

## The Third Stage of Life Nutrition for the Spirit

*After you retire, nutrition for the spirit becomes more important than ever. In this dialogue, SGI President Ikeda gives some interesting ideas — from dancing to working — on how to care for your spirit, how to stay healthy, no matter how old you are.*

*Participants in this discussion on the 'Third Stage of Life' are SGI President Ikeda as well as Osamu Matsuoka and Katsusuke Sasaki of the Seikyo Shimbun.*

**Matsuoka:** This series has stirred a strong reader response. Recently, one of our readers sent us some materials he had collected on the factors believed responsible for the long life spans of people who live in Okinawa.

**Ikeda:** Yes, Okinawa has the longest average life expectancy in Japan, doesn't it? And since Japan has the longest average life expectancy in the world, the longest within Japan means the longest in the entire world.

I first visited Okinawa just two months after I became the third president of the Soka Gakkai on May 3, 1960.

**Sasaki:** The day you arrived in Okinawa, July 16, 1960, was the 700th anniversary the day that Nichiren Daishonin submitted the "Rissho Ankoku Ron" to Japan's rulers, remonstrating against their support of erroneous teachings.

**Matsuoka:** Screenings of Sunrise Over Hong Kong, a film of the 16th World Peace Youth Culture Festival held in the former British territory in February 1997, are now being held all around Japan. Twenty members of the Okinawa young men's division represented Japan at the festival, performing the traditional Okinawan dance, the Kachashi, to great acclaim.

**Ikeda:** Yes, that's right. The Hong Kong members' performance and the traditional drum-and-dance performance of the South Korean members were also spectacular, but the Okinawan dance really stole the show. Okinawa has an international atmosphere, located at a key point along the maritime Silk Road, which has made it a melting pot of Asian culture.

**Sasaki:** The festival was held in the Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Center, where the ceremonies for Hong Kong's return to China were later held. After the festival was over and you and your guests had retired, Mr. Matsuoka and I remained. When your message declaring the festival a great success was conveyed to the participants in English and Cantonese, a great roar of joy went up through the hall.

**Ikeda:** The term Kachashi means to mix. The dance remains firmly rooted in daily Okinawan life, and it is performed regularly at all kinds of parties and gatherings. Everyone just gets in a circle and dances. There are no fixed steps. Each person just improvises as he or she steps into the dancing ring.

**Matsuoka:** The Okinawa youth division members visited the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten with a group of SGI members from all parts of the world before the festival

Title: Nutrition for the Spirit

Subject: World Tribune 08/14/98 n.3204 p.1 WT980814p01

Author:

Keywords: Aging Guidance Life News Nutrition Spirit Stage Third Tribune World

began. They lost no time in teaching the eager kindergarten students to dance, and the Kachashi wound its way from classroom to classroom, picking up more dancers along the way.

**Ikeda:** Yes. Once you start dancing, all barriers of age, gender, nationality and race melt away. Dance is a great equalizer. That equality is the Okinawa spirit, a spirit that we can also see in how the elderly are treated with love and respect there.

At the festival, our friends from around the world found themselves captivated by that Okinawan rhythm and joined together as one. The barriers between audience and performers disappeared.

**Sasaki:** Hifumi Kinjo, a young men's division headquarters vice leader, played the shamisen [a traditional Japanese three-stringed instrument] for the dance. The Okinawan word for sun is tida. Mr. Kinjo and his friends have formed a pop group they call Tida Company, which uses traditional Okinawan instruments and musical influences in their songs and is very popular there. They appear on television and have many fans.

**Ikeda:** I'm so happy that they're doing well. Mr. Kinjo also performed at the 1994 Asia Youth Peace Music Festival at the Fukuoka Dome in Kyushu, Japan, and he received enthusiastic applause.

**Sasaki:** Yes. His mother, Hideko, is 80 years old. She has two older sisters, Toyo Kohagura, 96, and Tooyo Oshiro, 93.

**Matsuoka:** All three of these long-lived sisters first encountered Buddhism and joined the Soka Gakkai during the great wave of propagation that took place around the time of your first visit to Okinawa.

**Sasaki:** Toyo Kohagura is now in a nursing home, but she is healthy. Every day she reads the Seikyo Shimbun, from cover to cover, without glasses.

Her 93-year-old sister rises every morning at 5:00. After taking care of her housework, she goes out to work in the fields. Her daughter, who lives with her, tries to stop her, but she says: "It's no fun sitting in the house watching television with the fan on. I'd rather be out weeding."

**Ikeda:** One of Rome's great wise men once said that work is the best nutrition for the spirit, and that is true. It's well known that many people age very quickly after they retire and lose the excitement and interest that work provided them. Most of Okinawa's elderly citizens are hard workers.

It is also the local custom to treat elderly people well, and they have a distinct role to play in society. That is wonderful. Having a forum to work and be productive contributes greatly to their health.

**Matsuoka:** Whenever I report on elderly people, I am awed by their strength. It is a strength that has allowed them to survive the hardships of war and poverty, an invincible spirit that I don't find in Japanese people born after World War II.

**Ikeda:** Yes, I think that's true. Okinawa in particular suffered in World War II. It was the only part of Japan in which a ground war was fought, and the islands were bombed so

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fiercely, it was called a storm of steel. The attack even changed the island's topography, blasting away mountains and valleys, and killed many innocent civilians. Today's elderly Okinawans are the people who rose from the ashes of that devastated land. Okinawa was not rebuilt by the government or the military. It was rebuilt by the Okinawan people.

This effort was a true battle. That, no doubt, is what instilled in the depths of their hearts the keen awareness of the meaning and nobility of life and work.

**Sasaki:** The younger brother of Hideko Kinjo, feeling it would be unpatriotic to do otherwise, joined the army and was killed when still in his teens.

**Matsuoka:** The Okinawans experienced the terrible inhumanity of the Japanese forces fighting on their islands, and they also always had a deep suspicion of mainland Japan. In the early days of Soka Gakkai activities on Okinawa, those who accepted faith in the Daishonin's teachings were often ostracized for "worshipping mainland gods."

**Sasaki:** Tooyo Oshiro was the first member to embrace faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism in her region. Her two sisters followed suit, and all three have lived long lives devoted to faith.

**Ikeda:** Their long lives demonstrate the greatness of Buddhism. Living out our lives fully and surviving the vicissitudes of life is what faith and our activities for kosen-rufu are all about. These noble sisters of Okinawa have fought alongside me over the years, praying for the happiness of their friends, even when many still derided the Soka Gakkai as a gathering of the sick and the poor. Without doubt, they are advancing on the path of eternal good fortune and benefit.

**Sasaki:** Shortly before the Vietnam War, Hideko Kinjo was destitute — so poor that she didn't know where her family's next meal would come from. She made necklaces out of shells she picked up on the beach and walked to the town of Kincho to sell them to American soldiers.

When she found that she was pregnant with her sixth child, she seriously considered having an abortion. But a friend said to her, "You don't know what great mission this child might have." These words touched a core deep inside and, weeping, she offered prayers of apology and gratitude to the Gohonzon. This child turned out to be Hifumi Kinjo, who performed at the culture festival.

**Matsuoka:** When a child, Hifumi and his family were ridiculed because they lived in a house missing half its roof, but four years ago he managed to build a new, three-story house for his mother. The second floor is the central meeting place for Onna Chapter's Tancha District members, and they have had the concrete wall surrounding the water tank on the roof painted in pastel shades of the SGI tricolor flag — blue, red and yellow. Against the deep blue tropical skies, it shouts out "Here's the Soka Gakkai!"

**Sasaki:** The Okinawa Training Center, a fortress of peace built on the site of an old nuclear missile launching pad, is located in the same district. The area where the three sisters worked so hard for kosen-rufu has now been transformed into a region of peace and prosperity visited by SGI members from all over the world.

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**Ikeda:** It was in Okinawa some 33 years ago, on Dec. 2, 1964, that I first took up my pen to write the novel *The Human Revolution*. Visiting the islands, I could not help but cry out: “War is barbarous and inhuman. Nothing is more cruel, nothing more tragic.”

My undying hope for Okinawa is that, as a place that has experienced the cruelest pain and suffering, it become a place of supreme happiness and joy. I can’t begin to express how happy I am that our Okinawa friends are living such long, healthy lives.

**Matsuoka:** The “mother of kosen-rufu” in Okinawa, Tamae Nakama, the first women’s division leader there, is now 71. She is a perfect example of someone making the most of the third stage of life.

**Ikeda:** Yes. She has really worked hard for kosen-rufu in Okinawa.

Faith means courage and taking action. She has said: “The struggle can’t be won unless you keep taking action, unless you keep moving forward, going round to visit people until your legs ache and become hard as iron. You have to walk and walk and walk until you develop those iron legs.” She is a wonderful example for us all.

Her husband was born in Okinawa, but he was educated in Hawaii and then moved to Tokyo, where he met her. After they were married, Mr. Nakama decided to go back and settle in Okinawa. The couple arrived there together by boat on New Year’s Day 1956. Mrs. Nakama was born and raised in Tokyo.

**Matsuoka:** During your first visit to Okinawa in July 1960, the Okinawa Chapter was established, and Mrs. Nakama was appointed as the first chapter women’s division leader. The day before the inaugural chapter meeting, you visited Mr. Nakama to pay your respects and confirm her appointment with him. He told you that he would fully support his wife in her new responsibilities.

**Sasaki:** That night, Mr. Nakama said to his wife: “We’re involved in a revolution, so I want you to devote your full energies to your Gakkai activities. I promise not to complain if one of my shirts is missing a button or my shoes aren’t polished. Give it all that you’ve got. Work hard together with President Ikeda. You promised him that you would.”

**Ikeda:** It was at the height of the July heat, but Mr. Nakama, with his strong eyebrows and handsome face, was wearing a necktie. When I said that I wanted to ask his wife to take on the position of Okinawa’s women’s division leader, he replied, “My dear wife will be working for the Okinawan people, and I will support her in any way I can.” I met him the following year and the year after that, each time offering my thanks for his cooperation.

**Matsuoka:** Before she started practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism, Mrs. Nakama was very sick and weak. She used to spend about half of every month in bed. But sensing that her mission lay in helping the Okinawan people, she became a hardworking woman with legs of iron and continued her ceaseless efforts to promote our movement to this day.

**Sasaki:** Her husband died in 1970, leaving her a widow at only 43. His last words to her were “Work for kosen-rufu with President Ikeda.”

**Ikeda:** Mr. Nakama was hospitalized in Tokyo, and I sent my greetings to him several times. I told Mrs. Nakama that everything would be fine in Okinawa, and she should spend her time taking care of him — but she couldn’t bring herself to stay away from Okinawa

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too long. That is how devoted she was to her adopted home.

Kosen-rufu is a revolution. Without selfless devotion, without the ungrudging spirit of individuals such as her, this revolution cannot be accomplished.

**Sasaki:** Nevertheless, she loved and respected her husband and was deeply grateful to him. In the almost 30 years since his death, she has never failed to carry out his last instructions to her, working day and night for kosen-rufu. She cares nothing for her own comfort, only for that of others. When she sees young members working late at the community center, for instance, she'll fix them a snack of some kind, like hot miso soup with fresh fish.

**Matsuoka:** As I said earlier, she is a model for how one can be productive and fulfilled in the third stage of life. "I have decided that I will continue to work for kosen-rufu all my life," she has said. "That is how I will end my days. As long as President Ikeda is still healthy and devoting himself tirelessly, I am determined to do so, too. I want to repay President Ikeda for making Okinawa a land of peace."

**Ikeda:** The Daishonin writes, "Whatever trouble may occur, consider it as transitory as a dream and think only of the Lotus Sutra" (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 147). When all is said and done, those who dedicate their lives to kosen-rufu, just as the Daishonin instructs, will triumph. He also says, "You will grow younger" (MW-5, 158).

If you continue on the path of kosen-rufu, a strong life force will naturally well forth from the depths of your being. As the years pass, you will grow younger and younger and live to the end of your days filled with vitality. That is what Buddhism teaches us, and that is what so many of our worthy seniors and comrades in faith have shown us through their lives.

**Sasaki:** More than 40 years have passed since Mrs. Nakama left Tokyo to settle in Okinawa, so I felt it was worthwhile to ask her the Okinawan secret to long life. She said it was because Okinawans are essentially good-natured people. They are broad-minded. The pace of their lives is relaxed. And they care about others, placing great value on human relationships. Those, she suggested, were the secrets to their long lives.

She said that when she comes to Tokyo, the city is too fast-paced, and she doesn't feel comfortable anymore.

**Ikeda:** I see. Being a good-natured person is the secret to long life. I suppose that is true. A person who cares for others is treasured by others. I think that tradition is alive and well in Okinawa.

In our next installment, let's talk about the secret to the Okinawans' long life from a medical perspective.

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