

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S FEB. 29 ENCOURAGEMENT SUFFERINGS LEAD TO ENLIGHTENMENT

SGI President Ikeda tells survivors of the Great Hanshin Earthquake that ‘happiness is not simply an absence of hardships. Buddhism teaches that the sufferings we experience as human beings lead us to enlightenment.’

The afternoon of Feb. 29, SGI President Ikeda visited the Soka Gakkai's Nagata Culture Center in Nagata Ward, Kobe, Japan, where he led a memorial gongyo service for those who died in the Great Hanshin Earthquake of January 1995. Nagata was one of the hardest hit areas.

The Nagata Culture Center, which remained essentially unscathed, opened its doors to the community as an evacuation center, giving shelter to as many as 800 people a day at the height of the crisis. During his visit, President Ikeda played the piano for the Nagata members.

President Ikeda sincerely thanked the center's caretaker, the Community Center Cleaning and Maintenance Group members and all who were involved in the relief efforts. He praised their hard work and selfless dedication at the time of the earthquake and in the long, painstaking task of reconstruction.

“I am amazed by how much Nagata has been rebuilt!” declared President Ikeda. “I'm sure there are still many trying challenges ahead of you. I will continue to support you in every way I can. I will send you daimoku for as long as I live. Please be absolutely confident that all your friends and loved ones who died in the disaster will without fail rejoin the movement for kosen-rufu.”

The SGI leader also said: “Life is a struggle—it is a struggle to become happy. But happiness is not simply an absence of hardships. Buddhism teaches that the sufferings we experience as human beings lead us to enlightenment. The Daishonin writes, ‘There is no true happiness for human beings other than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo’ (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 681).

“Everyone has problems and sufferings. Everyone meets with misfortune. The greatest of these is death, which is the inescapable fate—the destiny, if you will—of humankind. However, because we chant daimoku and strive for kosen-rufu, our lives become entities of the Mystic Law.

“Faith enables us to forge a solid, invincible self and gives us the strength to serenely overcome any difficulty or misfortune. When we die, our lives merge back into the life of the universe and, in rhythm with the Mystic Law, continue to advance on the path of happiness.

“The Mystic Law gives us the energy to live our lives to the fullest. The Daishonin assures us that those who embrace strong faith in the Mystic Law ‘will grow younger’ (WND, 464). May the final chapter of your lives, therefore, be bright and vibrant—just like a ripe, deep-orange persimmon, just like a glorious sunset.

“The Daishonin states, ‘[Chanting] Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys’ (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788). Please be cheerful! None are stronger than those who are cheerful. And please live with a spirit of fortitude to make it through all things. Let's live out our lives together!

“I wish you all the very best! Nagata Ward is No. 1 in Japan! I am always sending you my daimoku. See you again!”