

## **SGI President Ikeda's Essay The Power of the People**

*Faced with a government bureaucracy that refused to do anything to remedy a flooding problem, the people of Yamanashi, Japan, took matters into their own hands. 'The people are the true sovereigns, and it is their power that changes the course of history,' SGI President Ikeda writes.*

This year, heavy rains have caused terrible flood damage in various parts of Japan. I would like to express my deepest sympathies to all who suffered the brunt of these natural disasters.

The power that allows us to overcome whatever difficulties we may encounter is faith. I continue to pray fervently each day that those living in the affected areas will come through these arduous trials as winners.



There is a beautiful, green park in Yamanashi City called Manriki Park. I have visited it several times on my travels to Yamanashi. The area around the middle reaches of Fuefukigawa River, where the park is located, has been subject to flooding for centuries. The park was given its name "Manriki" (Everyone's Effort) because the people of the area joined forces to build a dike to control the flooding. The name expresses their hope that the levee would be as strong and indomitable as the combined effort and will of the people who built it to protect themselves.

The great feudal warlord from Yamanashi, Takeda Shingen (1521–73), once composed a poem with the lines, "The people are our castle / The people are our stone wall / The people are our moat." These words, too, as with the park's name, sing of the pride of people working together, joining forces, for a common goal.

The name Manriki Park always brings a happy smile to my lips, because to me it is the perfect symbol of our Yamanashi members, making remarkable progress as they work together in harmony and unity.



I have many fond boyhood memories of the Tamagawa River, the source of which is in northeastern Yamanashi Prefecture, at Kasatoriyama Mountain in the Chichibu Range. Up to the first decades of the century, the Tamagawa was a wild, untamed river that flooded repeatedly. The lower reaches of the Tamagawa serve as the border between Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture. The dikes on the Tokyo side of the river were largely completed in the late-19th century, but most parts of the Kanagawa side lacked such protective barriers, and whenever it rained heavily there was much flood damage on the Kanagawa side.

The citizens of Kanagawa repeatedly submitted requests and petitions to the local government for the construction of a system of dikes, but their pleas were ignored. The government's first priority in those days was military spending, and it placed severe restrictions on any expenditures for flood control.

In addition, the Tokyo Prefectural Government opposed construction because, if embankments were also built on the Kanagawa side, there was a possibility that floodwaters would wash over the levees on the Tokyo side. As a result, it refused to permit new dikes to be built. From the time Tokyo was the imperial capital, the national

government officials that have been centered in that city have shown a terrible and deep-rooted tendency to place Tokyo's needs over those of the rest of the nation.



In 1914, the Tamagawa River flooded again, and the Kanagawa region was severely flooded. The long-suffering people of Kanagawa could take no more, and they joined forces and marched on the Kanagawa Prefectural Government Office. They were dressed in farmers' working clothes and straw sandals and, as a sign of their unity, they all wore woven bamboo hats as they headed for the prefecture's capital, Yokohama. Different accounts number the demonstrators variously at several hundred, fifteen hundred, or two thousand. Some of the demonstrators were women.

Crossing the muddy streams and rivulets caused by the flooding, and scuffling with the police officers sent to watch them, they made their way to the prefectural offices. But they were stopped by the police, and only a representative was permitted to see the governor.

The group's spokesperson earnestly presented their case, but the governor didn't even attempt to respond sincerely.

The enraged citizens then formed an "Association for the Construction of Dikes Along the Tamagawa." They organized. Their unity and determination increased, and their movement gathered momentum.



The next year, as the rainy season approached, they planned a meeting to raise money to build dikes with private funds, but the police quashed their plans. Why were they forced to be victims, year after year? Why were they refused permission to build their dikes? They did not give up. They fought the unreasonable authorities with a secret weapon: wisdom.

If they could not get permission to build flood-protection barriers, they decided, they would apply for permission to raise the roadway that ran along the river. In the name of road improvement, they would get their embankments built. This brilliant wisdom, born of their desperate struggle, stirred the new prefectural governor to action, and work on the dikes began.

The Tokyo Prefectural Government, of course, opposed the project, and Kanagawa was ordered to cease construction. The project proceeded with difficulty. But the new governor and his citizens were united in purpose, and they refused to be stopped. There were many reverses and detours along the way, but finally in October 1916 a system of dikes was completed. It was a true victory for the determination and perseverance of the people.



A sage of old once said: "The ruler is a boat, and the people are the water. The water can float or sink the boat." The people are the true sovereigns, and it is their power that changes the course of history.

The Soka Gakkai is an organization of the people, by the people, and for the people. That is why the authorities fear its growth and devise all sorts of plots and strategies to stop its course, attacking it with a surging flow of foul persecution. But no matter what force they may employ, the great embankment of the people, built through our alliance of goodwill, will not be broken. Why? Because it is an embankment of the victory of the people, the greatest force that the 20th century has produced.

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