

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S SEPT. 7 SPEECH SETBACKS ARE WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITIES

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SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 49th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Sept. 7.

As of today, Sept. 7, there are only 116 days to the start of the 21st century. A general review of the 20th century is now taking place in a wide variety of spheres. As part of that review, let us ask ourselves: What was the most brilliant speech of this century — socially, politically and aesthetically?

American intellectuals have chosen an immortal speech by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., leader of a momentous human rights revolution and graduate of Morehouse College. [At this meeting, SGI President Ikeda was inducted into the Martin Luther King Jr. International Collegium of Scholars of Morehouse College, Atlanta.]

Dr. King gave his stirring speech at a historic civil rights march on Washington, D.C., on Aug. 28, 1963, a hundred years after Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation freed slaves. On the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, before a crowd of more than a quarter million, Dr. King cried out those famous words: "I have a dream!" It was the lion's roar of a 34-year-old youth.

Speaking out with passion and fighting vigorously against injustice is a hallmark of youth.

We have a dream — kosen-rufu.

We of the SGI, too, have a dream: the dream of kosen-rufu.

In his speech, Dr. King says: "I say to you today, my friends, that in spite of the difficulties and frustrations of the moment I still have a dream.... I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.'"

Dr. King devoted his life to this noble dream, and he died a martyr to his cause. Today, we are honored by the presence of two great, wise teachers who have inherited that dream and fought with all their might to make it a reality.

On behalf of everyone here, I offer the warmest welcome to Dr. Lawrence Carter Sr. and Dr. George Miller. Gentlemen, we greet you with deep admiration and profound respect. [Dr. Carter is dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, Morehouse College, and professor of religion and philosophy. Dr. Miller is professor and director of the Scholars Academy of Lewis University, Ill. Founded in 1867, Morehouse College is the United States' only private, historically black, four-year liberal arts college for men. It has a student body of approximately 3,000 and more than 160 full-time faculty.]

This building, the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall, is dedicated to the memory of the Soka Gakkai's first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who cherished a dream of peace and justice, just like Dr. King did, and who died in prison for his beliefs. President Makiguchi, who was driven to his death by the insane forces of nationalism, was one of

the great thinkers of this century, a person of whom all Japan should be proud.

I dedicate the honor that I have just received from Morehouse College to my esteemed predecessor Mr. Makiguchi, as a symbol of the brilliant triumph the Soka Gakkai celebrates in this 70th-anniversary year of its founding.

It is now time to leave everything to youth.

In the audience today, we have 250 SGI youth representatives from 45 nations and territories who are participating in the SGI youth training course. I extend my warmest welcome and deepest gratitude to all of you.

I know that you have traveled long distances, and that many of you have also struggled to overcome great financial difficulties to be here. Nichiren Daishonin would surely have high praise for your strong seeking spirit, saying, “Wonderful, wonderful!” You are practitioners of Buddhism in the truest sense of the word.

A gathering of noble direct disciples of the Buddha, a gathering of warriors for kosen-rufu — this is the SGI. Today’s meeting clearly attests to that.

I am well aware of all that you are going through. I “rise and revere you as Buddhas.” I welcome you, youthful leaders of the SGI, with all my heart, and I praise and commend you. I sincerely pray that, uniting with SGI youth around the world, you will strive to make the dream of Dr. King and the dream of Mr. Makiguchi a reality in the 21st century.

We must leave it to the youth. The new century is completely in your hands. We must pass the baton to a new generation of capable people. Youth, I am counting on you!

Prayer can even change DNA.

Dr. Carter gave a speech on Aug. 22 at Mercer University, Georgia. In it, he says, “Scientists now believe that they can substantially prove that prayer changes DNA.” This is a thought-provoking statement as we consider science and religion in the 21st century. He highlighted that work is under way to prove scientifically how powerful prayer can be.

Dr. Carter has also illuminated the lofty path of spiritual transmission between mentor and disciple. He has edited a book on Dr. King’s mentor, Benjamin Elijah Mays, who was president of Morehouse College. It is a book filled with the rich pearls of wisdom of a great educator.

For instance, these words of Dr. Mays are quoted: “The test of good religion is...not how we treat the man highest up, but how we treat the man farthest down.... [T]he real test of my religion would be...not how I treat the educated, but how I treat the man who can’t write his name” (*Walking Integrity: Benjamin Elijah Mays, Mentor to Martin Luther King Jr.*, p. 64).

This is a profoundly compassionate point of view. I hope that all leaders of the kosen-rufu movement will bear these words in mind in their interactions with others. As leaders, it is important that you always humbly serve your fellow members. Please never let yourselves grow arrogant.

Dr. King fought on the side of the oppressed and suffering. This is what the SGI is doing. This is our greatest pride and our strength.

Dr. Mays also asserts: “It is not sufficient for Morehouse College to produce clever graduates, men fluent in speech and able to argue their way through; but rather honest men who can be trusted in public and private life — men who are sensitive to the wrongs, the sufferings, and the injustices of society and who are willing to accept responsibility for correcting these ills” (pp. 201–02).

These words express the basic foundation of humanism and resonate with the core teachings of Buddhism.

In accord with this ideal, Morehouse College has produced such exceptional leaders as Dr. King and many other talented, capable people who embody these qualities.

We express our deepest respect for Morehouse College's more than century-long tradition of fighting for justice.

The mission of SUA is to benefit all humankind.

Morehouse College has always been open to ideas from other cultures. In that regard, I especially admire that, through its powerful commitment to learning, Morehouse College was instrumental in introducing Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence into the civil rights movement, where it became a potent force for change.

In more recent years, Dr. King's practice of nonviolence or passive resistance has been transmitted to Europe, where it played a crucial role in bringing democracy to the countries of Eastern Europe.

If we go back, we can trace the inspiration for Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence to the great Russian writer and thinker Leo Tolstoy, while Tolstoy in turn had been inspired by Henry David Thoreau, the noted American Renaissance thinker. Thoreau read the quintessential teaching of Mahayana Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, in a French translation, and was powerfully influenced by its ideas. Here we see a grand chain of spiritual inspiration spanning the globe.

I am one of many who pray that we will make further progress in the coming century in expanding and strengthening this magnificent alliance of respect for the sanctity of life that enfolds our blue planet.

I want Soka University of America to shoulder this profoundly humanistic mission and to become a university capable of fresh, innovative value-creation for the benefit of humankind.

Right now, outstanding students from across the United States and the world are applying to be members of the historic first graduating class of the university.

Two of the classroom buildings on the campus have been named the Linus and Ava Helen Pauling Hall and the Mohandas and Kasturbai Gandhi Hall. These names are symbols of our dedication to learning from the great men and women who have championed world peace, in the open-minded spirit of Morehouse College, which we look upon as an older sibling.

America is crucial for the future of kosen-rufu.

SGI-USA is making tremendous strides forward. The United States is a crucial center of the world today, and it is a crucial center for kosen-rufu.

I have heard that in October, to commemorate the 40th anniversary of my first trip to the United States, in 1960, large general meetings will be held all over the country, including a meeting of 10,000 members in Los Angeles. I thank and congratulate my friends of SGI-USA on this wonderful occasion with all my heart!

At President Ikeda's urging, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima then came to the microphone and vigorously called out in English to the assembled SGI-USA members, "Let's all fight together to build a new, great SGI-USA!" The gathered members cheered in approval.

Incidentally, I have heard that it was a dialogue with a dedicated educator, an SGI-USA women's division member, that paved the way to the wonderful friendship we enjoy today with Dr. Carter. In every country, in every region, the activities of our SGI women are blazing new trails of hope and trust. The power of women is truly awesome.

Way back in the 13th century, the Daishonin wrote, "There should be no discrimination among...men or women" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 385). He loudly proclaimed that the lives of all human beings are fundamentally equal. True to his golden words "A sage is one who fully understands the three existences of life — past, present, and future" (WND, 641), the Daishonin saw far into the future.

Tomorrow, Sept. 8, with SGI women representatives from many nations gathering to celebrate the event, the new Soka International Women's Center will be opened. Congratulations! [The new building is located a short distance from the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Shinanomachi, Tokyo.]

I want all our SGI leaders to value women and their contributions to the utmost. Men must be strong and resolute when they confront those that seek to harm us, but they must never scold or be disdainful toward our pure-hearted women's and young women's division members. I want you all to know that we have entered an age where such arrogant leaders will not be tolerated.

The key to winning is going to difficult places.

Dr. King's movement faced a series of perils and obstacles, and there were times when it was forced to endure bitter setbacks. But each time, Dr. King bravely took action, launching a fresh offensive to overcome those reverses.

To fight back with even greater determination at the direst of times—this is the standard practice of truly brilliant leaders.

More often than not, defeat makes people cowardly or causes them to grumble and complain. But in reality, setbacks and defeats are wonderful opportunities to turn poison into medicine.

Dr. King took his movement to Birmingham, Ala., a place that had some of the harshest racial discrimination of the day. He believed that a single victory in the most difficult place could change the course of events and become a driving force toward total victory in the overall struggle for freedom and justice.

Going to the most difficult place—that is the key. All too often, people flee when a problem arises, when they are faced with a demanding situation. But a first-rate leader purposely goes where the most trying challenges lie. This is the mark of a great human being.

Dr. King demonstrated this spirit with his own life. And it is here that I see his strength. I, too, have sought out the hardest challenges, and that is why I have won each time. This is true in any struggle.

From the time I became Soka Gakkai president, I have continuously prayed that I might successfully protect the organization that Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda founded—that I would face every persecution alone, and that no one else would suffer.

Leaders should always speak clearly.

Dr. King resolved to expand his movement in the most inhospitable place, creating a momentum as powerful as a raging storm. To do that, he led the way, going there himself, calling on small local groups and speaking with people from all walks of life. This is a

point I hope all of you will engrave in your hearts.

If you only attend large meetings, you cannot come to know the participants as individuals. You cannot communicate one to one. Small meetings are very important. A strong, powerful solidarity can only be built through one-on-one dialogue.

Everywhere he went, Dr. King was greeted with a frosty, unyielding response. But that did not stop him. He was wise. He was great.

He burned with a passionate fighting spirit. Also, he was determined to breathe new enthusiasm and commitment into those who had abandoned the struggle, to unite them all into a mighty force for justice. He continued talking with people, frankly discussing the heart of the issue at hand. Always courteous and polite, he was above all sincere in his exchanges with others.

Leaders must speak clearly. Making vague statements that lead to confusion or a lack of proper understanding will not do. It is important for leaders to grasp the essence of a problem, clearly identify the source of others' worries and to then outline a concrete plan of action.

Victory and patience belong together.

Dr. King's patient, thoroughgoing dialogues with others eventually won over the hearts of those who, through doubts and misunderstandings, had become too emotional to reason clearly. One after another, they rose up and agreed to join the struggle.

Patience is victory.

Dr. King also made sure that the leaders stayed in close, constant communication and worked together in a spirit of mutual encouragement and support, so that no one's efforts would be wasted. Through a quiet struggle focused on getting his message across to one small group of people at a time, he succeeded in increasing the momentum and strength of his movement.

As leaders, do not be popularity seekers, the kind of leaders who say grand things at large meetings but never take any responsibility and never really do anything. I want you to learn the true art of leadership. Unless you do, people will not follow you.

The unified movement that Dr. King built grew with the power of a rushing torrent, until it claimed the support of millions of ordinary people and finally achieved a dramatic victory. It was Dr. King's unshakable conviction that the universe sides with truth and justice.

Let us have that same conviction! Let us not be limited by the narrow confines of Japan but create a momentous movement that the entire universe will support, achieving resounding success in our aims.

Good people need to break their silence.

Our members around Japan are advancing in high spirits. Congratulations to the men on this leaders meeting today! Earlier, Kansai Region Leader Takeshi Fujiwara called out for a "men's revolution." I like the sound of that! Let's carry out a men's revolution!

May each of you strive with pride and vigor, further expanding your state of life. I ask all the men to think of themselves as the Dr. Kings of the 21st century and take the lead to victory and growth.

Dr. Mays believed that injustice triumphs only when good people are silent. We Buddhists share the same belief. The fearful forces of darkness that robbed Dr. King, Mahatma Gandhi and Mr. Makiguchi of their lives are alive and well today in human

society. It is part of the unfortunate karma of humankind. And the world is still rampant with the spiteful, destructive spirit of those who envy decent, honest people and try to destroy them through slander and lies, through verbal violence.

Many, many Asian leaders feel uneasy about the rise of reactionary nationalism that Japan is evidencing. Expressions of grave concern about this dangerous trend are unceasing.

It is crucial for good people to break their silence and to speak out boldly and freely. We cannot transform the tragic cycle of human history unless they do, thereby expanding and strengthening the forces of light that champion truth and justice. The Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that unless good wins over evil, the disasters that afflict our society and our age will continue unabated (see WND, 1114).

Let all the Soka Gakkai members in Japan pledge today that we will make the most of the golden opportunity of the unique challenges that lie ahead next year, at the start of the new century. Let us work to achieve an unprecedented alliance of people 10 million strong that is committed to the ideals of peace and humanism.

We shall overcome everything!

No matter how bitter the struggles they faced, Dr. King and Mahatma Gandhi were always surrounded by smiles and warm laughter. This is because they always encouraged and roused the spirits of others with their own unaffected smiles of invincible hope.

A life of challenge is bright. Those who advance toward their ideals are cheerful. For they are advancing toward victory.

And in the case of Dr. King, wherever he went, the vibrant, joyful chorus of "We Shall Overcome" resounded. Is there anyone in the audience who can sing this song?

In response, a number of people rose and sang an impromptu chorus of "We Shall Overcome."

Thank you!

We shall overcome! With that determination, let us march boldly toward victory, setting our sights on May 3, 2001.

In closing, I pray with all my heart for the excellent health of Dr. Carter, for whom I have the greatest respect and admiration, and everyone else in attendance. And for the boundless prosperity of the United States and all the nations represented here today.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS NO DISCRIMINATION IN BUDDHISM

From This Speech:

Way back in the 13th century, Nichiren Daishonin wrote, “There should be no discrimination among...men or women” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 385). He loudly proclaimed that the lives of all human beings are fundamentally equal. True to his golden words “A sage is one who fully understands the three existences of life—past, present, and future” (WND, 641), the Daishonin saw far into the future.

1) For a Japanese priest in the 13th century to say that “there should be no discrimination among...men or women” was revolutionary. Why did the Daishonin believe this? How was his idea based on the teachings of Buddhism?

2) The roles of men and women have changed a lot in the recent decades in America. Do you feel that men and women are now equal? How do you think that the roles of men and women will change in the new century? What part do you think Buddhism will play in this?

3) Do you believe that “the lives of all human beings are fundamentally equal”? If you do, how do you put your belief into practice? Are there times when it is hard to do so?

4) What will it take for all human beings, all across the world, to treat one another as equals? Do you think that will ever happen? When?