

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JULY 4 MESSAGE HOPE IS WHERE EVERYTHING STARTS

SGI President Ikeda tells SGI Training Course participants that 'as long as we have hope, there is nothing we cannot achieve; everything is born from hope.'

The SGI is now making thorough preparations for the 21st century. It is a time of fresh departure—the start of a momentous new expedition toward peace.

Alexander the Great made careful preparations before setting out on his expedition to Persia and other far-flung parts of the world. The young Macedonian king gave away all his personal wealth and possessions to his retainers. He wanted them to be able to follow him with complete confidence and peace of mind.

One of his retainers was astounded by his gesture. “Your Majesty,” he exclaimed, “you have just given away all your wealth! Won’t your coffers be empty now? What on earth are you going to do?”

Alexander smiled and replied: “I have not parted with all I have. My most cherished treasure still remains with me.”

“Where is that treasure, Your Majesty? I cannot see it,” the retainer wanted to know.

“The name of my secret treasure is hope. There is no greater treasure than this,” Alexander explained.

As long as we have hope, there is nothing we cannot achieve; everything is born from hope. When we possess the treasure of hope, it gives rise to other treasures, too. Hope draws forth our inner potential and strength. It is a magic weapon that enables us to make our dreams come true.

Faith is the flame that sets hope blazing with utmost brilliance and vigor. Faith itself is eternal hope.

What’s most important is the central figure’s commitment.

To my dear friends visiting from 52 countries: Thanks for the great efforts you have made for this SGI Training Course! I am confident that your traveling all this way to Japan and earnestly participating in each activity on the course program marks a peerless triumph and achievement, another proud page in the history of your lives.

The indestructible benefit you have accumulated as a result will also encompass your family members, friends and all with whom you share a close connection. Though invisible, a seed has been planted in your lives — one that will enable you to develop into outstanding leaders of society in lifetime after lifetime. Please have every confidence in this.

The most important thing is the central figure’s inner resolve and commitment. Nichiren Daishonin cites this passage from the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai’s *Great Concentration and Insight*: “If the lord of a castle is brave, its defenders will be strong, too. If the lord quails, the defenders will cower” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 979).

Crucial is strong, invincible faith. Crucial is prayer. Faith and prayer determine everything.

Irish writer Frederick Langbridge in “Pessimist and Optimist” writes, “Two men look out through the same bars: / One sees the mud, and one the stars.” To live looking up to the stars and the sun—this is to have hope.

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I am reminded of an anecdote: Once there were two brothers, identical twins. One became an eminent educator and the other a thief.

Why did their lives take such different courses? Born into a poor family, the twins left home together at an early age to make their way in the world. But things did not go well. Pressed for money, they decided to each break into a different house and steal what they needed.

One of the twins was caught red-handed and sent to prison, there falling into evil ways. He then spent the rest of his life a thief. The other twin was also caught in the act of breaking and entering, but the people of that household warmly encouraged him, saying: "You are young. There's still plenty of time to start over."

They found him a job and gave him hope, encouraging him to study. That hope led him on a journey to become an educator, and he became a splendid teacher who inspired similar hope in the hearts of those younger than him.

Although both twins had started out from the same abject beginnings, one made his way gazing at the stars, while the other was looking only at the mud.

If we live with boundless hope, we'll grow without limit.

Friends from around the world have joined us today. In the southern hemisphere right now, it is winter.

In "Ode to the West Wind," the great English poet Shelley writes, "If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?" Spring always follows winter. Morning always follows night. As the Spanish writer Cervantes says, "As long as there is life, there is hope."

If we live with boundless hope, we can continue to grow without limit. For that reason, no matter what happens in life, we must never give up or let ourselves be defeated.

The spring, the dawn, the sun — these are all found in the depths of our own lives. We should lift our heads and stand tall.

Hope is life. Despair is death. Hope is victory. Resignation is defeat.

Those who bring hope to others are in turn filled with hope.

American journalist Dr. Norman Cousins, a dear friend of mine, who was known as the "conscience of America," titled his last book, *Head First: The Biology of Hope and the Healing Power of the Human Spirit*. This work, which has drawn considerable attention, seeks to illustrate the relationship between hope and physical health in an objective, scientific manner.

Dr. Cousins maintains that "a strong will to live helps the body's own apothecary to go to work" (*Head First*, p. 102). Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda similarly described the human body as "a pharmaceutical factory." According to Dr. Cousins, when hope is manifested as a strong will to live, the brain commands the body to employ its own chemical system for combating illness.

Hope is the commander determining victory in the struggle to survive. Hope, says Dr. Cousins, is a secret weapon, the "greatest force of all within the human arsenal" (p. 66).

Laughter, too, is good for our health, activating the release of endorphins, secretions that have painkilling capabilities, Dr. Cousins writes. He cites the words of American humorist Josh Billings: "There ain't much fun in medicine, but there's a heck of a lot of medicine in fun" (p. 125).

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Dr. Cousins further notes that “nothing I have learned in the past decade at the medical school seems to me more striking than the need of patients for reassurance” (p. 65). He is not talking about mere consolation; he explains, “[Reassurance is] a way of summoning all one’s strength and resources in the most important fight of one’s life.... Reassurance and hope are ways of activating [the human] apothecary” (p. 66).

Dr. Cousins conducted an experiment: A small blood sample was drawn from a subject, and five minutes later another sample was taken. He found that, depending on what went on in the person’s mind during those five minutes, the level of disease-fighting immune cells in the blood was likely to change.

When people imagined something wonderful, their immune system was activated, and their resistance to illness strengthened. In contrast, when they had negative or pessimistic thoughts, their immune system weakened. These results tended to be consistent across a vast spectrum of test subjects.

It has been found that people who suffer from loneliness or chronic stress have weakened immune systems and lower resistance to illness. On the other hand, people who are happy, secure in the knowledge that they are not alone, have been found to experience strengthened immune function.

Therefore, I hope you will reach out to and support others. Those who bring hope to others are in turn filled with hope.

As long as we have courage, we’ll always find a way forward.

The cause of high cholesterol, which is often associated with obesity, was, until the 1980s, commonly believed to be solely dietary in nature. Recently, though, it has been found that emotional stress can play a significant role as well. For instance, many students preparing to take their final exams and accountants pressured to file income tax returns on time suffer elevated cholesterol levels.

In other words, there is no purely physical or psychological illness—a finding that accords with the life philosophy of Buddhism, which expounds the principle of the oneness of body and mind.

Dr. Cousins investigated this relationship between mind and body at the School of Medicine of the University of California at Los Angeles. He personally experienced overcoming serious illness, including tuberculosis as a child and a serious connective tissue disease, which struck at age 50. He proved, not through armchair theory but by personal example, the incredible healing power of the human spirit, when it is firmly resolved to beat illness.

If we have courage, we’ll find a way forward. Dr. Cousins asserts that “hope can rekindle one’s spirits, create remarkable new energies, and set a stage for genuine growth” (p. 69).

He also says, “We discover ourselves as human beings when we move in the direction of our dreams” (p. 68). I completely agree. When we are fighting hard and striving with all our might—that is when we become truly human. When we forget about challenging ourselves, we grow lazy and degenerate, falling into a state of Animality.

Hope begins with challenge, with effort. As Dr. Cousins proclaims, “It is far better to pursue a remote and even unlikely goal than to deprive oneself of the forward motion that goals provide” (p. 69). He also asserts: “Death is not the ultimate tragedy in life. The ultimate tragedy is to die without discovering the possibilities of full growth. The approach of

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death need not be denial of that growth” (p. 25).

What grounds does anyone have for simply deciding that it is all I’m capable of. This is the extent of what I can hope to accomplish in this life”? We are the universe in miniature — microcosms of the cosmos. As long as we have hope, we can limitlessly develop ourselves.

The Gohonzon is an unlimited source of hope.

July is a month of wondrous significance: It is the month in which the Daishonin submitted his treatise “Risho Ankoku Ron” to the ruling authorities. It is the month in which presidents Makiguchi and Toda, and myself, too, were arrested. It is also the month in which President Toda and I were released from prison.

I was arrested and detained in prison in 1957. What was it that President Toda wrote about in his New Year’s greetings that year? Hope.

“In looking at great people of the past,” he writes, “we find that they remained undefeated by life’s hardships, by life’s pounding waves, holding fast to hopes that seemed but fantastic dreams to ordinary people. Or rather, they let nothing stop or discourage them from realizing their aspirations. The reason for this, I feel certain, is that their hopes themselves were not directed toward the fulfillment of personal desires or self-interest but based on a wish for all people’s happiness, and this filled them with extraordinary conviction and confidence.

“Let us take the example of the Daishonin, the original Buddha. At age 16, he awakened to the great wish to lead all people to happiness. After becoming enlightened to the profound truth of the universe, until age 32 [when he proclaimed Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the world for the first time], he engaged in study to confirm his conviction. Until his death at 61, he never abandoned a single of his youthful hopes and dreams, which he realized in his life. What a truly awesome and magnificent life of achievement the Daishonin shows us!...

“Whether you are young or old, it is crucial that you have firm hope in your life, and that you live enveloped in that aspiration. I want you to remember that the life force for living one’s life with hope is found in the Gohonzon, the fundamental object of devotion, which embodies the oneness of the Person and the Law and is the life of the original Buddha, the Daishonin.”

The Gohonzon itself is an unlimited source of hope. And the Daishonin’s Buddhism is the Buddhism of hope.

Looking back, we see that the Daishonin inscribed Gohonzon for his followers for the first time after his near execution at Tatsunokuchi and his subsequent exile to Sado Island — in other words, amid life-threatening persecutions. His exile to Sado was tantamount to imprisonment. It was in that harsh, cheerless “prison,” where no hope seemed possible, that the Daishonin first inscribed the Gohonzon, which would bring hope to all humankind. This is most significant.

He did not inscribe Gohonzon in some magnificently ornate temple, nor did he do so in order to gain authority and power while living in the lap of luxury. Rather, amid dire persecution, he continued to cherish the great hope of kosen-rufu — a hope that blazed in his heart as bright as the sun — and he infused the Gohonzon with his indefatigable fighting spirit to achieve that goal.

The Daishonin declares, “I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in *sumi* [black Chinese

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ink]” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 120). The Gohonzon is thus infused with the Daishonin’s spirit for kosen-rufu. Consequently, from a strict standpoint, the lives of those who have lost the spirit of faith, the spirit to work for kosen-rufu, no longer can commune and fuse with the Gohonzon.

The Daishonin teaches that the Gohonzon is found in faith alone” (MW-1, 213). The Gohonzon and the world of Buddhahood are found in faith dedicated to fighting for kosen-rufu. “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself,” writes the Daishonin (MW-1, 213).

When Mr. Toda was in prison, he didn’t have the Gohonzon with him. However, he had faith that was dedicated to kosen-rufu. That is why he was able to attain a profound realization of the reality of life and the universe while in prison.

On the other hand, even if a person possesses the Gohonzon but lacks faith, it will be useless: No benefit will be forthcoming.

The 26th high priest, Nichikan, emphasizes the importance of our faith when he stresses that the Gohonzon is the “object of devotion for observing one’s mind (enlightenment),” that is, for believing, for faith. He urged believers never to forget this point.

The Gohonzon is the object of devotion for enlightenment — or, expressed more simply, the object of devotion of faith.

It is important that we fight resolutely against malicious, corrupt individuals who have forgotten this, who have forgotten faith and kosen-rufu. The Daishonin writes, “To seek enlightenment without repudiating slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water” (MW-1, 165).

If our leaders are in good health, all those around them will be encouraged.

When I was in prison, I read writings by the French author Victor Hugo. He, too, was charged with a crime he did not commit and spent long years in exile.

In his novel *Ninety-Three*, the character Gauvin states: “This is my thought: Constant progression. If God had meant man to retrograde, he would have placed an eye in the back of his head.” Our eyes indisputably face front, always looking forward. That’s why Hugo urges, “Let us look always toward the dawn, the blossoming, the birth.”

I want all of you to advance forward, ever forward, growing more youthful with each passing year.

Writing of a ruler who regains his good health, the Daishonin states, “[King Rinda] grew more youthful, his complexion glowed, his spirit was vigorous, his physical strength remained undiminished” (MW-7, 245). He also says that the strength of [King Rinda’s] body and the perceptive powers of his mind became many hundreds and thousands of times greater than they had been before” (MW-7, 181–82).

If our leaders are in vigorous good health, all those around them will be encouraged and inspired. At the same time, they can win the trust of people outside the organization. I hope you will put your health first, get plenty of sleep — not giving exhaustion a chance to accumulate — and strengthen your life force.

The 21st century is waiting for the sun of hope — and we’re the ones who will make it rise.

In closing, I want to share some words from the noted American authority on comparative mythology, Joseph Campbell. He said this toward the end of his life; as such, this could be called a summation of his lifelong comparative study of the myths and philosophical traditions around the world, past and present: “When the world changes, then the religion has to be transformed.... [T]oday there are no boundaries. The only mythology that is valid today is the mythology of the planet — and we don’t have such a mythology. The closest thing I know to a planetary mythology is Buddhism, which sees all beings as Buddha beings. The only problem is to come to the recognition of that (*The Power of Myth*, pp. 21–22).

Dr. Campbell’s use of the word mythology has the same meaning here as thought or philosophy.

To enable all people to awaken to their inherent Buddha nature.... To enable all people to become aware of their infinite potential..... To teach all people the source of inexhaustible hope..... These are the aims of the SGI’s worldwide movement to promote the ideals and philosophy of the Daishonin’s Buddhism toward realizing happiness and peace for all.

The 21st century is waiting for this. It is waiting expectantly for the sun of hope to rise. And it is we who will make that sun rise.

My dear friends, I now present you with two poems in commemoration of this day.

*Writing a history of joint struggle
Across the three existences,
Together, ever together.*

*

*Our ultimate destination
Is the world of Buddhahood —
The Castle of Many Treasures.*

I will travel around the world again with increased vigor. Let’s meet again soon!
Take care!

SGI President Ikeda’s message to the closing session of the SGI Training Course, held at the Soka International Friendship Hall in Sendagaya, Tokyo, July 4.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

Gohonzon

From This Speech:

Nichiren Daishonin did not inscribe Gohonzon in some magnificently ornate temple, nor did he do so in order to gain authority and power while living in the lap of luxury. Rather, amid dire persecution, he continued to cherish the great hope of kosen-rufu — a hope that blazed in his heart as bright as the sun — and he infused the Gohonzon with his indefatigable fighting spirit to achieve that goal.

1. What do you think led the Daishonin to start inscribing Gohonzon?

2. Why is it important for us to know the circumstances in which the Daishonin started inscribing Gohonzon?
3. When we're chanting, how can we tap into the same hope with which the Daishonin inscribed the Gohonzon?
4. Have you had an experience in which you were in a difficult situation and chanting to the Gohonzon gave you hope?

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