

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S FEB. 21 SPEECH SGI ACTIVITIES ARE THE SOURCE OF GREAT BENEFIT

In his speech at the recent SGI Asia Peace and Culture Conference, President Ikeda makes the point that nothing in our SGI activities is ever a waste of time. 'In accord with the principle of earthly desires are enlightenment,' he says, 'all our hard work for kosen-rufu keeps moving us in a better, brighter direction. The more time passes, the more clearly our benefit manifests.'

Mensore! (“Welcome!” in Okinawan dialect.) And congratulations on this historic first SGI Asia Peace and Culture Conference!

My deepest appreciation also to the Okinawan members for the wonderful goodwill and warm hospitality they always show us when we visit their islands.

South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau — each area represented at this conference has been making magnificent strides in the widespread propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

We also have a member from SGI-Zambia [originally from Okinawa] with us today. Welcome!

In countries and territories throughout the world, the SGI is expanding its network of exemplary citizens, contributing to society and gaining immense trust everywhere. The development of the youth division members has also been remarkable — a development that gives me unsurpassed joy.

In “On the Buddha’s Prophecy,” the Daishonin writes: “The moon appears in the west and gradually shines eastward, while the sun rises in the east and casts its rays to the west. The same is true of Buddhism. It spread from west to east in the Former and Middle Days of the Law, but will travel from east to west in the Latter Day” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 114).

Fulfilling this prophecy of the original Buddha, we of the SGI — and no one more than you gathered here — have boldly made the westward transmission of Buddhism a reality. I wish to declare that the foundation for kosen-rufu in Asia and throughout the world, the cherished dream of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, is now complete in every way.

I am certain that the flow of the correct teaching of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, with its spirit of practicing for both oneself and others, will continue limitlessly. Each of you is the source and the cornerstone of our movement. How infinitely praiseworthy you are! How boundless are the benefits you receive!

The Daishonin declares: “You [deserve] to be known as one who propagates the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo].... At first one person, then two persons, then a thousand, ten thousand, a hundred thousand, and then all the people throughout the country come to chant the daimoku, before you know it, all the blessings [of the daimoku they chant] will accumulate in your person” (MW-5, 203).

Nothing in our SGI activities is ever a waste or done in vain — everything is a source of benefit.

In accord with the principle of earthly desires are enlightenment, all our hard work for kosen-rufu keeps moving us in a better, brighter direction. The more time passes, the more clearly our benefit manifests. The enormous benefit we obtain also flows to our children

and descendants. This is the function of the Mystic Law known as inconspicuous benefit.

Okinawa and the Philippines have a long history of cultural exchange.

Okinawa is the cornerstone of Asian kosen-rufu. If we get out a map and with a compass draw a circle, centering the point on Okinawa's capital city, Naha, we find that Tokyo, Hong Kong, Macau and Manila form an almost perfect circle around it, while Korea and Taiwan lie within the circle.

Recently at the Okinawa Training Center [on Feb. 17], I received, as your representative, the first Persona Integra Total Person Award from the Philippine's esteemed Cagayan Capitol College in Cagayan de Oro City, Mindanao.

There is a long history of exchange between Okinawa and the Philippines. The Kuroshio current, also known as the Japan current, flows northward from the Philippines, going past Taiwan and along the Okinawan islands. One theory has it that cultural influences from the Philippines and the South Sea islands traveled to Okinawa by way of the Kuroshio, and that such exchange gave rise to the development of a common cultural sphere.

In 1954, archaeologists uncovered unique earthenware and stone agricultural implements from ancient shell mounds in the Yaeyama Islands of southwestern Okinawa. These stone implements appear to have been used in the cultivation of yams and are regarded as evidence that the yam agriculture of the South Sea islands was carried northward on the Kuroshio to Okinawa. In ancient Okinawan, the word for *yam* was *ummo*, which is said to resemble the word *ubi*, as yams are called on many South Sea islands.

As well, traditional Okinawan and Filipino music have similar musical scales. Much traditional Okinawan music uses a pentatonic scale [C-E-F-G-B-C], having no A or D. This musical scale is not found anywhere else in Japan except in Okinawa.

Some scholars have also pointed out linguistic similarities between Okinawan and Tagalog, the indigenous language of the Philippines.

From the 15th century, the kingdom of the Ryukyus — most of which is now present-day Okinawa Prefecture — conducted trade with the Philippine island of Luzon. This was almost two centuries before Japan's Tokugawa shogunate permitted foreign trade with the Philippines at the beginning of the 17th century.

In 1904, 360 Okinawans traveled to the Philippines as laborers. Later, Okinawans migrated to Davao on the island of Mindanao. They cleared land and contributed greatly to the development of the cultivation of Manila hemp. After that, Mindanao became firmly established as a destination for Okinawan emigrants, and the population of Okinawans living there soared.

Of the some 20,000 people of Japanese descent living in Davao before World War II, 70 percent were from Okinawa. The Okinawans there were also involved in the fishing industry, achieving great success with bonito [skipjack tuna] fishing and the implementation of a unique style of Okinawan net-fishing.

Let us resolve that war will never happen again.

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Japan's Asian neighbors, including the people of Okinawa, were caused untold suffering by Japanese militarism in the years leading up to and during World War II.

The names of some 237,300 who lost their lives in the Battle of Okinawa are inscribed on the Cornerstones of Peace in the Okinawa Peace Memorial Park. Some historians put the number of Filipinos killed in the war at more than a million. In the infamous Bataan Death March, close to 20,000 people lost their lives. [The Bataan Death March was the forced march of more than 70,000 American and Filipino prisoners of war captured by the Japanese in the Philippines.]

One of the survivors of this truly horrific march went on to dedicate her life to peace education. Her name is Madame Laureana S. Rosales, the founder of Cagayan Capitol College and numerous other educational institutions, including the Bataan Heroes Memorial College in Balanga, Bataan. These institutions were founded from the noble wish that all people — be they Filipinos, Americans, Japanese or of any other nationality — could become champions of peace.

The determination of this great mother of education turned the tragedy of the Bataan Death March into a powerful driving force for the creation of many hope-filled centers of learning that are dedicated to peace. Similarly, the construction of this Okinawa Training Center has transformed a former missile base into a fortress of peace.

The people of the Philippines are renowned for their hospitality. They also have a wonderful solidarity, which they call *bayanihan* — the spirit to help and support one another and work together for the development of the community.

Okinawa also has the famous expression “All whom we meet are our brothers” (*Ichariba chode*). I have been told that Okinawan members brought more than 9,000 friends to their district general meetings last November. This is no doubt because the Okinawans are sincere, good-natured and possess the spirit of equality and tolerance.

Many Philippine members are also practicing in Okinawa.

How profound are the ties between Okinawa and her Asian neighbors. Continuing to forge bonds of friendship with citizens in each country, let us expand our indestructible alliance for peace in Asia, resolved never to let war happen again.

Those who can endure suffering courageously will win in the end.

I want to introduce some words from Dr. José Rizal, national hero of the Philippines. He writes: “Let us be reasonable and open our eyes, especially you women, because you are the ones who open the minds of men.... And because life is full of sorrows and perils, fortify [your children's] character against any difficulty, strengthen their hearts against any danger.”

We are now in the era of women. No one has the right to berate women or behave arrogantly toward them.

In one of his poems, Rizal extols the virtues of education:

*Within the breasts of hapless mortals
she kindles the living flame of good;
she binds the hands of the wild criminal;
and faithfully pours out consolation
to those who seek her kindly mysteries,*

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*inflaming their hearts with a love for good.
And thus is education, so noble
and perfect, the sure balm of life.*

Let us put even greater efforts into fostering youth.

Rizal also declares: "I have attempted to do what nobody had wished to do.... I have unmasked hypocrisy that under the cloak of religion has impoverished and brutalized us. I have distinguished the true religion from the false, from the superstitious, from that which capitalizes the holy word in order to extract money.... I have lifted the curtain in order to show what is behind the deceitful and brilliant words of our government."

Rizal fought head-on against the evil of both hypocritical priests and lying politicians. He was a person of courage who championed justice.

And so are you, the members of the SGI.

In an essay titled "The Philippines a Century Hence," in which he envisages his country's future, Rizal writes: "Very likely, the Philippines will defend with inexpressible valor the liberty secured at the price of so much blood and sacrifice. With the new men that will spring from their soil and with the recollection of their past, they will perhaps strive to enter freely upon the wide road of progress, and all will labor together to strengthen their fatherland, both internally and externally...."

In the same essay, he declares, "We shall never tire of repeating this [our demand for our rights as Filipinos] while a ray of hope is left us."

Those who bravely endure suffering, who continue to fight with perseverance and tenacity, win in the end.

Only when leaders and educators set a good example can they hope to persuade others.

Last November, Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and his wife, Sunanda, kindly attended the World Peace Youth Culture Festival held in Nagoya, Japan. [Arun and Sunanda Gandhi are cofounders of the M. K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence in Memphis, Tenn.]

I want to share a story that Mr. Gandhi related from his childhood: When he was about six or seven years old, he lived in an ashram community with his grandfather. One of his friends was a boy of about the same age who was also living there with his parents. This friend was very fond of sweets, consuming them in great quantity. As a result, he started getting boils all over his body.

No matter how his parents nagged him to stop eating sweets, he wouldn't listen. Since there were always sweets around, he would simply grab some to eat when nobody was looking.

Worried, his mother called on Gandhi, with her son in tow, and urged him to speak to her child, to explain to him that he should not eat sweets anymore.

After hearing the mother's story, Gandhi said, "Please come back in 15 days, and I will speak to him."

Perplexed, the mother did as asked and returned with her son in 15 days. Gandhi took the boy aside and spoke to him for less than a minute. That was all. Surprisingly, though, from that moment on, the boy stopped eating sweets.

His mother was puzzled. What kind of miracle had Gandhi performed on her son, she

wondered. A few days later she went to ask Gandhi this herself.

Gandhi replied that it was not a miracle. “The reason I asked you to come back in 15 days,” he said, “was that I had to give up eating sweets for 15 days before I could ask the child to give up eating them.” He had told this to the boy and added that he himself would not touch any sweets until the boy’s boils had healed, until the boy could eat sweets again.

In other words, Mahatma Gandhi lived by the creed of “I’ll challenge myself, so please you do, too.” This was the secret of his success in changing the young boy’s attitude.

Arun Gandhi further said that only when leaders and educators set a good example can they hope to persuade others to do what they ask. This was Mahatma Gandhi’s conviction, he said, and the secret to his charismatic leadership.

The essence of nonviolence, Arun Gandhi added, is the ability to educate people — and education is about being a positive role model.

The key to the SGI’s development, too, has been the fine example set by the leaders, by their dedicated efforts and hard work. When leaders fail to exert themselves, they grow bureaucratic and lapse into empty rhetoric.

The essence of nonviolence is to change oneself first.

As a country, Japan today is in a serious deadlock. All kinds of cures are being recommended: “Japan should try this.” “If Japan does this, we’ll see a recovery.” While such advice is all well and good, many of those handing it out are overlooking one very simple but very important thing. And that is the need to set good examples themselves.

If the people who make such admirable suggestions actually did what they preached, the country would surely be in fine shape in no time. But the exact opposite is true. There are far too many leaders who preach restraint and forbearance while seeking only personal gain and advantage for themselves.

If we return to the child in Arun Gandhi’s story, the child’s entire family loved sweets and was always eating them. It is hardly surprising that they could not convince him to give up sweets. Japan has become a country like the child addicted to sweets, a country that has no self-discipline, no principles, no thought for any consequences and is consumed by unrestrained greed.

I am concerned that if Japan continues to be led by such shortsighted avarice, nationalistic forces will take advantage and strengthen their influence in society. To combat this malaise, leaders in every area of society must first set an example themselves. They must experience hardship and suffering firsthand and fight with the spirit to sacrifice themselves for the future.

Why were people able to endure the bitter struggle for Indian independence? There were many hurdles to self-rule that many thought impossible to overcome. Yet still people followed Gandhi. Why? Because he never asked others to do anything that he had never done himself.

Gandhi always strode in the front of protest marches. He always went where the greatest crisis or suffering was. This is, in fact, the essence of nonviolence. In other words, it is to change oneself first and, through that transformation, change others’ hearts.

Let’s rack our brains about how we can bring people more joy.

I have received many kind letters from friends, members and nonmembers, that have

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been personally delivered to me in Okinawa. I cannot fully express my appreciation.

My wife and I also received a wonderful piece of calligraphy from the renowned Hong Kong artist and calligrapher Madame Fang Zhaoling. This month she celebrated her 85th birthday. With bold brush strokes, she wrote, “Art is a struggle.” I was deeply moved and impressed by these words. These are words of wisdom from a woman who has experienced the profound depths of life and art.

Faith, too, is a struggle. It is an eternal struggle toward kosen-rufu. This I wish to clearly state.

In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” the Daishonin says, “‘Joy’ means delight shared by oneself and others.... When both oneself and others have wisdom and compassion, this is called joy” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 761).

“Let’s bring joy to everyone! Let’s bring joy to our fellow members!” This is the spirit of an SGI leader. What can we do to inspire joy? What can we say? Racking our brains over how we can bring people joy while devoting ourselves wholeheartedly to encouraging and supporting everyone — such compassion and wisdom radiates with the true light of faith.

Next year, in 2000, a World Peace Youth Culture Festival will be held in Okinawa. With fellow members from throughout Asia and the world, let’s make it a magnificent celebration that will open the curtain on the Century of the SGI.

SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the SGI Asia Peace and Culture Conference, held at the Okinawa Training Center in Onnason, Feb. 21.