

MARCH 16, 1958
THE SPIRIT OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE
BY CORY TAYLOR, LOS ANGELES

Would you stand up against the country of your birth if you had the foresight to see it and all its people heading for ruin? Would you find the courage to speak out for the sanctity of human life, when doing so meant imprisonment or execution? What if the national policies you sought to challenge were being celebrated in public rallies? What if speaking out meant endangering your friends and family? Would you be willing to take these risks in order to avert a national disaster? First Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and second president, Josei Toda, faced these questions. And their decision is the legacy of the Soka Gakkai.

It is a matter of fact that few of us would ever have come into contact with this legacy if it weren't for current SGI president, Daisaku Ikeda's worldwide propagation efforts. There would be hardly a tear of joy shed or single hearts flush with the surge of hope.

March 16, 1958 — as his life was drawing to an end, Josei Toda addressed an assembly of 6,000 Soka Gakkai youth and declared: “Never forget that you are heirs to this legacy. I want you to fight and advance bravely, as valiant young warriors, in the proud battle to spread the Law. Today, I want to bequeath this mission to you young people. I entrust the future to all of you. I'm counting on you — counting on you to accomplish kosen-rufu!” (*Seikyo Times*, August 1995, p. 42).

For thirteen years, since his release from prison in 1945, Toda had lovingly devoted himself to the poor and sick of Japan. In those chaotic post-war years — when values had been turned upside down — he had resurrected hope in the hearts of nearly a million citizens through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. But prison's bitter cruelty had robbed him of his health. By March 1958, Toda's emaciated body and labored steps revealed that his time was running out.

Early that month, President Toda proposed holding a youth gathering as a dress rehearsal for kosen-rufu. “Shin'ichi, I'm thinking of March 16 as the occasion on which I will formally transfer the mission for achieving kosen-rufu to all of you” (*Seikyo Times*, March 1995, p. 49).

Word of the gathering reached every corner of the youth division with lightning speed. The youth were willing to do whatever was necessary to be by Mr. Toda's side.

In the pre-dawn hours of March 16, thousands of young people arrived for the gathering at the head temple. Toda had made preparations for hot pork soup to be provided for each participant. “The hot soup satisfied their hunger and warmed their bodies to the core. When they realized that the food had been provided out of President Toda's concern for them, many were moved to tears at their mentor's sincerity” (*Seikyo Times*, June 1995, p. 54).

Directed by young Daisaku Ikeda and deeply concerned about Toda's ailing health, youth members had prepared a litter for the president to ride in. President Ikeda describes the scene in *The Human Revolution*: “Looking at Shin'ichi, Toda smiled and nodded. He then allowed his disciples to help him onto the seat they had affixed to the center of the litter. Carried by several young men's division members, who had been selected for the task, the litter quietly moved down the path toward the Grand Lecture Hall. Shin'ichi walked closely alongside.

“A sense of love and pride filled his heart as he gazed at the youth who lined the walkway. Deeply moved by their robust growth, Toda addressed them in his heart, ‘Thank you for coming! I'm so happy to see you. How splendidly you have grown! You've really developed. This will probably be the last time I'll be able to meet you like this. After I'm gone, it will all be

up to you! I'm counting on you to realize kosen-rufu!" (*Seikyo Times*, July 1995, p. 53).

"When the litter carrying Josei Toda arrived in the square in front of the Grand Lecture Hall, joyous cheers arose, like the sound of crashing waves, from among the youth waiting there. 'It's President Toda, it's President Toda!' Though Toda was gaunt and emaciated, the youth were beside themselves with joy to see his dauntless form after so long. Some of the young women strained to hold back a rising surge of emotion and keep from sobbing" (*Seikyo Times*, August 1995, p. 40).

That day, President Toda declared: "The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world. We are afraid of nothing. Never forget that you are heirs to this legacy" (*Seikyo Times*, August 1995, p. 42).

Forty-three years have passed since then. The year is 2001. Soka Gakkai International members exist in 163 countries and territories. A new generation of youth has taken the lead in the American kosen-rufu movement.

The meaning of March 16 lies in the bond between mentor and disciple; history will record how we respond to the call of our mentor, President Ikeda: "I ask that each of you, the young leaders of the new century, please realize that now is the time to develop yourself. So please journey boldly along your chosen course of magnificent humanism, surmounting all billows and swells so that you may establish the immortal castle of happiness in your heart" (*World Tribune*, March 20, 1998, p. 1).

"Your mission is to ensure that this precious organization endures for all time, to create a Soka Gakkai that nothing can ever destroy" (*World Tribune*, April 17, 1998, p. 10).

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