

## **SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S AUG. 24 SPEECH AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE 21ST CENTURY**

*SGI President Ikeda declares, 'Standing at the threshold of the 21st century, I declare that I—and all of us—have resolutely triumphed over the three obstacles and four devils, and the three powerful enemies!'*

*During this meeting, President Ikeda was inaugurated as an honorary professor of Kyrgyzstan's Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures. To commemorate his inauguration, Rector Avazbek Atahanov of the Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures, which is affiliated with the Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University, presented the SGI leader with one of the country's famed thoroughbred horses. Rector Atahanov personally selected the horse, which he will raise and care for in Kyrgyzstan on President Ikeda's behalf.*

Thank you for the fine Kyrgyz steed! A woman named Kurmanzhan Datka is today known as the mother of Kyrgyzstan. Her husband was a leader in the country's Alay region and after his death, she inherited his mantle. With her consummate skill in diplomacy, she parried Russian pressure on Kyrgyzstan, defending her people.

But one day her son, who had been fighting against the Russians, was captured and sentenced to death. Unbelievably, the Russian authorities forced her to attend her son's execution. They no doubt expected this proud woman to break down and beg tearfully for her son's life. As the time for the execution drew near, these cruel individuals watched her intently with sadistic pleasure.

But this mother declared resolutely: "My son! You know the cause for which you give your life. Be proud! Fear nothing and go bravely to your death!" All those present were amazed by her courage. Many wept with great emotion.

I see in this mother the essence of the Soka Gakkai spirit.

Kurmanzhan Datka did not spill the blood of her people, the people of Kyrgyzstan, but she urged her own son to walk the road of martyrdom nobly. Kurmanzhan Datka is still held in high regard in her homeland, and her face is depicted on Kyrgyzstan's 50-som note. [The som is the basic monetary unit of Kyrgyzstan.]

### **The struggle to develop ourselves and better the world makes our lives immortal.**

Today is Aug. 24 [the 52nd anniversary of President Ikeda joining the Soka Gakkai]. Standing at the threshold of the 21st century, I declare that I—and all of us—have resolutely triumphed over the three obstacles and four devils, and the three powerful enemies!

Every possible intrigue, scheme and falsehood has been employed to attack and destroy the Soka Gakkai, which alone is carrying out the Buddha's will and decree. Let me say here and now that the evil doings of these conspirators will be recorded forever in history.

Today, our 12 million members throughout Japan and the world are shouting "Hurrah!" You have all worked so hard. Thank you! Thank you from the bottom of my heart!

Our members everywhere around the globe are in high spirits.

The great Russian writer Leo Tolstoy asserts: "An immortal soul requires a task as

immortal as itself. And just such a task is assigned to it: endless striving after perfection of self and of the world.” How true this is! The struggle to develop ourselves and make the world a better place is what makes our lives immortal.

Napoléon Bonaparte, meanwhile, declares: “There is only the difference of one step between triumph and downfall. I have seen that in the most crucial of circumstances, the smallest things decide the greatest events.” Napoléon knew that only one step separates victory and defeat. The distance between pride and a fall is just one tiny step.

Napoléon also declared that he needed no Arch of Triumph or victory celebration, for he knew no triumph greater than the people’s satisfaction. A victory is genuine only when the people are happy and satisfied.

### **The Lotus Sutra had to pass through perilous places on a long road fraught with danger and hardship to get to us.**

I thank all of you for traveling from afar, in such hot weather, to attend today’s meeting.

I feel as if I were galloping across the vast plains of Kyrgyzstan, the cool winds blowing on my face, on the magnificent steed that has been presented to me today by our honored Kyrgyz guests. The sparkling snowcapped peaks of the imperishable Tien Shan mountain range tower majestically on the horizon like a procession of kings. The highest peak in the range, called Victory Peak (Pik Pobedy), is 24,406 feet, soaring far above Japan’s Mount Fuji [at 12,388 feet].

The mountain snows of Tien Shan melt into pure, rushing streams that nourish the plains below and gather in Kyrgyzstan’s Lake Issyk-Kul, which is nine times the size of Lake Biwa [Japan’s largest freshwater lake]. This resplendent lake is known as the beauty of Kyrgyzstan and the pearl of Tien Shan. How many travelers it must have captivated with its scenic beauty as they traversed the Silk Road, east to west and west to east! Many Buddhist relics and sites have been discovered near the lake.

Today, Aug. 24, leaders from China, Russia and the three Central Asian republics of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan are meeting in Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, for a five-nation summit. China’s President Jiang Zemin will be there and so will Russia’s President Boris Yeltsin. The world will be watching this summit with great interest.

Kyrgyzstan, or the Kyrgyz Republic as it is formally known, was born in 1991 after the end of the Cold War, appearing on the world stage as a republic of hope, like the new day’s dawning sun. Kyrgyzstan is composed of a harmonious blending of more than 80 diverse ethnic groups. Bringing its rich cultural heritage to shine, Kyrgyzstan is beginning to emerge as a new leader for peace in the 21st century.

Honored by the presence of two great Kyrgyz leaders in the field of humanistic education, today’s meeting represents a historic people’s assembly.

Honorable President Amangeldy Bekberaev of Kyrgyz State Pedagogical University; Honorable Rector Avazbek Atahanov of the Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures; fellow SGI members who have traveled to Japan from 20 countries; and my precious members across Japan who continue to strive tirelessly despite the fierce summer heat: I have just received the unparalleled honor of being conferred the title of honorary professor from a great palace of wisdom and hope for the new century. I offer my deepest thanks and gratitude.

One of the major Silk Road routes, the so-called Northern Tien Shan route, passes through Kyrgyzstan. Mahayana Buddhism, which originated in India, traveled to China

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and East Asia along this route.

Nichiren Daishonin writes of this, paying tribute to the efforts of those who carried Buddhism along this path. He comments that, in its transmission, the Lotus Sutra had to pass through such perilous places as the deserts of Central Asia and the Pamir highlands, and that the road was long—58,000 *ri* or even 100,000 *ri*—and fraught with danger and hardship (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 145). [One *ri* is about four kilometers.]

Fifty-two years ago today, on Aug. 24, 1947, I took my first step together with my mentor, Josei Toda, on a new spiritual Silk Road of peace, culture and education, based on the teachings of Buddhism. I humbly accept this great honor from Kyrgyzstan—a country which has such a wondrous connection with the transmission of Buddhism to Japan—together with my fellow members in 128 countries and territories, who have shared my sufferings and joys and worked so hard to open a great path of heart-to-heart exchange and communication around the globe.

### **'Do not be afraid! Do not retreat!' – this is the essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.**

The West has the heroic epics the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* from Ancient Greece. We in the East have a great heroic epic, too, more than 40,000 lines in length—the towering masterpiece of oral literature, the Kyrgyz epic *Manas*. This remarkable cultural legacy has been passed down for a thousand years.

Four years ago, Kyrgyzstan held a national celebration to commemorate the millennium of the epic's creation. I received a kind invitation to attend this event from the Kyrgyz minister of culture. When the members of Kyrgyzstan's Kambarkan Folk Ensemble performed in Japan last year at the invitation of the Min-On Concert Association, they gave a fine choral rendition of parts of the epic.

The *Manas* tells the story of how the Kyrgyz people, who are being harassed and divided by foreign invaders, rise up and unite, centering around the young hero, Manas. The people fight courageously against oppression and insult, and over three generations they firmly establish and defend their homeland.

British historian Arnold Toynbee also made reference to the *Manas* in his studies of the region's history. As you know, Dr. Toynbee viewed history as a process of challenge and response. He believed that the secret to the development and growth of a culture was how it responded to challenges. This ability to respond to challenges determined the success or failure of a civilization, concluded Dr. Toynbee.

The great epic poem of Kyrgyzstan tells the story of a courageous response to a cruel challenge.

In the epic, the hero Manas calls on his compatriots to rouse themselves to action:

*There is life and there is death  
There is good and there is evil  
There are times when we are fated to be tested by trials*

*Why was I born of my father?  
As long as my soul abides,  
My only course is to advance along the path to glory!  
I am not fool enough to relinquish to the enemy*

*This land that I inherited from my father!*

*Why was I born of my mother?*

*To walk the path of heroes.*

Unless one has a burning determination to vanquish evil, one cannot protect the people. One cannot ensure that justice will prevail.

The Daishonin writes, “Those with the heart of a lion will surely attain Buddhahood” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 35). You cannot become a Buddha unless you strive with the heart of a lion.

Cowards cannot attain Buddhahood. Self-serving individuals who, when faced with an enemy of the Buddha, simply stand by in silence or flee—those who only fight halfheartedly or leave the battle to others—will never attain enlightenment.

I want all of you, the youth division members, to be people of courage, to be lions, just as the Daishonin urges. He says, “Each of you should summon up the courage of a lion and never succumb to threats from anyone” (MW-1, 241).

“Do not be afraid! Do not retreat!”—this message is the essence of the Daishonin’s Buddhism. No matter how high your position in the organization, you disqualify yourself as a leader the moment you lose your determination to go on fighting for kosen-rufu.

The Daishonin was a lion king. We must follow directly in his footsteps and in those of Mr. Toda. We must wholeheartedly pursue the path of mentor and disciple that is the SGI.

For the past half century, I have defended this people’s organization, the Soka Gakkai—which my mentor declared more precious to him than his own life—and developed it into a global organization. I have fought.

The Lotus Sutra says that people will “curse and speak ill [of us]” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 193). I have personally endured that and countless other persecutions, just as the sutra says. Throughout it all, I have followed the path of mentor and disciple that transcends life and death, spreading the alliance of global citizenship that was my mentor’s cherished dream.

I am proud of my accomplishments and my life. In every struggle or endeavor, and in the presence of any and all, I believe that I have always acquitted myself ably and honorably.

I am happy to announce that today in Brazil, on the other side of the globe, my great mentor will be awarded a posthumous honorary citizenship from the city of São João do Meriti in the state of Rio de Janeiro. A special conferment ceremony will be held in the City Council chambers.

I have made the accomplishments of Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda known to the world. This is the task of the true disciple; this is the path of mentor and disciple.

## **Education provides the wings that allow us to attain glory.**

In Kyrgyzstan, they say that a horse is a person’s wings. When our distinguished guests presented me with this magnificent steed, they asked me to name it. I want, with their permission, to name it Glory, taking inspiration from the message of the Manas, their great national epic, which urges: “Advance resolutely along the path to glory!”

Education provides the wings that allow us to attain glory as human beings—in a way that is truly human and dignified. President Bekberaev and Rector Atahanov are two individuals who have devoted themselves tirelessly and passionately to the cause of education.

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President Bekberaev is a renowned scholar of German language and literature. Aug. 28 will mark the 250th anniversary of the birth of the German literary giant Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, who says, “One must be young to do great things.”

Youth is strength, youth is hope.

What constitutes youth? It is not simply a matter of age. Youth is determined by whether one possesses a lively intellectual curiosity, whether one takes courageous action for what is right.

Both President Bekberaev and Rector Atahanov are standing at the head of the youth and taking the lead in building their respective schools with a young, dynamic spirit. Rector Atahanov, at 37, arrives at the Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures each morning before anyone else and stands outside the building to greet the instructors and students as they arrive. He sets a superb example for us all. I hope that our Soka Gakkai leaders will show this kind of concern toward their fellow members.

What is crucial is the vibrant energy and momentum of the central figure.

Mr. Toda often used to say that if the leaders at the top are truly serious in their commitment, any vital areas for reform would naturally become apparent to them.

### **Leaders need to have a sound philosophy of life and death, or their leadership will have no foundation.**

Young, energetic people, whose average age is below 30, staff the Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures. This was true of the Soka Gakkai in the old days, too. I became president at 32. I hope all the youth division members will quickly develop into fine leaders.

Assistant to the Rector Hironori Ito, who is a trusted institute member, is a Soka University alumnus from the 15th graduating class. In commemoration of this day, I present him with a poem:

*I dedicate this to you  
Noble friend  
Soka University alumnus  
May you always advance with the pride  
Of being a pioneer in Kyrgyzstan*

Today, Soka University graduates are active in 52 nations around the world. Of those teaching Japanese in Kyrgyzstan, five are Soka University alumni—two men and three women—and four are employed at the Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures. I humbly ask you, President Bekberaev and Rector Atahanov, to take care of my Soka University graduates, who are as dear to me as my own sons and daughters.

Ballsagun, the great 11th-century Kyrgyz poet and scholar, writes in his mature years: “Live, ever thinking of death which is inevitable. That is the way to avoid suffering after you enter the grave.”

The Daishonin also says, “First study death, then study other matters” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1404).

What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of death? Such fundamental philosophical contemplation is of utmost importance to human beings.

People in positions of leadership, especially, need to have a sound philosophy of life and

death—or their leadership will be without firm foundation. They will not lead people to happiness.

There are those who have no solid philosophy to guide them in life, and they have no interest in seeking one. Yet they are cocky and arrogant. Aren't such people complete failures as human beings? Whatever power or authority they may have, it is as evanescent as a dream.

But the lives of you who live in accord with and dedicated to the Mystic Law, the eternal and imperishable Law of the universe, are eternal and imperishable in return. By comparison, social status and material wealth are insignificant. I want you to be confident that you are leading the greatest of all lives.

Ballsagun also entreats: "A person who does not work for others is as if in the grave. Don't be a dead person! As long as you have strength, work for others!"

Today is Men's Division Day. The men's division is the golden pillar of kosen-rufu. I hope all of our men's division members will lead positive, youthful lives, always taking the initiative in working for others' welfare.

### **The new century will be the century of women and the century of youth.**

The well-known Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov is a dear friend of mine. Last autumn we met again in Kyoto and spoke intimately about many issues, including reviving the culture of the written word.

Mr. Aitmatov holds the highest hopes for the Soka Gakkai's daily, the *Seikyo Shimbun*, a truly humanistic organ. He remarks: "In an age filled with all sorts of vulgar writing, the *Seikyo Shimbun* does not print gossip or fabrications. It publishes on a very high cultural level and is read by millions."

Next year will mark the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding. With that in mind, let us all work together to increase the readership of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, source of inspiration and hope to leading thinkers around the world. One of Mr. Toda's fondest wishes was that everyone in Japan would read the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

The 21st century will be the century of women. More and more women are moving into leadership roles. As they do, the times will change dramatically.

The new century will also be the century of youth. It is the stage on which the youth division members will carry out their activities.

The Aug. 12 *Seikyo Shimbun* ran an article that Mr. Aitmatov wrote especially for the newspaper. In it, he introduced an ancient Kyrgyz song that praises "seed sowers":

*Give the seeds you have sowed sufficient water,  
Build wide irrigation ditches,  
Don't let weeds grow in your field,  
Don't let tricksters steal your crop,  
Personally stand guard against thieves.  
Seeds, produce a rich crop, multiply!  
One seed producing a thousand fruit!*

Youth are the seeds. We must nurture each of these seeds so that each may bear a thousand fruit. We must cultivate and foster each youth, so that each develops into a person of great ability and strength.

We must not allow our precious organization dedicated to propagating the Daishonin's Buddhism to become the victim of tricksters or thieves.

### **The people must become stronger.**

The important thing is for the people to become strong—for the organization of the people, the Soka Gakkai, to become strong. It is essential that we do not let anyone get away with treating the people with ridicule and contempt.

We must rise up and courageously speak out for truth and justice. Silence equals defeat. There will be no justice unless we demand it.

I stood up firmly, all by myself, to defend Mr. Toda and fight our opponents. I fought, and I won. I knew that Mr. Toda was indispensable for kosen-rufu. By protecting him, I was protecting kosen-rufu.

I am determined to work together with our honorable friends from Kyrgyzstan to sow and nurture even more hope-filled seeds of peace, culture and education, and to dedicate the rest of my life to creating a monumental epic poem to the victory and glory of the people—an epic poem that will be sung down through the generations across the new millennium.

In closing, on behalf of all present, I offer my sincerest prayers for the eternal, unimpeded growth and development of the Institute of Oriental Languages and Cultures, a fine institution dedicated to producing the rich fruit of humane education.

*Chon Rakhmat!* (“Thank you very much” in Kyrgyz.)

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 36th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Aug. 24.*

### **TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS**

#### **A Sound Philosophy of Life and Death**

##### **FROM THIS SPEECH:**

Nichiren Daishonin says, “First study death, then study other matters” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1404). What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of death? Such fundamental philosophical contemplation is of utmost importance to human beings. People in positions of leadership, especially, need to have a sound philosophy of life and death—or their leadership will be without firm foundation. They will not lead people to happiness.

1. Why does the Daishonin say to “first study death, then study other matters”?
2. How does thinking about death help us live better lives?
3. How would you describe what a “sound philosophy of life and death” is?
4. Why do leaders who don't have such a sound philosophy lead people to unhappiness?
5. Why do many leaders today not have such a sound philosophy?
6. Does the Daishonin's Buddhism have a positive view of death?

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