

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MARCH 9 SPEECH WHAT A DRAMA OF INNER CHANGE!

President Ikeda shares another experience of an SGI-USA member who has accomplished remarkable human revolution: Orlando Cepeda, baseball hero. Mr. Cepeda, who recently was welcomed into the Baseball Hall of Fame, fell from stardom after a drug bust and subsequent prison time in the 1970s — but rebuilt his life with the power of faith.

Thank you for coming all this way today, in such cold weather. I deeply appreciate all your efforts.

There are the famous words “A spirit so bold strikes the hearts of all” by the Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca, whom I have spoken about a number of times, in his *Troades*. Today, I want to offer a brief overview of his life that I hope you will find interesting.

Seneca was active not only as a philosopher but as a dramatist and statesman. His tragedies had a profound influence on the works of Shakespeare and other later playwrights.

Seneca is known for such philosophical writings as *De constantia sapientis*, *De brevitate vitae* and *De clementia*, and for his 10 famous tragedies, including *Troades*. From a young age, he also gained repute as an orator and entered politics. His talent inspired jealousy among members of the Roman Senate and other leading political figures of the day. Greater be those who are envied than those who envy!

In Seneca's case, he was envied by the highest rulers of the land. Attempts were even made on his life. He was finally banished to the Mediterranean island of Corsica, where centuries later Napoléon Bonaparte would be born. Seneca spent eight years there in exile. Being driven out and exiled is nothing unusual for those who stand up and fight in earnest for justice.

Seneca eventually was recalled from exile and returned to Rome. Under the patronage of an influential figure at court, he secured the position of tutor to the future emperor Nero. Seneca applied himself diligently to his duties, and after Nero became emperor, Seneca continued to serve as one of his aides.

During this early period of his reign, Nero is credited with having judiciously ruled. But before long, his infamous tyranny began. He no longer cared about governing for the people, only about governing for his personal whims and ends.

The people became merely pawns to be manipulated. The empire was ruled by corruption and treachery.

And Seneca was appalled. Although it pained him to do so, he decided to retire from politics.

Rulers who have veered from the path of justice and truth cannot endure the presence of people of integrity. So it was not long before Nero wanted to be rid of his erstwhile teacher. For alleged involvement in subversive activities, Nero ordered Seneca to commit suicide.

How Seneca must have lamented the depravity to which Rome had succumbed! But he went to his death with great dignity and composure, encouraging and consoling his sorrowing friends until the last moment. The solemn scene of his death has been depicted on

canvas by many artists over the ages. His dauntless courage has moved untold hearts.

Let us also continue to fight on the side of truth. Let us live long and vanquish injustice.

Moving to another subject, the German author Goethe once observed that only with positive action can we surmount that which is unpleasant. He is absolutely right. If we cheerfully go about our daily activities, trifling annoyances will disappear.

For example, rather than reluctantly forcing yourself to do gongyo after someone has nagged you to, you should decide on your own: "Right! I'll do gongyo." You have everything to gain by starting off with a cheerful, positive attitude.

The same applies to other areas of your life as well. To take action, not because you've been asked to or told to, but because you have recognized on your own what needs to be done — this brings pleasure and joy to life.

The other day, some exciting news came my way like a home run flying into the spectator stands. It was the announcement that Orlando Cepeda, an SGI-USA member, has been elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame — the highest honor a baseball player can achieve in the United States. Mr. Cepeda is a former major league power hitter. I immediately sent my congratulations.

Mr. Cepeda is 61 and an SGI district chief in San Francisco. At the beginning of the year, he sent me a signed photograph of himself. His face radiated a wonderful warmth and maturity.

Mr. Cepeda signed the photograph: "To Sensei: Thanks for helping my life so much. Love, Orlando Cepeda, 30." The number 30 is his uniform number from his days with the San Francisco Giants.

Countless members who are foremost in their fields are emerging around the world. How remarkably the times have changed!

Americans' love for baseball is profound. Being elected to the Hall of Fame is an undying honor conferred on only the most outstanding baseball players — legends such as Babe Ruth.

I understand that not only performance on the field but also the ballplayer's overall qualities — his character and contributions to society — are taken into consideration by the Hall's Veterans Committee, comprised of former players and sportswriters.

The news of Mr. Cepeda's election to the Hall of Fame made headlines everywhere and was applauded with delight and happy surprise. This personal triumph of a fellow member is wonderful news for all of us in the SGI.

Come to think of it, around about the same time that I made my very first visit to San Francisco, in 1960, Mr. Cepeda was scoring big for the San Francisco Giants. The young first baseman and power hitter had many fans. In 1958, he was named National League rookie of the year. And in 1967, he won the National League Most Valuable Player Award. During his 17-year major league career, he hit a total of 379 home runs. He was known as one of the most feared major league sluggers of the 1960s. His record of runs batted in and home runs shines brightly even today.

However, a number of severe tests were in store for Mr. Cepeda. First, he was forced to retire due to a 1974 knee injury. Without the injury, he most certainly would have gone on to achieve an even greater batting record. His fans had looked forward to that. How bitterly disappointing it must have been for him to have his dreams dashed!

In 1975, he was arrested for smuggling marijuana and subsequently spent 10 months in a Florida prison. It was a swift, ignominious fall from fame and celebrity. Overnight he lost his prestige, his wealth, his friends — everything. After his release from prison, people gave him the cold shoulder. He was scorned and discriminated against.

Everyone experiences hardships and trials. A life of all smooth sailing doesn't exist.

Mr. Cepeda was in the depths of hell. But it was in this dark period of despair that he encountered the Buddhism of the sun, the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, through a friend. That was in 1982.

He found the new world of the SGI to be infinitely warm, compassionate and profound. And how much hope the members' encouragement gave him! He gradually came to experience through his own life how incredible is the hope-giving philosophy of human revolution.

People who have suffered a lot can bring hope and courage to others.

A magnificent drama of inner transformation — a drama of revitalization and victory — had begun. With the determination to become a star player in the realm of kosen-rufu, Mr. Cepeda challenged himself in Buddhist practice for both his happiness and that of others, thus changing himself and his environment in the process.

He took his practice very seriously. He was no longer big-headed about being famous nor did he delude himself that he was great just because he was a star. In the depths of his anguish, he had grasped the essence of life. He was no longer lost and uncertain. Instead, he resolved to rise again and win the laurel crown in life as an outstanding human being. His was a drama of transforming earthly desires into enlightenment, of using sufferings as fuel for growth.

Eventually, Mr. Cepeda had the good fortune to secure a responsible position as a community relations representative with the San Francisco Giants, his old team. It marked his return to the world of baseball. Having given everything to that sport, how ecstatic he must have been!

Buddhism changed Mr. Cepeda's attitude toward life 180 degrees. His life changed from one of personal ambition to one dedicated to working for humanity, society and the future. This is the correct path in life.

Selfishness is a particularly disgraceful trait in leaders.

With enthusiasm and joy, Mr. Cepeda started working for kosen-rufu on the front lines of our organization. To decide to do something and then pursue it wholeheartedly — such unwavering commitment is often found among our members abroad. Despite his knee injury, despite sometimes having to use a cane to get about, Mr. Cepeda traveled far and wide. Leaning on his cane, he would laboriously climb the stairs of apartment buildings one at a time. Limping, he would visit one member's house after another. What sincerity! What passion! None could help being moved and inspired by his example.

He also devoted his energies to fostering and educating troubled youth. He would frankly relate his own experiences — telling them about his drug arrest and subsequent imprisonment. No doubt he wanted to drive home the message “Your life is precious. You have to treasure yourself. I made a mistake and paid the price, so I know how valuable is the time of youth. I don't want you to go through the same hardships I did.”

He visited hospitals and prisons across the United States, encouraging many, many peo-

ple. Having overcome indescribable suffering himself, his life glowed with genuine humanity. People who have experienced suffering can bring hope and courage to others. And such is the spirit of a genuine practitioner of Buddhism. It is the true spirit of the SGI.

Mr. Cepeda's warm character and sincere efforts have won him immense trust and respect from his local community and society at large.

By contrast, those who remain drunk on fame and position ultimately lose people's trust and are despised.

Many members regard Mr. Cepeda with great affection, looking up to him like a father or brother. He is a hardworking, dependable district chief, who leads by his own example. Whenever there is an SGI meeting of any kind, he is always there with a guest or two. I hear that he brought three guests to last month's discussion meeting.

Despite an extremely busy work schedule, which takes him around the United States, he never fails to stay in touch with his members. He also makes time to visit members at home, sparing no effort to encourage and support them. A person such as Mr. Cepeda is a true member of the SGI, a disciple directly connected to the Daishonin.

It is a wonderful opportunity to be a leader in the SGI organization.

Today, the greatest pride of this illustrious baseball hero, Mr. Cepeda, is to stand on the front lines of kosen-rufu as an SGI district chief.

From the perspective of the Mystic Law, such things as worldly fame and status are totally insignificant and frivolous.

Mr. Cepeda says that he absolutely does not wish to be treated as a celebrity in the SGI. He undoubtedly believes that a spirit of equality should prevail — that this is the real SGI spirit, that this is precisely why he is exerting himself with his whole life.

What a wonderful and sublime thing it is to live as an SGI leader! Any leaders who cannot appreciate that are to be pitied. At heart, they are vain and worried about appearances.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda sternly rebuked vain people. A young men's division leader once asked him, "What should we strive to achieve, so that our family and friends can be proud of us?" Mr. Toda replied strictly, "How can there be any prouder achievement than being a Soka Gakkai leader?!" Mr. Toda keenly perceived the questioner's vanity.

Mr. Toda's sentiment, which I loudly echo, was: "Does fame make someone great? Does status? No! Surely there is no life more noble and valuable than dedicating yourself to kosen-rufu as an SGI leader, even if you have no particular social standing or recognition. Do not forget this Soka Gakkai spirit!"

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 32nd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, March 9. Part 2 will appear in next week's issue.