

IMPRESSIONS OF PRESIDENT IKEDA'S 52ND ANNIVERSARY OF PRACTICE WHAT AUGUST 24 MEANS TO ME

TINA MAY, PHILADELPHIA

Mid-Atlantic Zone Youth Leader

I love reading about President Ikeda's first encounter with Buddhism — his first meeting on Aug. 14, 1947, and his conversion 10 days later. At the time, due to his poor health, he reflected on the possibilities of being physically capable of giving his whole being to a religious and social revolution.

Now 52 years later, we can see the tremendous power of Buddhism based on President Ikeda's life. He is leading the worldwide kosen-rufu movement, which is now in 128 countries, introducing the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin to all kinds of people.

Because of his efforts, I was able to begin my practice at the age of 20 while studying in Germany. I was at that time emotionally very dependent on my family and friends and had no specific goals. I can look back on my view of life and the sense of hopelessness and pessimism I had about my future in this crazy world. Over the years, because of President Ikeda's example, I have studied and tried to live up to his guidance. I have achieved an inner revolution I could not have otherwise done. I am very hopeful about life and very committed to helping other people gain hope about their individual futures. I feel I owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Sensei and Happy Buddhist Birthday!

MATTHEW ANTON, NEW YORK

Northeastern Zone Youth Leader

When I think of Aug. 24, I am always reminded of President Ikeda's first discussion. Wouldn't it have been exciting to be there in that packed room with President Toda on that hot and humid summer night? I wonder what the other people in the room were thinking as this honest and sincere young man spontaneously recited a poem. Some probably thought he was a little strange!

At the time of their first meeting, young Daisaku was 19 years old and President Toda was 48. Mystically, Toda had been 19 and President Makiguchi had been 48 when *they* met for the first time — also on an August night.

Reflecting on the significance of President Ikeda's joining the Soka Gakkai, I am reminded of the awesome power of *shakubuku*. Two young friends brought the teenage Daisaku to a discussion meeting. They had the courage to invite him — and because of their effort, he was able to take his first step in faith. How many future leaders are also waiting to be told about the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai organization?

We don't need to be experts in Buddhism. All we need is the courage to invite our friends to activities — and then help them join and develop in faith. Who knows? The friend you invite today could be a future president of the SGI.

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MIMI KUBIAK, DALLAS

Texas/Oklahoma Region YWD Leader

I sometimes wonder what my life would be like if President Ikeda hadn't joined the Soka Gakkai. I ask myself: 'Would I be practicing now? Would I have the opportunity to transform myself into a better person?' I look at the changes that have occurred in my life, through my chanting Nam-myho-renge-kyo and participation in SGI activities, and I cannot imagine any other way of developing into a better person.

Through his example and guidance, I have been able to chant for strength, courage, wisdom and compassion. Of course, I haven't fully developed all of these qualities, but I now know that these qualities will continue to mature throughout my life. Through the SGI, I have learned to appreciate everything as an opportunity for me to do more and grow.

If I were asked to single out one quality that President Ikeda possesses that has touched me the most, it would be the quality of acceptance. He has reached out to so many people — Rosa Parks, Linus Pauling, Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro — just to name a few. He has educated me by recounting the problems they faced and encouraged me by discussing their triumphs. I now understand that I must accept people for who they are and that I can learn something from everyone. I appreciate all the lessons that I have learned from President Ikeda every day through his example and guidance.

DAVID EISENBERG, SAN FRANCISCO

Northwestern Zone Youth Leader

Wow! President Ikeda joined the Soka Gakkai 52 years ago! At the age of 19, he was able to discern the greatness of Josei Toda and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Since that time, he has dedicated almost an entire lifetime to the people, selflessly pouring his entire being into each person he meets. Tirelessly and without hesitation, he has left for us clear and concise explanations of Buddhism, a great philosophy that can bring peace and true happiness to everyone.

Aug. 24 is also Men's Division Day. What will I do when I join the men's division? Will I be a role model for the younger generation? Will I be able to offer others encouragement as they struggle through their youth, infusing them with hope and courage? This, I believe, is my future responsibility. President Ikeda and countless others are, by their example, showing me how. And if I can show the same kind of actual proof as my seniors in faith, then I will be able to continue in the rich tradition of the Soka Gakkai.

As I reflect on the depth of President Ikeda's 52 years of practice to the Gohonzon, I'm filled with determination about my own life. I must make the most of this precious lifetime, putting my whole being into every action I take and never regretting a single moment of this great opportunity I have to create change in society.

My mentor, President Ikeda, has taught me how to do this. He has given me the encouragement and nourishment I need to change the seemingly impossible into reality. Now the rest is up to me. Only I can put forth the effort required; only I can chant daimoku; only I can do my human revolution.

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