

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA HAWAII – ISLANDS OF PEACE

SGI President Ikeda remembers his first visit to Hawaii and says that ‘the people throughout the world look to Hawaii as islands of eternal peace.’

What is a road? A road is built by stepping where no one has gone before, by opening a way through the thorns and brambles.”

I copied these famous words of the great Chinese writer Lu Xun in my diary one night shortly before taking on the position of third Soka Gakkai president. They were a kind of challenge to me, with new frontiers lying in wait to be opened.

The Hawaiian beach that early morning was peaceful and serene, like a gentle friend. Caressed by the soft morning breeze, I gazed out at an ocean that made me want to exclaim unending admiration. I turned around and saw, beyond the palm trees, the peak of Diamond Head soaring with noble aspiration, gleaming gold in the morning sun. It was my first morning in Hawaii, Oct. 2, 1960, and I had taken my first step for worldwide kosen-rufu.

Just the year before, Hawaii had become the 50th state of the United States. From a Hawaii that had just entered a new phase in its history, I, too, made a new departure.

I was only in Hawaii for a brief 30-or-so hours, but, in that time, I formed the Soka Gakkai’s first district outside Japan, establishing an organization that would continue to celebrate the future of peace, happiness and joy. Most of the people I met during my visit were Japanese Americans. All of them carried a history of great sorrow and pain deep in their hearts. Some of them were second-generation Japanese Americans whose lives had been turned upside down by World War II. There were some women who wanted to return to Japan so badly that they cried every day.

To all of them, I spoke of the greatness of faith, which is a source of infinite strength and enduring hope. I impressed on them that the purpose of our Buddhist practice and of our mission as Soka Gakkai members is to live lives of joy, lives free from fear, lives of victory, lives in which we have triumphed over ignorance.

I began a struggle for peace that was waged not with weapons of destruction but with dialogue — a struggle to confront unhappiness on the individual level and to light the flame of hope and courage in each person’s heart.

I had our driver take us to Pearl Harbor, which lies west of Honolulu. On the morning of Dec. 7, 1941, Japanese forces attacked the U.S. naval base there and sunk four battleships, striking a devastating blow against the United States. This was the start of the war between Japan and the United States — senseless, tragic and destructive.

I turned to the members accompanying me and voiced my belief that the only way to eradicate war — war that brought sorrow and heartache to so many women and children, war that killed with cruel, cold precision — was to propagate the great teaching of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism around the world.

On Jan. 15, 1981, 21 years after my first visit to Hawaii, I came to this tragic site once again and made my way out to the USS Arizona Memorial in the middle of the harbor. The *USS Arizona* suffered the most damage of the battleships hit by Japanese forces, and

it was decided not to try to raise it. Today, it remains on the sea bottom, a memorial to the 1,177 sailors who lost their lives on board.

The pristine white memorial is built above the sea, spanning the area where the ship lies. The small amounts of oil from the ship's engines that continue to flow to the surface seemed almost a message, a reminder of the tragedy.

At the hands of the Japanese government and military leaders who started the war, the lives of many promising, decent young men were destroyed. The silent ocean, illuminated by history's judgment, seemed to me to soundly condemn the warmongers for the evil folly they wrought.

*Ah, chanting daimoku
For the repose of the deceased
At Pearl Harbor —
This day and this moment,
I will never forget as long as I live.*

I dedicated this poem to the person who guided me around the Arizona Memorial.

People throughout the world look to Hawaii as islands of eternal peace.

On my 1960 visit, I also went to the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific, which is nestled in the Punchbowl, a volcanic crater just outside Honolulu. There I saw the graves of Japanese Americans who had fought and died for America in World War II. As I wrote in my novel, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor completely destroyed the trust that Japanese Americans had worked so hard to earn as new citizens of the United States. It led other Americans to view them as enemies, and it exposed them to prejudice and discrimination.

To prove their loyalty, Japanese Americans born in Hawaii swore their allegiance to the United States and threw themselves into the war, fighting in such units as the 100th Infantry Battalion and the 442nd Regimental Combat Team — the latter composed solely of second-generation Japanese American volunteers. Determined to “go for broke,” they dashed into the rain of bullets and, making the greatest sacrifice of all, proved themselves a heroic force, restoring the faith of the American people in the bravery and loyalty of Japanese Americans.

In 1985, years after my first visit, I offered flowers at the Punchbowl National Memorial Cemetery, and nine veterans of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team who are SGI members attended the ceremony. Their proud, courageous figures remain engraved on my heart.

The Soka Gakkai's first Hawaii District leader was a Japanese American, Harry Hiram. I will never forget him or the first Hawaii Chapter leader, Wataru Kawamoto.

Mr. Hiram was solidly built and had friendly eyes. Later, he was active as a leader of the young men's division. He was loved and trusted by all, especially the people of Hawaii. Whenever he appeared, he was greeted by happy voices. People smiled when they saw his face.

He led the young champions of peace of the YMD in those early days of the Soka Gakkai in Hawaii. Fighting a battle not of guns and violence but a battle to achieve kosen-rufu, the group soon became known as the Pineapple Corps.

Mr. Hiram had experienced the horrors of war directly, and he was very strongly committed to peace. The Pineapple Corps shone with pride as Hawaii's force for peace with the Mystic Law. They decided on a uniform of white shirts and black ties with tie tacks in the shape of pineapples.

On one occasion, 27 members of the group visited Japan and astonished the Japanese youth division with their spirit and strength. The Pineapple Corps has produced many people dedicated to peace who are still working hard for kosen-rufu in Hawaii, including T. J. Rife and Tom Hara.

Next year will mark 40 years since my first visit to Hawaii. In that interval, I have traveled to those islands where east meets west 18 times.

"Aloha!" How many times I have said and heard that beautiful word of greeting. Aloha is an expression of love for humanity, of compassion, of tolerance, of gentleness and of sympathy. The Aloha spirit is the spirit of peace and the heart of Hawaii itself, those rainbow islands where people of many different races and ethnic backgrounds live together in harmony. Isn't this a triumph of humanity, which cannot be polluted by the hideous cruelty of war? Which adorns Hawaii more beautifully than the most precious gem?

A shimmering new tide for peace, known as worldwide kosen-rufu, began in Hawaii. Without a doubt, this profoundly significant, brilliant honor will shine in the annals of the SGI for all time.

Hawaii, beacon of the 21st century, light of hope, may you shine forever!

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