

DIALOGUE OF HOPE USE YOUR WORRIES AS A SPRINGBOARD

‘Your worries about your inferiority complex, your experiences of being picked on by others — all these things enable you to become a deeper, more sensitive person,’ says SGI President Ikeda. ‘Mr. Toda said, “Far stronger are those with a sense of inferiority! They are determined to win.”’

A discussion on inferiority complexes among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai junior high school division leaders Kenji Shiratsuchi (young men’s leader) and Keiko Maekawa (young women’s leader).

Kenji Shiratsuchi: We have had a tremendous response to this series. Not only junior high school students but their parents as well have flooded us with requests to discuss various topics.

Keiko Maekawa: Many students are reading the series with their parents.

SGI President Ikeda: That’s wonderful. But I hope our readers will remember that we can’t fully answer their questions and concerns without actually meeting and talking to them. In a dialogue featured as a newspaper article, we can only give the most general advice. There are also space limitations. So I’m sure there will be readers who won’t agree with everything we say, or who’ll have a different take on the topics we’re discussing. The best way for our readers to use this series, therefore, is as a point of reference for overcoming their own individual problems.

I will be happy if our discussions serve to stimulate thought, so that our readers might say to themselves: “Well that’s a new way of looking at it.” “That’s the advice for that person’s problem; I wonder what it would be for mine?”

I also hope that parents won’t push their children to read the series! This is a “Dialogue of Hope” to help our young readers deal with their problems. If parents try to force their children to read it, I’m afraid it will just become another one of their problems! We certainly don’t want that, do we?

Shiratsuchi: It is true that no matter how good a book is, if you feel you have to read it for some reason, suddenly it’s a chore and it’s not fun anymore.

Ikeda: Students don’t have to read the whole article, or to understand it all. They have their studying for school to do first, anyway.

Nevertheless, I intend to do everything I can to help our young people, our treasures of the future.

Shiratsuchi and Maekawa: Thank you so much.

The people you least expect often have a complex of some kind.

Shiratsuchi: Today’s question is from a student in his second year of junior high. His

problem is that he's short. He says, "I am the shortest boy in class, and the other kids call me 'shorty' and 'shrimp' and tease me." When he told me about this, I must have smiled, because he said: "Don't laugh! This is really serious to me. Try to understand how I feel."

Ikeda: Maybe adults don't think it is a serious problem, but he's right: for the person involved it is a very big thing. It really bothers him, and that's what's important here.

People's problems and anxieties—and not just those of junior high school students—often seem trivial to others. And in fact they may actually *be* trivial. But you'll find that, on the whole, people rarely worry or agonize over grand or lofty problems.

Therefore, it's not the content of the problem that matters, but the fact that a person is suffering over it. When we see a person in such a situation, it is important that we empathize with them and try to help them find a way to overcome their problem.

Complexes about physical appearance—thinking you're too short or too fat or have a terrible complexion or are unattractive—cause the most intense suffering and are the hardest to talk to others about.

So we have to commend the student you just mentioned for having the courage to confide in you and tell you what's bothering him!

How tall is he, by the way?

Shiratsuchi: He's 5 feet tall. Many of his family members and relatives are also short. He asked his mother why he was short, and she said that it ran in the family. "Everyone is unique and special," she said, "like the teaching of cherry, plum, peach and damson. Just be yourself." While he understands what she's saying intellectually, he still finds it hard to accept. ["Cherry, plum, peach, and damson" refers to the Buddhist principle that likens each individual to a beautiful flower that has its own mission and unique potential.]

Maekawa: I think I know how he feels. You know in your head that you can't do anything about it, but you still want things to be different.

In elementary school, I had really bad eyesight and had to wear glasses with thick corrective lenses. I loathed wearing them. They made me look hideous and I worried about what others thought when they saw me. In fact, I was teased a lot about wearing glasses. I didn't want to wear them, but the doctor insisted that I had to.

Now I'm glad I did: Today I have 20/20 vision.

Shiratsuchi: When I was in junior high, I had the reverse problem of the student who felt self-conscious about being short. I had a complex because I thought I was too tall. I felt really conspicuous and I hated it.

Ikeda: From the viewpoint of a person who is worried about being too short, that would seem like a great problem to have!

The point is, even the people you envy have something they feel inferior about. The people you least expect often have a complex of some kind. That's just the way it is. It's a fact of life.

When you succumb to a complex, you are likely to see everything about yourself in a negative light. When something doesn't work out for you, you tend to blame it on those things which make you feel inferior: "It's because I'm short" and so forth. When you adopt this negative attitude, you close your heart to the wonderful potential you possess and

negate your good points as well, which only insures that things keep going from bad to worse in your life.

Shiratsuchi: It's a vicious circle, isn't it?

Ikeda: When your feelings of inferiority are really strong, you think everyone is laughing at you. The truth is that people are not nearly as interested in you as you imagine.

Maekawa: Often it's a case of us being overly self-conscious, right?

Ikeda: Self-consciousness is so much a part of being young that it probably doesn't do any good to say, "Don't be self-conscious." The important thing is to accept the fact that you are self-conscious, that you have a complex, but not let those feelings of inferiority beat you. You can use those feelings as a springboard to maximize your strong points.

If you feel self-conscious about being short, then just go ahead and feel as self-conscious as you want! But it's silly to think that being short means you're worthless or no good. You can say to yourself: "I may be short, but I'm going to have the biggest heart possible!" "I may be short, but I am going to be the best student in my school!" "I know how it feels to be teased, so I will never tease anyone!" "I'm going to be a person who is kind and considerate!"

These are some of the ways you can use your complex as a spur to growth and self-improvement. You mustn't let it defeat you. That's the key.

Put your most cherished wishes and desires into your daimoku – without pretense.

Ikeda: This way you can change something negative into something positive. This is what *Soka* stands for—value creation. It may be a little difficult to understand, but this is what it's all about.

It is such a waste to let yourself be defeated by your complex, to let it cause you to hate yourself and envy others and to lead a glum, downcast existence. Being jealous of others doesn't get you anywhere. It just makes you feel bad about yourself.

After all, we can count other people's money forever, but it won't increase our own bank account, will it? For that reason, you mustn't let feelings of inferiority and jealousy defeat you or limit you.

Many of those who make fun of others or lord it over others have actually been defeated by their own feelings of inferiority. They lack self-confidence, so they look down on others in order to feel some small sense of superiority. It's really pitiful when you think about it.

Shiratsuchi: The student with the complex about his height said to me that he chants to the Gohonzon every day to keep growing. He wants to know if his prayers are selfish.

Ikeda: Most prayers *are* selfish! You can chant for whatever you like. You can put your most cherished wishes and desires into your daimoku, free of any pretense, in a way that is true to your own heart. Though you may not get results immediately, your daimoku will steadily move you in the right direction, and a horizon of boundless hope will open up for you without fail. You also have to make efforts, be resourceful and take practical measures

to make your prayers come true.

Come to think of it, Napoleon used to be called “shorty,” too.

Maekawa: Napoleon, the great general and leader?!

Ikeda: The young Napoleon was on his way to Italy as commander in chief of the French forces. The previous commanders in chief had always been tall men of imposing stature and appearance, but Napoleon was short, thin, and pale. Napoleon’s four divisional commanders looked down on him, calling him “the Corsican midget” behind his back, and they were very unhappy about serving under him.

Napoleon summoned his four commanders. They arrived in his chamber, but they refused to remove their hats in his presence, a customary sign of respect. They were showing their scorn for him.

But when they saw the look in Napoleon’s eye, none of them could move. It was as if his sharp gaze pierced them.

When Napoleon was satisfied that he had put his generals in their place, he removed his hat. The four generals rushed to remove theirs as quickly as they could.

Then Napoleon put on his hat again. But the four commanders didn’t have the nerve to put theirs on again.

Napoleon then told his generals his brilliant battle plan, and they were very impressed. “The midget trampled all over us!” they said as they left Napoleon’s chamber.

Maekawa: Their attitude had completely changed!

Ikeda: Great individuals appear taller than they are.

Napoleon was short for a general, it’s true. Everyone around him was tall and imposing. But he used his complex as a driving force to live with strength and fortitude. “I won’t let those tall guys beat me!” he said to himself.

Please don’t become the kind of weak, easily influenced person who gets upset or depressed every time someone makes fun of him or her.

Shiratsuchi: I guess the message is, don’t let your complex be the winner.

Ikeda: That’s right. A complex, if you win over it, can become a means for forging strength and confidence. It can become a plus for you. Your worries about your complex, your experiences of being picked on by others — all these things enable you to become a deeper, more sensitive person; they help you understand others’ feelings. Those who’ve never had a complex can’t appreciate the sensitivity of people’s hearts. Mr. Toda said, “Far stronger are those with a sense of inferiority! They are determined to win.”

You might know the Japanese children’s story of *The One-inch Boy*. He wanted to be big. He wanted to be strong. He wanted to impress the princess.

When the demon attacked the princess, the one-inch boy fought with all his might, holding off the demon with his sword made from a needle and protecting the princess. He was ready to defend her to the death.

Shiratsuchi: But the demon just picked him up and swallowed him.

Ikeda: But still the one-inch boy didn't give up. He ran around the demon's stomach, sticking him with his needle.

Shiratsuchi: The demon started screaming in pain, spat the one-inch boy out, and ran away in terror.

Ikeda: And the demon left behind his famous "magic mallet." The mallet made wishes come true. The princess asked the one-inch boy what his wish was and swung the mallet for him. Having wished to be big, the one-inch boy immediately grew to full size. He and the princess later married.

Now let's ask ourselves a few questions. What does the demon symbolize? How about the magic mallet? And who is the one-inch boy?

Maekawa: Well, he's certainly not just a short person.

Ikeda: That's right. I think he stands for a person bothered by a sense of inferiority, a person who doesn't think very highly of himself. The demon represents the harsh reality bearing down on the person, or perhaps the person's feeling of inferiority itself.

Maekawa: That means that the one-inch boy's battle against the demon is his conquest of his own feeling of inferiority!

Ikeda: Some psychologists have suggested as much.

The one-inch boy didn't just sit there wallowing in self-pity, he fought the demon with all his might—and as soon as he did that, the demon ran away, and the one-inch boy's wish to be big came true.

The magic mallet is representative of one's own strength of will, the determination not to give up, to go on fighting. If you use that force of will, you can achieve anything. You can become a big, big person.

To tell the truth, it's actually quite a luxury to have time to compare yourself to others and suffer feelings of inferiority or superiority. In a life and death situation, you don't have time for any of that. You just have to put all of your energy into surviving. At such times, a person's spirit, a person's life, brings forth incredible power.

Shiratsuchi: Life force is the magic mallet, then.

Ikeda: You all have your own magic mallet. You're the one who decides if you're going to use it or not.

If you have the time and energy to sit around fretting and worrying about your supposed faults, it would be far better to spend that time and energy doing things you *can* do or are good at—in other words, working on realizing your full potential.

Those who can do that are the true victors. They won't have feelings of inferiority or superiority. They won't envy others or look down on them. They will be warm and friendly to everyone they come into contact with. They are able to live a life as clear and bright as the blue skies.