

**FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR  
SOKA  
CREATING THE HIGHEST VALUE**

*Greetings to the readers of Living Buddhism*

I receive many reports from members throughout the country, and I am so happy to hear of the efforts and accomplishments of so many of you. Thank you for these messages.

Recently, SGI President Ikeda has been encouraging us about the development of our American SGI organization. As I pondered his messages, I realized that he has been reiterating three essential points. He has asked us to support Soka University of America; for each of us to take personal responsibility for the Soka Spirit efforts, the actions to understand and protect the essential spirit of the Soka Gakkai organization and the purity of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism; and to dedicate ourselves to support the growth of each individual member. In discussing these points with Matilda Buck, our SGI-USA national women's leader, she termed this last point "Soka Care." I believe that these three points — Soka University of America, Soka Spirit, and Soka Care — illustrate something vital about our SGI organization and how it relates to the principle of *soka*.

We speak often about soka or value creation. This idea comes from the founder and first president of our organization, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. He was an educator, and his idea of value creation was first developed as a pedagogical theory, expressed in the title of the English edition of his work *Education for Creative Living*.

What Mr. Makiguchi's work ultimately expresses is the belief that as humans, our happiness and fulfillment come from how we create value, or how we express our highest creative potential. He discusses this in terms of how a human being progresses from a dependent life, in which one lives by receiving the efforts of others, to self-reliant living, where one lives through one's own efforts. But the ultimate aim of human growth is a contributive life, where one extends one's efforts to others, and where the private self of either dependent or self-reliant living is expanded to a greater self, which cares about the good of humanity. He writes:

As humans we are born into society. Every one of us should offer his or her services to society for the good of all in the best way individually possible. No one lives a life apart; no occupation arises independent of the needs of others around us. In the rightful order of mutuality, each person, each labor, is part of the whole. Although mere physiological and psychological subsistence might have been enough as far as the individual is concerned, entering into cooperative social living requires taking the ends of individual life and simultaneously applying them as means to the fulfillment of greater common life.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Makiguchi was urging each of us to move beyond the shallow happiness derived from self interest and to develop a deeper happiness based on a life of contribution and meaning. Happiness based solely on taking care of your wants and desires is limited at best. And to the extent that the educational system of Japan at the time taught people that their value as human beings depended on their value as workers and that the aim of life was simply to make a living, education was failing. Mr. Makiguchi developed his theory as a way of reforming education. He felt that the purpose of education is not the transmission of bits of information, but rather, the development of character. Ultimately,

the purpose of education was human happiness, to enable each person to develop his or her highest and best self.

Mr. Makiguchi's theories ultimately led him to the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. In this Buddhist philosophy, he found a practice and a set of principles that naturally produced a life of the highest value. In other words, what he sought through the realm of education — the means to enable people to become happy — he found within the Buddhist practice taught by Nichiren Daishonin. Therefore, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai — the Society for Value-creating Education — became, after World War II, the Soka Gakkai — the Society for Value Creation.

Value creation means to create value where we are. It means to transform suffering into happiness; to change difficult circumstances into situations in which we develop our character. By transforming our lives, we can contribute to a transformation of our families, communities and society as a whole.

The principle of value creation is understandable when we think of it in terms of our lives. But as I pondered President Ikeda's recent guidance about developing our American organization by taking responsibility for supporting Soka University of America, Soka Spirit and Soka Care, I was thinking about how our institutions express this concept of value creation.

When we talk about "Soka Spirit," we are talking about the heritage and purpose of our SGI organization, so this is nothing other than cherishing and protecting the SGI and its members. What does it mean to have a "Soka Society" — an organization for value creation? What does it mean to be preparing to open a "Soka University" — a university dedicated to the ideal of creating value?

Soka University of America and Soka Gakkai International–USA: These two entities — one in the realm of education and one in the realm of religion — are the physical expressions of the principle of value creation. To put it another way, though the two institutions are separate, with distinct and different missions, both seek to create a structure for individuals to use in realizing their highest potential. Value creation for the individual means to move from a life of minor value, based only on satisfying one's individual desires, to a contributive life of great value. Similarly, Soka University of America and SGI-USA are not closed worlds that only concern themselves with creating value for Buddhists, but are rather engaged with the world, and are concerned with developing people who can address the various problems which face our society.

If Soka University and Soka Spirit are focused on value creation, then the idea of Soka Care is at the heart of all our endeavors. Speaking as the general director of our organization, I am strongly convinced that the happiness and development of each person are the first and most important aims of our organization.

In *The New Human Revolution*, volume 8, President Ikeda writes:

Guidance is not by any means an easy thing.... But it is also an opportunity to train yourself. In assisting and nurturing others, you will grow. This difficult process is also true Buddhist practice.

Personal encouragement through home visits is what built the Soka Gakkai's network of faith and trust. Just as a mighty tree is supported by a vast network of roots sinking deep and wide into the earth, the accumulated efforts of personal guidance at the grass-roots level is what supports Soka Gakkai. (NHR vol. 8,

chapters 2, 4. Translation tentative.)

The care of each individual member constitutes the roots of our organization. Our collective efforts in the realms of peace, culture and education only create value when they are based on the joy of faith and joy of life of each person. As individuals, our correct Buddhist practice is one that does not limit itself to the achievement of our own, narrow—and ultimately shallow—definition of personal happiness. Instead, it is through the dynamic interdependence of self and others, of the individual and society that Buddhism elucidates, that we can experience genuine happiness and fulfillment as human beings.

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1. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Education for Creative Living*, ed. Dayle M. Bethel, trans. Alfred Birnbaum (Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press) 1989.