

**SGI President Ikeda's Essay
Supporting the Community
By DAISAKU IKEDA, SGI President**

For 45 years, the Soka Gakkai has supported its neighbors in Shinanomachi, home to its headquarters. From helping install street lamps to providing meeting spaces for local groups, the Soka Gakkai has always tried to be a good neighbor and make its facilities hubs of peace and prosperity for all in the community.

It will soon be 45 years since the Soka Gakkai Headquarters moved to Shinanomachi, Tokyo, and 35 years since we built the present building.

I am always deeply grateful for the warm support of the local Shinanomachi residents. Members visit our headquarters here in great number, and I'm sure that there are times when it must cause some inconvenience to our neighbors. But despite that, they have always treated us warmly.

On our 60th anniversary, in 1990, the storekeepers' association in the area hung a congratulatory sign at Shinanomachi Station, joining us in our celebrations. And when the Soka Senior High School baseball team made it to the national high school baseball championships, held each year at Koshien Stadium in Osaka, the association members placed congratulatory stickers and posters in their shops.

This neighborly warmth has meant a great deal to our members from all over Japan and the world who visit the Soka Gakkai Headquarters here in Shinanomachi.



I have always taken great pains to stay in close communication with our neighbors and to make a positive contribution to the local community. Buddhism must be practiced in society. Sure progress in propagating Buddhism depends upon nurturing relations of trust and friendship with our neighbors and working actively for the development of our local community.

When I became the third president of the Soka Gakkai, I visited our neighbors and introduced myself to them. I remember calling on the home of then Minister of International Trade and Industry Hayato Ikeda (later prime minister of Japan), located a short distance down the road from the headquarters. When Mr. Ikeda came out to greet me — remember, I was only 32 at the time — he looked at me and remarked humorously: “You’ve become the new president? Of the local youth club?” We both had a good laugh.

Communication makes people comfortable with one another and brings them together.



Once, in the past, there was a problem with the street lights in Shinanomachi. They were too dim, and there were several incidents of people being attacked late at night. The neighborhood association planned to replace the lights with bright mercury-vapor lamps, but the expense made its early realization most unlikely.

When I heard about this, I brought the matter up at the Soka Gakkai's executive conference, suggesting that we look into whether we could assist in some way. We eventually decided to contribute to the project, and the new lights were duly installed.



I remember another occasion, a little more than 13 years ago. I had stopped in at a coffee shop near the headquarters, and the owner began to tell me about the traditional summer celebration, the Bon dancing, that they used to hold in Shinanomachi.

It had started soon after the war. Life was hard and bleak, but one night each summer the people in the neighborhood would gather in an empty, burned-out lot on the Keio Hospital grounds (just across the road from Shinanomachi Station) and hold a rousing Bon festival.

But as the neighborhood was gradually rebuilt, there were fewer and fewer open spaces for the festival, and eventually it was discontinued. The local residents very much wanted to revive this popular annual tradition, however.

The coffee shop owner asked me, “Is there some area that the Gakkai could let us use for the festival?”

I replied on the spot: “That’s a great idea. After all, I’m a Shinanomachi resident, too.” I’ll never forget the smile of delight that lit the coffee shop owner’s face.



On Aug. 9, 1985, the sound of drums accompanying the Bon dancing rang out from the open area in front of the Seikyo Shimbun building. The first “Shinanomachi Hometown Bon Dancing Festival,” sponsored by the Shinanomachi Storekeepers’ Development Association, had begun. This is the 14th year of the festival, and over the years it has become a beloved summer event in Shinanomachi — one that keeps getting better and better.

I wrote a poem for the festival two years ago:

Bon dancing

So many memories

Scenes of peace



The presence of Soka Gakkai culture and community centers has drawn appreciation from local residents in regions around Japan.

Our members always make utmost efforts to avoid any inconvenience to the neighborhood when we hold meetings. Furthermore, in many areas we have set aside Sundays as a day when teams of members go out to collect trash and clean the streets leading from our facilities to the nearest train or subway station.

We also make our centers available for use by local groups, at their request. In addition, these facilities are designated as emergency evacuation centers and play an important role as bases for relief and rescue efforts in cases of natural disasters.



Buddhism teaches the oneness of our lives and the land in which we dwell. We are one with the physical environment and the community we live in.

The smiling faces of Gakkai members cannot fail to cheer and brighten their communities. Where the Mystic Law flourishes, the region does, too. It is the mission of every Buddhist to make this happen.

Our greatest wish is that the communities in which we live become centers of peace and happiness, capitals of prosperity.

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