

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR VICTORIES FOUNDED ON THE MENTOR–DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

Greetings to all the readers of *Living Buddhism*. May is a beautiful month and the heart of springtime. It is during this time of the year when nature is so full of beauty and new life that we celebrate Soka Gakkai Presidents' Day. May 3 is the date when Mr. Toda and, nine years later, Mr. Ikeda were inaugurated as presidents of the Soka Gakkai. In a sense it is the "New Year's Day" of our organization, a day signified by a spirit of new beginnings.

In President Ikeda's recent message to the participants in the Central Executive Conference, he urged us to "create a succession of victories." What an exciting image! When I look back on the history of the Soka Gakkai and President Ikeda's leadership, I can see concrete examples of what it means to create a succession of victories.

These victories are founded on the mentor–disciple relationship. In the strictest sense, this is the relationship we form with the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, Nichiren Daishonin, through our prayer to the mandala he inscribed, the Gohonzon. Our profound prayer to realize the Daishonin's will constitutes the heart of the Soka Gakkai International. As Nichiren Daishonin writes in "The True Aspect of All Phenomena": "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remotest past" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 385).

The Soka Gakkai International is a gathering of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, people dedicated to practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and illuminating society with the light of Buddhist humanism and pacifism. We are also an organization of people dedicated to protecting Nichiren Daishonin's teachings from corruption or distortion. This dual mission—to protect and to propagate—is the spirit that flows within our organization. This is also the spirit that pulsed within the lives of first president Makiguchi and second president Toda. It is something we can inherit through the mentor–disciple relationship.

Recently, SGI President Ikeda held a dialogue with SGI-USA Women's Division Leader Matilda Buck and SGI-USA Youth Division Senior Advisor Ed Feasel. This discussion will be published in future issues of *Living Buddhism*. During their conversation, President Ikeda talked about his recent visit to Kansai Soka High School. One young woman asked him what his dreams or hopes were. He replied that his dream was to realize every single dream of President Toda's. All his energy, passion and sense of mission are dedicated to this objective. President Toda would often share with the young Daisaku Ikeda the ideas or hopes he had for the future, not just for the Soka Gakkai organization, but for the future of humanity.

President Ikeda explained that because he was convinced of Mr. Toda's great heart and profound vision, his entire life has been dedicated to accomplishing everything that Mr. Toda had hoped to accomplish. It was his determination to expand upon each word that his mentor spoke. In fact, Soka University was born in a conversation with Mr. Toda in which he said: "Daisaku, let's build Soka University. I wish we could build it while I'm still alive. If not, then I'm counting on you. Let's create a world class university." President Ikeda cherished this conversation in his heart for many years, and finally, on April 2, 1971, Soka University opened in Hachioji, Japan. April 2 is the date of President Toda's passing in 1958, and 1971 was the centennial of first President Makiguchi's birth. Today, the dreams

President Ikeda has been sharing are far beyond the scope of what he has accomplished thus far. He says we should always have new dreams.

At the time of President Toda's death, President Ikeda was a thirty-year-old youth division member. He had only been practicing Buddhism for eleven years, but he worked alongside Mr. Toda every day for more than a decade. The guidance and training he received during that time set the direction for his entire life.

On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president of the Soka Gakkai and, in that same year, took the first steps toward establishing SGI chapters around the world. In other words, at a young age, he took on the awesome responsibility for the worldwide propagation of Buddhism. He did this based on his commitment to reply to what was in his mentor's heart.

Through his tenacious and selfless contribution, we can enjoy the current international prosperity of our SGI movement. Naturally this inspires in us a deep sense of appreciation. More important, I think his example shows us how much one person can grow and how much each of us can accomplish when we dedicate our lives to a great cause based on the mentor-disciple relationship.

The gratitude we feel toward President Ikeda can be expressed by developing the same heart, the same sense of responsibility, as has President Ikeda had in striving to realize his mentor's vision. He wrote of his hopes for us last year:

We are no longer in an age in which one person can shoulder everything. Today our great people's organization has grown into an international body of immense size and diversity active in all parts of the world. And we have achieved this phenomenal development independent of state protection or patronage and while enduring constant harassment and attack. Such progress is not possible through the efforts of one or two people alone. It has been solely dependent on the united effort of our many members.

Of course, for the day-to-day running of the organization, someone will still be officially designated as president, but ultimately our future development hinges on every member having the commitment required of a Soka Gakkai president. With this spirit, this sense of responsibility, this leadership in your activities, may you always work for kosen-rufu and for the victory of the people. May you also build a Soka Gakkai where everyone can advance joyfully—a Soka Gakkai of undying progress.

(March 13, 1999, Youth Division March 16 Commemorative Meeting, Tokyo)

As we develop this profound determination, we can inspire others to stand up with the same conviction. To do this, it is essential that we return to the basics of faith, practice and study. This is the only way to develop a truly self-motivated practice filled with benefit and joy. Let's share Buddhism with our friends. Let's pray sincerely, and let's study this great teaching to deepen our conviction. With the same sense of responsibility as a Soka Gakkai president, let's make this year one of unlimited growth and benefit for all of us. And next year, on May 3, 2001, we can gather 100,000 "SGI presidents" across this great country!

Once again, congratulations on our new departure during this beautiful spring season. I look forward to seeing all of you soon.

Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director