

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA THE GOLDEN BONDS OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE

SGI President Ikeda recalls how he was finally convinced to accept the Soka Gakkai presidency in the spring of 1960. Remembering that ‘the golden bonds of the oneness of mentor and disciple are the essence of Buddhism and the tradition and spirit of the Soka Gakkai,’ he determined to do his best.

“Great love cannot be separated from deep wisdom. Breadth of wisdom is the same as depth of emotion. Therefore, it is great hearts that reach the loftiest heights of humanity, and that in itself is great wisdom.” These are the words of the renowned Russian author Ivan Goncharov, who visited Nagasaki, Japan, in the mid-19th century.



Soka Gakkai General Director Takashi Koizumi, one of my seniors in faith, used to live near Kamata Station in Tokyo’s Ota Ward. His home had previously been a kindergarten, and we often used it as a meeting place for the local Kamata Chapter.

My home was in Kobayashicho, a 20-minute walk from Mr. Koizumi’s place. I fondly remember how he would often visit me, leading his dog—a fine Akita—on a leash. His friendly, open manner never changed, even after he became a member of the Tokyo Metropolitan Assembly. Later, in the autumn of 1958, about six months after Josei Toda’s death, General Director Koizumi moved to Meguro Ward, where Mr. Toda had lived.

Early in 1960, on a cold winter’s morning, General Director Koizumi suddenly appeared at my home. Surprised, I invited him in. “You are probably preparing to go out,” he began, “so I won’t keep you.”

With an expression of tremendous intensity, he continued: “Please, please accept the post of third Soka Gakkai president. This is the unanimous wish of the directors.

“The person who worked hardest at President Toda’s side should become the next president. Also, President Toda frequently told us, ‘Daisaku will be the next president.’ I promise to support you, no matter what may happen, so please accept—for the sake of the Gakkai, for kosen-rufu and for President Toda.”

He went on to say: “Koji Harashima [one of the Soka Gakkai’s directors] wanted to come with me this morning, but I thought it would be better if I came alone. He told me to do my best, and said he looked forward to me bringing back good news.” Then Mr. Koizumi left.

Both my wife and I were very moved by his sincere plea.



When I think about it, General Director Koizumi and I seem to have been bound by some mysterious connection. He was there at the discussion meeting where I first met Mr. Toda on Aug. 14, 1947. And when my mentor’s business fell into dire straits, and I alone continued to stand by Mr. Toda and work wholeheartedly for him, Mr. Koizumi was the one to express his sincere gratitude to me.

Finally, those difficulties were overcome, and Mr. Toda was inaugurated as second Soka Gakkai president in May 1951. Several months later, in January 1952, I was appointed chapter staff of the Kamata Chapter at the age of 24. Mr. Koizumi was the Kamata Chapter

leader at the time, and Shizuko Shiraki, my wife's mother, was the chapter women's division leader. In the single month of February, Kamata set a propagation record, with more than 200 new households joining the Soka Gakkai. This was the February Struggle, the catalyst that sparked the monumental effort to achieve Mr. Toda's goal of a membership of 750,000 households.

Later, General Director Koizumi was arrested together with me in the Osaka Incident, and he joined me in preventing Mr. Toda from being persecuted. [President Ikeda was arrested and wrongfully charged with election law violations in a House of Councilor by-election in Osaka in 1957. At the end of the court case, which dragged on for almost five years, he was fully exonerated.] Also, High Priest Nichijun called General Director Koizumi and myself to his bedside the day before he died to solemnly entrust us with the widespread propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

General Director Koizumi was always saying: "There's no question about who will inherit the leadership of the Gakkai after Mr. Toda. It should be the person who has worked the hardest for the Gakkai. And that is clearly Mr. Ikeda. Who else could it possibly be?"



With the death of Mr. Toda, many were saying that the Soka Gakkai would "disintegrate in midair," but as general administrator I did everything in my power to support General Director Koizumi and lead the organization in the direction of unity and advancement.

However, in 1960, as the second anniversary of Mr. Toda's death approached on April 2, the Soka Gakkai directors, led by General Director Koizumi, moved to have me inaugurated as third president. On the afternoon of March 30, in Reception Room 1 of the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, General Director Koizumi formally asked me to accept the presidency.

"The Gakkai will experience no fresh development if things continue as they are," he said. "Calls for you to assume the presidency have been growing louder throughout the organization. I want very much to see you inaugurated as the new president at this year's general meeting on May 3." His sincere intent was painfully clear to me, but still I refused, selfish as it might have seemed.

I was only 32. I was too young for the position. Mr. Toda only assumed the post after the sixth anniversary of first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's death. I wanted to wait at least until we had observed the sixth anniversary of Mr. Toda's death. I was also a defendant in the Osaka Incident trial. If, after becoming president, I was for some reason found guilty, it could only harm the Gakkai. I had decided not to accept the presidency until I had proven my innocence to all.

General Director Koizumi's expression clouded with disappointment at my refusal, but clearly he had not given up.

Following that meeting, at a specially convened board of directors meeting on April 9, the directors decided to ask me to accept as a formal resolution of the board. But I again politely declined. My health was poor; my doctor had told me many years before that I would be lucky to live to be 30. In my diary that day, I wrote, "Is there no one else who can take leadership in place of my tired, worn-out self?" (*A Youthful Diary*, p. 498).

Then, on April 11, an emergency board of directors meeting was convened in a conference room at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, and I also attended. The directors unanimously requested that I become president. It was very hard for me, but I could not concede. The following day, April 12, and again on April 13, representatives of the

directors contacted me, but I remained adamant in my refusal.



On Thursday, April 14, the rain that had been falling from morning gradually ceased, and the sky began to clear. General Director Koizumi and the other directors, Koji Harashima, Takehisa Tsuji and Yasu Kashiwabara, were waiting for me again in Reception Room 1. General Director Koizumi urged me fervently — in a tone that showed he would not take no for an answer.

“Your turning down the presidency will only delay kosen-rufu,” he declared. “Mr. Toda told us that if we support the third president with all our might, if we devote our lives to working together with the third president, we will achieve kosen-rufu without fail.” He further stressed: “Out of a sincere desire to realize kosen-rufu, all of our leaders wish you to become president. Please accept the presidency.”

I no longer had any choice. “If this is how strongly you all feel, then....” The moment I said those words, General Director Koizumi jumped in: “You accept? Thank you very much.” He bowed deeply in gratitude. It was 10:10 in the morning.

Portraits of Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda looked down on the scene. One of the directors dashed from the room. Cheers erupted outside and spread like a wave. With tears in his eyes, General Director Koizumi grasped my hand and squeezed it hard. He held on to it and would not let it go.



There were members who betrayed Mr. Makiguchi during the war, fearing persecution by the military authorities. And there were those who turned on Mr. Toda in the years of the Soka Gakkai’s development after the war. Using those examples, General Director Koizumi always strictly warned the leaders: “This is something that personally concerns each of us. Because it is longtime practitioners who, if they’re not careful, end up being tainted with the jealousy that corrupted the five senior priests who betrayed the Daishonin.” He was determined that the Soka Gakkai would never allow the schemes of spiritual descendants of the five senior priests to divide it.

Around that time, youth division members were impatiently demanding to know why the Soka Gakkai executives were taking so long to appoint me third president, urging them to take prompt action. General Director Koizumi was greatly heartened by the youth division’s strong resolve and sense of responsibility.

On leaving Mount Minobu, which had become a place of slander, Nikko wrote in a letter to a young follower named Hara, “I am glad that you know what is right” (*Fuji Shugaku Yoshu*, vol. 8, p. 12). In other words, Nikko’s mind was at ease as long as Hara and other young followers held fast to the correct path of faith, even if others were deceived and led astray by evil friends.

Seeing the youth division rise up to fight at the side of the new young president, General Director Koizumi, Soka Gakkai elder, smiled with confidence. He knew that this meant the future of the kosen-rufu movement had been eternally secured.



During the Freedom of Speech Incident in 1970, when I was a target of criticism from all sides in Japan, General Director Koizumi, then already retired, declared, “We must not allow the third president to be toppled!” And for an entire year, he performed early morning ushitora gongyo to pray for my health, knowing how poor my constitution was.

He was a man deeply committed to the Soka Gakkai spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Later, when he was very ill, I prayed with all my heart for his recovery. I received reports on his progress from his daughter and his wife, and they relayed to me that he had said, “I was ready to die, but because of Sensei’s prayers I’ve surprisingly gotten better and feel quite well again.”

The golden bonds of the oneness of mentor and disciple are the essence of Buddhism and the tradition and spirit of the Soka Gakkai.

I wonder whether Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, seeing today’s top Soka Gakkai leaders content in their comfortable surroundings — used to having everything so easy and feeling “important” — wouldn’t think that this fundamental spirit was on the wane.

My young friends of the youth division, I am counting on you to do your best! This is my hope, and that of all the SGI members.