

## FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR BUDDHISM LIVES IN THE MENTOR-DISCIPLE RELATIONSHIP

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*! Congratulations on being able to greet this significant May 3, 2001! I am so happy to share this wonderful day with all of you.

May 3 is like New Year's Day for the Soka Gakkai. It is the date every year that as an organization, we renew our determination and refresh our spirit of continuous advancement. This is the first May 3 of the new century, and it is the date we have been aiming toward for many years. We made it! Each one of us has made it!

The reason we commemorate this day is because on May 3, 1951, Josei Toda became the second president, and on May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president of the Soka Gakkai. Therefore, May 3 expresses the spirit to take responsibility. It is not a holiday to admire our past heroes; it is a day for all of us to express our own spirit to take responsibility where we are.

Also, this spirit means to carry on the work begun by our mentor. When President Toda assumed responsibility in 1951, he did so to fulfill the task he inherited from Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and when President Ikeda took leadership in 1960, he did so on behalf of all the disciples of Mr. Toda. This is the spirit of May 3 — a day of great determination.

This is the spirit of mentor and disciple. This is a living relationship. Each great leader has himself or herself been an exemplary disciple. In my opinion, the greatest mentors have been dedicated disciples. Buddhism has always flourished and been propagated through the relationship of mentor and disciple.

Although Nichiren Daishonin revealed a totally new practice, he based himself on the words and teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha. He lived his life as a disciple.

After Nichiren's passing, it was the actions of his disciple, Nikko Shonin, that laid the foundation for the correct practice and propagation of his teachings. Even in the twentieth century, the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai who practiced and propagated this philosophy exactly as the Daishonin taught revived the spirit of the Daishonin's Buddhism.

The foundation of the mentor and disciple relationship lies in living with a sense of responsibility. It is to deeply understand the mentor's heart, and to act based upon that understanding. The mentor is the heart, and the disciple is the action. Because of the mentor, the disciple acts.

The converse is also true. We can say that when Buddhism had historically fallen into decline, it had been because the genuine, heartfelt relationship between disciple and mentor had disappeared.

In President Ikeda's series "The Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" he takes up the question of why Buddhism declined in India. He concludes that it is because "Shakyamuni the mentor" became "Shakyamuni the deity". When the essential humanity of Shakyamuni became lost, Buddhism fell into decline. He states: "Fundamentally, Buddhism is a teaching about how to live that is transmitted from mentor to disciple. The relationship of mentor and disciple is formed when there are people who desire to follow the correct path in life and who seek a mentor, and when the mentor responds to their spirit. But if the Buddha as the mentor ceases to be a human being and becomes a "god," then, practically speaking, the path of mentor and disciple cannot exist" (*Living Buddhism*, March 1998, p. 29).

This was the cause of the historical decline of Buddhism in India: "When 'Shakyamuni the human being' was forgotten, Buddhism ceased to be a teaching about how to live the best

possible life. The path of mentor and disciple disappeared. Consequently, Buddhism declined and became authoritarian” (Ibid., March 1998, p. 30).

This is a principle that Nichiren Daishonin stresses, also. The way of life taught by the Buddha is not simply idealistic. The mentor actually walks this path with the disciple. Even when the mentor is not physically present, the disciple can still walk the path of the mentor by understanding the vision and the way the mentor lived. It is a living relationship, a life-to-life relationship where one human being responds to another.

Within the SGI, we are disciples who engage ourselves in the real world. Our continued development depends on whether or not we can maintain the living relationship between mentor and disciple. We don’t worship or deify our mentor. We seek to live based on the example he is showing us.

May 3 is the day we commemorate the spirit of the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai to take leadership for the widespread propagation of the Law. It is also the day each one of us can determine to take a personal stand with the same sense of responsibility as the successive presidents of our organization.

On this highly significant day — the first May 3 of the new millennium — allow me to thank you all for your untiring dedication and effort. I congratulate each of you for being able to make this great new departure with our mentor.

Thank you very much!

Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director