

BECOME GOLDEN PILLARS OF KOSEN-RUFU

Tariq Hasan, SGI-USA men's leader, discusses the focus of the men's division for the remainder of the year.

Greetings everyone! Thank you so much for all your efforts this year. It has truly been an incredible year so far, filled with great victories. The women's division once again held their annual meetings in February, which always create so much excitement and are eagerly awaited, even by our friends of the SGI. The youth held their amazing introductory meetings in March, with each meeting overflowing with guests. One meeting I attended appeared to have more guests than members! Then, of course, on March 21, there was the great victory in the Seattle Incident Trial. In April, we had a very successful entrance examination with more than 1,800 participants, showing that new members are solidifying their faith based upon study.

Now we've begun the May Commemorative Contribution, in which each of us can show our appreciation for having encountered Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and being a member of the SGI. We can show our determination for accomplishing kosen-rufu of our country through our financial support, without which our activities would not be possible. I am sure this month will be very meaningful for our continued advancement.

Although I have spoken of victories in terms of our organization, there are also numerous recent stories of members overcoming illnesses, family problems, financial difficulties and showing great actual proof at work and in society. In his message commemorating May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, SGI President Ikeda says: "All of you, my friends of the SGI, have striven to be exemplary citizens, actively contributing to the prosperity of your countries and communities and becoming a driving force for social revitalization. Your integrity of character and the sincerity of your words and conduct have won the widespread support and trust of many people. This is clear proof of the validity of Buddhism" (May 12 *World Tribune*, p. 2).

However, through home visits and personal encouragement, I've also realized there are some men who feel anything but victorious. One problem that invariably comes up is the person's feeling of being at a deadlock in his life—life is just not as exciting as it once was and it's hard to figure out why. The joy in everyday living and the sense of excitement we had in our practice when we started is missing.

Nichiren Daishonin taught that "to accept is easy; to continue is difficult" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 471). As we all know, even if we continue chanting, it is not easy to maintain a sense of challenge in our practice. Especially if we have been practicing for a while and have accumulated some measure of fortune, we are subject to the natural human tendency to sit back and enjoy what we have.

I am sure you have heard the following analogy: When we start to practice, our lives can be compared to a cup of water. As we continue, we are able to expand our life-condition to be like a sink, then a bathtub and eventually an ocean. The problem is that sometimes we don't want to go beyond the bathtub. This might be because we feel the bathtub fulfills all our needs, so why go any further? Or because we've defined how much benefit we believe we can achieve through our practice and the bathtub is the limit. The problem is

that our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth is for our lives to be like an ocean. We can't stop at the bathtub!

The good news is that being stuck in our practice is a common malady and there is a cure for it. It's all up to our determination and sense of challenge—nothing will ever change without a profound determination on our part. Once we decide to change the situation, the crucial point becomes what kind of prayer to offer to the Gohonzon.

President Ikeda reminds us: “What are we praying for? How are we praying? A person's state of life is expressed in his or her prayer. Therefore, I would like you to become people who pray with a broad and deep resolve. To pray to accomplish kosen-rufu, to chant seriously for everyone's happiness—such prayer encompasses one's own happiness. Those who pray in this way will amass tremendous good fortune” (November 1994 *Seikyo Times*, p. 53).

Regardless of whether you are experiencing great victories or facing a deadlock at this moment, I would like to share with you a one-year challenge. I believe at this great juncture, one year away from May 3, 2001, we have the opportunity to make a great determination to win and open our lives up to be a great ocean. Toward May 3, 2001, let's challenge that aspect of our lives in which we have not been able to create a breakthrough. Let's not select something easy that we know we can accomplish, but something you've been avoiding challenging. I'm sure that if this is a true challenge, then it will require that we do profound human revolution.

It's not going to be easy. But if we want to be happy then at some point in our lives, we have to say: “This is it. This is the time.” Besides, our sense of challenge is not just for our own sake but for the sake of kosen-rufu. Whether or not we can truly lay a foundation for kosen-rufu in our country, whether or not we can truly respond to our mentor depends on how victorious we each are in our lives. Let's break through the limits. Based upon this renewed sense of practice, let's hold the most joyful and meaningful men's division commemorative meetings in August. After the completion of the May Commemorative Contribution on June 4, I would like to ask each area, at whatever level is appropriate, to hold men's division kick-off meetings toward August. When the men's division zone leaders gathered at the last CEC in March, we determined that now was the time to help men become more active in our organization. We felt that it was so important to create activities for men to help develop camaraderie, and at the same time reduce the tendency of men in our organization to isolate themselves.

In his poem to the men's division last year titled “Your Noble Voyage of Life,” President Ikeda writes: “Do not become alienated from the harmonious community of believers dedicated to kosen-rufu and fall into the hell of loneliness! Solitude may seem free of constraints, but it is like a shattered spirit that has lost its center.”

As a goal toward helping us reach out to as many men as possible, we felt that if 10,000 men can gather in August, it would be a great contribution to the progress of SGI-USA. This may sound like a big number, but on the average this goal can be achieved if each district has a participation of six men. Home visitation and personal guidance is the starting point toward this effort of helping the men's division be “The Golden Pillars of Kosen-rufu” that President Ikeda asked us to become in his men's division guideline for last year.

As President Ikeda mentioned in his May 3 message, “Though one defeats a million men in battle, one who overcomes the self alone is in fact the highest victor. It is important that we triumph over ourselves. This is the purpose of Buddhism” (May 12 *World Tribune*, p. 2).