

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA A RAINBOW OF VICTORY IN GERMANY

By the banks of the Main, a chief tributary of the Rhine River, lies Seligenstadt—“Town of Bliss.” My friends in Germany chose this town as the location for the executive conference of SGI-Deutschland. A 30-minute drive from Frankfurt am Main, the birthplace of Goethe, Seligenstadt is a small town of 18,000.

I walked along the cobble-stoned street lined with half-timbered houses with small windows and sloping roofs. Those houses, standing gently in a row, reminded me of a scene from Grimm’s Fairy Tales. Here, I am told, people still live in homes built four or five centuries ago.

There is a legend associated with this town. Charles the Great (Charlemagne), king of the Franks and founder of the first empire in Western Europe after the fall of Rome, was reunited with his missing daughter in this town. Overjoyed, he named it Seligenstadt, “Town of Bliss.”

We talked beside the river’s blue waters. Everyone was earnest and attentive. It was the 23rd of May 1994—four years after Germany’s reunification. As the Main flows into the Rhine, the great father river, the peace movement promoted by my German friends was itself developing into a mighty river. I had just arrived in Frankfurt from Moscow, and was scheduled to leave for Italy two days later.

It was already late in the afternoon, but at that time of year the European sky remains light until quite late. But suddenly the sky darkened with clouds, and heavy rain began to fall. It tapped on the rooftops with a thousand fingers, like a pianist playing a lively sonata. It fell like curtains of silver dust, moving fast beyond the large terrace windows, beating on the river’s surface.

The sound of raindrops gradually softened into a whispering melody. A shaft of sunlight pierced the clouds, brightening the sky once more. After the brief shower, the air was cleansed and fresh; heaven and earth seemed to be smiling.

Then there appeared an arc of light connecting sky and earth, at first faint, but then quickly growing into vivid splendor. People held their breath. Red, yellow and blue—a long and slender “tricolor” flying in the heavens.

I went out to the terrace and watched the rainbow steadily increase its light. The townspeople came out too, gazing up at the multi-hued arc of flame in the sky—orange, green, indigo and violet.

One leg of the rainbow seemed to stand upon the pier across the river before us; it was rising out of the place where we had held our dialogue aimed at a peaceful future. Verdant trees stood on the opposite shore, beyond this transparent column of light. It was as if the golden sunlight were plucking silver harp-strings of rain to create a seven-colored melody. May the human world be as beautiful!

The rainbow’s sweeping arc embraced the town. One of the locals said, “I’ve never seen such a rainbow!” Then someone exclaimed, “Another one!” A second rainbow appeared. Fainter than the first, its colors were arranged in the opposite order, the red band on the inside.

People in the neighborhood had been enjoying a friendly picnic under a large canopy by the river, but everyone—children and adults—now came out into the open. Taken in by the arcs of color in the sky, each became a poet. The rain had stopped completely.

The rainbows seemed to form a pathway in the sky by which people’s dreams are

conveyed to the heavens. They reminded me of the Buddhist unity of many in body, one in mind. They also brought to mind humankind's future solidarity. After the rainbows appeared, the river seemed to turn a deeper blue.

These rainbows of hope were born of torrential rain; they were gifts from the rain. Goethe, man of wisdom to whom this land of the Rhine and Main gave birth, wrote:

But see how, rising from this turbulence,
the rainbow forms its changing-unchanged arch

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Of human striving it's a perfect symbol —
ponder this well to understand more clearly
that what we have as life is many-hued reflection.

(*Faust*, Part II, Act I)

It is when ever-moving raindrops reflect the sun's eternal light that a rainbow is formed. Similarly, only in earnest and dedicated striving does the eternal sacred life of humanity shine forth. There is no happiness without perseverance. Only upon the tormenting downpour of earthly desires and suffering is reflected the rainbow of enlightenment.

Though gifted with talent, health, good looks and wealth, Goethe, who appeared to have it all, once remarked: "I have ever been esteemed one of Fortune's chiefest favourites; nor will I complain or find fault with the course my life has taken. Yet, truly, there has been nothing but toil and care; and I may say that, in all my seventy-five years, I have never had a month of genuine comfort. It has been the perpetual rolling of a stone, which I have always had to raise anew" (*Conversations of Goethe with Johann Peter Eckermann*, p. 38). In any day or age, life is never without hardship and troubles. This is why, as long as we are alive, we must live with vigor. This is how Goethe lived. There is no use in losing heart, worrying about trivial matters, or brooding over your lot in life. Do not waste your life on foolish slander and complaint! Instead, live earnestly and respectfully, seeing how much enjoyment you can derive from each day.

Do not envy others; instead praise them!
Do not resent others; instead surpass them!
Summon your courage, and work cheerfully!
Do what needs to be done! Do it now!
Focus always on the present! For only in the present exists eternity!

So we must live with gusto! Joy is the springboard of life; it is the force that moves the universe. Joy is what makes the buds bloom and the sun blaze. When people create joy, even the heavens dance!

Though worries and troubles set upon us like rain and storm, as long as we keep moving forward, powerfully, tenaciously, like this river, a rainbow will emerge. No matter how often the rain drenches us, as long as we keep facing the sun, a rainbow will appear. What's more, the bigger the raindrops, the more splendid the rainbow! The greater our sweat and tears, the brighter our rainbow of victory!

Ah, how many times can we behold a rainbow of victory in our lifetimes? Such happiness may well be heaven's gift, reserved only for those who struggle and strive hard throughout their lives.

Sixteen in a series