

## Your Voice Counts

**Speaking out and taking action for the people makes our lives shine brilliantly, SGI President Ikeda says at a youth division meeting in May. This is the purpose of faith and our activities.**

*Before SGI President Ikeda's speech, the Soka Gloria Wind Orchestra performed Jean Sibelius' Finlandia.*

Members of the orchestra, thank you for your performance! It was splendid! This piece is well known. Does anyone here know the meaning behind it?

*Someone in the audience stood and said: "It's a revolutionary song of the Finnish people, who fought to throw off oppressive Russian rule."*

That's exactly right. Singing and playing this song, the people of Finland achieved independence. A country that had seemed small and weak succeeded in casting off the shackles of the mighty Russian empire. This struggle for independence began exactly 100 years ago.

*At the end of the 19th century, a movement to resist Imperial Russia's repressive rule over Finland arose among the people. Finlandia, sometimes referred to as Finland's second national anthem, was first performed in 1899. Due to the composition's patriotic timbre, the Russian authorities prohibited it from being performed. Nevertheless, it was soon being played and sung throughout the country under different names, symbolizing the struggle for freedom. Finland gained its independence in 1917. At President Ikeda's request, the orchestra performed the piece again.*

*Finlandia* is a wonderful melody overflowing with joy. The music begins somberly, but gradually the sound and tempo intensify until they explode into a bright, energetic dance. Listening to this piece unfold conjures images in my mind of the people who are at first lost and afraid, worried about their livelihoods and fearing for their lives. Slowly, they begin to awaken, and finally they rise up with the spirit, "Let's fight!" They dance with joy at their newfound confidence.

### **Attending Meetings Lifts Our Spirits**

Congratulations on this youth division leaders meeting!

I also commend the efforts of the arts division members who are watching via satellite broadcast at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters.

Among those of you gathered here tonight, there may be some who were reluctant to come, thinking on the way, "I really don't feel like going," "I'm not in the mood for this," "I'd much rather stay at home," or "I'd like to go and relax somewhere." I wish to state, however, that the fact that you came to this meeting is in itself most noble and is a victory for your life. Attending meetings for kosen-rufu is part of our Buddhist practice, and we attain immense benefit as a result. When we participate in such activities, our spirits are lifted and rejuvenated. Those who know such moments of fulfillment lead truly profound lives.

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Spending our time doing what we please may bring momentary pleasure, but it will not bring us true and lasting joy. We cannot become great artists or great actors of life — we cannot become great human beings. Literature, music and drama are all to be found in our activities for faith — in our prayers, our challenges to develop ourselves through SGI activities, and our efforts to educate others. All value is encompassed in these activities. This is the profound realm of Buddhism.

### Open the Way Forward for the People

The novel *The Eternal City* by the British author Hall Caine contains the passage, “The people are the true sovereign, and the only rebels are the classes who oppress them.” The people — not politicians or celebrities — are the true “sovereign” of society. Anyone who suppresses the people, therefore, is guilty of treason against that sovereign.

Caine also writes, “Our duty as men, in the face of injustice and oppression, is to assert the sovereignty of the people.” Injustice, oppression, misgovernment — to denounce these evils and arrogant outrages is our duty as human beings. We must not remain silent.

The author further adds, “Our duty as men is to remove every obstacle in the path of the people.” True humanism is opening a path along which the people may progress. The SGI is doing just that; it is advancing in the vanguard of the people. Those who persecute the people are enemies of democracy. To lose sight of this point is to invite disaster.

My mentor, the Soka Gakkai’s second president, Josei Toda, made me read *The Eternal City*, and I know why he did. Its contents are etched and ever alive in my mind.

The book also contains the line, “Public opinion is the most powerful force in the world, and no evil can live long in the face of it.” “Public opinion” is the voice of the people. And the voice of the people, the author says, is the most potent impetus that none can long resist. Therefore, I hope all of you will speak out and take up your pen. Authoritarian power must be boldly opposed and challenged with the power of speech and the written word.

This is also the spirit behind propagation, as taught by Nichiren Daishonin. Failing to speak out is to care only about protecting your own interests; it is a sign of cowardice. Even in my youth, whenever there was the slightest sign of unwarranted attack or criticism of the Soka Gakkai, I would immediately confront the perpetrator and defend the justice of our actions.

Now, putting my faith in all of you, I fight on, confident that you will carry on this spirit.

### Thirteen Million Voices for Peace

Recently, a petition of 13 million signatures collected by the Soka Gakkai youth division calling for the abolition of nuclear arms was submitted to the United Nations European Headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland and the Preparatory Committee Meeting of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference. The petition has elicited a tremendous response. I commend once again your historic efforts to bring together so many voices for peace.

The petition was in support of Abolition 2000, a campaign sponsored by the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation calling on governments to sign by the year 2000 an international treaty to eliminate nuclear weapons from the world within a time-bound framework. Some 13 million signatures were collected throughout Japan by the youth division in three months and presented to the U.N. secretary-general on April 27. Its submission to the U.N. European Headquarters was reported on by four newspapers in Germany, Switzerland and

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Spain.

### A Genuine Revolutionary

The other day, the prestigious French photography association, Val de Bièvres Photo Club, located in Bièvres on the outskirts of Paris, named me the first non-French honorary member. Later this year, the club will be holding a special photography exhibition in Paris to commemorate its 50th anniversary, and I was invited to submit several items for inclusion in the showing.

Speaking of Bièvres, the illustrious French author Victor Hugo was a frequent visitor to this area.

The Victor Hugo House of Literature, founded by President Ikeda, is located in Bièvres.

In addition to writing novels, Hugo was also a photography buff and artist. One of his paintings is titled *Ma Destinée* (My Destiny). How did he depict his destiny? He boldly painted a scene of a ship being tossed on a billowing wave. A fierce gale blows, giant waves crash down as the ship forges ahead into the raging storm, into tumultuous seas. “This ship is me!” — this is how Hugo saw his life. What a heroic spirit!

When Hugo painted this work, he was living in exile from France as a result of opposing the despotic Napoleon III. His struggles abroad lasted 19 years, from 1851 to 1870. The surging waves of oppression pounded relentlessly. His two sons were imprisoned by French authorities. A price was put on Hugo’s head, and a number of attempts were made on his life.

What he endured can be called a true struggle. In contrast, to be spoken ill of and have one’s name maligned are insignificant things. We still have a home to return to, food to eat and time to relax and take a break when we feel like it. How leisurely this is compared to the grueling demands of a genuine revolutionary struggle! Nevertheless, we cannot attain Buddhahood if we do not wage an earnest struggle for *kosen-rufu*.

Hugo’s sons no doubt were unable to stand by in silence while their father fought alone in exile and so resolved to join him in his fight.

Hugo was driven from his beloved Paris. Those who love their land the most are driven away; those who love the people the most are separated from them — the pattern of persecution is the same now as it was in the past. I can deeply relate to how Hugo felt. I understand well the sentiments of this noble champion of the people.

### One Person of Commitment

It is not simply a matter of enduring persecution. The question is how do we continue fighting even in the face of it? How can we come out victorious? That is what matters. Hugo also gave deep thought to these questions.

President Toda often told the members of the youth division: “If there is just one person who can continue to fight even if threatened with imprisonment or exile, then *kosen-rufu* will advance. My goal is to foster such a person of genuine commitment.” Determined to live up to these words, I have shouldered all and devoted myself unstintingly to our cause.

How to foster individuals of genuine commitment — everything comes down to this crucial point. I therefore take every opportunity to speak to youth in order to do just that. I am always addressing those individuals. “People will definitely carry on my work. Even one is enough. The future will unfold from there!” This is my spirit.

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Hugo possessed indomitable courage. He never stopped fighting for justice, even while enduring the constraints and inconveniences of life in exile. Without rest, he continued to wield his pen of censure; he never stopped writing.

My spirit is the same. Every day, I write something — for my fellow members and for posterity. Though my eyes grow tired and my shoulders stiff, I push myself on to write.

### Boldly Challenge Injustice

While he was living in exile, Hugo published a monograph castigating Napoleon III, titled Napoléon-le-Petit (Napoleon the Little). He criticized as “petty and base” this authoritarian ruler who cloaked himself in his uncle Napoleon Bonaparte’s glory, ascribing to him the epithet “Napoleon the Little.”

Wrote Hugo contemptuously: “Ah, Frenchmen! Look at this swine, covered with mire, who is wallowing in the skin of a lion!” He denounced the French ruler who had risen to his exalted status by exploiting the fame of the intrepid Napoleon Bonaparte. Napoleon III was not the least concerned about the people but preoccupied solely with personal comfort and safeguarding his own interests. Hugo’s words are harsh; they are a scathing condemnation.

I hope that all of you in the youth division will be courageous like Hugo and boldly speak the truth. We must strive to warmly embrace and work on behalf of those who are suffering and vulnerable. Yet, at the same time, we must fight vigorously against arrogant authoritarians.

The powerful may appear great, but in reality they are not. Greatest of all are the ordinary people. If those in power lead lives of idle luxury, it is because the people are silent. We have to speak out. With impassioned words, we need to resolutely attack abuses of power that cause people suffering. This is fighting on the side of justice. It is wrong to remain silent when confronted with injustice. Doing so is tantamount to supporting and condoning evil.

Hugo also produced a collection of biting satirical poems titled *Les Châtiments*. In them, he judges, condemns and rebukes injustice. Hugo declares, “I will pitch my tent among those who are amid tribulations.” There are many people in the world, not least refugees and exiles, who are undergoing severe sufferings and trials. It is among these suffering people, Hugo says, we should go, setting up camp and fighting alongside them. What dauntless composure he possessed! Not once did he cower in the face of adversity or seek a peaceful existence for himself. Rather, he asserted that those experiencing extreme hardship are most noble, and that we should live among the people who are subject to the harshest persecution.

The Soka Gakkai spirit is exactly the same.

It was Hugo’s belief that the more chaotic the times, the greater the opportunity for the solidarity of the people to shine. In this connection he wrote, “In times of social crisis, the last word that is left to me is...friendship.” Something on which we can depend — that is friendship; that is the bond among comrades. As SGI members, we have countless such bonds with one another.

Japan today is experiencing a period of social crisis. We have entered a very difficult and uncertain time. In a public opinion poll conducted in Japan this past May concerning people’s outlook for the future, more than 72 percent of the respondents — a record high — said that they felt the country was declining. That’s nearly three out of every four people. Meanwhile, an unprecedented low of only 12.6 percent of respondents said that they felt Japan’s situation was improving.

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Many thinking people are dismayed by the state of affairs in Japan today. Some suggest that the outlook for the future is growing dimmer. For precisely this reason, the unity of our youth division shines all the more brightly. I want to strongly impress upon you that the future of the world in the 21st century rests squarely on your shoulders. The youth of the SGI are the only hope for the future. There is no one else to turn to. Please work joyously to expand our brilliant network of friendship that is a foremost model for the world. There is nothing more respectable, beautiful or solid.

### Returning After 19 Years in Exile

Authoritarian rulers always come to a pitiful end. The dictator who persecuted Hugo gradually became deadlocked as a result of the country's escalating economic recession. In 1870, 19 years after Hugo went into exile, Napoleon III was ousted, and with that the period of tyranny suddenly came to an end.

[On Sept. 2, 1870, Napoleon III surrendered to Prussia after defeat in battle and was taken prisoner at Sedan. On Sept. 4, the establishment of the Third Republic was proclaimed in Paris, doing away with the imperial regime.]

I have witnessed the miserable end of many who clung to power and authority. How empty and wretched their final days are. The winds of praise and censure are impermanent. Faith is the only realm that is eternal.

The day after the new republic was declared, Hugo jubilantly returned to Paris. Although it was late at night when he arrived, a multitude of people gathered at the station to meet his train and lined the roads as he passed. They welcomed him with thunderous cheers, as though he were a general returning from a victorious campaign. "Hurrah for Hugo!" they cried. "Long live Victor Hugo!" This was the crowning triumph of a person of justice who had been forced into exile. What a difference from the end that met his oppressors, who for a time had appeared invincible and spent their days basking in pomp and splendor! Those who fight for justice will ultimately prevail.

In all likelihood, Hugo was not clad in fine garments on his return from exile. But he radiated with true magnificence as a human being. The victorious cheers of the people rang out with even greater fervor as he appeared before them. In response, Hugo went through the streets of Paris, stopping four times to address them. He called on them not to let up in their struggle against would-be oppressors, saying in effect: "I have returned triumphant. But we must not become complacent. We cannot be halfhearted in our fight. Let us continue our struggle until the republic has won total victory!"

I think that the Japanese people, who tend to content themselves with ambiguous outcomes, have much to learn from Hugo's tenacity of spirit. When fighting evil, we cannot desist until its roots are completely destroyed.

I am reminded of a poem by President Toda:

Death awaits  
All of us one day;  
Thus, be fearless,  
Leaving unchallenged  
Not a single enemy of the Buddha.

Not a single enemy must go unchallenged. This is the same spirit that Mr. Toda

expressed in his injunction: “You must never let up in your struggle against evil.” This is the meaning of a real struggle.

To realize decisive victory, Hugo appealed to his compatriots to unite solidly: “Unite! Then, you will be invincible.” Everything comes down to unity.

At the end of his exultant parade through Paris, Hugo expressed his deep gratitude to the people: “In a single hour, you have repaid me for 19 years of exile.” This was his famous declaration of victory.

Nineteen years — that is also how long it has been since I stepped down as Soka Gakkai president. Even after that, schemes to do away with me and all manner of persecution have continued unabated. Yet, I celebrated May 3 of this year, 19 years later, in high spirits supported by the cheers of the youth division and of 10 million members throughout the world.

### Youth Is an Invaluable Treasure

Hugo completed his famous novel *Les Misérables* while he was in exile. I read this book many times in my youth, even going to a local cemetery if I had nowhere else quiet to read. One passage in this work says:

The poverty of a young man is never miserable. Any lad at all, poor as he may be, with his health, his strength, his quick step, his shining eyes, his blood circulating warmly, his black locks, his fresh cheeks, his rosy lips, his white teeth, his pure breath, will always be envied by an old emperor.

Nothing can equal the splendor of youth. To be young is to possess a treasure of infinite worth, far greater than any person of power. This is all the more true of you who possess the “eternal treasure” of the Mystic Law. Those who live based on this supreme Law are bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

To fail to make the absolute most of this precious treasure of youth is a terrible waste. Please live so that your lives shine brilliantly. That is the purpose of faith and the reason for our Buddhist practice and SGI activities. Without such practical efforts, this treasure that you are so fortunate to possess will tarnish and fade. Your spirit will die. You are all youthful champions of the SGI. I hope you will take pride in that fact and adorn your lives for your own sake with a bright history of courageous struggle and intrepid advance.

### Refute Misguided Views and Slander

In a letter to the Ikegami brothers, who dauntlessly persevered in faith despite the many plots against them, Nichiren Daishonin writes: “No matter what should occur, you must not waver [in faith] in the slightest. You should attack [the enemies of the Buddha] even more vigorously. Though your very life may be in danger, you must not falter” (Gosho Zenshu, p. 1090).

Refuting misguided views and slander of the Law is the essence of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. It is a battle — a battle that must be won. That is why President Toda proclaimed, “Not a single one of the Buddha’s enemies must go unchallenged!” This is the ultimate conviction of Buddhist victory.

The American poet Edgar Guest (1881–1959) writes:

The only happy time of rest is that which follows strife

And sees some contribution made unto the joy of life.  
And he who has oppression felt and conquered it is he  
Who really knows the happiness and peace of being free.

In other words, true peace and tranquillity can be found only in carrying out a relentless struggle.

The German philosopher Nietzsche says: "If you want to rise high, use your own legs! Do not let yourselves be carried up, do not sit on the backs and heads of strangers!" Nietzsche is a philosopher whose works I have studied from my teens. He is famous for certain ideas that he developed, such as that of the "Superman," but it seems that he is not read very widely these days.

To truly "rise high" does not mean achieving status or fame or some immediate goal but to win as a human being. It is not using other people as stepping stones but lifting ourselves up through our own hard work. Only through laboring and striving in the task of construction can we ourselves create a life filled with indestructible and eternal happiness. Each of you is leading such a noble youth.

Shakespeare wrote, "The harder match'd, the greater victory."<sup>1</sup> The more formidable one's enemies, the more splendid the feat of winning victory over them. The more powerful the enemies we vanquish, the more brilliant our triumph.

### The 21st Century Belongs to You

In any event, the 21st century belongs to you. It will be you who shoulder the future. From your midst, the leaders of every sector of society will emerge. The grand stage of the new century is yours. I see all of you as the bright light of hope for the next generation. Each of you is infinitely precious.

You are the only ones who can spread the Daishonin's Buddhism throughout the world. As such, you enjoy the protection of the Gohonzon and Nichiren Daishonin, of all Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the universe.

I cherish each and every one of you and am wholeheartedly sending you my daimoku. I hope you will grow into outstanding and cultured leaders of the new century.

Please convey my sincere regards to all the members in your respective areas.

Thank you very much! Take care and let's meet again soon!

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespeare, King Henry VI, 3d. part, act 5, scene 1.