

DAISAKU IKEDA: A PROFILE
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Daisaku Ikeda was born in Tokyo on Jan. 2, 1928, the fifth son in a family that produced edible seaweed. Because his father's health was poor, from a young age he assisted in the arduous work of gathering and processing the seaweed and also took up a newspaper route to help with the family finances. When Japan went to war and his older brothers were called up for military service, Daisaku became the family's sole source of support. In the spring of his 15th year, he went to work at a local ironworks, which was soon converted to a munitions plant.

Hard work and compulsory military training exhausted the youth and he developed tuberculosis, beginning a decades-long battle with serious illness. His grief at the news of the death of his eldest brother in the war left him with the determination to devote his life to the goal of realizing a world without war. After the war ended, he worked during the day while attending night classes. After graduating from high school, he enrolled in a junior college.

The young Daisaku's life reached a dramatic turning point when, in August 1947, he met Josei Toda at a Soka Gakkai discussion meeting. He was deeply impressed with Mr. Toda's character, and asked him: "Sir, what is the correct way of life? The more I think about it, the more confused I become."

"Well now," Mr. Toda replied, "that is the most difficult question of all. You can of course ponder on what is the correct way of life. However, if you have that much leisure time, you would do better to practice the Daishonin's teaching. You are still young, after all. Through your own practice, you will come to realize that you are paving the correct way of life. I can assure you this."

The young Ikeda was so moved by their encounter, he recited the following poem of his own composition:

Traveler
From whence do you come?
And where do you go?
The moon has set,
But the sun has not yet risen.
In the chaos of darkness before the dawn
Seeking the light,
I advance
To dispel the dark clouds from my mind
To find a great tree unbowed by the tempest
I emerge from the earth.

Ten days later, Daisaku Ikeda joined the Soka Gakkai. Later, he took a job at Mr. Toda's publishing company and shortly became the editor of a magazine for boys. In the unstable economic climate of the time, Mr. Toda suffered a succession of business failures. Daisaku quit his classes so that he could support his mentor, working night and day to help resolve the problems stemming from the business failures despite his extremely poor health.

From his youth, Mr. Ikeda had been an avid reader and began composing poetry in his

teens. His insatiable thirst for learning led him to continue his education under the tutelage of Mr. Toda, a former school teacher. Under his instruction, he studied politics, economics, philosophy and other subjects, as well as Buddhism. About these private lessons, he would later say, "They turned into invisible possessions that have been literally engraved on my life (*A Youthful Diary*, p. 17)."

On May 3, 1952, he married Kaneko Shiraki, who would become his lifelong partner in their quest for peace. About her, he writes: "My wife is my dearest companion in life. She has been at times my nurse, my secretary, my mother, my sister, my daughter and, more than anything, my best and closest comrade in our struggle" (May *SGI Graphic*, p. 16).

The next year, the Ikedas' first son, Hiromasa, was born on April 28. During this time, he became increasingly active in the Soka Gakkai and in 1954 became head of the youth division with central responsibility for planning and operations. Shirohisa, the Ikedas' second son, was born on Jan. 28, 1955, and their third son, Takahiro, on April 11, 1958. Shirohisa later died of complications from a sudden stomach illness in 1985.

Mr. Toda died in 1958, having accomplished all of his goals for kosen-rufu. Daisaku Ikeda assumed overall responsibility for the Soka Gakkai as general administrator of the organization. After initially resisting the presidency out of respect for his late mentor, he finally relented to the strong desire of the Soka Gakkai board of directors. At his inauguration as third president on May 3, 1960, Mr. Ikeda declared, "From today onward, on behalf of President Toda's disciples, I will take leadership to move a step forward toward the substantiation of kosen-rufu."

Shortly after his appointment, Mr. Ikeda, then 32, took the first step in his travels for peace, visiting the United States, Canada and Brazil. In the years since, while constructing a bridge of peace and friendship spanning the globe and uniting the hearts of people around the world, he has conducted dialogues with presidents, prime ministers, scholars, writers, artists and leaders in all areas of society, with a view to encouraging the development of culture and creating lasting peace.

In 1971, Mr. Ikeda founded Soka University, realizing the vision of first Soka Gakkai President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. The Soka educational system now comprises elementary, junior and senior high schools, as well as secondary and post-graduate schools. The new Soka University of America campus, Aliso Viejo, Calif., will open in 2001 and offer a four-year liberal arts degree.

In 1975, Mr. Ikeda became president of the newly formed Soka Gakkai International. Through his continuous efforts to spread the philosophy and ideals of his mentor, the SGI has established organizations in 156 countries and territories around the world representing 12 million members.

Mr. Ikeda has become a world-renowned author, philosopher and photographer, publishing hundreds of books, dialogues and photo albums in 26 languages. Writing about his photography, he says: "Of course, I am not a professional photographer. As an individual who endlessly admires art that is open to all people, nothing gives me more joy if I can, through my photos, help expand the road to mutual understanding and cultural exchange beyond the limits of national boundaries and beyond the lapse of time" (June 9 *World Tribune*, p. 6).

Even at the age of 72, Mr. Ikeda continues his tireless quest for kosen-rufu. In his message to all SGI members commemorating the 40th anniversary of his presidency, he wrote: "For my part, I will continue to build a glorious network of friendship and philosophy that crisscrosses the globe like so many colorful rainbows spanning the world's

skies. Let us set off on our joyous, hope-filled journey, advancing together in friendship, harmony and good cheer! To eliminate war, misery and unhappiness from the face of the earth! To rid the world of all evil and injustice! To enable all people to change their karma and enjoy healthy and fulfilled lives! To realize lasting peace for humanity!” (May 12 *World Tribune*, p. 2)