

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S FEB. 27 SPEECH—PART 1 OUR DESTINATION IS ETERNAL JOY

‘All the sufferings and hardships we undergo in the course of working for kosen-rufu will be transformed into joys thousands of times greater than any worldly pleasure,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘They will lead us to eternal joy.’

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 43rd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Hyogo Culture Center in Kobe, Japan, Feb. 27.

Congratulations on the holding of this month's Headquarters Leaders Meeting here in sunny Hyogo Prefecture! [Hyogo Prefecture is located in the Kansai region of Japan.]

Winter is over, and spring has come. The sunshine is bright!

I am so happy to have this opportunity to see all of you again for the first time in several years. I see you've all aged a bit! But remember, people who have faith in the Mystic Law are always vibrantly alive and filled with youthful energy. As Nichiren Daishonin assures us, “You will grow younger” (*The Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin*, p. 464).

Our life is eternal – it continues after death.

Let me begin by sharing these words of the Dai-shonin with you: “The hell of the crimson lotus is so called because the intense cold of this hell makes one double over until one's back splits open and the bloody flesh emerges like a crimson lotus flower. And the hell of the great crimson lotus is even more horrible. When one falls into such an evil place, the fact that one was a ruler or a general means nothing. Tormented by the wardens of hell, one is no different than a monkey on a string. What use are fame and fortune then? Can one still be arrogant and persist in false beliefs?” (WND, 1026)

When one's life is filled with the suffering of hell, social position and success are of no use. No one can be arrogant or smug in such a situation. And since life and death are one, inseparable, the same is true after death. Such worries as not having enough money are indeed small, petty concerns when compared with the sufferings of hell after death.

In another passage, the Dai-shonin says: “There is nothing to lament when we consider that we will surely become Buddhas. Even if one were to become an emperor's consort, of what use would it be? Even if one were to be reborn in heaven, what end would it serve?” (WND, 657).

None of these achievements is important from the larger perspective of Buddhism. Our life is eternal, continuing on after death. It stretches on ahead of us infinitely into the future. Accordingly, whether we live in a nice house or enjoy comfortable circumstances in the brief time we are here on this planet is of little import.

The existence we are born into in our next lifetime will be defined by our inner state of life at the time of our death. That is where the importance of our Buddhist practice comes in.

How foolish it is to lose ourselves in worldly pleasures.

The Daishonin also writes: “At times we may be born as human beings and enjoy such high positions as the ruler of a country, a high-ranking minister, a court noble, or a lord. We may congratulate ourselves, thinking that there can be no greater pleasure and

contenting ourselves with the small reward we have received. However, the Buddha teaches that such prosperity is but that of dreams: it is an illusory pleasure. Therefore, one should embrace the Lotus Sutra, and quickly attain enlightenment” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 386).

According to Buddhism, we may be born as an animal or even a tree. Thus, since we have had the good fortune to be born as human beings in this lifetime, it is foolish to lose ourselves in worldly pleasures. They are nothing but an illusion.

Take, for example, people who fall head over heels in love, get married and a short time later call marriage a tomb!

By contrast, all the sufferings and hardships we undergo in the course of working for *kosen-rufu* will be transformed into joys thousands of times greater than any worldly pleasure. They will lead us to eternal joy. All we have to do is uphold the Lotus Sutra — to believe in the Mystic Law and chant *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo*. When we do so, we become entities of supreme nobility, possessing a true view of society, life and the universe. We can attain true happiness, the true life-state of a Buddha.

Please do not confuse good and evil, right and wrong.

Great places give birth to great people. Talented people dedicated to creating value burst forth, like the brilliant light of the morning sun, in those places that have weathered the fiercest storms of disaster and endured the long night of adversity.

Northeastern Argentina, where the campuses of the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste are located, is an area heading into the 21st century with boundless energy. [The Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, Argentina, conferred an honorary doctorate on SGI President Ikeda at this meeting.]

Let me say here and now that the same is true of our beloved Hyogo Prefecture, which refused to succumb to the Great Hanshin Earthquake of 1995.

General José de San Martín was one of the great leaders of Latin American independence, famous for his triumphant crossing of the Andes. And where was this great hero born? I am sure that some of our Hyogo members, renowned for their keen intellect, know the answer to that question. It was in the Argentine province of Corrientes, home to the main campus of the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste and also the birthplace of the university’s rector, Dr. Alfred Torres, who is here with us today.

San Martín was born 222 years ago, on Feb. 25, 1778. He writes: “Education is the master key that opens the door to prosperity and leads to people’s happiness.” This was his conviction and his dream.

San Martín’s heroic ideal has now been revived in his heroic birthplace, and his great dream of education has been realized steadily but surely by Rector Torres and his wife, Elena Páparo de Torres, also with us today. They are the first international guests we have received at the new Kansai International Culture Center, located next door. Rector and Mrs. Torres have specially traveled to Japan for this occasion in this cold winter season, all the way from Argentina on the other side of the globe, where it is now summer. I thank them both most sincerely. This is also my first visit to the new center.

What was San Martín’s most heartfelt wish? “I have no greater ambition than to be despised by ingrates and appreciated by virtuous men,” he declared. One is bound, he said, to be envied, defamed and hated by evil and foolish ingrates—but that is actually an honor. This is the conclusion the courageous liberator arrived at. It is also the essence of the *Dai-shonin’s* Buddhism.

Those who refuse to take ingrates to task, just wanting to stay in everyone's good graces, wanting to not make any waves, are pitiful. You are all wise individuals. It is vital that you do not confuse good and evil, right and wrong.

What is important is to be trusted and respected by people of foremost character and integrity around the globe. The SGI has reached out and formed an ever-expanding network of friends among the world's thinking people. This honor from the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste is one sign of that friendship. I accept it with the greatest pride today, together with my dear Kansai family. I am overjoyed to celebrate the start of our journey into the 21st century in this way with the members of the foremost area of Kobe and all of Hyogo.

What a wonderful recovery Hyogo has made in just five years from the earthquake! It is outstanding. The new drama of the 21st century has begun. The past is past. Let us begin anew from Kansai!

My spirit is always with Kansai. Kansai is home to the Gakkai spirit. May Kansai, a model for all, continue striving in solid unity for kosen-rufu. And may each of you, the Kansai members, write a new history in your lives.

Great people work to help and benefit others.

The citadel of learning that is the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, with its mission of education, creativity and social contribution, was founded in 1956. That year in Kansai, together with my fellow members, I built an indestructible organization for kosen-rufu that became a pivotal center of our movement for justice and peace.

Dr. Torres is the first graduate of the Universidad Nacional del Nordeste to become the university's rector, and he was reelected to the position with overwhelming support. His energy and passion have made the university the heart of development in Argentina's northeast. The Universidad Nacional del Nordeste has been a driving force for limitless progress.

Kansai, similarly, is the heart of the Soka Gakkai. And Kobe is Kansai's driving force. When Kansai advances, all Japan advances.

The beautiful Mrs. Torres is well known for her unremunerated services to the university, specifically in improving and enhancing its extension program over many years. She has achieved a great deal in linking the university to the community, making available language courses, adult education courses and vocational counseling, and organizing art and cultural exhibitions.

Both Rector and Mrs. Torres are to be highly commended for their involvement in a variety of volunteer activities that assist the university and the community. Great people work to help and benefit others. Self-serving individuals who care only about personal fame and fortune, who stoop to lying and cheating, can never be truly great, no matter how they may strut about.

Intellectual leaders must work for the people in times of crisis.

In 1998, the province of Corrientes experienced a terrible flood that triggered a worldwide outpouring of concern for the victims. [The flood occurred in mid-April 1998, affecting more than 400,000 people.] The Universidad Nacional del Nordeste, under the leadership of Dr. Torres, mobilized its top scholars in each field—physicians, architects, psychologists and sociologists—to assist in the flood relief operations. This wonderful relief effort is well known, and I want to praise Dr. Torres for his firm belief that

intellectual leaders must rise up and work for the people in times of crisis.

I know that our SGI-Argentina members also threw themselves energetically into assisting in the flood relief efforts. Today, three representatives of SGI-Argentina have joined us. *Muchas gracias!*

During the Great Hanshin Earthquake, this Hyogo Culture Center and all the Soka Gakkai community centers in the region were undamaged. Nine of our centers became refuges for more than 5,000 earthquake victims, contributing enormously to the relief effort. Though many of you were victims yourselves of the earthquake, you rose up courageously to help your fellow victims. People around the world, observing your noble actions, praised you as true bodhisattvas and Buddhas.

I take this opportunity to say a special thank you to the members of the Kansai 21st Century Symphony Orchestra, who performed so beautifully for us earlier. This orchestra was formed five years ago, just one day before the Great Hanshin Earthquake struck. After the earthquake, its members traveled all around the disaster area and, like Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, brought melodies of hope and sounds of courage to many victims. Their admirable contribution is known to all, and my wife and I are deeply grateful for their efforts in that difficult time. Their performance today was perfect! Let's all give a warm round of applause to the Kansai 21st Century Symphony Orchestra!

(To be continued in the March 31 issue)

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS POSSESSING A TRUE VIEW

From This Speech:

All the sufferings and hardships we undergo in the course of working for kosen-rufu will be transformed into joys thousands of times greater than any worldly pleasure. They will lead us to eternal joy. All we have to do is uphold the Lotus Sutra—to believe in the Mystic Law and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. When we do so, we become entities of supreme nobility, possessing a true view of society, life and the universe. We can attain true happiness, the true life-state of a Buddha.

- 1) SGI President Ikeda says that “all the sufferings and hardships we undergo...for kosen-rufu will be transformed into joys.” How do you think this process works?
- 2) President Ikeda is warning us not to be fooled by worldly pleasures. What do you think of when you hear “worldly pleasures”? What do you think that he means by the term?
- 3) What does it mean to you to “uphold the Lotus Sutra”? How do you try to uphold the Lotus Sutra in your own life?
- 4) What does it mean to you to possess “a true view of society, life and the universe”? How do you get to that true view? How does how we perceive society, life and the universe affect the quality of our lives?