some small way, to share in the work of spreading such a noble ideal as friendship around the world.



In a discussion with Mr. Fage when we met several years ago, I learned that the great French writer Victor Hugo was an aficionado of photography. Mr. Fage was kind enough to show me a rare photograph that Hugo had taken during a sojourn in Bièvres, a town on the outskirts of Paris.

Hugo was later driven into exile by the dictator Napoleon III. During his nine years abroad, he took several photographic self-portraits and sent them back to France.

The photographs were an announcement of sorts to enemies who had plotted his downfall: "I'm still here — hale and hearty as ever!" Taking photographs, too, can be an unceasing spiritual struggle.



As I recall, the first time I took up a camera was about 1970. I was feeling a bit run-down from overwork, and a friend gave me a camera, hoping it would provide a break from my normal routine. I wanted to show my appreciation for the gift by sending him a photograph I had taken, and so little by little I learned the art of photography.



In June 1971, a group of members and I were driving at night down a road along the edge of Lake Onuma in Hokkaido. Though the night was dark as pitch, there was a mysterious light coming from behind the distant mountains. One of my colleagues suggested it might be the lights of the nearby city of Hakodate, but I didn't think so.

We drove toward the light. Suddenly, we found ourselves staring up at a huge and brilliant moon. Its beauty took my breath away. On the lake's surface, the moon shimmered in gold and silver waves, creating a scene of magical beauty.

"This moment will never come again!" I thought, and I quickly grabbed my camera and snapped the shutter.



As such "dialogues with nature" accumulated over the years, they eventually took form as an exhibition of my photographs that has traveled around the world. I am humbled to have so many people view my work. At the same time I am happy if my photographs have given others the opportunity to commune with nature themselves and have enriched, in

even the smallest degree, their experience of the beautiful world around us.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, “In a single day a person has 840 million thoughts” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 471). The human heart is a fragile, ever-shifting thing, but nature stands majestic and immovable, providing us with a mirror to view our own lives.

The “Robert Capa Retrospective Exhibition” is currently on display at the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum. Robert Capa was one of the greatest photojournalists of the 20th century. His work documents the terrible and repeated tragedy of war from the battlefield, the front line of life and death.

Cornell Capa, Robert Capa’s brother, founded the International Center of Photography in New York to carry on his brother’s mission. During one of our several meetings, I said, “I believe that what motivates the photographer is a love of each irreplaceable moment, a love of life.” I also said, “Beautiful works of art cannot be created by a person whose life has grown soft through idleness and laziness.”



Nichiren Daishonin tells us that “life does not go beyond the moment” (MW-5, 34). Buddhism focuses on this single moment of life. The great life-entity of time without beginning is also contained in this transitory life-moment. We cannot postpone life to some vague future date; it is the here and now that counts, upon which all depends.

The renowned Russian physicist Dr. Anatoli Logunov, who was in Japan recently, said to me: “What makes you so strong, President Ikeda, is that you’ve never had time for a moment’s pause. That, I feel, is the key to your strength.”



The struggle to propagate Buddhism never stops for an instant. As the Lotus Sutra says, “This, the Buddha’s work, I have never for a moment neglected” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 226). We must devote our entire beings to this great undertaking with all our passion and energy; we must make our lives shine to illuminate that goal each second of our lives without cease. Only in that continuous effort can we walk the path toward lives of eternal brilliance and splendor. I believe that such a person can be considered a truly great photographer, a great artist, of life.

WT