

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S SPEECH MARCH 27 SPEECH—PART 1 ONE VICTORY AFTER ANOTHER

‘Winning is fun,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Winning brings happiness. In contrast, losing is sad. Everyone feels bad and disappointed. Buddhism is a struggle to win. Therefore, let us boldly and joyfully create a history of successive victories.’

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 4th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, March 27.

Congratulations on this Headquarters Leaders Meeting! Winter is over, and the bright season of cherry blossoms is here again! Thank you for attending this meeting today. A warm welcome to our visiting SGI members from a total of 15 countries.

Congratulations also to the Kansai Soka High School baseball team on their first victory today in the national invitational high school baseball tournament, held at the Koshien Stadium in Kansai. Thank you to the team for a fantastic effort! I watched the game on television and was impressed by the tenacity and fighting spirit of our Soka students.

To have the courage to always keep pressing forward and be utterly committed to winning. To persevere right to the end, even in a pinch, when the odds are stacked against you. To have the invincible spirit to press forward further still. When you give your all, victory is exhilarating.

How a team fares in a game is important, but even more so are how the team members have been trained, how they play the game. As a leader, this is what always interests me. I sensed that Kansai Soka manager Toshikazu Yoneda has made these basics an integral part of his team's training.

The quintessence of Buddhism lies in being swayed by nothing.

Sugamo, where this meeting is being held, is a place that I often used to visit in my youth. I would go to a cemetery not far from this Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium, actually. In those days, Josei Toda's office was in the Ichigaya area of Tokyo, and whenever I had time I would come here to Sugamo. I would find a spot in the cemetery, sit down on some sheets of newspaper and avidly read works of world literature.

On the train was also a good place for reading, but often just as you would get to a good part in the book, you would arrive at your station. Or the train would get really packed and it would be impossible to continue reading!

Also, in those days, Mr. Toda's business was foundering and swamped in debt. I worked hard but had no money. Going to a coffee shop was a luxury I could ill afford. The cemetery, however, was quiet, and it was free! It was an ideal place for reading.

Since all around Japan right now the cherry trees are in full bloom, I want to start by talking about a memorable book I read in my youth, Anton Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov is one of Russia's leading writers and playwrights, and *The Cherry Orchard* is the last play that he wrote. It was completed in 1903, the same year that first Soka Gakkai president Tsu-nesaburo Makiguchi published his work *The Geography of Human Life*.

The play is set in Russia in the period following the 1861 emancipation of the serfs and before the Russian revolution. The old powers are on the wane, and new powers are on the rise.

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The cherry orchard of the play's title is the beautiful backdrop against which the story unfolds. Chekhov's message in this work is that life should be beautiful and that we should work unceasingly for this goal.

Allow me to briefly outline the story. It is May in Russia, a time when the cherry blossoms are in bloom. An impoverished landowner, Madame Liubov Andryeevna Ranyevskaia, returns from Paris to her home and a cherry orchard that has been in her family for generations. Once rich and prosperous, Liubov Andryeevna is now heavily in debt.

Yermolai Lopakhin, a businessman whose family had formerly been serfs, urges her to divide the cherry orchard into plots that could be leased out for summer residences. Although Liubov Andryeevna desperately wants to hold on to her orchard, neither she nor her brother come to grips with the changing times, and they ultimately fail to find a way out of their predicament. The orchard is auctioned off and bought by Lopakhin.

Having lost possession of the beautiful cherry orchard that has held so many happy memories for her since childhood, Liubov Andryeevna makes the heart-wrenching decision to return to Paris. Her daughter, Ania, on the other hand, is glad that at last they can make a break with the past and start afresh. She encourages her mother, "We'll plant a new orchard, even more splendid than this one..." Joining hands with a youthful companion, she sets out toward a new era and a new life, filled with bright hope.

The play's ending might not exactly be described as a happy one. The future of each of the characters is left up in the air. For my part, however, I can hear Chekhov's words of encouragement echo forth, as though saying: "When spring comes, the cherries will bloom. Somewhere they will bloom. Never lose hope. Patiently wait for spring. Triumph and adorn your life with victory without fail!"

Life is full of vicissitudes. The times are constantly changing. The heart of life and the quintessence of Buddhism lie in how we stay ahead of these changes and win, rather than being swayed by them.

We have an SGI chapter in Russia. Our members there are carrying out their activities in high spirits.

In the orchard of Buddhism, all will lead long, healthy lives.

In my youth, almost every time I met Mr. Toda he would ask: "What book are you reading now? What does it say?" And wouldn't you know it, whenever I thought, "He's not going to ask anything so detailed," he would do exactly that! Second Soka Gakkai president Toda was an incredibly strict taskmaster. He was a genius. He was a first-rate world intellect—I still believe that.

The Cherry Orchard is a beautiful story. I was so moved by it that I remember reading it two or three times over.

Chekhov has one of his youthful characters, a student named Trofimov, say, "Humanity is advancing towards the highest truth, the greatest happiness that it is possible to achieve on earth, and I am in the van!" These words encapsulate the author's powerful sentiments on this subject.

I quoted this passage during a conversation I had in April 1991 with then Soviet president Mikhail Gorbachev at the State Guest House in Tokyo, on what was the first-ever visit to Japan by a Soviet head of state. I said to him, "The struggle that you are waging is the same as the struggle of this youth." I can still remember the Soviet leader nodding and voicing his understanding.

Chekhov's works are filled with profound insights. They reflect a highly perceptive view

of society and human beings. Let me give you some examples: He writes, “But how many people there are...who exist to no purpose whatever!” A life without a sense of purpose is sad and empty, pitiful.

And he asserts, “Man must work by the sweat of his brow whatever his class, and that should make up the whole meaning and purpose of his life and happiness and contentment.” Just leading an idle life of pleasure is not happiness. Human beings should work, make effort. This is where happiness and joy are found. This spirit exemplifies the Soka Gakkai youth division. The brilliantly blooming cherry orchard we are cultivating — it is the orchard of Soka, the orchard of peace and happiness, the orchard of mission. The orchard of Buddhism is an orchard filled with lovely, fragrant blossoms, where all lead long, healthy lives.

Chekhov also says: “But you can rest assured...that better times will come. ... a new life will dawn one day, and justice will triumph.” A new age will definitely come! Justice will definitely triumph! Let us advance energetically with this unswerving conviction.

New history begins from new places, new foundations and the enthusiasm of new capable people.

To the members of Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama prefectures: My sincerest congratulations to you on holding your first general meetings of the 21st century!

Kanagawa has broken new records by achieving, over a two-month period, a phenomenal increase of 50,000 subscriptions for the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper. I salute you on this unprecedented achievement! We are also now entering the Age of Saitama and the Century of Chiba. All three prefectures are advancing forward powerfully.

It was 750 years ago that the brilliant sun of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism rose from Chiba. In the more recent past, 50 years ago this year, the remarkable propagation efforts of the Kanagawa members adorned the first issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*. Mr. Toda himself came up with the headline, “The Flame Burns High in Tsurumi.” [The first issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, then a two-page broadsheet, was published on April 20, 1951. The second page featured the dynamic propagation activities of Tsurumi Chapter in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture.]

And after Mr. Toda passed away, it was the youth of Saitama who strongly called on the Soka Gakkai’s top executive of the day to hasten the efforts to appoint me to the position of president.

New history begins from new places, from new foundations. It begins from the enthusiasm of new capable people. It begins from the energy and vigor of one person. It begins with each of us.

I proclaim that now the driving force for fresh victory in the 21st century is Kanagawa, Chiba and Saitama.

Winning is fun. Winning brings happiness. In contrast, losing is sad. Everyone feels bad and disappointed. Buddhism is a struggle to win. Therefore, let us boldly and joyfully create a history of successive victories.

Incidentally, today I received a pair of umpire whistles as a gift for my wife and myself from some Tokyo members. [President Ikeda proceeds to blow the whistles as a demonstration.] Let us advance to victory with the sound of these whistles as our starting signal!

The protagonists in history are always the people.

Today, we have a number of my beloved fellow SGI members from Italy, birthplace of the Renaissance, with us. Thank you for traveling so far.

During World War II, the authoritarian forces of fascism ran roughshod over Italy. In response, courageous citizens fought back by forming a partisan resistance movement, whose efforts helped pave the way to victory over the fascists.

The people are the protagonists.

The partisans were determined not to rely on others but to wage their battle themselves. The city of Varallo in northern Italy was a rallying point for the anti-fascist liberation movement. The city is located near the Swiss border in an area with many beautiful lakes. Here, too, in this place of illustrious history, SGI members are carrying out activities. I was deeply honored to be named an honorary citizen of this city of heroes, Varallo, on March 3. I received this award as your representative.

Also, this morning, my wife and I had the privilege to be named honorary citizens by the Federated States of Micronesia, a Pacific paradise. I asked a representative to attend the presentation and accept the honors on our behalf. I was told that it was held with great ceremony at the presidential offices, with the Micronesian president in attendance.

An eminent Japanese scholar once pointed out that cities put their reputations on the line to bestow honorary citizenships on individuals who will serve as a model for their citizens, and he congratulated me on receiving honors of such significance. Each award is profoundly meaningful.

These honors that I receive from around the world are all due to you, my fellow members. You are setting a wonderful example of good citizenship in your communities, working for the sake of people's happiness and striving to contribute to a better society and a bright future. Your efforts have borne fruit in the form of the many kudos we of the SGI are receiving today. I want to express my deepest appreciation to each of you.

The 'great power of faith' is a mighty engine.

In a famous passage that the Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo, one of our early predecessors in the Kanagawa region, he says, "Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851). Please strive hard as a member of society in your own sphere of activities, in your workplace and your community, always basing yourself on faith, and become the kind of person of whom others speak with admiration and praise. I want each of you to become a person who is respected and trusted by all. This is kosen-rufu.

Causing people trouble and engaging in duplicity, on the other hand, degrades Buddhism and constitutes slander of the Law.

The Daishonin also urges, "Bring forth the great power of faith, and be spoken of by all the people of Kamakura, both high and low, or by all the people of Japan, as 'Shijo Kingo, Shijo Kingo of the Lotus school!'" (WND, 319). I particularly hope that you, our Kamakura members, will be proud of the fact that you are present-day Shijo Kingos and strive to develop yourselves into people of outstanding caliber.

The "great power of faith" of which the Daishonin speaks is like a mighty engine. With it, we can speed powerfully along the highway of life. Since we have been born in this world, we may as well set our sights on a grand objective and enjoy ourselves as we

confidently, serenely climb the mountain of glorious personal achievement. If we are weak, life is misery. We should make our way with this pride and resolve: “I am the Soka Gakkai. No matter what anyone says, I am a representative of this great organization.”

We are who we are. Our life is our own. It is important that we discard a cowardly, animalistic way of life—where we are always worried about what others say or do, about how we might appear to others—and instead live with confidence and conviction. If people say rude or unkind things to you about your practice, just go ahead and say: “What’s wrong with my practicing this Buddhism? Is it banned by the constitution?” [Laughter.] Or you could try saying: “The Soka Gakkai has helped a huge number of people. What have *you* done?” [Laughter.]

Please live with strength and resilience. You miss out on so much in life if you are not strong. President Toda often used to say, “Advance confidently!” This is faith. There is nothing stronger than this. Faith is the most powerful force there is.

The Daishonin was persecuted. All people who strive to achieve great things suffer this fate. Those who are fawned upon and flattered from an early age tend to lack inner substance and can be easily crushed. Those who dedicate their lives to following the path of justice and the path of principle are ultimately the most admirable of all.

Hence the Daishonin says: “One should regard meeting obstacles as true peace and comfort” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). “What greater joy could there be?” (WND, 767). “Nichiren’s disciples cannot accomplish anything if they are cowardly” (WND, 481).

The Daishonin is telling us: “Obstacles are to be expected! Rejoice when you encounter them! Rejoice when you meet with criticism and attack! You must not be cowardly!”

The Soka Gakkai now is indisputably the “pillar of Japan.” And the more than 160 honorary citizenships I have received attest to the immense trust we enjoy around the world. This is living proof of the principle that Buddhism is manifested in society.

There are deep expectations for our SGI movement as a world religion of the 21st century. I proclaim, “The Soka Gakkai has won around the world!” Please advance with great confidence.

Being here with Kanagawa members today brings back a fond memory I have of watching the Yokohama’s annual Port Festival parade from a window in the Kanagawa Culture Center with a handful of local members. It was in May 1979, shortly after stepping down as Soka Gakkai president.

This year’s parade is being held on May 3. I am told that our delightful emissaries of peace, the Fife and Drum Corps, will be performing. Their participation is a symbol of the Soka Gakkai’s triumph.

To be continued in the May 11 issue.