

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S OCT. 22 SPEECH (PART 2) **The Making of Champions**

What makes a good leader? Humility, strength and religious conviction. 'What matters is one's substance as a human being. And what one has done,' SGI President Ikeda emphasizes.

I want to talk a little more, if I may. After all, the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra speaks of "never for a moment neglecting the Buddha's work" (*The Lotus Sutra*, 226).

Today we have with us the noble mothers of the U.S. kosen-rufu movement — members of the women's division Pioneer Group. My warmest welcome to you all. Thank you for traveling such a long distance to join us. I have fond memories of all of you from the early days of our movement. You've all done a truly magnificent job in your adopted homeland.

We also have representatives of the arts division Young Power Group — a gathering of talented entertainers, the bright stars of the Soka Gakkai. Congratulations on the 30th anniversary of your group's founding.

When arts division members come to a gathering, our community centers are always packed. No Gakkai leader is a match for them! You, the arts division members, are advancing kosen-rufu by bringing unsurpassed joy to many people. My deepest appreciation to you.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote many letters voicing his praise and respect for women — these were women exerting themselves earnestly in their practice, widows who were valiantly persevering alone in faith. He always commended them and expressed appreciation for their sincere devotion to Buddhism. In the male-dominated society in which he lived, the Daishonin stressed equal rights for men and women, insisting that there should be no discrimination among them.

In a letter addressed to the mother of Oto Gozen (thought today to have been Nichimyo Shonin), who had made the long, perilous journey to visit him on Sado Island where he was exiled, the Daishonin writes: "I, Nichiren, have been exiled here for a reason. The fact that you, a woman, have traveled all this way makes me think that my exile may have been destined so that you might reveal your profound seeking spirit in faith. When I think of this, I feel a deep sense of gratitude" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1222).

"How wonderful your faith is!" he is exclaiming. "I have been exiled to Sado, so that you might reveal the splendid depth of your faith. How amazing that you made it here! I'm filled with profound appreciation. I will never forget your sincere faith. You will definitely enjoy happiness and fulfillment in lifetime after lifetime, eternally." Those were probably his sentiments. This is a very significant letter.

The Century of SGI Women

Obstacles and hardships are the material that let us forge genuine faith. We should actually be grateful when we have them.

The Soka Gakkai has advanced in accord with the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin, fighting against the three obstacles and four devils. This is proof that our organization is truly dedicated to carrying out the widespread propagation of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Those persecuted by the forces that would destroy the correct Buddhist teaching are the real thing.

Whenever the Soka Gakkai has encountered persecution, it has been the courage of the women's division members that has stood out. Their sincerity, strong faith and true grit

mirror that of the courageous women who shine brightly in the pages of the Daishonin's writings.

No matter how some men may strut around pretending to be great, the benefit that our women's division members gain as a result of their tireless efforts for kosen-rufu belongs to them; it is the fruit of their hard work.

The whole world recognizes that the 21st century will be the Century of Women. I hope that through your efforts, you will make it the Century of SGI Women.

Fearless

My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, said: "The Soka Gakkai is confidently carrying out its activities in accord with Buddhism, in accord with the laws of the land and in accord with the principles of society. For that reason, it fears no one." The Soka Gakkai is fearless.

Our first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, died in prison for his beliefs. The second and third presidents — Mr. Toda and myself — were also imprisoned. The Soka Gakkai has weathered and prevailed over incredible defamation and persecution. It is rock-solid.

Let's, therefore, always advance unafraid and dignified — as champions of philosophy, as champions of the spirit, as victors of unsurpassed triumph, as winners of the greatest glory.

There is a maxim, a spiritual gem, that I want to share: The Chinese author Lu Xun wrote, "Final victory is determined by the number of people who keep advancing." We of the Soka Gakkai will "keep advancing." As a result, final victory will be ours.

Serving the People

Former president Patricio Aylwin of the Republic of Chile is known throughout the world as a philosopher-statesman. He is a leader of immense caliber. I enjoy a close acquaintance with him. We spoke at the presidential offices, in the magnificent Moneda Palace in Santiago, when I visited Chile in 1993. Mr. Aylwin is tall in stature and gracious in demeanor.

We met for the first time in November 1992 in Tokyo. Our meeting was brief, but our shared convictions struck a chord, and we agreed to collaborate on a dialogue for publication. The Japanese version of the work, *The Dawn of the Pacific*, has already been published. Mr. Aylwin put a great deal of thought and effort into the dialogue, which touches on a wide range of subjects.

The Chilean leader states his views about democracy, declaring that politicians must have the spirit to serve. Politicians are here to serve the people, he asserts, not to be served by them. Everyone, not just politicians, should ask themselves, "What is the purpose of my life?" Is the reason for your being here right now to indulge in idle pleasures, to gratify selfish desires? Or is it to serve humanity? Mr. Aylwin declares that for him the answer is clear: we are not here to have others at our beck and call but to work for others' welfare.

This is also the Soka Gakkai spirit. A genuine leader is one who serves the people. Those who think they can make others do all the work, while they sit back and take it easy, are failures as leaders. Such behavior is unacceptable.

I declare that "Serving the People" will remain the eternal creed of the Soka Gakkai.

Power Corrupts

Mr. Aylwin also argues that power should be used to lead people in the direction of good not in the direction of evil. Power is simply a means, a tool, for doing good, he says. The moment power becomes an end or goal in itself, all ideals are abandoned.

The Chilean leader further discusses why power corrupts. Power brings privilege, he

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observes. When people acquire positions of authority, they are given special treatment and addressed with deference and respect.

In their daily lives, as well, they occupy the highest echelon of society — they receive special services and many other advantages, and are made a great fuss over by many people. In addition, those around them, continues Mr. Aylwin, deliberately neglect to communicate certain facts or information, or else present them in a distorted manner so as not to displease, anger or offend the leader. They massage the leader's ego and fan his or her vanity, he says.

Those in power are surrounded by sycophants, who flatter and tell them only things that will please them. So unless there are people who harshly state the truth, leaders can easily lose sight of themselves and succumb to delusions of grandeur.

Mr. Aylwin says that if politicians lack humility and strength of character, then, when they are placed in high positions of power, they are all too likely to shelve or forget the great ideals they originally championed. In the process, their once-firm convictions will crumble.

That is why leaders need something that elevates them as human beings. And this is one of the reasons why the achievements of many political leaders of deep religious conviction in countries around the world have gone down in history.

Mr. Aylwin laments as the unfortunate thing about power that it inevitably leads to arrogance, corruption and authoritarianism. He keenly perceives the devilish nature of power.

People Become Wise

What, then, are we to do?

Mr. Aylwin concludes, "As you [President Ikeda] have aptly stated, people themselves must become strong and wise.... It's important for each individual to take a great interest in the issues affecting him or her and to be involved in them." He stresses the need for the people to be wise, for them to keep a close watch on those in power. He calls on the people to condemn injustice and corruption without hesitation. It was with this conviction that Mr. Aylwin fought against the military regime in Chile and successfully restored democratic rule.

Democracy is about the citizens of a nation keeping an eye on politicians and government officials, making requests of them, and ensuring that the opinions and views of the people are heard and reflected in government policy and legislation. Dictatorship, on the other hand, does not permit the citizens any say at all.

Let's continue to advance proudly on the path of democracy.

Which Side Are You On?

Zhou Enlai, the former prime minister of China, said: "Far more important [than looking at the social class a person comes from] is to look at where they stand. The most important thing is whether they stand on the side of the people or on the side that is oppressing the people." His meaning is crystal clear.

In Japan, there are people who place great store on the kind of family or region a person comes from or the kind of school a person has graduated from. But one's true worth as a human being is completely divorced from such things!

There are many people who have gained success and recognition in society without having a high education. What matters is one's substance as a human being. And what one has done.

We can find many, many people who possess truly beautiful hearts among those who

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boast no particular claim to fame or prestigious academic credentials, just as there are truly beautiful people among those who suffer from severe illness or disabilities and were never able to attend school.

In contrast, isn't it often the case that people who have graduated from elite schools and are admired for being smart are the ones who end up engaging in corrupt and disreputable activities?

Premier Zhou and his wife, Madame Deng Yingchao, always stood resolutely on the side of the people. They spent their entire lives closely involved with those suffering. That is what makes them great.

Their shared creed was to be general servants of the people. This spirit, they said, is vital for politicians, for leaders.

The world today is populated with leaders the exact opposite of this noble ideal.

Speak Out (Loudly!)

Once, Madame Deng encouraged a woman placed in great hardship as a result of being accused of a crime that she did not commit. To stand falsely accused — few things can compare to the outrage and injustice inflicted by such an act.

Madame Deng told the woman: “Endure this test. Hold fast to the truth. Going through this struggle will strengthen you. From now on, when you encounter problems, have the courage to express your opinions. Maintaining this kind of spirit is praiseworthy.”

She also told her: “Undergoing this struggle will temper and forge you both mentally and physically. The bad things will turn into good ones. I therefore wish to congratulate you.”

What powerful conviction!

Just as Madame Deng urges, we have to have the courage to express our opinions. We mustn't stay silent. To witness injustice and then say nothing is to aid and abet injustice. We must speak out loudly so that our voices will be heard.

Three years before her death, Madame Deng also made the following appeal to the youth of China: “When you achieve success, guard against becoming arrogant and self-satisfied. When you encounter difficulties, don't lose heart or flinch from them. Forge yourselves into strong, indomitable individuals, who possess ideals, aspirations and willpower.”

Her words are very important. I hope you, the youth division members, the successors of our movement, will reflect deeply on these words.

Hearts for Justice, Hearts at Peace

When people come to wield great power, they are filled with a heady sense that they can do anything. And this progresses until one day they actually think that it's OK for them to do anything they want, regardless of the consequences. This is the devilish nature of power.

But all worldly power is ineffectual in the face of death. It is ultimately no match for the Daishonin's Buddhism, which solves the fundamental questions of life and death.

Almost four centuries ago, King Philip III of Spain said on his deathbed: “Oh would to God I had never reigned. Oh that those years in my kingdom I had lived a solitary life in the wilderness. Oh that I had lived alone with God. How much more secure should I have died. With how much more confidence should I have gone to the throne of God; what doth all my glory profit but that I have so much the more torment in my death.”

His words ring with the regret of not having led a life dedicated to faith. It is an agonized cry made in the face of the solemn reality of death. It is a genuine cry from the heart. “I should have been more devoted to faith instead of being drunk on the nectar of power,” he infers. But no matter how much he regrets his folly, it is too late.

The Daishonin writes: “How long does a lifetime last? If one stops to consider, it is like

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a single night's lodging at a wayside inn. Should one forget that fact and seek some measure of worldly fame and profit? Though you may gain them, they will be mere prosperity in a dream, a delight scarcely to be prized" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 34).

In light of these words, and given that ours is a journey that continues for eternity, the opportunity to polish our lives in this existence is our greatest happiness and supreme treasure.

Those who champion justice and truth die with serenity and peace of mind. When the famous French knight Bayard was mortally wounded in battle, he said to the enemy general, whom he saw gazing upon him with pitying eyes: "I am not to be pitied, Your Grace, for I die as a man of virtue. But I pity you, for you betray your prince, your homeland, and your oath." The implication is that traitors invariably come to a wretched end. "You're the one who should be pitied," he says. The hearts of those who fight on the side of justice are at peace.

Our movement to propagate the Daishonin's teaching for the happiness of all humanity is a cause of the greatest justice. Those who betray the ideal of kosen-rufu betray the Daishonin. As his writings clearly state, they will incur grave negative effects without fail.

You, however, are the richest people in all the world. You can enjoy life and death with a spirit of hope and ease throughout eternity.

Let's advance strongly united in purpose, with confidence, optimism and joy, as champions of the SGI. Let's keep up our tireless efforts.

Never To Crumble

I'll close with an old Korean maxim: "A tower built through the accumulation of great achievements will never crumble." In other words, an undertaking into which one puts one's entire being can never be destroyed. The Soka Gakkai is like this: We put our entire hearts into each effort that we make. Therefore, the Soka Gakkai will never crumble.

And one final Korean maxim: "When we use beautiful words, they come back to us." That is, if we address others with courtesy and respect, they will respond in kind. I hope you will use beautiful, warmhearted words when you talk with your juniors and friends.

Thank you for your long attention today.

The weather has grown quite cool, so please take care of your health.

This concludes SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 27th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Hall in Hachioji, Oct. 22. Part 1 appeared in last week's issue.