

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA INSIGHTS OF AN UNPRETENTIOUS EDUCATOR

In commemoration of the Soka Gakkai's 70th anniversary, SGI President Ikeda remembers the teachings of his mentor, Josei Toda, 'an honest, unpretentious educator, a complete contrast to hypocritical religious leaders who try to force people into rigid, stifling molds.'

For the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding, I want to share some more of my mentor's insights on humanity and life.



On the subject of personality, my mentor, Josei Toda, said: "Our personality is largely unalterable. Just as a river's course does not change that much, our essential personality is something that does not change radically either. The personality we have is the way we were destined to be. Nevertheless, just as it's possible for a muddy river to become pure and clean, we can rid our personalities of mud and dirt, and purify them."

How can we purify our personalities? By vigorously chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and working earnestly for people's happiness and the welfare of society. This is what Mr. Toda taught. For only through working for the highest good can the river of our lives be purified and its waters rise to become a lush, abundant flow.

In the course of working wholeheartedly to achieve the unsurpassed goal of kosen-rufu, the negative aspects of our personalities are naturally submerged, while the positive aspects come vibrantly to the fore.

For instance, a short-tempered person can direct his or her anger against evil and injustice. An introverted person can transform his or her shyness into thoughtfulness and consideration for others. An impatient person can use his or her speed and efficiency to accelerate the progress of good.

We each strive to realize our own wonderful, great human revolution, in a way true to ourselves, while giving full play to our unique qualities and talents. This is the way of life based on the Buddhist teaching of cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms, which expounds the unique beauty and mission of each person.

Mr. Toda also stated with great candor: "It is human nature to want to make ourselves look good in the eyes of others. We all have this tendency. But I urge you to be yourself. I have worked hard to overcome my own sense of inadequacy and unworthiness."

These words give us a glimpse of an honest, unpretentious educator, a complete contrast to hypocritical religious leaders who try to force people into rigid, stifling molds.

Mr. Toda also said: "Anyone—thanks to having people take him or her to task and pointing out his or her errors again and again—can smooth his or her rough edges and improve over time, eventually finding the niche that is just right for him or her."

This was his view of life. Based on what he said, it is extremely important to have seniors and friends who can give us this kind of feedback and point out our shortcomings in a constructive way. And how even more valuable is the occasional scolding of a mentor, who cares above all for the progress and growth of his disciples!

A true leader understands others' personalities and strives to guide people in a positive

direction while respecting their individuality.

Mr. Toda described the art of leadership as follows: “The greatest person has shortcomings, just as the most difficult person has strengths. If you help everyone maximize their strengths, all can be capable and active participants in our movement. It is vital that we look at each person and identify where he or she can be most effective.”



Mr. Toda also had wise, reasoned words to offer on the subjects of husbands and wives, and families: “Though a person may score 100 points on the likability and character scale, if the spouse is ignorant and foolish, the score can be dragged down to 50. On the other hand, even if a person scores only about 50 points, if the spouse is wise and prudent, he/she can make their spouse come to shine with a brilliance that earns them as much as 80 or 90 points.

“Therefore, it is important for couples to be wise and sincere in the way they live their lives as people, in the relationship they have with one another and in their dealings with society. And it is faith and the guidance of the Soka Gakkai that enables a wife to earn a perfect score of 100 points. The same applies to a husband.”

Mr. Toda also strictly instructed the women of the Soka Gakkai who worked in the home: “If you have a sloppy attitude toward finances, you cannot hope to establish a stable home. Just complaining all the time about having a meager monthly income serves no constructive purpose. I ask that you keep a careful record of all your daily expenditures.”

By keeping a daily account of your expenditures, you can see where money is being wasted and find ways to economize. And you can acquire the skills to plan and live more practically and frugally.

My wife still keeps a household account book today, just as Mr. Toda urged. Over the years, those account books have become a family treasure.

One day Mr. Toda offered advice to couples: “It is all right if you get into an argument at night. But in the mornings, I want you to always part with a pleasant smile before heading out for another demanding day. Do not get angry in the morning. Never have an argument just before leaving the house for work.”

Mr. Toda’s guidance always reflected a keen sensitivity to the complexity of human feelings.

He also said: “Children’s faith is determined by their mother. Mothers have a natural love for their children. Because of this, even when scolded by their mother, children can still sense her true warmth and affection. But if their father scolds them or nags them about practicing Buddhism, they will rebel. This is because, in the father’s case, they sense a certain kind of harshness rather than the love and affection they feel from their mother.”



When Mr. Toda was envisioning the establishment of the Soka Schools and Soka University, he said: “We do not need to include religious education in the curriculum. If we force religion on the students, their outlook will become narrow. By the same token, however, education cannot completely neglect spiritual matters. What we need to teach is spirituality. If we put so much emphasis on knowledge and science that we reject all spirituality, we will not be able to provide good education that fosters well-rounded human beings.”

Whether your children decide to practice Buddhism or not, or whether you as a parent insist that they practice or not, is ultimately something that has to be decided by the

individual or family.

However, spiritual nourishment is vital for society as a whole, in the form of such teachings as the sanctity of life, respect for the individual and the rejection of violence.

It is clear that education in Japan today is in dire need of this kind of sound spirituality.



One day, looking into the distant future, Mr. Toda said: “In the future, many of our members will travel overseas to work for world peace and kosen-rufu. When that happens, we must not suddenly spring discussions of Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai on others, thereby causing ill will and casting doubt on our motives and intentions. Truly humanistic dialogue that nurtures communication, friendship and an understanding of other cultures is absolutely crucial. We must never give an impression that runs counter to this basic commitment.

“When there are women present, especially, it may be preferable to allow the conversation to unfold in a wise, harmonious manner, centering on something like culture or literature—for instance, sharing well-known Japanese stories such as *The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter*, Sei Shonagon’s *The Pillow Book* and Murasaki Shikibu’s *The Tale of Genji*.”

My dialogues with over 1,500 leading figures worldwide are my continuing effort to carry out Mr. Toda’s guidance on this matter.



In Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, we find the passage “When I asked him about what you told me the other day, I found it to be exactly as you said” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 33). In other words, the Daishonin confirmed the report of one of his disciples with another and found it to be accurate.

Mr. Toda, quoting this passage, keenly observed: “We receive all kinds of reports. But are these reports accurate? Are they based on emotion? Or are they motivated by malice? It is very difficult to judge these things on the spot. So you must not accept a report at face value. You must use your wisdom, always trying to discern the real situation, so that you can make a sound judgment.”

Leaders must be neither shortsighted nor longsighted. They must see things and events with undistorted vision at all times. This has been the lesson and the practice of Soka Gakkai leaders from the time of first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.



The anniversary of the Soka Gakkai’s founding is also the anniversary of the day Mr. Makiguchi died in prison for his beliefs.

Every time Nov. 18 came around, Mr. Toda would declare with passion, his voice ringing with anger at injustice: “We must never forget the authoritarian powers who oppressed, persecuted and ridiculed the Soka Gakkai, an organization committed to justice and truth. We must never forgive the authoritarian powers who hurt, scorned and insulted our members. As the Daishonin says, ‘Buddhism primarily concerns itself with victory or defeat’ (WND, 835).

“We must clearly perceive the true workings of the strict law of cause and effect, and through the Soka Gakkai achieving overwhelming, total victory, become models for the 10,000 years and more of the Latter Day of the Law.”