

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA ONE-TO-ONE EDUCATION IS THE BEST

SGI President Ikeda explains that real education comes from the relationship between teacher and student. Remembering ‘Toda University,’ he says, ‘The truth is that I am the product of the personal, one-to-one education of our second president, Mr. Toda.’

In January 1950, Mr. Toda said to me, an extremely grave expression on his face: “The Japanese economy is in a period of turmoil, and I am going to become busier and busier at my business. Would you consider giving up school and helping me full time?”

Without hesitation I replied, “I will be only too happy to do whatever you say.”

A glimmer of kindness shone in Mr. Toda’s stern eyes. “In exchange,” he said, “I will make it my responsibility to personally give you an education.”

And so it was that Mr. Toda invited me to his house every Sunday for private, one-to-one study with him.

The classes of this “Toda University,” emanating with the light of our spiritual communion, started in the morning and went through the afternoon. Mr. Toda frequently asked me to stay for dinner as well, and I always returned home in the best spirits.



As time went on, Sundays were not enough. Mr. Toda started to also hold classes for me every morning. These classes, which took place at the company, began on Thursday, May 8, 1952, and continued through 1957. They started right after Mr. Toda’s first year as second president of the Soka Gakkai and continued until just before his death. The lecture hall of the Toda University was in Mr. Toda’s company office in the Ichigaya Building in Ichigaya, Central Tokyo.

While President Toda specifically held the classes for me, he also later let several other employees attend, too. I have fond memories of my fellow students in those days, friends and companions whom I will never forget.



When he first began the classes, Mr. Toda told me: “I will give you a broad higher education. I want to give you a better education than what you could receive at a prestigious university. Most people who graduate from college don’t remember anything they’ve studied. The best they can do is retain general outlines. I want to teach you all kinds of living fields of study.”

The classes were held before work began, from a little past 8:00 a.m. to 9:00—just short of an hour in length. Mr. Toda was strict about the time we had to arrive at work. We had to be there before him, clean the office and wipe the desks, and then be waiting when he arrived.

He would come in with a friendly greeting and start the class almost immediately. I would sit directly in front of him, and the other students would pull up their chairs around us.

The classes started with students taking turns reading aloud from the textbook, and then Mr. Toda would comment and expand on the readings. At times, he would criticize the

textbook, saying things like: “This is an illogical argument.” “This theory won’t stand up to analysis.” “This line of reasoning is not based on deep consideration of the issue.” “This scholar is trying to make his case apply more broadly than it actually does.” His keen analyses shone with astonishing genius.



We were not allowed to take notes. It seems that Mr. Toda wanted us to engrave every word and every sentence in the substance of our beings.

He used a historical anecdote to explain why he wouldn’t permit note taking. During Japan’s feudal period, he said, there was a scholar of Western learning who went to Nagasaki to study Dutch medicine. He took prodigious notes, and his notebooks filled up his whole travel case.

But the ship he took on his return home sank, and he lost all his notebooks. He had concentrated so heavily on recording in his notes everything that he had studied — instead of in his head — that he hadn’t retained an iota of it. “That is why,” said Mr. Toda, “I want you to put everything inside your heads. No note taking!”

We thus had to concentrate intensely during class. I later heard from one of my fellow students that Mr. Toda said of me, in my absence, “Daisaku soaks up everything like a sponge.”



Our course of study began with economics, followed by law. Then we studied chemistry, astronomy and life science. There were also classes in Japanese history, world history and classical Chinese literature. Finally, we got to political science.

We used the most modern, advanced texts available in every subject. For example, for science we used the New Science Compendium series. Sometimes, within a matter of days of a new volume coming out, it would be incorporated into Mr. Toda’s early-morning lectures. Mr. Toda was trying to impress upon us the importance of always being at the forefront of the times.

Of course, there were also classes on Nichiren Daishonin’s writings and Buddhist doctrine, including lectures on “The One Hundred and Six Comparisons,” which represents the quintessence of the Daishonin’s teachings, as well as Nichikan Shonin’s *Six-Volume Writings* and his commentaries on various Goshos.

When I look back at my diaries from that period, I find frequent references to Mr. Toda’s classes. For example: “How can I ever repay my debt of gratitude to my mentor, who has striven to raise this disciple without regard even for his own health? Now is the time — the time to accumulate capability, strength and ability. Must accumulate ability in every area in preparation for the future.” This is from an entry on Dec. 22, 1953, when I was 25.



In one of our classes, we studied the theories of the universe put forth by the Russian-born U.S. scientist George Gamow. Recently, on Nov. 14, 1999, Moscow State University Rector Viktor A. Sadovnichy and others came from Russia to present me with an honorary membership to the International Higher Education Academy of Sciences of Russia. I am deeply grateful for this.

After the presentation ceremony, we discussed education in the 21st century. Dr. Sadovnichy, a world-renowned mathematician, said: “Truly outstanding intellects do not emerge from big classrooms. You have to sit students down next to the teacher and educate

them one to one. In short, we must not think of schools as buildings but as something that is formed around the character of the teachers.”

I immediately agreed: “I know that my beloved mentor would be glad to hear you say that. The truth is that I am the product of the personal, one-to-one education of our second president, Mr. Toda. I am a graduate of Toda University!”