

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S NOV. 9 SPEECH—PART 1 WELCOME TO THE AGE OF WOMEN!

‘Every woman who devotes her life to kosen-rufu is a person with the noblest of missions,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Moreover, the 21st century will be an age of women. That is why it is crucial for men to respect women and treat them with the highest regard.’

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the 51st Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Soka International Friendship Hall in Sendagaya, Tokyo, Nov. 9.

We celebrate the Soka Gakkai’s 70th anniversary in great triumph! Thank you for the part you have played in this wonderful achievement!

I extend my deepest respect and appreciation to all of you, my eternal comrades—comrades in the struggle for kosen-rufu throughout the 10,000 years and more of the Latter Day of the Law. I hope that you will advance with confidence and pride, achieving lives of even greater victory.

Life is precious—it would be a shame to end it in defeat. Those who fail to exert or challenge themselves are strangers to the true thrill and meaning of life.

Life’s true pleasures are those shared with others.

In his educational treatise *Emile*, Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote that we ought to be “hardy in good deeds and courageous in speaking the truth.”

My mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, was a strict taskmaster when it came to reading. He rigorously trained me, always grilling me on what I had read. “How was the book? What did it teach you?” he would ask. And *Emile* was no exception. He was very strict. As a result, I read each book so thoroughly that I could almost recite passages from it by heart.

Rousseau stated in *Emile* that life’s true pleasures are those one shares with the people. This aptly describes the realm of the SGI and the spirit of Buddhism. Sharing with our friends, sharing with the people, is real happiness.

Contemplating the absurdities of history, Rousseau noted that all too often it is the wicked who gain fame in the pages of history, while the good are forgotten or ridiculed. Rousseau had penetrating insight. This is just the perverse situation we see in Japan today. People who are making beneficial contributions to the world are attacked and persecuted. The same thing is happening to the Soka Gakkai.

A warm welcome to my beloved fellow SGI members, precious Bodhisattvas of the Earth from 55 countries and territories, who are with us today! I welcome you with my deepest thanks and appreciation.

Each of you has an important mission—each of you in your respective land will serve as a starting point and a model for our movement for worldwide kosen-rufu in the 21st century. I greet you with the same respect and reverence I would accord a Buddha. I am praying wholeheartedly for your happiness and successful endeavors. And I am determined to support and protect you with all of my strength.

Nichiren Daishonin kept a close eye on the trends of the times.

Nichiren Daishonin always observed the turbulent world around him with a keen eye. He watched the trends of the times and constantly asked himself how he could help others, how he could bring stability to society. He paid attention to everything and pondered deeply on all that he saw.

His writings also contain detailed information about conditions in China and other parts of Asia. The Daishonin gathered accurate data on a wide variety of social spheres, including economics and government. He was an astute, genuine leader of the people. He knew how many districts and villages there were in Japan, the total acreage of land under cultivation and how many shrines and temples there were. He knew the country's population. All this and much more—in precise numbers. In his writings, for example, he gives the population of Japan as 4,989,658, of whom 1,994,828 were men and 2,994,830 were women (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1015).

These figures correlate closely with those appearing in other historical sources, making them data of the first rank in understanding the conditions in Japan at that time.

It is interesting to note that there were about a million more women—or 1.5 times more—than men. It is thought that one of the reasons for this huge disparity is the incessant warfare of the period, which claimed many men's lives. Some have also suggested that the relatively large population of women may have contributed to the unprecedented flourishing of Buddhism in Japan at the time.

Ensuring the happiness of women is the essence of Buddhism.

In those days of chaos and upheaval, women suffered terribly. They were bound by “the three obediences,” spending their entire lives subservient to someone else: obeying their parents in childhood, their husbands after marriage and their sons in old age.

Yet against that social background, the Daishonin vowed to save all women: “I have made a vow to save all the women in Japan, and that sincerity cannot be ignored” (WND, 932). He also referred to various scriptural commentaries and summed up their intent, saying: “Among all the teachings of the Buddha's lifetime, the Lotus Sutra is first, and...among the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, that of women attaining Buddhahood is first” (WND, 930). In other words, ensuring the happiness of women is the essence of Mahayana Buddhism.

The Daishonin had many women followers. Lamentably, however, people cast aspersions on his character, spuriously charging him with immoral conduct as a priest. Their attacks were fueled by jealousy toward the Daishonin, a towering champion of truth and justice.

The Daishonin also wrote many letters to his female disciples. Historians have noted this point with great interest. In fact, historians rank the Daishonin in a class of his own when it comes to the volume of letters he wrote to believers, male or female. No other founder of a religious school compares in this regard.

A true leader sincerely supports the members above all.

Among the Daishonin's female disciples were those who were widowed at a young age or who had lost a beloved child. There were women who were suffering from illness or whose children were sick. They suffered problems that are universal, problems that women can relate to even today.

Some of these followers were troubled because they could not have children. Some were

caring for elderly mothers-in-law. Japan today is a rapidly graying society, and people will more and more find themselves in similar situations, having to care for the aged in the future.

The Daishonin offered constant encouragement to these women struggling amid all manner of suffering and hardship, setting forth clear, practical and detailed guidance appropriate to the circumstances of each person.

The SGI's goal is kosen-rufu. So those working to widely propagate the Daishonin's teachings are the most precious and praiseworthy of all. To show such dedicated members the highest respect and appreciation and to sincerely support and encourage them—this is the behavior of a genuine leader of kosen-rufu, a true leader in faith.

In contrast, to treat the members with contempt and to be arrogant and abusive toward them are the actions of oppressive, authoritarian leaders whose presence serves only to undermine and destroy kosen-rufu.

The Daishonin repeatedly appealed to his female followers to awaken to the correct teaching of Buddhism and to base their lives on this valid philosophy and correct view of life and the world. If they did so, he said, they would be unbeatable, no matter what challenges they encountered—they would become victors in life and champions of happiness.

The Daishonin wrote: “Only in the Lotus Sutra do we read that a woman who embraces this sutra not only excels all other women, but also surpasses all men” (WND, 464). There is no discrimination in the Daishonin's Buddhism. Every woman who devotes her life to kosen-rufu is a person with the noblest of missions. Moreover, the 21st century will be an age of women. That is why it is crucial for men to respect women and treat them with the highest regard.

He also told Nichigen-nyo that, as a woman with faith in the Lotus Sutra, she was “foremost among all of the 2,994,830 women of Japan” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1188). And he declared: “A woman who embraces the lion king of the Lotus Sutra never fears any of the beasts of hell or of the realms of hungry spirits and animals” (WND, 949).

I want all of our male leaders to engrave in their minds just how important and respectable are women who embrace the Mystic Law.

Happiness comes from character, good fortune and a sound philosophy.

The Daishonin also encouraged women to become self-reliant and realize their brilliant potential, teaching them that their lives were infinitely precious and noble.

Some women are obsessed by vanity and outward appearances. A certain philosopher has pointed out that commercial interests often promote vanity. Be that as it may, happiness is not determined by external appearances, by fancy outward trappings. Popularity and fame in and of themselves are illusory, and in most cases they fade and disappear all too quickly.

What is important for happiness is character, good fortune and a sound philosophy. And the ultimate philosophy is faith. Faith is the true foundation for happiness.

The Daishonin wrote: “Let others hate you if they will. What have you to complain of, if you are cherished by Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, as well as by Brahma, Shakra, and the gods of the sun and moon? As long as you are praised by the Lotus Sutra, what cause have you for discontent?” (WND, 464).

He also said: “Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only

within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life's functions" (WND, 832). The Gohonzon exists within the lives of all of us who exert ourselves in faith. Within us we possess the eternal state of life of Buddhahood. The Daishonin expressed his own enlightened state of life in the form of the mandala that is the Gohonzon, so that we might summon forth and manifest the Gohonzon within us.

From the perspective of the Mystic Law, our biggest problems are tiny things.

The Daishonin encouraged women who embrace the Mystic Law, assuring them that "misfortune will change into fortune" (WND, 412), and "you will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate" (WND, 464).

All we have to do is look around at the wonderful results experienced by countless fellow SGI members to appreciate the tremendous power of the Mystic Law. Faith is a golden rule for living a happy life. It is a source of energy and vitality. Faith enables us to transform difficulties into opportunities, turning poison into medicine, and to lead strong, confident lives brimming with good fortune.

No matter what happens, no matter how daunting the obstacles we encounter, when viewed from the vast perspective of the Mystic Law, which encompasses the entire universe, they are all tiny, trifling matters. The important thing is to look at things from a lofty state of life. Rising high above the clamorous din of the world, let us advance with courage and joy.

The Daishonin was considerate and compassionate. He took utmost pains to ensure that his women disciples could work together harmoniously as fellow practitioners of faith and support one another in their development and growth. For example, in some of his letters to his women followers, he instructed them to read the letter together: "Since you two are of the same mind, have someone read this letter to you [both] and listen to it together" (WND, 595). "I hope you will read this letter over and over again together" (WND, 315).

Here, we see why having an organization is so important. Today, the members of our women's and young women's divisions work together and support one another in a spirit of friendly cooperation. They are practicing just as the Daishonin teaches.

To be continued in the Dec. 22 issue

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS SEEKING THE GOHONZON WITHIN

From This Speech:

Nichiren Daishonin said: "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The body is the palace of the ninth consciousness, the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life's functions" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 832). The Gohonzon exists within the lives of all of us who exert ourselves in faith. Within us we possess the eternal state of life of Buddhahood. The Daishonin

expressed his own enlightened state of life in the form of the mandala that is the Gohonzon, so that we might summon forth and manifest the Gohonzon within us.

1) How do you make sure that you are not seeking the Gohonzon outside yourself? Have you had the experience of seeking the Gohonzon outside yourself, of treating it like a god?

2) If “the Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people,” as Nichiren Daishonin says, why do we chant to the mandala of the Gohonzon? Why did the Daishonin inscribe the Gohonzon for his followers?

3) Have you had the experience of chanting without the Gohonzon? How was it different (or not) from chanting to the Gohonzon?