

## EXPERIENCE—YOSHIE YOSHIKAWA, KYOTO, JAPAN MY PERSONAL VICTORY IN FAITH

**Yoshie Yoshikawa, the wife of reformist priest Kodo Yoshikawa, renews her faith. “All my sufferings and hardships during those difficult days were to make it possible for me to appreciate the Soka Gakkai today.”**

I was born in Kita-Kyushu City, Japan, in 1959, the eldest daughter of a family consisting of one boy and three girls. Since my family was very poor, we suffered from malnutrition. Our neighborhood Soka Gakkai members, who saw our destitute condition, tried to introduce our family to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, but my mother detested the Soka Gakkai so much that she threw salt on the porch to purify our home after Soka Gakkai members left.

After we moved to Kanagawa Prefecture, my father was introduced to this Buddhism by a colleague at work and received the Gohonzon without my mother’s consent. It ended up, however, that my father did not practice seriously, but my mother did embrace the Gohonzon and began practicing. Our family of six started life in Kanagawa in a tiny 6 foot by 9 foot room.

We were a family without any fortune, but because of my mother’s devoted practice, we overcame our bad financial and health karma; our family situation changed dramatically. My mother’s favorite saying was “Our happiness today is all due to SGI President Ikeda’s encouragement! I owe a lot to him for what we are today.” I learned to respect the Gohonzon and President Ikeda through my mother’s actions. However, my daily life was not focused on my own practice.

When I was 21, I introduced a friend to Buddhism. The same year, I met my husband, Kodo, and became part of a priest family. In the beginning, my husband mentioned that he had no intention of ever marrying. After becoming a priest, he saw how difficult it was to continue practicing within the priesthood, where there was no faith in the Gohonzon. He saw the wives of the priests who were once active soon discover that they had no place to practice and rapidly lose their faith. Since he had seen this occur so often, he was afraid to make a woman miserable by marrying her.

After we got married, my husband told me: “If I happen to die before you, please sever your ties with the priesthood and go back to the Soka Gakkai. Yet, as long as I live, I take full responsibility for leading your faith and practice on the correct path.”

My husband first met President Ikeda when he was 17. Since that time, he knew the correct way of practicing existed only in the Soka Gakkai. He felt that President Ikeda was his mentor, and my husband practiced sincerely even though he was in the thoroughly corrupt priesthood.

This is how, from the day I got married, I began life as a “closet” Soka Gakkai women’s division member. The conditions were severe, but I never heard my husband complain. He steadily continued to practice. The two of us, as closet Soka Gakkai members who followed President Ikeda’s guidance, practiced this faith together. Consequently, my husband was denied audiences with High Priest Nikken Abe, and he was not allowed to participate in any priesthood activities. He continued his kosen-rufu activities, though, knowing that he might be banned from the priesthood at any time. As I watched my

husband challenge himself in these dire circumstances, I continued to chant sincere daimoku to the Gohonzon. If I did not chant abundant daimoku, I felt I would go crazy.

After we were married, I moved into the Ichino-bo, my husband's living quarters at the head temple. It also served as the lodging for the members visiting the head temple. Eight employees managed it, and training them was one of the responsibilities of the priest's wife who was assigned to that living quarter. Any mistakes the employees made in their speech or behavior—even if the mistakes were made outside the quarters—were regarded as the responsibility of the wife in charge. And everyone there was eager to find the mistakes of others. Their attitude was contrary to Nichiren Daishonin's teachings.

I was only 21 and certainly could not manage everything without making mistakes. So whatever I did, I was a good target for their criticism and bullying. For example, they did not like the way that I bowed to them. Even when I bent down 90 degrees, they were not satisfied. After all, it was not the matter of how I bowed—I was an outlet for their stress.

In the very small world of the head temple, there was no sense of joy, only conceit and egotism. To them, helping others or encouraging others was regarded as lowly behavior, unbecoming. Such behavior was only permissible for the lay believers.

In such an environment, the stress I felt was so severe that I suffered horrible migraines once a month. I could not get out of bed. I could not even turn over. I just had to wait for the migraines to pass.

I took my frustration to my husband and kept asking him why I had to suffer this much. He listened to me patiently, but in the end he would tell me, "It is your karma."

I felt miserable and upset. I thought: "I'll chant daimoku. I'll show him." I chanted an average of two to three hours a day. When I was 24, my brother died suddenly in an accident; he was 26. Three months later, my newborn baby died after living only one day in this world. I felt the heaviness of my karma, over which I could gain no control.

Several hours before my child died, while I was chanting, I saw myself on the Gohonzon; it was as if I were looking at myself on a TV screen. At that time, a thought hit me: My karma had been engraved in my life since the infinite past. I felt deeply apologetic to my husband and this child for the way I was and made up my mind to become a better wife and mother.

My child died several hours later of an unknown cause. Like my mother three months earlier, I had the karma of losing a child.

The doctor told me that even if the child had lived, he would never have been able to walk or see anything, because his brain lacked sufficient oxygen. When I learned this, I was convinced that we had changed our negative karma, and I thanked the Gohonzon. This experience established a solid foundation for our faith.

My mother overcame the sorrow of losing her son and again exerted herself wholeheartedly in faith. She had her own community center built, with a meeting room of 1,046 square feet; it was her longtime dream. My mother now lives in a four-story building that she also had built, and she is filled with joy and still enjoys activities.

Ten years passed, and my husband was transferred to a temple in Kyoto. It was the 80th temple donated by President Ikeda. My husband was planning to spend his whole life at the head temple, dedicating himself to kosen-rufu by educating the young acolytes—this new assignment was quite a surprise.

The first two years in Kyoto were totally frantic. From the time the temple opened in the morning until it closed, time passed like a speeding arrow. Even though I chanted,

something was missing. I was always seeking something, but I did not know what I was looking for. Those busy days left only anguish in my heart. I was constantly asking myself: “Am I doing the right thing? Am I on the right track?”

In 1990, the priesthood dismissed President Ikeda from the position as the head of all Nichiren Shoshu lay organizations and began to persecute the Soka Gakkai. The persecution by High Priest Nikken’s group fell on my husband, too. They were always plotting a way to strip him of his position in the priesthood; they always persecute those who speak the truth.

My husband, together with some of his fellow young priests, eventually decided to sever ties with Nichiren Shoshu. He started his campaign to prove the righteousness of President Ikeda and traveled all over Japan and the world. Whenever I saw him off, I felt an indescribable loneliness, thinking that I had fallen behind in the kosen-rufu movement.

Last November, President Ikeda invited me to the Chubu Culture Festival. Everything I witnessed was deeply moving. At the finale, all the people’s hearts were united as one. “I want to be part of this great surge of energy!” I said to myself. I felt as if my heart would burst with this desire.

When I got home, I chanted. I was filled with gratitude. “With the Gohonzon and President Ikeda in my heart, what is there to fear?” I asked myself. I could not stop my tears.

I called Vice President Eikichiro Ueda, who was in Kyoto, and asked him to make a women’s division membership card for me. This is how I finally began my activities as a full-fledged women’s division member last November.

Being an observer versus actually belonging to the women’s division is totally different. Before, even if I were in despair, I was the only one to cheer myself up. Now, when I am down, if I attend planning meetings and other activities, everybody’s high spirits naturally inspire me. It is so wonderful!

In the Soka Gakkai, President Ikeda continuously leads us to happiness through various campaigns. For example, when there is a campaign to promote publications, I think of how I can promote publications from the moment I wake up and chant sincerely to actualize my prayers. Before I became a Soka Gakkai member, there were no opportunities to challenge myself to break through my limitations. I now realize that it is only through challenging my limitations that I can really grow. As of today, I have promoted 19 subscriptions to the *Seikyo Shimbun* and introduced my friends to this Buddhism.

The way I pray has definitely changed since I became involved in Soka Gakkai activities. I earnestly engage in dialogue, so that people will understand the Soka Gakkai and President Ikeda. I have learned how to practice this Buddhism correctly.

The most surprising difference is the amount of benefits that I have received. Before practicing with the organization, I had a very passive attitude in faith. Today, under the guidance of President Ikeda, my faith is deepening daily. As a result, my son, who used to be extremely introverted, has changed so much. He is talking to every student at his school about Buddhism.

He does not get depressed anymore. I understand now that he is a reflection of my life-condition. He had to suffer to teach me the power of Buddhism, so I am very grateful to him. Both my son and daughter love to attend meetings.

Some time ago, my husband received a message from President Ikeda at a Soka Spirit training meeting. President Ikeda said, “Districts are the main stages of the kosen-rufu

movement.” I took this guidance as my own and made up my mind to take action in the forefront of the district.

It is as if spring has come to our family, filling us with the blossoms of happiness. Twenty years ago, when I was at the head temple, I used to watch the visiting Soka Gakkai members through the windows. I felt envious of them as they joyfully sang Soka Gakkai songs. I shed tears in front of the Gohonzon, wondering when I would live proudly and vigorously like those people. Now my life has changed wonderfully. Now I shed tears of joy.

I am very happy that I am not alone anymore. I have many fellow members who share my joys with me when I am happy, who cry with me when I am sad. Most of all, I am happy to openly profess that President Ikeda is my mentor.

During the last 20 years, I have gone through many things. All my sufferings and hardships during those difficult days were to make it possible for me to appreciate the Soka Gakkai today. I believe that it was my mission to testify to the validity of the Soka Gakkai through my own experiences. I honestly feel that the Daishonin’s passage “Winter always turns to spring” has come true (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 536).

President Ikeda has taught us that the most important thing is how much we exert ourselves to help others. And he has taught us that those who genuinely find the greatest joy in doing so will win the final victory. My past struggle was a process of human revolution. It was so that I can now appreciate President Ikeda’s guidance from the bottom of my heart.

It is my eternal joy that I was allowed to join this great voyage of kosen-rufu with President Ikeda. I conclude my experience with my appreciation and determination to strive alongside President Ikeda for achieving the great dream of kosen-rufu.