

## **BECOMING A BUDDHIST**

### **A PERSPECTIVE ON PRESIDENT IKEDA'S FIRST SOKA GAKKAI MEETING BY SHAN SERAFIN, SGI-USA VICE HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION LEADER**

Tuesday of this week marks a significant day: the 52nd anniversary of SGI President Ikeda becoming a practitioner of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. As do many members, he has a remarkable story about joining the Soka Gakkai.

1947 — at age 19, Daisaku Ikeda was very well read. Living in post-war Japan amid streets strewn with rubble, he struggled hard to make out a living. Difficult financial times were compounded by the fact that he suffered from a dry cough (tuberculosis — it turned out), so it was an auspicious moment indeed when two of his grade-school classmates came knocking on his door to invite him to a Buddhist meeting.

How did the young Ikeda respond to the idea of a new philosophy? His interest was piqued! Since he was already searching and researching the essence of life (his bookshelf was packed with heavy literature — Nietzsche, Kunikida, Byron, Bergson and more), a lecture by Josei Toda seemed a perfect investigation of philosophy.

The night of the meeting, young Daisaku's classmates were ready to escort him to the meeting, but he, plagued with bad health, was grappling with a high fever. He told the members he would wait for his two other friends to come, but in truth he didn't really want to attend the meeting.

His friends finally did show up and, ultimately, they all ended up going.

How fateful!

Daisaku Ikeda's first moment in a Buddhist meeting was to hear Josei Toda in mid-lecture. Everyone in the meeting was riveted to Toda's words, including young Ikeda, who sat down and immediately felt a connection with him. In fact, in writing about this moment, President Ikeda recalls that he thought Toda was paying him special attention — eye contact! — to which the young Ikeda boyishly averted his glance.

Toda spoke to Ikeda in very familiar terms, making him feel comfortable and welcome. It was as if they had a relationship that went far back in time.

Ikeda spoke up and asked several questions: What is a correct way of life? What is a true patriot? What is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?

To each question, Toda offered a succinct, profound reply. The logic and power of his words was astounding. Young Ikeda knew he had found a special philosophy and a great man to teach it. His conviction was so intense that he spontaneously announced his resolution, conceiving the following poem:

*Traveler,  
From whence do you come?  
Where do you go?  
The moon has set,  
But the sun has not yet risen.  
In the chaos of darkness before the dawn  
Seeking the light,  
I advance  
To dispel the dark clouds from my mind  
To find a great tree unbowed by the tempest  
I emerge from the earth.*

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With such dauntless determination, it is little surprise that young Daisaku received his Gohonzon just 10 days later and began his practice of Buddhism.

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