

Courage for the Future

Echoing President Kennedy's words that 'Courage, not complacency, is our need today,' the SGI president says that what the world needs more than anything now is lots of courage. 'We need the courage to look to the future and resolve to set to work on fresh challenges, on opening new frontiers,' he says.

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 25th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji on Aug. 27.

Thank you for traveling all this way to attend today's meeting.

What was the human quality most valued by President John F. Kennedy? Courage.

The Soka Gakkai's second president, Josei Toda, also continually stressed the importance of courage, saying: "It is important to have compassion. But compassion must ultimately be backed by courage. Only through courageous action can we be truly compassionate. Compassion and courage are two sides of the same coin."

President Kennedy called on people to ask themselves this: "First, were we truly men of courage — with the courage to stand up to one's enemies — and the courage to stand up, when necessary, to one's own associates — the courage to resist public pressure as well as private greed?" He emphasized fighting not only external evils but internal evils as well. I understand his sentiments well.

Genuine Vs. Brute Courage

I have met many world leaders. I was scheduled to meet President Kennedy but had to cancel at the last minute to mitigate would-be exploiters. Unfortunately, a short time later, President Kennedy was assassinated. And much to my lasting regret, we never met.

President Kennedy also said, "Courage, not complacency, is our need today...." If we simply content ourselves with maintaining the status quo, there is no progress. There are no fresh victories.

We need the courage to look to the future and resolve to set to work on fresh challenges, on opening new frontiers. Kennedy's words are truly wonderful.

Many Japanese lack moral courage. Critics are quick to point out that while the Japanese may give a superficial appearance of having courage, it generally tends to be of the brash, physical sort — a reckless valor. This kind of brute courage is what produces arrogance.

On the other hand, to have genuine courage means holding fast to one's beliefs and convictions. And faith in the Mystic Law is the ultimate belief or conviction. Faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism means to become a friend to those suffering, to brave all obstacles to fight against injustice.

Faith, compassion and courage are one. Through courage, the SGI has triumphed. Courage has made it possible for us to open the path of kosen-rufu as widely as we have today. The Daishonin also warns strictly, "Nichiren's disciples cannot accomplish anything if they are cowardly" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 128). And that "a coward cannot have any of his prayers answered" (MW-1, 246). The SGI is an organization of the most courageous, unsurpassed champions of justice.

Defeat Is Defeat

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "So long as there is even a handful of men true to their

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pledge there can be only one end to the struggle — and that is victory.”

As SGI members, we have made a pledge to realize kosen-rufu. If there are even a small number of people who have a genuine commitment to achieving kosen-rufu, then we will succeed in the end without fail. Then our victory is assured.

And it is imperative that we do succeed. Defeat, no matter how we justify it, is defeat. We cannot afford to fail in our struggle to eradicate the roots of human suffering.

As Chinese premier Zhou Enlai once said, victory cannot be achieved by sitting around and waiting for it to happen; it must be won through struggle. We have to take the initiative. If we just wait passively, we cannot hope to win.

In *The World As I See It*, Albert Einstein said, “Remember that difficulties and obstacles are a valuable source of health and strength to any society.” Hardships and obstacles are an inescapable part of life and the world.

Similarly, it is a great mistake to think that gaining position and prestige in society means that all your difficulties will simply disappear. Every individual or organization encounters obstacles, comes face to face with hardships. As Einstein points out, challenging these trials strengthens us and contributes to our good health.

If things were always to go smoothly, we’d have no opportunity to develop our fortitude and strength. We’d grow weak and apathetic.

“Overcoming difficulties strengthens us” — leading intellectuals and the teachings of Buddhism agree completely on this point.

Zhou Enlai said, “The direction and the objective being set, it is up to us to make the journey one step after another.” We have fixed our course on kosen-rufu, but that is not enough: We have to make continuous, steady efforts toward it. Without those efforts, we cannot reach our goal.

In his novel *The Eternal City*, Hall Caine cried out that the strongest are those who become strong through suffering and forbearance. This conviction resonates with the idea of human revolution, the stand-alone spirit.

I have striven with this same readiness to endure all. The cowardly do not have the courage to take on and endure suffering. And the SGI has no use for leaders who shun hardship, who are self-serving and do anything to protect themselves.

The renowned American educator John Dewey once said, “I should say that my philosophy of life is based essentially on the single word *patience*.” These are the words of a scholar whom both President Makiguchi and President Toda held in high esteem.

The First Step Is Now

Gathered here are leaders and representatives from throughout Japan as well as from 17 countries and territories abroad. Welcome and thank you for attending this Headquarters Leaders Meeting, which may be regarded as the first step toward the 21st century. I sincerely appreciate the long way many of you traveled to be here. Let’s give a hearty round of applause to the overseas members as an expression of our deep respect and admiration.

We have members here from Brazil, Argentina and Nicaragua, from the United States and from Taiwan and South Korea.

The Taiwan government, by the way, has commended the SGI organization there as an exemplary social organization for the seventh year in succession. Congratulations!

Our members in South Korea, meanwhile, have built a solid, united organization of faith, a model for the rest of the world. The youth division in particular has been undertaking wonderful activities. I also warmly congratulate the Korean members on the many awards and commendations they have received.

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Continuing, let us welcome members from Thailand, Myanmar and Sri Lanka. From Europe, we have members from Italy, France, Germany, Spain, Belgium and Russia. And all the way from Africa, we have members from Ghana!

Let's give them all another warm round of applause.

Aiming Toward the Sun

Today, Aug. 27, is the birthday of the great German philosopher Hegel. He originated the famous Hegelian dialectic process for reconciling opposites.

There was a poem that Hegel loved to recite to himself for encouragement and inspiration:

*Friend, strive toward the sun
The day of humanity's salvation is near
Insignificant are obscuring leaves and branches
Charge ahead till you reach the sun.*

Where should we aim? Toward the sun, the poem urges. Toward a better world for humanity. How immense is the aspiration, spirit and hope embodied in these words!

When Hegel was young, the French Revolution was taking place. His youth was lived out against that backdrop.

Today, we of the SGI are in the midst of a revolutionary movement known as kosen-rufu. We are not walking with our heads downcast or devoting ourselves to empty, fleeting amusements or thinking only about personal profit.

“Rise with a deep determination to work for the welfare of humanity,” the poem seems to say. “Do not be concerned by small obstacles, like so many branches and leaves, that obscure your path. Pay no heed to mindless criticism and insults!”

Let us advance boldly toward the sun of kosen-rufu. Doing so truly shows our courage.

The poem concludes:

*And when you are tired
That is fine too
Your sleep will be all the more satisfying.*

When we are tired, we can sleep well. When we have worked hard, we can sleep all the more soundly. When we have worked at something with all our might, we are left with a sense of peace and well-being.

Striving to realize our dreams can be exhausting — but nothing is more satisfying or fulfilling.

Do you know what day tomorrow is? Aug. 28 is the birthday of another illustrious German figure, the poet Goethe. Hegel and Goethe were contemporaries, with Goethe being the senior by 21 years. I have heard that while both men were still alive, a German university held a two-day festival on their birthdays, Aug. 27 and 28, to celebrate “two world-acclaimed German cultural giants.” This is a far cry from the festivals held around Japan in honor of various local gods that, if pressed, most people would admit to not knowing the first thing about. In this celebration of real, live, cultural figures, one senses a nation of people who possess profound cultural richness and depth.

Veering Off Course

Goethe wrote: “Ingratitude is always a kind of weakness. I have never come across

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capable people who were ungrateful.”

In other words, ingratitude cannot be found among people of first-rate caliber. Goethe declares that no decent person who has achieved a modicum of success ever forgets the debt of gratitude he or she owes others.

Only fools delude themselves into thinking that they did everything on their own. Such individuals can accomplish nothing of consequence — this is Goethe’s implication. If you wish to achieve something significant, to leave behind a legacy of lasting value, you also need to possess outstanding human qualities.

We have seen many ungrateful people — people who, though they gained position and prestige through the support of our organization, showed no appreciation or respect toward the members. Some of these base individuals even betrayed the organization and their fellow members for personal gain.

While for a time such faithless, back-stabbing individuals might smugly congratulate themselves on profiting so cleverly from maligning the Soka Gakkai, they invariably come to a wretched end. I have seen clear proof of this countless times over the 51 years I have been practicing Buddhism.

What have those who betrayed the Soka Gakkai achieved? Did they accomplish anything great for posterity? Were their efforts applauded? I can say with certainty that the answer in every case was no.

In the end, such individuals lose the trust and support of people in society at large, as well. They end up being scorned and despised.

Those who mistakenly believe that they have achieved everything through their efforts alone embark on a course that derails their entire lives. Ungrateful people will never be successful in anything that they do.

Those who have lost sight of their starting point only continue to veer even further off course. For us, our starting point is faith and the SGI. If we lose sight of that, if we lose sight of the correct path in life, we cannot hope to achieve success in anything.

President Toda, I must add, was incredibly severe with people who showed ingratitude or forgot the debts they owed to others.

Everyone Has the Right

Goethe wrote, “In today’s age no one should be silent or give way.” We have to advance courageously — to press ever forward. The poet continued, “We have to speak out and bestir ourselves...; whether on the side of the majority or the minority is quite unimportant.” He also declared that we can neither protect nor defend ourselves from criticism — we must remain impervious to it. Then, eventually it will ease off.

Everyone has the right to speak out, to take action — this is democracy. This applies across our membership, whether you hold a top leadership position or none at all. Goethe is saying that we should speak out fearlessly and act boldly, without worrying whether our opinion is in the majority or the minority or whether what we say will be criticized by others.

When speak out in this spirit, those antagonistic toward us will come to respect us. Goethe is talking about an eager, challenging spirit. Let us continue to advance with this indomitable spirit — now, next year and the year after!

While citing the insights of such great thinkers as Hegel and Goethe, we discuss the profound truths of Buddhism — we explore doctrines such as a single life-moment containing 3,000 realms and delve into the nature of the Buddha of limitless freedom, as well as many other Buddhist principles. We study and discuss the wisdom of the ages, East and West, the essence of Buddhism and everyday life and society. This is what makes the SGI so remarkable.

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My Heart Is My Only Pride

What is the ultimate message of Hegel and Goethe? Quite simply, I perceive it to be that our heart or spirit is what matters most. Goethe once said: “My intellect and talent are valued far higher than my heart. But my heart is my only pride. It alone is the source of all things — all my strength, all my happiness, all my travails. What knowledge I possess, anyone can acquire. But this heart of mine, only I alone can possess.”

The ultimate essence of Buddhism, too, is that our heart, our invincible spirit forged through life’s challenges, will remain as our eternal treasure — both at the moment of death and in our next lifetime. It will shine forever with undiminished brilliance.

You are all living such noble lives. You are all walking the path to unsurpassed happiness. I hope that you will take pride in the wonderful teaching “What matters most is the heart.”

To be continued in an upcoming issue of the World Tribune

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