

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JAN. 28 SPEECH LET'S CLIMB HIGHER!

'Let us eagerly embark on a never-ending journey of self-development and growth,' SGI President Ikeda says, 'climbing higher, ever higher toward the great mountain ranges of the new millennium!'

SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 42nd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Jan. 28.

Guam has a spirit that is among the most beautiful in the world. It is a place where people can live with true dignity and humanity. [SGI President Ikeda received an honorary doctorate of humane letters from the University of Guam at this meeting.]

Today, the University of Guam's green flag hangs proudly above our heads. It bears a single Latin word. What is it? *Excelsior!* This famous word means "Higher!"

Excelsior! — Higher! — this inspiring motto and goal has reverberated in the hearts of humankind since ancient times.

The great American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow composed a well-known poem titled "Excelsior." It tells of a young man braving snow and ice to climb a perilous mountain peak. Brushing aside all temptation to rest and unafraid of the dark and the buffeting wind, he climbs higher and ever higher. Though he may lose his life, he will never let go of his convictions. Longfellow's poem sings of the essence of the spirit of youth.

Seven years ago, in September 1993, on the occasion of my second address at Harvard University, graduates and students of Soka University living in the United States presented me with a precious manuscript of this poem penned in the author's own hand. It is now included among the treasures of Soka University of America.

My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, declared decisively: "What is the Soka Gakkai's mission? It is the challenge of elevating the character of all humanity to the highest level of value."

Today we are privileged to welcome such people of noble character as our honored guests — the professors of the University of Guam.

Together with the faculty and students of the University of Guam, let us eagerly embark on a never-ending journey of self-development and growth, climbing higher, ever higher toward the great mountain ranges of the new millennium!

Honorable Chairman of the Board of Regents David Shimizu, President Jose Nededog and Mrs. Carmen Nededog, regents of the University of Guam, distinguished Guests: We of the SGI will always look to Guam as our starting point. As such, the honors my wife and I have received today from Guam are honors more precious and more significant than any other. [President Ikeda and Mrs. Ikeda were designated honorary citizens of Guam, while Mrs. Ikeda received the Ancient Order of the Chamorri, the highest honor that Guam's indigenous people, the Chamorro, can bestow on a non-Chamorro.] My wife and I humbly accept these awards together with SGI members in 148 countries and territories around the world. Thank you very much.

Nichiren Shoshu lost Nichiren Daishonin's spirit during World War II.

The SGI was not inaugurated in the temple of a closed, parochial, self-serving Buddhist sect. It was formed on Guam, a haven of world citizenship, open on all sides to the vast blue Pacific and abloom with the fragrant flowers of many cultures.

Guam suffered great tragedy during World War II, when it was occupied by Japanese troops and became the site of intense fighting. I am grieved to learn that Chairman Shimizu lost a precious sister and that President Nededog lost not only his beloved father but also his dear brother in the war. As a Buddhist, I have offered solemn prayers for the eternal happiness of their deceased loved ones.

Some 80 years ago, the noted American philosopher John Dewey visited Japan. Both Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Mr. Toda had utmost respect for this renowned thinker and educator. Dewey offered an especially keen observation about Japan: "It takes more force, more moral courage to be an outspoken critic of the politics and social condition of one's nation, to be a dissenter, in Japan than in any other country in the world."

It is just as he describes. Anyone who stands up for justice and truth in Japan is persecuted. The only way to change this is to spread the unsurpassed philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

In a nation defiled by erroneous views, both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda demonstrated unrivaled strength and moral courage, and called out with a lion's roar for peace and justice in their unbending struggle against Japan's nationalism and militarism.

In sharp contrast, when Japanese military forces invaded and occupied island after island in the Pacific, including the island of Guam, the corrupt priesthood immediately performed ceremonies praising the military and praying for Japan's victory. From that time, not a trace of the Daishonin's spirit could be found in the priesthood.

Advances in science and technology have made little impact on human happiness.

Guam possesses wonderfully wise perspectives on peace that have much in common with the Buddhist view of life. A proverb of the Chamorro, the indigenous people of Guam, says: "Respect is like a mirror. It reflects back at you." The Daishonin said something very similar: "When you bow to a mirror, the reflected image bows back" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 769).

It is important that we respect and value every individual—especially, every young person—recognizing that they are infinitely precious and worthy, and engaging in earnest dialogue with them, patiently persevering in encouraging and supporting them. Such sincere behavior will eventually come back to us in the form of others' deep trust and respect for us.

I particularly want to ask young people to cherish their parents. Please take the time to say "Mom, let me help you with that," or "Dad, you must be tired. Let me massage your shoulders." Even just words like that will be a great comfort to them! And how much more so if you follow through! Nothing can put parents' minds more at ease or encourage them more than such simple gestures of love and concern from their children.

There is another wonderful saying of Guam: "When you hurt someone, your turn to be hurt will come. Even if it takes a while, you always pay the debts you incur." This refers to the unswerving law of life, the law of cause and effect: We reap what we sow. How lamentable is the fate of those who envy and attack the just! We have all seen what happens to them.

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That is why another wise proverb of Guam warns “An intelligent man is worth little if he has no respect.” This is simply put, but its message is important indeed. We have made tremendous advances in science and technology, and great increases in our store of knowledge and information. Yet this has made little direct impact on the happiness and peace of the world at large. Why is this? We have lost sight of what all of these advances are for. This is the root of human folly and the cause of the madness we see all about us.

The ancient wisdom of Guam firmly rebukes this error—the error of the arrogance of knowledge. If world leaders would only adopt the spirit of this wise saying, we would have world peace without fail.

The University of Guam upholds the highest ideals of humane education and takes as its mission teaching, research and service. Chairman Shimizu and President and Mrs. Nededog are great examples of translating these ideals into practice. They have shown enormous love and concern for young people, transcending all national and ethnic boundaries. They have worked hard to raise fully rounded human beings. As an expression of our deep respect and admiration for their efforts, let us give them a warm round of applause!

Traditionally, women have enjoyed high status on Guam. Strong, wise mothers played an important role in the preservation and transmission of the rich human culture of the island.

Ms. Judith Wonpat-borja, former senator of the Guam legislature, who bestowed honorary citizenships on my wife and me earlier, is also an SGI-USA women’s leader on Guam. Through her wise contributions, she has helped open the path to an age of women.

On a similar note, just the other day, two members of the SGI-Venezuela women’s division sent me a letter announcing the wonderful news that they had been appointed to important positions in the Venezuelan government. Ms. Dilia Parra Guillén will be the head of a newly established government agency to protect human rights called Defensora del Pueblo, or Defender of the People. Ms. Adelina González de Hernández was appointed vice chairman of the official Bureau of Audit. Both women, as women’s division members, are proud of the SGI’s philosophy of respect for human rights and of service to society. Using this philosophy as their inspiration and driving force to serve their fellow citizens in the field of government, they have won enormous trust among their country’s people. Let us pray for the prosperity and bright future of Venezuela.

Without education, religion falls into the trap of self-righteousness.

In December, the Brazilian lower house, the Chamber of Deputies of the National Congress of Brazil, held a special session to honor the SGI. Applause for the SGI’s efforts is spreading like a huge wave across that great nation.

We have also recently received many honors from counties, cities and provinces throughout South Korea.

Despite frequently having to endure misunderstanding and prejudice in society, our members around the world, not the least those in Brazil and Korea, have continued, with perseverance and steadfast prayer, to sow the seeds of peace and friendship. I wish to praise these noble members with all my heart!

It is a terrible shame that today, after the end of the Cold War, we still see no end to bloody regional conflicts caused by religious differences. This is why in the SGI Charter we have so strongly advocated, along with the promotion of increased educational and cultural exchange, the need for mutual understanding and cooperation in the international

community.

Today, leaders around the world are finding in the SGI a model for achieving a peaceful alliance of global citizens in the 21st century. Many of them are starting to point to our organization as the only hope for realizing this dream.

When I met with Dr. Allen Sessoms, president of Queens College of the City University of New York, on Jan. 18, he expressed his sincere wish that the SGI will transmit to the world its ability and know-how to bring people together, employing that ability to prevent conflict and war.

I am determined to devote more and more of my energies to humanistic education, which I regard as my final work. Without education, religion falls into the trap of self-righteousness and is easily swept away into blind faith.

Humanistic education is the path to our eternal triumph.

Construction on the eagerly awaited Orange County campus of Soka University of America is proceeding on schedule, aiming toward the opening date of May 3, 2001. [Classes will begin in September 2001.] Three mottoes for SUA have been announced: “Be philosophers of a renaissance of life”; “Be world citizens in solidarity for peace”; and “Be the pioneers of a global civilization.” The university has also fielded a superb staff for its teaching faculty from around the United States and the globe.

It was the wish and cherished hope of Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda that, with a clear sense of purpose, we spread a unified force for good throughout the world based on humanistic education. Both of them believed this to be the path to humanity’s eternal triumph.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Mr. Toda’s birth. And next year will be the 130th anniversary of Mr. Makiguchi’s birth. As we reach these momentous milestones, I, the third in this succession, have made the grand dream of our first and second presidents a reality in the form of Soka University of America. I humbly thank all of you for the part you have played in this!

This is a university for your children and grandchildren. I hope that talented students from around the globe will gather to study there in great number.

I also hope that the University of Guam professors will continue to support and encourage SUA, a younger sibling across the Pacific Ocean.

Struggle is the essence of life.

I want to share a favorite passage from *Song of the Open Road* by Walt Whitman, the great American “poet of democracy,” whom I have loved since my youth:

*Now understand me well—it is provided in the essence of things
that from any fruition of success, no matter what,
shall come forth something to make a greater struggle necessary.
My call is the call of battle....*

This passage means that however much we succeed, we can never rest, relax or sit back on our laurels. Success by its nature produces even greater struggles, and we must get up in readiness for the next battle.

Struggle is the essence of life. It is crucial that our lives are strong enough to triumph through struggle after struggle throughout eternity. Buddhism enables us to forge such

invincible lives, so that we can win through successive struggles.

Justice must prevail. That is why we have to keep fighting. Justice cannot be upheld unless we fight for it and win. I have found this to be true from personal experience.

The higher one climbs a mountain, the narrower and more perilous the path becomes. Harsh winds blow. If we let these obstacles defeat us, we cannot reach the summit.

As long as we keep striving, however, we will find a way to the top. As long as we keep striving, we will prosper, we will never be frustrated or held back. Let us strive on! The Daishonin's Buddhism is about winning!

Another wise saying of Guam is "If you have a problem, stand up and face it. Don't wait until it overwhelms you." The key to winning the struggle of the 21st century will be consistently taking the offensive with speed, courage and daring. Those who exert themselves in this way will win. This is what Buddhism teaches. This is a rule of history.

The University of Guam is internationally renowned for its research in the field of marine biology, particularly for its preeminence in coral reef research. Guam's coral reefs rank among the earth's great treasures — they have grown from one generation to the next for more than 100,000 years.

Kosen-rufu is a river. Let each of us, in the respective countries of our mission, demonstrate the power of a hundred or a thousand. Let us create a mighty river of capable people who possess courage and champion justice — a river that will flow for all eternity.

Please joyously continue your victorious march into the 21st century, uniting the world with hope as you advance with a joy, optimism and good cheer that sparkle as bright as the waters off Guam in the golden morning sunlight.

I pray that Guam, precious hometown of my heart, will enjoy lasting peace and prosperity, and that my beloved University of Guam will continue to flourish and grow into the eternal future.

Thank you! My best to you all!

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS STRUGGLING TOWARD VICTORY

From This Speech:

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- 1) Why do you think SGI President Ikeda says that "struggle is the essence of life"? What things are you struggling with in your life right now?
- 2) President Ikeda says that as long as we continue struggling, our victory is guaranteed. How do you encourage yourself to keep struggling when you feel like giving up?
- 3) What does it mean to say that "the Daishonin's Buddhism is about winning"? What is true victory in your opinion?