

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S NOV. 9 SPEECH—PART 2 SOMETHING SO STRONG

‘Something so strong that nothing can destroy it—that is faith,’ says SGI President Ikeda. ‘Such is the faith of those who uphold Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. Such is the faith of the SGI members.’

The conclusion 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.

Today, since we have members from around the world with us, I want to share, with deepest respect, the words of great men and women from various nations.

Let us start with Thomas Paine, noted pioneer of the American Revolution. Paine says, “Vigor and determination will do any thing and every thing.” “Vigor and determination”—this describes the Soka Gakkai spirit.

The Swiss philosopher Carl Hilty writes that once you begin an undertaking, you must never look back. We should set our sights on our future success and keep advancing steadily toward that goal. Not advancing is regressing. Please keep moving forward—and win.

I am also reminded of Winston Churchill, the British prime minister during World War II. I remember once purchasing a figurine of him when visiting London.

During the war, when Nazi Germany was heavily bombing London, Churchill, casually tossing a ball in one hand, walked through the rubble-strewn streets to lift the spirits and morale of his countrymen. Without words, his relaxed, confident attitude said to them: “Do not worry. Everything is all right. I am here. We will win!” He was a great prime minister.

No matter how adverse the circumstances, it is crucial for a leader to give people hope and confidence, to lighten their hearts. A leader’s invincible spirit gives people courage and becomes a driving force that paves the way to victory.

Without a mentor, we cannot be fully human.

The day before yesterday, I received an honor from the country of Ukraine. [On Nov. 7, SGI President Ikeda received an award of honor from the cabinet of the Ukrainian government for his contributions to the development of global cultural exchange.] In my acceptance speech, I mentioned the novella *Taras Bulba*, written by one of the most famous names in Russian literature, Nikolay Gogol. Born in Ukraine, Gogol in his youth met the renowned Russian poet Aleksandr Pushkin. [Gogol was 22 and Pushkin 32 at the time.] Gogol regarded Pushkin as a staunch friend and lifelong mentor. A great life is always marked by an encounter with another great person, a great mentor.

The relationship of mentor and disciple, of teacher and student, is unique to human beings. Without mentors or teachers, we cannot be fully human, remaining little more than animals. The mentor–disciple relationship is a noble path of human growth and development. And this is something that will never change, now or in the future. The Daishonin clearly states that the path of mentor and disciple is the foundation of life, and many eminent Western thinkers have said the same thing.

In contrast, those who turn their backs on this path grow arrogant. They lose their direction and stop growing.

The story *Taras Bulba* holds many fond memories for me. It was one of the books that Mr. Toda insisted I read. On Feb. 16, 1955, I wrote in my diary: “I began reading *Taras Bulba*. I cannot stop thinking about it.” I later asked Mr. Toda if we could use the book as study material for the Suiko-kai [the young men’s division training group that studied directly under Mr. Toda], and we did.

True faith means being ready to die for one’s beliefs.

Taras Bulba is set in 16th-century Ukraine and tells the story of the unyielding struggle of the Cossacks against the foreign invaders of their land. *Cossack* means free man. Taras Bulba is a commanding officer of the Cossack forces and a symbol of true Cossack virtues. He is stubborn and strong-willed, forthright and honest, daring and resolute, with an abundance of passion and determination.

He has two sons, Ostap and Andrii. Both have just returned home after graduating from school, and Tara Bulba is very proud of them.

The father, a veteran of many battles, contemplates how best to help his sons grow strong. He does not want to spoil them. Wishing to thoroughly forge and train them, so that they will develop inner fortitude and strength, he takes them to the front lines with him.

He wants to teach them “living lessons” in the school of real-life struggles. He hopes that in the course of these trials, they will acquire the courageous strength of lions.

Mr. Toda also believed that young people must be trained through actual struggle. Using the fierce struggle of the Cossacks as a metaphor, he taught us that we must triumph over every difficulty. There may be attacks by the three powerful enemies, onslaughts of the three obstacles and four devils, or persecutions that befall us, he said, but we must overcome them.

That is why he trained us so hard and tried to forge in each of us a faith as strong as iron. And it is thanks to that strict training that I am who I am today.

Taras Bulba scolds his sons, telling them that a true Cossack is prepared to endure anything and, no matter how he is tormented, bravely defends his position to the death. Earlier in the novel, crowds of Cossacks cry out that they would willingly give their lives for their faith.

This is the attitude, the determination that is required—the readiness to die for one’s beliefs, to give one’s life for one’s faith, if need be. This is faith.

I was 19 when I met Mr. Toda and first began walking the path of faith. I served Mr. Toda from early in the morning until late at night.

After he died, I inherited his vision and tirelessly devoted myself to its realization. I have never had a moment’s rest or respite, having endured an endless succession of life-or-death struggles to protect my beloved fellow members—so many that I have no more tears left to shed.

I want to adorn the epic drama of my human revolution by setting an example with my life that says: “If the need arises, I will give my life for my faith! This is the Soka Gakkai spirit!”

Through the power of humanity, we must bring an end to war.

In one scene in *Taras Bulba*, the elderly mother of Ostap and Andrii weeps, worried what will happen to her sons when their father takes them to fight on the battlefield. Not only her husband but also her two children will go off to war. How painful life is!

Similar scenes were played out everywhere during World War II. This was another

reason why Mr. Toda had young people read this book.

I remember him saying: “In this novel, Gogol describes life in a barbaric age. And by portraying the love and affection that a mother and father have for their children, he tries to awaken our humanity.”

We must bring an end to the age of war — through the power of culture and humanity, through the united efforts of the Soka Gakkai! This was Mr. Toda’s wish.

He also said: “This novel depicts the strict love of a father for his children. A mother can get away with scolding her children all year round, because they can feel her underlying love and affection for them.

“But a father can be intimidating without even opening his mouth, so he should be like a friend to his children. He should never join in with the mother in scolding them. That said, I hope that parents will love their children and make it their goal to raise them into people who can contribute to society.”

The task Mr. Toda entrusted to us was “Love and nurture the youth so that they might contribute to the world and kosen-rufu!” This is my spirit as well.

I wanted to share this with you today for the sake of the future.

Betrayal is one of the worst offenses a human being can commit.

Taras Bulba shifts to the tumultuous battlefield. Taras Bulba’s two sons account for themselves just as their father had hoped, fighting bravely. The Cossack forces appear ready to win a string of victories.

But an unexpected betrayal takes place. Taras Bulba’s younger son, Andrii, switches to the enemy side. He has fallen in love with the daughter of an enemy nobleman.

For a Cossack, betrayal is the most despicable of acts. Eventually, when Taras Bulba encounters Andrii on the battlefield, the latter wearing the enemy uniform, he takes his son’s life. As a Cossack commander, such was his uncompromising stance toward betrayal.

Deploring treachery and cowardice, Taras Bulba cries out, “I ask you all, what sort of a Cossack is he who would desert his comrade in misfortune, and let him perish like a dog in a foreign land?” He burns with pride in being a Cossack. There is a sacred solidarity, he says, forged by spiritual bonds, a solidarity unprecedented anywhere.

Let us of the SGI, too, advance in unshakable unity!

Taras Bulba laments his son’s betrayal, saying that he is “fallen without glory, like a vile dog.” Betrayal is one of the worst offenses a human being can commit.

Mr. Toda consistently warned young people: “In every age, there will be traitors. You must move past these pitiful wretches, empty shells of ruin and defeat, and as comrades who share a true commitment to the Soka Gakkai’s goal, keep pushing bravely onward.”

The bonds of SGI members are indomitable.

The Cossacks find themselves in dire straits. The enemy forces, hard pressed, resort to trickery. They pretend that they are willing to seek peace, hoping to lull the Cossacks into a false sense of security and make a surprise attack on them.

Completely taken in, the Cossack general and other commanders prepare to accept the enemy’s offer of peace. But one commander — Taras Bulba — sees through the ruse. “It is a plot!” he warns. He urges his comrades not to trust them, saying that if they abandon the fight and compromise too easily with the enemy, they will be ruthlessly slaughtered.

Taras Bulba’s call stirs not only his soldiers but also those under other commanders. “We will follow you!” they cry. “We will follow you to the end!”

He is filled with a passionate fighting spirit and an unswerving commitment to his cause. That is why other brave soldiers follow Taras Bulba.

I am reminded of Mr. Toda's intrepid figure. The bonds of Soka Gakkai members are forged with the same indomitable spirit and conviction.

What happens to the Cossack soldiers who compromise with the enemy? Just as Taras Bulba predicts, they are deceived and destroyed.

But—as Gogol alludes to at the end of his story—Taras Bulba, a hero who fights against the enemy to the end and ultimately lays down his life for the struggle, will long be remembered as the pride of the Cossacks.

In closing, I want to share another passage from *Taras Bulba* that states to the effect: There is no power stronger than faith—it is awesome and invincible like a rock standing firm amid the stormy, ever-changing sea.

Something so strong that nothing can destroy it—that is faith. Such is the faith of those who uphold Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Such is the faith of the SGI members.

Next year, at last, we greet the start of the 21st century. As great actors in the drama of life, let us advance with joy and confidence, and make the year ahead one of wonderful personal achievement! Let us energetically construct a magnificent alliance of peace and humanism!

The days are growing colder, so please take care not to catch cold. Each of you is precious, and I am praying for your health and happiness with all my heart.

Thank you for your long attention. Thank you for everything!

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS MENTOR AND DISCIPLE

From This Speech:

The relationship of mentor and disciple, of teacher and student, is unique to human beings. Without mentors or teachers, we cannot be fully human, remaining little more than animals. The mentor-disciple relationship is a noble path of human growth and development. And this is something that will never change, now or in the future. Nichiren Daishonin clearly states that the path of mentor and disciple is the foundation of life, and many eminent Western thinkers have said the same thing.

- 1) In what ways is the relationship of mentor and disciple or teacher and student unique to human beings?
- 2) Do you feel that you have grown through the influence of mentors or teachers? Who was the best teacher you ever had in school? Why was he or she the best?
- 3) Nichiren Daishonin says that the mentor-disciple relationship is the foundation of life. Why do you think he believes this? In what sense can we call it the foundation?
- 4) Do you think that the mentor-disciple relationship, the way that President Ikeda explains it here, is stronger in some cultures than others? With some people more than others?
- 5) Do you ever see yourself as a mentor?