

PUBLISHER'S COMMENTARY

LEADERS WHO INSPIRE HARMONY AND TRUST

As I meet members around the country, I sometimes hear reports of leaders who are causing concern and discomfort among their fellow members. The leader might have a habit of making decisions without consulting the other leaders responsible or without considering the situation of those affected. Or he might frequently dismiss any differing opinion. In one case I heard of, the leader did not invite to planning meetings other leaders who tended not to always agree with him.

As general director, I feel it is my responsibility to work with all the leaders to ensure that our organization exists to serve and support the membership in their practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism, and to enable everyone to see the real results of growth and benefit in their lives. I am determined that, in this way, the SGI-USA will become the kind of organization SGI President Ikeda envisions, a gathering of people dedicated to their personal growth, to the happiness of others and to the betterment and peace of society — a family of Bodhisattvas of the Earth. And I wish to express my deepest appreciation for the efforts of our members and leaders who have been working hard to make this so. However, I feel it is also important for SGI-USA leaders to periodically reconfirm the spirit with which we serve our fellow members.

Whenever President Ikeda warns of the dangers of arrogance or authoritarianism, the authoritarian and the arrogant are usually the last to think it applies to them. Because of this human tendency, it is important to take each passage of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, each speech or guidance from President Ikeda, as if it were directed at ourselves — personally and individually. We may not be able to control how others apply Buddhism to their actions, but we each can certainly develop our own ability to do so if we try.

Buddhism is a practice of self-improvement. It exists so that we can make ourselves grow to be more human and humane. When we see someone doing something wrong or unjust, this, too, presents a chance for us personally to develop our strength, wisdom and compassion. If we simply think "I'm OK, and they are not," and take no action, we forgo the opportunity not only to contribute to a solution, but to develop ourselves. On the other extreme, if we misunderstand the principle of oneness of life and the environment and passively assume that any injustice by others is caused by something wrong or amiss within us, we will never come up with the initiative to help transform the situation. When we see problems, if we act responsibly toward them — if we challenge ourselves to deal with them effectively — we will grow and eventually cause a positive change.

What does it mean to deal with a problem effectively? When the problem involves human relations in the realm of our Buddhist activities, I think it means to seek dialogue based on a strong commitment for *kosen-rufu* and a strong prayer for the growth and happiness of all involved, including ourselves.

In his recent message to the youth of Los Angeles, President Ikeda encouraged us to create an "ideal world of harmony" and "a grand human network of trust."

Harmony and trust are key elements in disseminating Buddhism and creating peace and human prosperity. This is as Nichiren Daishonin states in "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life":

"All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as

fish and the water in which they swim” (MW-1, 23).

To create such an atmosphere of harmonious unity, conversation is crucial. President Ikeda has said that “Happiness is to be found close by. In a world where indifference and inhumanity prevail, let us use our discussion meetings as the pivot for creating oases of peace and harmony in our homes and in our local communities and then extending them to encompass every sphere of society.” Open, warm-hearted and honest discussion, based on the shared goal of kosen-rufu, will be the cause for harmony and unity in any aspect of our activities.

Nichiren Daishonin constantly carried on conversations with his followers, both face to face and extensively in writing. In these exchanges there was not the slightest pretension or aloofness on his part. He was totally open, inviting people into his life and showing deep concern for each aspect of another’s life. To one disciple, he wrote from the mountains of Minobu:

“Should any calamity befall us, you should immediately come to visit me here, where you will be welcomed wholeheartedly. Should the worst happen, then let us starve together among these mountains. I would imagine your daughter, Oto, has become a fine and intelligent young girl. I will write you again” (MW-3, 202).

The Daishonin took the sufferings and struggles of others as if they were his own. Leadership in our organization means that one has volunteered to accept a responsibility—to pray and work for the happiness of the members. It is not a position of status or personal power. In addition, just because someone is a leader in our movement this does not mean that he or she has completed the process of human revolution. We are all “works in progress” moving toward an ideal vision of reality, which our present reality may not yet resemble.

We should not lose that vital vision, something that President Ikeda has been constantly sharing with us. We should also realize that those who have leadership functions in our organization are human. They, too, are fellow members whose sufferings we can concern ourselves with and whose happiness and health we can pray for. It is the nature of bodhi-sattvas, without regard to status or position, to seek to share one another’s joys and sufferings and pray for everyone’s mutual growth and victory. I believe that this is the meaning of the phrase “transcending all differences among themselves.”

Unfortunately, we may still at times encounter leaders in the SGI-USA who refuse to listen, who resist meaningful dialogue or who cling to their personal views and prejudices. But we should never allow such individuals to prevent us from moving ahead in our own human revolution or to obstruct the progress of kosen-rufu. When President Ikeda was a new member, his mentor, Josei Toda, asked him one day how he liked the Soka Gakkai. “I don’t like it,” was his resounding answer. He did not like the attitude of many of the leaders, who were high-handed and autocratic, yet refused to take responsibility themselves. “In that case,” President Toda told him, “why don’t you go ahead and make the Gakkai into the kind of organization you can really like? Build the Gakkai through your own hard work and effort.”

Since that day, President Ikeda has been expending every ounce of his energy doing just that. He completely transformed the organization, infusing activities for peace, culture and education, and building the membership to some ten million people. And so doing, he has always tried to embrace and encourage even those of his seniors whose attitude and leadership style he did not like, so that they, too, might come to fully enjoy the benefit of dedicating their lives to kosen-rufu.

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In his message to the recent Grand Youth Culture Festival in Los Angeles, President Ikeda also said that “we must learn to pull forth from the depths of our beings that awesome spiritual strength that is greater even than the power of nuclear weapons.” With such strength, we can win over any injustice, fill in for the weaknesses of those with whom we live and work, and enrich our organization, families and communities with real harmony and trust.

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