

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR A NEW COMMON SENSE FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

February is always a significant time for the SGI. February 16 is the date of Nichiren Daishonin's birth, and on February 11, we also celebrate the 100th anniversary of President Toda's birth.

These important dates are a wonderful opportunity to reflect on the spirit of selfless dedication exhibited by both the founder of our school of Buddhism and by the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai who established our lay Buddhist organization. While we may be well acquainted with the persecutions and struggles they underwent, their effort and dedication amidst tremendous deprivation and difficulty are unimaginable. We who practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism at the dawn of the 21st century don't face their hardships. But we do possess a profound mission to build upon their work into the new millennium.

February is also a time to reflect upon the events ten years ago when President Ikeda made his historic visit to the United States. As I read and reread the guidance he gave us on that occasion, its profundity and significance become clearer to me. I am convinced that his words are not simply for those who heard them a decade ago; rather, they teach us important principles for our growth and development as an organization dedicated to kosen-rufu into the next century.

During this historic stay in the United States, President Ikeda taught—or rather, reminded us of—many essential points about our Buddhist practice. For the first three decades of what was then called NSA, we American members were earnestly seeking the correct way to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. But in our sincere desire to spread this Buddhism, in some cases we went too far, creating an atmosphere in which the organization took precedence over people. This contradicts the Daishonin's spirit to cherish each individual and President Ikeda's guidance and example that leaders and organizations exist to serve the people. During his 1990 visit, President Ikeda said:

Spontaneity underlies the spirit of autonomy and independence; conversely, taking action because one is told to amounts to slavery of the spirit. Kosen-rufu will be accomplished by brave people armed with the spirit of independence who voluntarily strive to fulfill the vow they made at the time of *kuon ganjo*. Because they struggle on their own volition, they have no complaints or grievances. (p. 11)

The essential point of Buddhism is for each of us to awaken to our own mission and to take action based on our own sense of purpose. Autonomy and independence, not obedience and dependency, will allow us to accomplish kosen-rufu. Freedom is not simply freedom from external constraint or compulsion. It is actually the freedom to live a life of value in which we pursue the mission we have chosen. "Mission" doesn't refer simply to what we do within the organization; rather, our mission expresses itself in our relationships with our friends and family, in our workplace and in everything we do on a daily basis. Our practice of Buddhism is the soil from which our mission and benefit emerge, and our activities within the SGI are like the cultivation and tending of the fields of our lives.

Therefore, the meaning of freedom and independence is that, regardless of the difficulty of our lives, we can choose to lead lives dedicated to a great purpose. When we are

dedicated to a mission, we take action voluntarily, and our efforts ennoble and energize us. We have “no complaints or grievances,” because we are living exactly as we want.

As President Ikeda pointed out in his New Year’s poem this year, the “common sense” of the 20th century was the culture of war and coercion. But the common sense of the 21st century must become peace, respect for the dignity of all life, and an awareness of the interconnectedness of all things. “Kosen-rufu will be accomplished by brave people armed with the spirit of independence who voluntarily strive to fulfill the vow they made at the time of *kuon ganjo*.” Kosen-rufu — “to widely declare and spread” — makes the profound humanism and pacifism of Buddhism the “common sense” of our society.

But this transformation doesn’t happen passively. It will only happen when each of us — spontaneously and of our own initiative — becomes deeply convinced of our mission to inspire hope in others. It is not enough to simply talk about Buddhism and hope people understand the general principles. I think we must take the additional step of teaching our friends and loved ones how they themselves can transform their suffering into joy. This is the practice of *shakubuku*, the propagation of Buddhism and kosen-rufu, communicating the principles of Buddhism broadly throughout society.

It is young people to whom SGI President Ikeda entrusts the future. I sincerely hope that this is not taken to imply that the lives or contributions of those of us who are older are any less valuable. Rather, I believe that President Ikeda is demonstrating the spirit to nurture young people. This is because the youth of today are responsible for tomorrow. By teaching, encouraging and fostering young people, we are in fact creating the 21st century. Our focus to raise and entrust youth in the SGI-USA expresses the truly profound mission we have to raise the next generation and thereby create a new culture of peace and humanism in the next century.

But since it is the young people who will live in and create the new century, I hope that they will take seriously their own mission to be the ones to transform the 21st century into a century of life. If I may speak frankly to the youth, if you don’t take on this challenge, if you yourselves don’t decide to transform a culture of war to a culture of peace, then it simply won’t happen. But if you decide to fulfill the mission to contribute to lasting peace, then, based on your Buddhist practice, you will definitely accomplish what you set out to do.

This is freedom. This is living a life of value creation. And the aggregation of such powerful, meaningful individual lives is the definition of actualizing kosen-rufu.

Finally, I want to express my deepest respect to the women’s division members who, during their annual general meetings, return each year to the guidance President Ikeda gave at the women’s division training meeting on February 27, 1990. I am moved by their spirit to deepen their understanding of their mentor’s expectations.

The women’s division general meetings being held this month are a time for all of us to unite and support those people who are quite frankly the backbone and the engine of our organization. We all know how much these women do to support all the other members through their prayers, phone calls, encouragement and even through feeding the rest of us! Let us in the men’s and youth divisions take this opportunity we have each year to support them fully as a small, partial repayment of the deep debt we owe them.

The many commemorative dates and events during February are significant only if they inspire us to action. I hope we can use these events as an impetus to forge a deep determination to share the benefit and joy of our practice with others. Let’s make each day of this short month a meaningful step away from a culture of war to a culture of peace, and

advance proudly, step by step, in our work to create the future.

Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director

Title: A New Common Sense for the Twenty-first Century
Subject: Living Buddhism 02/00 v.0 n.2 p.3 LB0002p03
Author: Danny Nagashima
Keywords: Century Common Director Encouragement General Guidance Messages Organization Propagation
Sense Twenty-first