

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA THE DISTRICT IS THE FOUNDATION

In this essay, SGI President Ikeda explains that ‘in the SGI organization, the district is the foundation of eternal victory and a base for people’s happiness. The district is the True Land of kosen-rufu and of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.’

*Little snail,
When did you arrive
At my feet?*
— Issa (Japanese Haiku poet)

Slow but sure progress, one step at a time, is the mother of outstanding victory. Mahatma Gandhi knew this important truth when he said, “Good travels at a snail’s pace.”

Once I was looking through the issue of a magazine I had contributed an essay to, when I spotted an article by Japanese novelist Fuyuji Domon about the “Thousand-man Force of Hachioji.” Whenever I see the name Hachioji, I think immediately of Soka University, which I founded there, as well as of my beloved fellow members in Hachioji.

I remember being drawn into the article by seeing the name Hachioji.

The Thousand-man Force of Hachioji was originally called the Thousand-man Constabulary of Hachioji. It was a group of samurai retainers that the Tokugawa government posted in farm villages around Hachioji soon after the shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu first set up his new capital in Edo, present-day Tokyo. The retainers were under the direct command of the Tokugawa government, and as there were a thousand of them, they were given the name the Thousand-man Constabulary.

The Tokugawa government gave these samurai land, which they farmed. Their duty in return was to rise up to protect Edo should it ever be threatened. Thus, they kept up military practice, so they would always be prepared to do so.

Their loyalty to the Tokugawa government was strong, and they passed their allegiance on from father to son, generation to generation—right up until the fall of the Tokugawa military government, in fact, almost three centuries later. I was deeply impressed by their magnificent devotion.

Mr. Domon made a sharp observation. He wrote: “I believe that one source of the strong loyalty of these people to the Tokugawa was their deep attachment to the land. Those who went to the big cities were fickle-hearted. When something happened, they were quick to make excuses or to flee. But these retainers who were strongly rooted in the land did not behave that way. That is the true Edo spirit.”

I understand this spirit very well, for I have seen many individuals who, lacking a solid base for their Gakkai activities, ultimately veered from the path of mentor and disciple. They ended up losing their essential direction in life.

To be rooted in the earth means to have a solid foundation.

The Japanese expression *issho kenmei*, which means to exert one’s utmost, was originally written with different characters meaning to defend one’s place with one’s life. This came from the tradition of the samurai warrior to defend his fief with his life.

To defend one's place against all odds, even at the risk of one's life.... To be rooted in one's region and to triumph there.... Such earnest commitment is the formula for ultimate victory.

The Lotus Sutra describes this strife-filled saha world as the True Land where the Buddha has always dwelled. No matter where, the place where you decide to work for kosen-rufu is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, filled with glory and victory. It is the place you have chosen from the infinite past.

In the SGI organization, the district is the foundation of eternal victory and a base for people's happiness. The district is the True Land of kosen-rufu and of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. To shun it is to lose sight of the place for one's true mission in this world.

The pillars of the district are the district leaders. No one could be nobler than these men and women who are devoting themselves earnestly to our multifaceted SGI activities on the very front lines of the kosen-rufu movement. I have no doubt that they would be praised by the Daishonin and that they are being protected by the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the 10 directions—the protective functions of the universe.

When I was young, I, too, was active in the district, serving as a group young men's division leader and later as a district leader of Omori District in Tokyo's Kamata Chapter. This was around the time when Mr. Toda took office as the second Soka Gakkai president in 1951.

My wife, also, for a time after we were married, served as a group women's division leader and later took on the additional position of district women's division vice leader. Each group at this time consisted of several units, so a group women's division leader was equivalent to our district women's division leader today.

Michiko Hagiwara, who was then a young women's division member, has reminisced of my wife during those days. She says: "When she was young, Mrs. Ikeda used to bring her little boy along with her when she carried out propagation activities or gave personal guidance. Many people were so impressed by her spirit that they were inspired with fresh resolve. That little boy was her eldest son, Hiromasa, who is now working on the front lines of the movement for kosen-rufu as a Soka Gakkai vice president. Mrs. Ikeda would accompany me when I wanted to introduce my friends to Buddhism, and she would come over to see me whenever I had some problem or was upset. She was always ready with a smile and warm encouragement. She was a true safe harbor for me, always there with comfort and good advice when I was struggling or having a hard time."

My wife has always believed that our fellow Soka Gakkai members are precious family and we must never let even one of them suffer misfortune.

Back in those days, there was a youth division leader who was disliked by all. Once he complained that such positions as district leader and district vice leader were too far beneath him to accept. His fellow members reproached him for his arrogance, asking him if the purpose of his faith was only to gain positions and titles.

But his faith was not grounded in reality. In the end, he gave it up and lived a sad, lonely life. It is as the Daishonin writes: "Even a tree that has grown up in place may fall over if its roots are weak" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p.109).

In the Nirvana Sutra, Shakyamuni urges his followers to "depend upon the Law, not upon persons." The Law is the basis of faith, and the organization dedicated to widely

propagating that Law for all eternity is the SGI. Doing activities in the organization, therefore, makes for a life centered on kosen-rufu, a life that accords with the True Law.

The Daishonin writes, "I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province" (MW-5, 151). If we understand "your province" as "your district," we realize the important mission of the district leaders.

Vibrant, vigorous activities at the district level speed up the process of kosen-rufu. Those who are engaged in those activities will accumulate infinite benefit and good fortune and be forever caressed by the breezes of happiness.

I pray earnestly for your victory, happiness and health!