

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA WE EACH HAVE THE GREATEST TREASURE

Praising SGI-Australia, SGI President Ikeda says: ‘We all have an important mission. We all possess the most precious treasure that is life itself.’

The last Olympics of the 20th century, the 2000 Sydney Olympics, is avidly awaited by people the world over. For the first time since the Melbourne Olympics 44 years ago, the Olympics are being held in the southern hemisphere.

May the curtain of the new century rise from Australia, land of tolerance and multiculturalism! I pray with all my heart for the success of this wonderful festival of peace.

In February last year, the shining new SGI Australia Culture Centre opened in the area that has been designated Olympic Park, home to the main stadium of the Sydney Olympics.

When I visited Australia in 1964, the Soka Gakkai membership there was very small, with less than 10 members under the leadership of Tsutomu Teitei. Nevertheless, praying for the peace and prosperity of this land and the happiness of her citizens, I established the first chapter, Melbourne Chapter, on this continent of hope.

Today, 36 years later, SGI-Australia has made brilliant progress, now boasting five headquarters and 18 chapters. My heart is filled with gratitude for the pioneering efforts and struggles, the arduous challenges of construction, of our noble members there.

Today, SGI community centers proudly stand in Sydney, Melbourne, and Brisbane. I set foot in each of these cities on my first visit to Australia, and I am deeply moved to think that many members are now gathering at SGI centers there.



The first SGI center in Australia was the Sydney Community Centre, which opened in 1977. The late Matsuyo Hanson, Australia’s first women’s leader, served as the center’s caretaker. She was a treasure. In her 10 years of service in that capacity, until she died at the age of 63, Matsuyo wonderfully protected that center, which nurtured and produced so many capable, talented people.

Matsuyo was born in Shimane Prefecture, Japan. She met her husband, a member of the Australian armed forces, in Hiroshima after World War II. They returned to his homeland, Australia, after marrying. Matsuyo joined the Soka Gakkai shortly after my visit, and from that moment on she devoted herself to Soka Gakkai activities while struggling with her illness-ridden karma.

When women came to see Matsuyo for guidance, they always encountered the same scene: her back, as she faced the Gohonzon in earnest prayer. “Always daimoku!” was her credo.

When she had finished chanting, she would turn to her visitor with a warm smile and ask, “Now, what is on your mind today?” She sat and listened patiently to her visitor’s problems. Members were always put at ease by her sincere manner, and they trusted her deeply.

Leaders must listen earnestly to the voices of the people.

In the Lotus Sutra, there is a bodhisattva called Perceiver of the World’s Sounds, who,

out of profound compassion, listens for and responds to people's cries for help or salvation. We must listen patiently and closely to what our friends and fellow members have to say. We must never forget that listening to people's hearts is an important part of our bodhisattva practice.

Matsuyo was not a talkative person. She was quite reticent, whether she was speaking English or her native tongue, Japanese. Yet her each and every word was golden, shining with her powerful conviction in faith, through which she had time and again conquered the demon of illness.

"Daimoku! If you chant daimoku, everything will be fine!" "Be cheerful! Just move forward cheerfully!" These were her bywords, and they never failed to rouse courage in the hearts of the suffering members who visited her and to send them out of the center with their heads held high.



Needless to say, she was not the sort of person satisfied with just sitting and waiting for people to come to her. She was a hardworking, extremely active women's leader. Once, while she was still Sydney Chapter women's leader, she learned there was a woman practicing in a town 120 miles away. From that day on, for more than 10 years, she drove that long distance—and driving was not one of her strong points—to visit that lone member once a month.

Many people told Matsuyo that she was wasting her time and energy, saying that no matter how many years she drove all that way, that particular member would never really become active. But Matsuyo knew that giving one's all—even for just one member—was the Soka Gakkai spirit. She refused to stop her efforts.

Eventually, the member in that distant town stood up in faith and introduced others in her area to Buddhism, creating a new circle of members dedicated to the Mystic Law.

In "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," Nichiren Daishonin writes: "The sutra states: 'If one [of these good men or good women in the time after I have passed into extinction] is able to secretly expound the Lotus Sutra to one person, even one phrase of it, then you should know that he or she is the envoy of the Thus Come One. He has been dispatched by the Thus Come One and carries out the Thus Come One's work.' Who else but us can this possibly refer to?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 385).

Australia's second women's leader, Sumi Mack, was introduced to the Daishonin's Buddhism by Matsuyo and embarked on the road to happiness. And the present women's leader, Fumie Hiramatsu, too, says she is deeply indebted to Matsuyo for her unstinting help and support.

There are members all over Australia who proudly declare that they are who they are today because of Matsuyo, and that their families owe her an immense debt. Here we see the beautiful ties of the eternal Soka family.

We all have an important mission. We all possess the most precious treasure that is life itself. The true humanistic spirit of Buddhism lies in our efforts to touch and inspire the hearts and minds of others through valuing each person with the recognition that our lives are equal.

The brilliant light of freedom, tolerance, and happiness profoundly suits the beautiful land of Australia.



In his famous work *The Geography of Human Life*, first Soka Gakkai president

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi shows how intimately a person's daily life is linked to the wider world. For example, he points out that the wool in the clothes he wore was produced in Australia. He was always teaching us to understand ourselves as part of the larger world around us.

Our Soka School System is based on Mr. Makiguchi's theories of value-creating education, and recently Soka Kansai Senior High School and Ashcroft High School, located in the city of Liverpool, Australia, on the outskirts of Sydney, have become sister schools and set up a student-exchange program. Students of both schools can engage in short-term special studies in language and culture at their sister school. Ashcroft High School has also awarded me the title of honorary principal and my wife, honorary deputy principal.

I have received honors from a number of Australian cities and local councils. These include honorary citizenship from Auburn, the home of our SGI Australia Culture Centre, and Darwin, along with citations of recognition from the Gold Coast—which I also visited on my trip to Australia 36 years ago—Glen Eira and Hornsby.



“You will be tortured probably in many horrible and primitive ways, but you will realise that genius of which you sometimes suspect you are possessed.” This is a passage from the novel *Voss*, written by the great Australian writer and Nobel laureate Patrick White. The novel's hero, an explorer, is urging a young man to join him on his expedition into uncharted territory and share a life of challenge.

Only when we dare to scale the towering mountain range looming before us do we discover our true selves! There is a royal road that leads to eternal happiness! Kosen-rufu is a momentous, pioneering effort to create a future of hope for all humanity.

My dear friends of SGI-Australia, who in 2001 will celebrate the centennial of your nation's federation: Fully supporting General Director Hans Van Der Bent, please build a magnificent castle of kosen-rufu unrivaled for the harmonious, friendly relations of its members and the strength of its unity anywhere in the world. Lead the way boldly into the next millennium! The dawning sun of humanism is rising brilliantly in the skies of Australia, Continent of the Future!