

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA NEVER FORGET YOUR MISSION AS LEADERS

‘Leaders are there to work for the members’ happiness and inspire them to unite joyously together for a lofty cause,’ SGI President Ikeda writes in this essay commemorating the Soka Gakkai’s 70th anniversary. ‘They are there to help everyone strive in their Buddhist practice and deepen their faith, so that all can lead worthwhile, fulfilling lives. Leaders must never forget this most fundamental mission and spirit.’

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda gave strict instructions: “Always act with complete propriety concerning leadership appointments and finances, and do not allow any problems to arise.” He also sternly declared, “Any leaders who try to use the Soka Gakkai for their own purposes or do anything that arouses the disdain of other members should be dismissed from their positions.”

If there should be leaders who exploit our organization, are self-serving and arrogant, deceive honest, sincere members and cause confusion and disorder, we must resolutely drive them from our midst. The reason the Soka Gakkai’s president and leaders exist is to give guidance to this effect while protecting the members and taking the lead in kosen-rufu activities. That is why we have leadership positions.

Leaders are there to work for the members’ happiness and inspire them to unite joyously together for a lofty cause. They are there to help everyone strive in their Buddhist practice and deepen their faith, so that all can lead worthwhile, fulfilling lives. Leaders must never forget this most fundamental mission and spirit.

Mr. Toda was insistent that anyone who harmed the Soka Gakkai should be expelled, and that any leader who brought shame on it should be removed from his or her position. The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore said that to silently endure injustice is to be a party to injustice.



Mr. Toda was very strict. He severely reprimanded anyone who was late coming into work. He said: “Morning decides the day. A person who arrives at work late and is scolded by his boss will never amount to anything. New employees, especially, in the interest of earning trust and credibility in the workplace, should come into work earlier than anyone else. Without the willingness and enthusiasm to come in early and tidy up in preparation for the workday, for example, and to be on hand ready to greet their boss and colleagues, they will not get far in life. This is the first step to success in life.”

Mr. Toda taught us many detailed, practical lessons for success in the real world.

On one occasion, he thundered with white-hot fury: “Young people must never, ever lie! A young person with the eyes of a snake who lies without compunction is not a human being. He is an animal!”

He could be very severe.



Mr. Toda was also strict about the attitude we should have when studying Nichiren Daishonin’s writings. He said: “As you read each line, you should try to absorb it deeply,

so that you can say: ‘How true! It is just as the Daishonin states!’ Based on that approach, when you come across a passage you do not understand, you should work humbly and sincerely to interpret and comprehend its meaning. You must never read the Daishonin’s writings lightly, just skimming over the surface and pretending to understand what is written there without pondering and striving to grasp its deeper meaning.”

Mr. Toda drummed into us that forging ourselves through the strict training afforded by our Buddhist practice and study, reminiscent of the relentless training of a master swordsman, is the honored tradition of the Soka Gakkai.



One day at a meeting, a young man asked: “I want to go back to my hometown with honors. I do not have any honors right now, so what should I do?” Mr. Toda had been smiling warmly, but hearing this question, he suddenly grew angry. “Striving to achieve kosen-rufu and being a Soka Gakkai leader are the highest honors there are,” he said. “No matter how you look at it, there can be no greater honors!”

When we heard these words, it was as if a ray of sunshine illuminated our hearts. Filled with confidence and hope, we realized that being Mr. Toda’s disciples was the most noble thing we could aspire to.

We were also struck to the core by the greatness of this wonderful world of the Soka Gakkai, where people were working tirelessly to achieve kosen-rufu—the realization of happiness and lasting peace for all humankind.

It is highly likely that some at that meeting felt a stab of remorse when they heard their mentor’s words, having recognized that they were too concerned with appearances and had let themselves be blinded by vanity. By the same token, there may also have been some who, superficial and fickle, and easily swayed by the desire for worldly fame, only pretended to accept Mr. Toda’s words.

It is crucial to cast out vanity, fickleness of mind arising from a lack of substance and principle, and all such dark tendencies from our lives.

The base pretenders in our midst that day must surely have been knocked flat by Mr. Toda’s words and left trembling, having had their true feelings penetrated and laid out before them so vividly.



Mr. Toda also said: “You must keep your promises. The most important practice for young people is to keep their promises. Youth who are easygoing and make promises thoughtlessly and then break them just as readily will never become people of any substance. No one will trust them. They are paving their way to defeat. Learning this lesson in the crucial time of your youth and winning the trust of others is the most precious of treasures.”

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India and a man whom Mr. Toda wanted very much to meet, wrote a series of letters to his daughter, Indira (later Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi), from prison, where he was placed by the British colonial authorities. In one of them, he wrote: “Life is rich and varied, and though it has many swamps and marshes and muddy places, it has also the great sea, and the mountains, and snow, and glaciers, and wonderful starlit nights (especially in jail!), and the love of family and friends, and the comradeship of workers in a common cause, and music, and books and the empire of ideas.”

In our long lives, we must not allow ourselves to get mired in the mud. We should

continue our victorious advance, our lives exuding a fresh, invigorating spirit, our hearts always filled with joy and our heads held high.

Every jeweled word of wisdom in Mr. Toda's strict but loving guidance was designed to help us do just that.



Our mentor also left us with several final injunctions. One of them was "Support the third president! If you support the third president, you will achieve kosen-rufu without fail." The senior leaders of the Soka Gakkai all know that he said that.

About a year after Mr. Toda's death, the call went up for the vacancy of the presidency to be filled. (The position had remained open since Mr. Toda's death.) It started in Tokyo and neighboring Saitama, and then spread across Japan and to our members scattered around the world. They insisted that the third president be appointed without delay, their cry resounding like the roar of billowing wave.

At the time, General Director Takashi Koizumi was the highest-ranking Soka Gakkai leader. He had decided that the best time to appoint the next president would be after the third memorial (second anniversary) of Mr. Toda's death [to be conducted in April 1960]. Until then, he felt that time was needed to tie up various loose ends and unfinished projects left in the wake of Mr. Toda's death and to stabilize the Soka Gakkai in preparation for its future growth.



Mr. Toda had already given us detailed instructions for the future of worldwide kosen-rufu. For example, he said: "The day will come in the future when there will be many members overseas, and *Seikyo Shimbun* correspondents will be dispatched to cover our activities in different countries. Our leaders may also come to travel abroad regularly to give guidance to members in various parts of the world. One thing they [the correspondents and leaders] must strictly adhere to when they do so is to always show the utmost respect to the people of the countries they are visiting. They must not become the kind of Japanese who are loathed for their narrow-mindedness and ready arrogance. Nothing is achieved unless we win the trust of the people in those countries. Otherwise, our efforts will end in failure. Please be extremely careful in this regard when you go overseas. I also hope that you will always warmly and courteously welcome members from abroad, when they visit Japan."

These were very detailed, precise instructions. However, they convey an important larger message. And that is: As SGI members, we must try to avoid causing meaningless conflicts and resentments. It is important that we contribute to the countries in which we live, that we make friends based on sincerity and respect for others.

I have made this vision of Mr. Toda my own and, while chanting wholeheartedly for its realization, have worked to open the way for the global spread of our movement. And my beloved fellow members have worked earnestly alongside me.

That is why, transcending societal conflicts and disputes, and overcoming persecution, we have extended our alliance of peace and happiness to 163 nations and territories around the world today.



In the famous "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin discusses the profound significance of the "lion's roar," which is expounded in the Lotus Sutra.

Noting that the word *lion* is written with Chinese characters for *teacher* and *child*, he says: “The Chinese character *teacher* represents the Mystic Law as it is passed on by the mentor, and the Chinese character *child* indicates the Mystic Law as it is received by the disciples. The Chinese character *roar*, meanwhile, refers to the sound of mentor and disciples chanting in unison” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 748).

Letting the lion’s roar of mentor and disciple resound powerfully far and wide, the Soka Gakkai will forever advance on the path of undefeated victory.