

**SIGNIFICANT DATES: MAY 3—SOKA GAKKAI DAY
STANDING UP FOR ONE’S CONVICTIONS
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This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 280–81)

It is uncomfortable to stand up in front of others and vow to accomplish something as huge as world peace; you might be regarded by others as arrogant, as foolish, as a dreamer. The Buddhist way is to have courage to make a vow in public before the actual goal has been accomplished.

In the above passage from “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin’s vow shows that he is standing, in 1272, age 50, at the beginning of a new phase in his life, having experienced a realization of his true identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. From victory at the greatest battle of his life — by walking away intact from the attempted midnight beheading at Tatsunokuchi Beach in 1271 — the Daishonin arrived at the strongest possible resolve for his activities in the future. The experience of excruciating personal hardship — exile — accompanied the Daishonin’s vow.

Similar hardships appeared in the lives of Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda. In 1943, Makiguchi uttered the words that would launch the Buddhist lay organization on the path of justice. When the chief administrator of the Nichiren Shoshu head temple advised Makiguchi as president of the lay organization to accept, even for a short time, the Shinto talisman being pressed on all religions in Japan by the militarist government, Makiguchi replied, “We cannot accept it.” Because Makiguchi clearly took a stand against government authoritarianism, the government trailed him, arrested him and imprisoned him later the same year. He died in prison in 1944.

Preceding Josei Toda’s inauguration as second president of the Soka Gakkai, on May 3, 1951, his business was failing and creditors were hounding him, even as some in the lay organization questioned his leadership. Of this President Ikeda writes, “What Josei Toda experienced during these several months must have been similar to something like the Tatsunokuchi Persecution of Nichiren Daishonin” (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 235). On Nov. 18, 1950, a few months before his inauguration as second president, Josei Toda said on the anniversary of Makiguchi’s death, “Embracing the Dai-Gohonzon, placing absolute belief in the founder, Nichiren Daishonin, and safeguarding the future of the Soka Gakkai to the last, I will determinedly devote my entire being to the Mystic Law and to the development of this organization, so long as my life shall last” (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 226).

Daisaku Ikeda’s inauguration as president of the Soka Gakkai on May 3, 1960, came in the midst of the Soka Gakkai’s court battle against false charges of electioneering in the 1957 election campaign in Osaka. President Ikeda was called in for questioning on July 3, 1957, and the case would not be finally resolved and he cleared of charges until Jan. 25, 1962. President Ikeda writes about that May 3: “On assuming the presidency, Shin’ichi [the character in *The Human Revolution* who represents Daisaku Ikeda] had resolved firmly in his heart to dedicate his all to kosen-rufu with the spirit revealed in the Daishonin’s words, ‘This I will state. Let the gods forsake me. Let all persecutions assail me. Still I will give my life for the sake of the Law.’ Strangely enough, from that day on, all of

his fears had disappeared” (February 1992 *Seikyo Times*, p. 35).

In 1962, after learning that the court had exonerated him of all wrongdoing, “Shin’ichi’s thoughts were on Josei Toda, to whom he silently said: ‘Sensei! Things turned out just as you predicted: I was acquitted. Thus your precious Soka Gakkai—which was your very life—was spared injury.’ He was keenly reminded again of his late mentor’s greatness.

“Shin’ichi also recalled how on a rainy evening in June 1957, just prior to his arrest, Toda had told him that the process of kosen-rufu would necessitate a fierce struggle against the devilish nature of authority.

“Tsunesaburo Makiguchi had died in prison, and Josei Toda had spent two years behind bars. Shin’ichi, too, had been imprisoned, albeit only for two weeks, and the ensuing trial had lasted four-and-a-half years. Thinking of these things, he was struck by a powerful realization of the Soka Gakkai’s inescapable destiny to battle against the devilish forces of authority.... At this time, unknown to others, Shin’ichi Yamamoto’s imperishable, lifelong determination to struggle for human dignity and freedom began to take root in his heart and mind.

“‘Yes!’ he thought. ‘I will do it! As a child of the Buddha, I will dedicate my life to the task of freeing people from the demonic shackles of authority and scoring a victory for the freedom and dignity of human beings!’” (May 1992 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 51–52).

In light of this history, the SGI honors the date May 3. Historically, on May 3, all SGI members reaffirm our vows as Buddhists in our own realms. May 3 marks the moment when ordinary lay people—and not schooled members of the clergy—take responsibility at the head of this great religious movement. We vow to take on any external attacks from ignorant forces in society, authoritarian leaders of the government and slanderous members of the clergy, as well as to vanquish all internal attacks from self-doubt. All in order to accomplish world peace.

The revolution of the Dai-shonin’s Buddhism can never be led by a specialized band of people: It’s not the Daishonin’s Buddhism if it requires someone other than an ordinary person to lead it. The SGI is decentralized to empower each individual member through the neighborhood discussion meetings. The ordinary person in an ordinary life, not a specially trained person, is thus the center of the SGI.

On May 3, we can remind ourselves of several things. We can honor the lay leaders who shoulder the responsibility to propagate the Daishonin’s Buddhism and protect and teach every lay member. We can recall that this worldwide lay movement led by thousands of local neighborhood groups is vitally active for peace in every society on Earth; that Buddhism is meant to be this dispersible, and that SGI members throughout the world are making this theory into reality. We can reflect on the fact that, while lay people taking full responsibility to spread a religion is important, most significant is the successor’s vow to realize the mentor’s dream. We can remind ourselves that the realization of world peace will only come about as a result of person-to-person dialogue—in our SGI districts, our places of work and study, our homes.

Finally, we can see the vow of the ordinary person as extraordinary, because it is made by an ordinary person who lives up to the spirit of Buddhism. We might see ourselves as that ordinary person who decides in our own excruciatingly difficult moments to make the vow that defines our identities anew. We don’t have to wait until we’re respected to respect our own faith. We don’t have to wait to be called to stand up for world peace. May 3 is a day for standing up for our convictions as lay people, in the midst of our challenging, difficult lives, and for deciding to reveal our own true identities.