

**AUGUST 15:  
THE DAWN OF A NEW DAY**

*By Shin'ichi Yamamoto [the name SGI President Ikeda uses for his character in The Human Revolution novels]*

**This poem by President Ikeda, written on August 14, expresses his personal ordeal as a teenager during World War II and the effect the war had on his family. His opposition to war is rooted both in his Buddhist faith and firsthand experience.**

**There was much controversy in the media this summer about Japan's current prime minister visiting a war memorial shrine because of the fact that some war criminals are also buried there. This incident is also mentioned in the poem.**

August 15 —  
The day that Japan,  
Led astray by arrogant, foolish leaders,  
Fell in defeat.

A day that marked the start  
Of a new age,  
A day people's hearts  
Began to leap with joy once more,  
Toward a new future!

A day of remorse  
Coming at the end  
Of the senseless deaths  
Of so many millions of loved ones  
On the battlefield.

It was a day of eternal parting  
From sweethearts and lovers;  
It was a day of tears for mothers  
Who would never again see  
Their beloved children;  
It was a day of hopeless regret,  
Knowing that young sons,  
Seen as future pillars of their families  
And promising leaders of society,  
Would not return.  
That day  
Was one of anguished grief,  
When fathers, too, shed bitter tears!

**The 15th day of August —**

**Ah, August 15!**

**During the war,  
Countless people  
Seen frantically fleeing  
Amid the inferno of the air raids,  
Only to be mowed down  
By a terrifying hail of lead from on high.**

**Who was responsible  
For plunging the people  
Into such hellish suffering?  
Who would pay  
For condemning the people  
To this terrible fate?**

**Untold numbers of innocent civilians  
Lost their lives  
In the air raids.  
As I ran helter-skelter  
From the fierce flames,  
Inexpressible sorrow and anger  
At the reckless folly of war  
Seared my heart.**

**For the war,  
For the sake of the nation,  
So many men died.  
As did many women support staff  
Who accompanied the troops  
To the battlefield.  
It is very much mistaken  
To think that only men  
Served and suffered in the war.**

**And we must also never forget  
The countless other women  
Who worked with devotion  
And died in the war.**

**Before we Japanese debate  
On where the war dead should be honored,  
It is more important  
That we should not forget  
Those precious, irreplaceable lives  
That were lost in the war.**

**All the people of the world  
Are equal as human beings.  
If we focus on that reality,  
That principle,  
It becomes clear that there is  
No distinction between us  
And no reason for conflict.  
The task facing the 21st century  
Is to firmly embrace  
And widely spread  
This fundamental  
Philosophy of humanism.**

**Memories of the war  
Are indelibly burned  
In my mind  
To this day.**

**The sight of elderly couples  
During nighttime air raids,  
Trembling with fear,  
Weaving their way through the streets  
In search of refuge.**

**Nor will I ever forget  
The pitiful sight  
Of men of considerable social standing  
Panicking like trapped prisoners,  
Bolting for their lives  
Like miserable losers.**

**In my family,  
My four elder brothers,  
In the prime of youth,  
Were called away to war.  
All four  
Were made pawns  
In Japan's invasion of China.  
Later,  
My eldest brother  
Was also sent to fight in Burma,  
Where he died in battle.**

**After the war,  
Unaware of this,  
My aged parents  
Waited and waited,**

Each day their steps heavy,  
Wondering when,  
Oh, when,  
He and their other three sons  
Would return.

During the war,  
My father and my mother  
Rarely smiled.  
I was suffering from tuberculosis,  
And did not know  
What to say — nor to whom —  
Of my hopes for the future.  
It was a time  
When sad figures  
Milled about the streets,  
Friendless and alone.

It was like being exposed,  
Day after day,  
To the icy blasts of the north wind.  
Everywhere one saw good citizens  
Looking like the condemned  
Being led to the gallows  
At the brutal command  
Of dark assassins.

I was filled with anger.  
I could almost hear  
The derisive laughter  
Of the hypocrites in power,  
Certain unscrupulous Japanese political leaders  
With their dismissive, arrogant attitudes,  
While we ordinary citizens  
Were forced to endure bitter hardships,  
And I could not bear it.  
In our hearts,  
We the ordinary people  
Had rejected the thought of war;  
We had repudiated it.

But, gradually,  
Before even realizing it,  
Controlled by the manipulations  
Of those in power,  
The people of Japan,  
As though brainwashed,

**Became glorifiers of the war.**

**The human heart  
Is frightening.  
And the authorities  
Who try to manipulate people's hearts and minds  
Are more frightening still.**

**On August 15,  
Japan lost.  
It was utterly defeated.**

**Haughty,  
Prideful Japan  
Was crushed  
By a determined, all-out  
counterattack.**

**No doubt  
Many wise and clear-sighted Japanese  
Cried out quite justifiably,  
“Hurrah for Japan's defeat!”**

**The true feeling of the people,  
Who longed for even just a little  
Peace of mind,  
Was that the callous authorities —  
The very ones  
Who had subjugated them like slaves —  
Should be struck  
With harsh lashes of agony and remorse  
As divine punishment.**

**Ah,  
August 15, 1945 —  
It was a day  
Of bright summer skies.**

**At noon,  
A radio announcement  
Broadcast Japan's defeat.  
Almighty Japan  
Thought it would win  
But it was utterly vanquished.  
Many wept,  
But  
Far more still,**

Without question,  
Were relieved  
Deep in their hearts.

The summer sky,  
Where we once watched  
Enemy planes,  
Was now incredibly quiet,  
And red dragonflies  
Flitted gaily through the air.  
Japan, which had declared itself  
The “invincible land of the gods,”  
Lay in utter ruin.

Just before the war’s end,  
My family  
Was forced to evacuate our home,  
And we went to stay  
With relatives in Nishi Magome.  
However, this refuge —  
A house amid peaceful cultivated fields —  
Along with all our worldly possessions,  
Was struck by an incendiary bomb,  
And in an instant  
Consumed by flames.

With the consent of our relatives,  
My father built  
A tiny hut for us on the same lot,  
With a small sheet of scorched tin for the roof.  
We had no mosquito netting,  
So now instead of bombs,  
Squadrons of mosquitoes assaulted us.

On that August 15,  
His face suffused with emotion,  
My father,  
Murmured to himself,  
“My sons will return.”

“My eldest, Kiichi,  
My second, Masuo,  
My third, Kaizo,  
And my fourth, Kiyonobu,  
Are coming home.  
One from Burma  
Three from China —

**They're coming home.”  
He whispered these words,  
His breath catching painfully in his chest,  
As if he had awakened from a dream.**

**My diminutive mother  
Prepared dinner,  
As excited as a young girl:  
“How bright it is!  
Now we can keep the lights on!  
How lovely and bright!”**

**That summer  
My father was 57,  
My mother was 49,  
And I was 17.**

**August 15 signaled the moment  
When we emerged  
From a dark dungeon of gloom,  
And became once more  
A cheerful, happy family.**

**Although some of my siblings  
At first wept bitter tears  
At Japan's defeat,  
Deep inside  
Everyone was relieved.  
Their true feelings were  
“How wonderful!  
How wonderful that the war  
Is over at last!”**

**Eventually,  
We received the sad news  
That my eldest brother had died  
In the fighting in Burma.**

**Though most soldiers  
Returned quickly to their homes,  
A year passed, then another,  
Before finally,  
My three other older brothers,  
Narrowly escaping with their lives,  
Returned quietly,  
One after another.**

All three,  
Unable yet to embrace  
The new age of hope,  
Returned home dazed,  
Hiding their feelings  
Behind a mask of bright smiles.

“Thank goodness! Thank goodness!”  
Were the only words  
That parent and child  
Could find to articulate their joy and relief.

My family had been thrown  
into disarray,  
My family had been cast  
Into the depths of misery.  
But we were not alone —  
Countless families,  
Parents and children,  
Wept tears of unhappiness,  
Of hellish suffering, of bitter grief  
Because of the war.  
Each year,  
When August 15 comes around,  
My heart burns with outrage.

My youth,  
A period that should have been filled with hope  
And been the best time of my life,  
Had been despoiled and sacrificed,  
And my pure heart  
Cruelly trampled underfoot.  
Each August 15,  
My feelings of sorrow at that pain and loss  
Turn into boiling anger.

O you, the political leaders of Japan!  
On this date, August 15,  
Shouldn't you  
Prostrate yourselves at the people's feet  
And vow to give your lives  
To the cause of peace  
And the welfare of the people,  
And pledge to strive  
With selfless devotion  
For the happiness of the entire population?

Following Japan's defeat,  
I wondered what words of apology  
Those eminent scholars  
Who had sung the war's praises  
Would offer for their role  
In leading the country astray  
As they now bowed down low  
Before their young students.

At the sight of the high and mighty,  
Bedecked with the honors of rank and position,  
Who had extolled the war,  
Their backs now bent  
And shoulders drooping wearily,  
Bowing in apology  
Before the people of Japan,  
No doubt many ordinary citizens  
Sneered in scorn, thinking  
Those arrogant leaders had received  
Their just deserts.

We plainly saw  
The truth that  
Malicious, devilish forces  
Are ultimately doomed to ruin and defeat.  
And Japan's leaders  
Must never, ever forget  
The immeasurable pain and suffering —  
A dark prison of hellish torture —  
Inflicted on people in many parts of the world  
Due to Japan's aggressions,  
Due to its bombings.

Monarchs and aristocrats are people.  
Industrialists are people.  
Political leaders are people.  
And we, the ordinary citizens, are people.  
Thus there is absolutely no need  
For the whole  
To quake with fear,  
To be buffeted by storms of suffering,  
To have their precious bodies poisoned  
For the sake of the powerful few.

The 19th-century Ukrainian poet  
Lesya Ukrainka writes:  
“The predawn light,

While heralding the sun's arrival,  
Dispels the darkness of night.  
In that time  
When the sun has not yet risen —  
The predawn light blazes  
And illuminates the sky.  
O you who are awake,  
Arise!  
The time to fight is here!”

We  
Have risen!  
We have risen  
For kosen-rufu,  
For world peace!  
But  
Many people with distorted views  
Have insulted our fathers,  
Scorned our mothers,  
Who have fought so hard  
For the sake of truth and justice,  
And  
They have slandered and attacked  
Our relatives and friends.

Our predecessors in faith  
Undertook the grueling and arduous endeavor  
Of scaling the towering cliffs of kosen-rufu  
At the risk of their lives, day after day.  
We will fight  
To carry on the work of those noble pioneers!  
And we will win without fail!

Because that  
Is the path of humanity,  
The path of faith,  
The path of peace,  
The path of truth and justice.

O, August 15 —  
Never forget  
The pain and suffering of that day!  
Never forget  
The dark atmosphere that prevailed!  
Never forget  
The humiliating awakening to the folly  
Of our slavish obedience to militarism.

**O, August 15 —  
I want this to become a day  
When Japan  
Wins genuine praise  
From all its Asian neighbors,  
And genuine respect  
From all the people of the world.**

**August 15, 2001,  
Is a day of fresh departure  
For the youth of the new century.  
It is an eternal anniversary  
Of peace,  
A glorious anniversary  
Of the century of life.**

*August 14, 2001  
— In memory of the day  
I first met my mentor,  
Josei Toda, 54 years ago.*

*With palms pressed together in reverence.*