

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAYS BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA 'HIMALAYAN LIGHT'

I had only a few seconds to get the shot.

The day was Nov. 3, 1995. I was heading for a hill on the outskirts of Katmandu, Nepal. We had been traveling by car for what seemed like more than an hour over a bumpy road. The sky, which had been blue when we left, was now taking on the reddish hues of twilight. Should the sun set completely, the chance for a photo would be lost. I wanted to get the shot if at all possible; I wanted to share this scene with the youth.

Katmandu is a city close to the heavens, yet from within the city proper one cannot glimpse the snowy peaks of the Himalayas. And depending on the weather, the mountains are not always visible even from the hill we were bound for. In fact, as we drove, the Himalayan peaks lay hidden behind a veil of white clouds.

But the view had changed completely by the time we arrived atop the grassy hill and got out of the car. The curtain of clouds obscuring the peaks had suddenly parted. Now, jutting into the sky beyond the clouds, were peaks glistening silver-white in the sun's waning light. Towering summits of the 23,000- to 29,000-foot class, such as Mount Manaslu, stood against the sky like a procession of kings and emperors.

The Himalayas strike a gallant image as a band of heroic figures towering in triumph above the world. Firmly, resolutely, they soar skyward. In terms of their height and majesty, no mountains in Japan can approach them. Just as ordinary mountains are a massing together of earth and rocks, the Himalayas appear as a massing together of countless other mountains — they are mountain giants.

These sublime, noble peaks were just as I had imagined them. As my heart filled with awe and appreciation, I raised my camera and snapped the shutter six, maybe seven, times.

These mountains seem alive — breathing. Behind these mountains exists a great life-force. Through these tremendous prayer towers, the life-force of the planet surges skyward and calls out to the heavens. The Himalayas stand as a monument to the Earth's unaging and undying activity.

After a moment, the inky darkness of night began to enfold the mountain summits, and a large moon cast its silver glow. Smoke from homes where evening meals were being prepared rose from the village below.

Just then, a merry group of children approached. There were about 20 of them, and they had come to the hill from the village nearby to play. At first, they had stood around watching me from a distance. But perhaps unable to restrain their curiosity, they had all drawn a little closer with each movement I made.

They were dressed shabbily, but their eyes sparkled like jewels. I couldn't help addressing them: "We are followers of Buddhism. This is the land where the Buddha was born. The Buddha grew up looking at these magnificent Himalayas, and he worked hard to become a human being who resembled these mountains. He made himself a winner in life — someone who stands tall, with dignity, like these majestic peaks. You are the same as him. You live in the same wonderful place. You can definitely become great!"

Ah, Earth's highest summit! It is said that even today the Himalayas continue to grow, to thrust upward, higher and higher. They are young mountains, still in their formative years.

As human beings, we too yearn for greater heights. We want to scale the highest peak

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Author: Daisaku Ikeda

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before us. Ever higher! Ever onward!

To all living things, the Himalayas seem to be calling out: "Break through your present circumstances! Stand tall, soar skyward!"

Challenge the impossible! Aim at the peak no one has climbed before! Scale the precipice!

Look down on those of base ambition, those mired in the mud of selfish desire! Drive away worthless smooth talkers devoid of action!

At the highest summit there are storms, lightning and fierce winds. But on that treasure throne there is also eternal honor, nobility and peace.

One in a series