A RECORD OF MY LIFE
BY DAISAKU IKEDA
LIVE FULFILLING LIVES

'Buddhism exists to enable people to live fulfilling, satisfying lives until the very end,' SGI President Ikeda writes.

Having dreams and aspirations nourishes one's spirit. When people lose their ideals, they lose their depth of character.

Shakyamuni teaches, "It is better to live a day or two / with equipoise and great wisdom, / than live one hundred years / in foolish agitation" (*The Tibetan Dhammapada*, p. 117). And Nichiren Daishonin says, "A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day's practice in the impure world" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 736). He also declares, "It is better to live a single day with honor than to live to 120 and die in disgrace" (WND, 851).

I met Konosuke Matsushita, the brilliant entrepreneur who founded Panasonic, on a number of occasions, and we published a dialogue in Japan together. I understand that he was determined to live to the age of 120.

Mr. Matsushita once reportedly told someone close to him: "When I met the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, he encouraged me, saying, 'Since you have only lived half of your heavenly life, you have many years ahead of you.' Chinese tradition holds that one's life span is bestowed by heaven — hence the expression 'heavenly life' — and that the natural span of life is 160 years. According to this reasoning, I should be able to live another 80 years to 160."

He continued: "Since I was born with a weak constitution, I figure my life has been cut short by about 10 percent. In addition, my having worked much harder than others has probably taken off another 10 percent. This leaves me with 128 years. But as things never go according to calculation in the world, I suppose that, allowing for various risks, I should be able to live to the age of 120. No, I will live to be 120."

Mr. Matsushita died when he was 94. I believe that his life was so full and rich that it was indeed as though he had lived 120 years.

When I turned 60, he sent me a letter of congratulations. That was in 1988, the year before he died. He wrote: "I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations on your having reached your 60th birthday in good health. In body and mind, you are so overflowing with youth that you seem far younger than your age. I hope you will view today as the start of your real endeavors. I pray that you will enjoy lasting good health and will strive with even greater energy — as if creating another Soka Gakkai — as you continue to work for world peace and the happiness and prosperity of all humankind."

I deeply appreciated receiving these words from a senior in life who had lived thoroughly and vigorously into his later years without ever retreating a step. And I have been determined to reply with my life to his sincere encouragement.

My mentor gave me his very life.

A journalist once asked Mahatma Gandhi, who demonstrated with his entire being the indomitability of the human spirit and left behind a philosophy of nonviolence, to convey a message to the American people, particularly those of African descent. Gandhi replied, "My life is its own message" (*A Higher Standard of Leadership*. p. 3).

Title: Live Fulfilling Lives
Subject: World Tribune 07/14/00 n.3302 p.6 WT000714p06
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Death Disciple Encouragement Fulfilling Guidance Ikeda Life Lives Memoir Mentor President Record Series Tribune World

Gandhi was 61 when he boldly undertook the famous Salt March. His struggle for human rights continued until the moment of his death at 78.

What am I doing now? What have I accomplished? How have I lived? How am I living? The answers to these questions are the greatest message we can leave for others.

I turned 60 on Jan. 2, 1988. That was a significant point in my life. Thirty years had passed since the death of my mentor Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president.

For a period of 10 years, from early morning until late at night, I received guidance and training from my mentor, who was 58 when he died. When I look at photographs from back then, I have a profound feeling that it was sheer will that kept me going.

By 1988, more than three times the length of time that I had spent with my mentor had passed since his death. Because I was 30 when we parted, I was by then twice as old. I believe that my having lived this long is due to his having given me his very life. He once said to me: "You must live — live out your life to the fullest. I will give you *my* life so that you may do so."

Incidentally, on Feb. 11, 1960, the same year that I became third Soka Gakkai president, I wrote in my diary: "Today is President Toda's birthday. If he were alive now, he would be celebrating his sixtieth birthday. My wife and I talked about this as if we were his son and daughter" (*A Youthful Diary*, p. 247).

I have no need for recognition, wealth or praise. I spent the days of my youth striving ceaselessly alongside my mentor, determined to give my life to spreading Nichiren Daishonin's teachings for the sake of the world, for the sake of all people. I do not have a single regret. And after my mentor's passing, I continued advancing with all my might into my 30s, 40s and 50s.

Time has passed so quickly. It is now 12 years — one "turn" in the zodiacal cycle — since I reached 60. This year, I am 72. Long ago, I was told by a physician that I would not live to 30. My wife, who knows my condition best of all and who is the one most concerned for my health, has commented with great delight that I now have more energy than I ever had before. Looking at photos taken in the early days of my marriage, in which I am so thin that I seem a different person, gives me an incredible sense of the passage of time.

Shakyamuni was 72 when he began expounding the Lotus Sutra, the reason for which he appeared in the world. During his last eight years, he gave himself completely to expounding and propagating this most exalted of Buddhist teachings. As a Buddhist, I, too, am taking action based on a vow to exert myself on behalf of the people and the Law, in the spirit that the most important work of my life is still ahead.

Old age is a time of golden harvest and fruition.

In Japanese, 60 years of age is called the "calendar return" because it completes the 60-year cycle. That is, at 60 we return to a year with the same symbol as the year of our birth. [In the ancient Japanese calendar system, each year has a name, and there are 60 names that make up a cycle of 60 years. Thus, on one's 60th birthday, a full cycle has been completed.] There are apparently still places where it is customary for people to celebrate their 60th birthday wearing a red sleeveless kimono jacket. The color red is associated with infancy, so doing so is supposed to signify a kind of rebirth.

The Daishonin was born in February 1222, and he passed away in October 1282. According to the modern method of calculating age, he lived to be exactly 60, which means he reached his calendar return. I am exceedingly grateful for each additional year

Title: Live Fulfilling Lives
Subject: World Tribune 07/14/00 n.3302 p.6 WT000714p06
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Death Disciple Encouragement Fulfilling Guidance Ikeda Life Lives Memoir Mentor President Record Series Tribune World

that I live beyond 60. This is one criteria for the way I view longevity.

People often say that those advanced in age are living their silver years. But this has a lonely ring to it. In terms of seasons, it brings to mind an image of winter. I have also heard it suggested that one's later years should be called the golden age, conjuring an image of autumn and a time of golden harvest and fruition. I would agree with the latter.

Anyone, no matter who they are, who reaches this stage of life having lived in earnest, is qualified to be regarded as a champion of life. It is my personal wish and determination to live out each day with composure and boundless strength. My life is adorned with the uncelebrated status of having struggled against all kinds of hardship and obstacles.

When my series "The Third Stage of Life" was running in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper, an 80-year-old member presented me with a towel on which was printed a number of adages regarding longevity well known in Japan. They shine with the wisdom and humor of ordinary people:

Life is a journey of traversing many mountains and hills.
When death starts to beckon:
At 60 (the calendar return), tell him, "Don't be silly," and send him away.
At 70 (old and rare age), reject him, saying, "You're too early."
At 77 (joyful age), tell him: "Don't be in such a hurry. The fun is just beginning."
At 80 (umbrella age—the Chinese character for umbrella is made up of the same elements used to depict the number 80), tell him: "Hold on! I'm still needed."
At 88 (rice age), tell him, "Just let me eat a little more rice."
At 90 (graduation age), tell him, "Age has no graduation."
At 99 (white age), ask him, "How about waiting until I've reached 100?"
At 108 (tea age), tell him, "I haven't had nearly enough tea to drink."
And at 111 (imperial age), you can say, "Now that I've become the oldest in the land, I am ready to relinquish my position."

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, encountered the Daishonin's Buddhism when he was nearly 60 years old. His description of his feelings on beginning to practice seethes with emotion: "With indescribable joy, I transformed the way I had lived my life for almost 60 years. The anxiety of searching in the dark for life's answers completely evaporated, and my inborn reserve and diffidence disappeared. My goals in life became increasingly grander and loftier, and my fears dissipated."

He could be described as a 60-year-old youth. He was filled with a youthful spirit to challenge things. One philosopher says, "Being old is a wonderful thing as long as one does not forget the true meaning of *beginning*." In accord with these words, President Makiguchi completely transformed his way of life at 60 and embarked on a new journey, beginning his life again.

By the traditional way of counting years in Japan [a person is 1 at birth], the calendar return comes at age 59. It was at this age that Mr. Makiguchi founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Society for Value-Creating Education), forerunner of the Soka Gakkai. From that point forward, he gave his life to spreading the true Law under the banner of Soka. Courageously enduring persecution at the hands of Japan's militarist government, he died in prison at 73. The heart and soul of the Soka Gakkai were forged through the life-or-death struggles of President Makiguchi and President Toda in their final years.

The newspaper *Value Creation* was founded in 1941 when President Makiguchi was 70.

Title: Live Fulfilling Lives
Subject: World Tribune 07/14/00 n.3302 p.6 WT000714p06
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Death Disciple Encouragement Fulfilling Guidance Ikeda Life Lives Memoir Mentor President Record Series Tribune World

During the next two years, he attended more than 240 discussion meetings. Mr. Toda says of the state of affairs prior to President Makiguchi's arrest, "If I would meet Mr. Makiguchi after not seeing him for three months, I would find that he had grown spiritually in like measure." Mr. Makiguchi was truly getting younger, just as the Daishonin promises ["You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate" (WND, 464)].

I recall the faces of the intellectuals I have met who carried out dynamic activities well into their 90s. There was Dr. Bishambhar Nath Pande of India, a direct disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, at age 91; Austregésilo de Athayde, the Brazilian champion of human rights and former president of the Brazilian Academy of Letters, at 94; and the American scientist Dr. Linus Pauling, recipient of two Nobel Prizes, at 94. They all led dauntless lives of incredible struggle.

The Chinese writer and journalist Ba Jin has also continued to work tirelessly into his 90s. He says, "I set fire to my pen and ignite my life." And John Kenneth Galbraith, the world-renowned economist and professor emeritus of Harvard University, now in his 90s is working on a new book and remains hale and hearty. His statement "I believe people should learn more and more as they grow older" impressed me. Former President Joaqu'n Balaguer of the Dominican Republic, the "Jewel of the Caribbean," last September turned 92. Even so, he continues to burn with the great, selfless passion of a young man.

Religion exists precisely to help people live valiantly.

From its inception, Buddhism has focused on the fundamental issue of life and death, and pursued the question of how to lead a fulfilled, meaningful existence. It could be said that the prime motivation of all world religions is to find an answer to the question of how to live in light of the reality of death. Religion exists precisely to help people live valiantly, embracing high aspirations and burning with ideals until the moment of death.

About a year ago, there was a documentary on Japanese television featuring the life of the historical Buddha Shakyamuni. One scene involved a village near the city of Chittagong, Bangladesh. This village has in a sense "preserved" the practice of Buddhism as it was in Shakyamuni's day, more than 2,000 years ago. In this scene, an old woman is on her deathbed. A family member goes to summon a monk and returns with him. The monk says to the relatives and friends gathered, "Let us recount all the good things that this woman has done, so that we may all know them and keep them in our memory." Each person then relates fond memories of the grandmother, one after another recalling how she helped or encouraged them. The monk was not called after she died.

Originally, Shakyamuni devoted himself only to the living. After his death, Shakyamuni's non-lay disciples abided by their mentor's instructions to continue their practice without involving themselves in funerals, and so they did not have a direct hand in conducting ceremonies for the deceased.

Incidentally, after the documentary was aired, a university professor who had been involved in the show's production contacted a Soka Gakkai member with whom he studied in graduate school. He told the member: "The more I learn about the Buddha, the more I am convinced of the Soka Gakkai's correctness. I want to see the Soka Gakkai succeed in its endeavors. The Buddha is surely delighted by your efforts."

Buddhism exists to enable people to live fulfilling, satisfying lives until the very end. After reaching Japan, however, this religion of life gradually devolved into funeral Buddhism.

Title: Live Fulfilling Lives
Subject: World Tribune 07/14/00 n.3302 p.6 WT000714p06
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Death Disciple Encouragement Fulfilling Guidance Ikeda Life Lives Memoir Mentor President Record Series Tribune World

Surplices and the like seem to have become ceremonial accessories of funeral Buddhism. But the word *surplice* (Jpn *kesa*) actually comes from the Sanskrit term *kashaya*, which was transliterated in China as jiasha. *Kashaya* literally means dirty cloth. It refers to the coarse garments worn in the time of Shakyamuni by those known as chandala, the class of people subjected to the most severe discrimination.

Declaring himself the "son of a chandala family" (WND, 202), the Daishonin waged an ongoing struggle to lead people to enlightenment. The young Shakyamuni also discarded his princely robes and clad himself in these garments of the poor. In other words, surplices are a symbol of living together with and sharing the sufferings of society's poor and unfortunate. They were certainly not intended as, nor should they become, a sign of clerical authority.

Eight in a series

Title: Live Fulfilling Lives
Subject: World Tribune 07/14/00 n.3302 p.6 WT000714p06
Author: Daisaku Ikeda
Keywords: Death Disciple Encouragement Fulfilling Guidance Ikeda Life Lives Memoir Mentor President Record Series Tribune World