

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR AN ENDURING MONUMENT OF HUMANITY AND JUSTICE

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism!* As you have seen from the reports in the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*, the opening of the Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America took place with great success last month. I felt privileged to participate in the opening events. Seventy-five members of the first class were also present. Their enthusiasm and open-heartedness inspired me. I was so happy to be around this group of hope-filled youth, and when I looked into their eyes, I truly felt I could see a new age being born.

I met SGI friends from all over the United States — actually, from all over the world. The dedication events of May 3 were like a beautiful family reunion, and people who had been working together in different places for many years were reunited in a celebration of their dream and their mentor's dream. I felt like I was attending the “ceremony in the air” described in the Lotus Sutra.

Dr. Lawrence Carter, Dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta, spoke during the opening ceremony. He also delivered a public lecture in which he expressed his hopes for Soka education (see pages 11–16). The main point was that the purpose of education is to enable people to “ascend to democracy's crown,” or to become worthy of the highest promises of democracy. This is certainly true of education in general, but it is particularly the aspiration of Soka University of America, which aims to foster world citizens and leaders of humanism with a global outlook. Dr. Carter's speech expressed a deep understanding of the heart of Soka education — the cultivation of human wisdom and ability in the creation of a new age.

While I was on the campus for those few days, I had the opportunity to reflect on the vision of the university's founder, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, and on the goals of Soka education as expressed by Dr. Carter.

In his message to the opening, President Ikeda says: “To bequeath to humankind an eternally enduring monument of humanity and justice, an imperishable bastion for the culture of peace — this was the burning desire of the first and second presidents of the Soka Gakkai. I believe that has been the anguished cry and hope of all those whose rights and lives have been trampled by violence and tyranny. Soka University of America has been built in an effort to fulfill those hopes and dreams” (May 18 *World Tribune*, p. 4).

While many people unfamiliar with Buddhism may view it as a monastic religion, with an emphasis on meditation and removed from the affairs of the world, we, within the SGI, understand that the spirit of Mahayana Buddhism is the spirit of engaged compassion. In other words, when Nichiren Daishonin taught Buddhism, it was with the spirit of engaging with the problems of society, not distancing himself from them. In his famous treatise, “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” Nichiren expresses his passionate concern for secular matters by saying “I cannot keep silent on this matter. I cannot suppress my fears” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 7).

In saying this, he is teaching us that Buddhists do not separate themselves from the problems of society — the practice of Buddhism is a living philosophy deeply connected to our efforts in society.

It is this spirit of engaged compassion, of taking action for the people, that is the motivating force of the Soka Gakkai. As President Ikeda said in his message, building a “monument of humanity and justice” was the ardent hope of the first and second presidents of the Soka

Gakkai. The “monument” he refers to is an educational institution, but I believe that the worldwide SGI movement is also such a monument and “bastion for the culture of peace.” In that sense, the project of education — the task of inspiring and cultivating young people with a sense of purpose and vision — is very much the task of Buddhism, and it is very much the heart of the SGI.

I believe this is why President Ikeda has dedicated so much of his life to the field of education.

The vision or promise of Soka education is not only for those young people who are able to attend Soka University. It is a vision for the cultivation of character, a vision for young people developing their insight, wisdom and values, in order to create a new age of humanism, peace and culture. All of us, in our own spheres of endeavor, have a role to play in this.

In our families, we can encourage each other to develop our innate capacities. At our places of work, we can foster an atmosphere of support and care which cherishes the unique contributions of each individual. In so many ways, we can work for the happiness of ourselves and other people. I believe that not only is this part of the founding spirit of Soka University of America, it is also the spirit of each of us and the way that we can make the vision of the founder part of our own lives.

Thank you very much!

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