

SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER MATILDA BUCK CREATING A SPIRITUAL CIVILIZATION AS WOMEN OF THE SGI

The event was the 1st SGI Women's Conference in Tokyo a month ago. Picture this: The soft lines of Indian saris and regal African dress, the hum of countless languages, women of different cultures—some familiar, some exotic—but all with the same feeling for Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It wasn't like looking at a picture of kosen-rufu—it *was* kosen-rufu.

The variety of personalities—some shy and soft-spoken, others taking the lead in society and their careers—was remarkable. But all of them stood up at some point and declared, "I will be responsible in my area." That's what Atsuko Yamabe and the women of Spain did, when the general director deserted the SGI for the Nikken sect and shook the foundation of the organization there; and Dr. Solange Kouo Epa in Benin, caring for four stalwart members; and gutsy Loren Braithwaite, who came to South Africa from America and declared "This is my home."

When I heard Naveena Reddi's lilting Indian accent talk about "our beloved" President Ikeda, I realized I knew these women. I was, well, *at home*, even halfway around the world from the United States.

And there were so many others I met on this trip: Scotland's Joan Anderson, who worked with the Save the Children organization in Cambodia for several years, and Mrs. Takimoto, who defied cancer and now, in her seventh decade of life, is taking responsibility in the Philippines. Heroes all.

A day or so later, I watched Kaneko Ikeda escort the stately queen of Tonga, holding her hand as they walked along a red ceremonial carpet. That simple gesture bridged culture and diplomacy and said so much more than words could convey. What humanness; what a profoundly "womanly" thing to do.

As I thought about these heroic women, I realized: "This is our 'spiritual civilization' in action. This is our 'solidarity as women of the SGI.'"

During the November Training Course in Japan (along with 330 members from 55 countries and regions), President Ikeda said that the 21st century will be the age of women, and that women have the power to bring peace to the world. He quoted Nichiren Daishonin: "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" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 930).

"In other words," President Ikeda said, "ensuring the happiness of women is the very essence of Mahayana Buddhism."

Nichiren Daishonin constantly taught women that their lives are precious, that they could be victorious. Among these international women, I saw with my own eyes that President Ikeda has been raising women all over the world to become self-reliant and to be world citizens who devote themselves to humanity. Who else on this planet is empowering common women as he does? Who is urging us to bring forth our unique potential, to become wise philosophers, to live a contributive life? Through his own example and his confidence in us, he is saying: "You need never be defeated. You will definitely become happy."

How can we, like those heroic women I met, bring forth the hope and the energy to realize victory for ourselves and for humanity in the 21st century? How do we reveal our

true selves, live contributive lives, fight for justice?

We can tap the great resource of the Mystic Law every day by chanting Nam-myoho-
renge-kyo. Nichiren Daishonin often wrote about three significant meanings of the
character *myo* (see pages 145–49 of “The Daimoku of the Lotus Sutra” in *The Writings of
Nichiren Daishonin*). The first meaning is “to open,” in the sense that it enables a person
to develop his or her full potential as a human being. Every time we chant Nam-myoho-
renge-kyo, we can open our lives; we are not passively accepting our situation, we are
taking initiative to find solutions. We are proactive.

Another meaning of the character *myo* is “to revive.” When its name is chanted, the
Mystic Law has the power to revitalize or renew one’s life. When we chant *myo*, we tap
our creative energies. As President Ikeda has said, “At the depth of life are the restorative
resources of wisdom, perseverance and courage to sustain reform and development.”

The third meaning, “to be endowed,” refers not only to our own potential, but to the fact
that every aspect of our environment, every situation we encounter, is perfectly “endowed”
with what we need for our self-development. It means that every moment has great
possible value. Nothing must be rejected; every circumstance can be transformed to
support our growth. And we will be endowed with good fortune and great abilities.

It has to be the power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that these women, some of whom will
go home to comfortable situations and some to very difficult, can return to their lives and
never be defeated; can reveal their true selves and think as world citizens, continuing to
expand because they have this resource of Buddhahood that is indicated by the character
myo of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The ultimate point of *myo* is hope—and that’s why none of us ever have to feel
discouraged or defeated!

Every woman reading this article is a world leader: We are all in orbit, constantly
speaking, touching, hearing the world around us. Have no doubt that every action you take,
however mundane you may think it is, ripples out into society and ultimately changes the
world. Yes, you have that much power.

Together in America, let’s hold hands—as Mrs. Ikeda showed us—with one another
and with our sisters all over the world.