

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR “TRANSFORMING THE LAND”

Greetings to the readers of Living Buddhism!

Recently, I was in Guam participating in events commemorating the 25th anniversary of the SGI. In celebration, the SGI, together with the University of Guam and Soka University of America, sponsored the First Pacific Islands New Millennium Peace Conference with the participation of civic leaders and tribal chiefs from many Pacific Island states.

Twenty-five years ago, on January 26, 1975, President Ikeda met in Guam with representative members from fifty-one countries for the first conference of the International Buddhist League. This was the origin of the Soka Gakkai International. On that occasion, the international scope of our grass-roots movement for peace, which began with President Ikeda's first trip to the United States in 1960, entered a new phase. In my opinion, this event will be recognized as the time when Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism took its place as a world religion. From that first meeting with representatives from fifty-one countries, the seeds planted by President Ikeda have blossomed into an organization with 148 member countries.

While I was in Guam this past January, I found myself reflecting on the significance of President Ikeda's actions twenty-five years ago. Why did he establish the SGI? And why was Guam the site for such an auspicious event? After all, at that time Guam was not yet the popular tourist destination it is today and barely had the facilities to accommodate our conference.

President Ikeda's visit to Guam in 1975 was the last stop on a worldwide trip that included activities in China, the Soviet Union and the United States. Prior to meeting with members in Guam, he had met with Zhou Enlai, the premiere of China; Alexei Kosygin of the Soviet Union; and in the United States with Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. This was at the height of the Cold War, during the final days of the war in Vietnam, and a time when relations between the United States, the Soviet Union and Mainland China were at their worst. In fact, for anyone to travel among those three nations, much less confer with their political leaders, was unheard of. It is significant that President Ikeda did not meet with heads of state but rather with advisors critical to determining the policy of these three most powerful nations, the three nations that had kept the world in a state of conflict.

It was at the end of this trip that President Ikeda formally established our worldwide Buddhist organization. This stemmed from his conviction that peace could not be established through military force or economic power. Rather, what was essential was a network of common people, global citizens united by a profound philosophy of humanism and pacifism. That philosophy was Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

In 1975, those of us at that gathering did not necessarily understand its significance. But that small group of ordinary people were determined to dedicate their lives to creating peace in their communities and families. Their meeting went largely unnoticed by anyone outside of our organization. Nevertheless, on looking back it was clearly the starting point of a movement that is being affirmed, applauded and supported by leaders around the world, from all sectors of society, as evidenced by the Pacific Islands New Millennium Peace Conference. Our grass-roots movement of spiritual rejuvenation is proving that, if the people take the lead, the leaders of the world will join us.

There is also deep significance in the fact that President Ikeda chose Guam, which many would view as a place of minor geopolitical importance, to begin a new substantial phase

of our global movement for peace.

For centuries, this small island was a colony of Spain, Japan and the United States. During the Pacific War, Japan and the United States fought one of their most intense and bloody battles to gain possession of this island. Though in a remote location, this island has for more than three centuries had more than its share of conflict and suffering at the hands of world powers battling for power and influence at the expense of the native people.

The people of this island had the karma to suffer for generations because of interests and conflicts that had nothing to do with them. It is a principle of Buddhism that people who suffer the most have the right to become the happiest. Similarly, peace should begin from those places that have suffered the most from war. This is why the SGI was founded on Guam.

The same logic motivated President Ikeda to take his first step outside of Japan in Hawaii, where the Japanese military made its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The place where the Japanese military sparked a global conflict became the place where the sun of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism first shed its light outside of Japan. In spiritual terms, we can say that the promulgation of war was transformed into the propagation of peace.

There is a concept we have learned from our study of the Lotus Sutra known as "the three transformations of the land." In preparation for the Ceremony in the Air, Shakyamuni takes a land that has been defiled and purifies it. The "three transformations of the land" refers to Shakyamuni's action to transform and purify the strife-ridden world three times.

This profound concept is discussed at length in the eighteenth installment of "Dialogues on the Lotus Sutra." (March 1997, *Living Buddhism*) Essentially, it expresses the function of Buddhism to purify our strife-ridden world, to go the place of war and conflict and make them Buddha lands from which peace and human prosperity emanate.

This is a principle we see at work again and again within the SGI. Each of us is dedicated to transforming the strife and conflict in our communities. Through our earnest practice of Buddhism—through consistent and compassionate effort—we aim to show positive proof of this principle of the three transformations.

In addition, President Ikeda began to write the novel *The Human Revolution* in Okinawa, where many innocent people lost their lives, sacrificed to the aims of Japanese militarism. I feel that we can regard these three events—the founding of the SGI in Guam, the first steps in the worldwide propagation of the Law in Hawaii, and the beginning of *The Human Revolution* in Okinawa—as illustrating the principle of "the three transformations of the land." More important, however, this exemplifies President Ikeda's spirit to go where people have suffered the most and there to sow seeds of peace for the eternal future. This action is an expression of tremendous care and compassion, and embodies the fundamental spirit of our bodhisattva practice.

On March 16, we celebrate Kosen-rufu Day, the day when the task of kosen-rufu was fully entrusted to the next generation, to the youth. I hope that the youth of the SGI-USA will use this opportunity to deepen their understanding of this heart of compassion at the origin of our movement for peace. Based on the actions of their predecessors, I hope they will spur themselves to more vigorous action to sow seeds of happiness and prosperity that will blossom throughout the next century.

Until next month, and until I have the opportunity to see you again in person, please take good care of yourselves.

Daniel K. Nagashima, SGI-USA General Director