

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JUNE 6 SPEECH FOLLOWING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF DEWEY AND MAKIGUCHI

‘Whatever challenges you may face,’ SGI President Ikeda says, ‘please proceed with composure and dauntless conviction — following the examples of John Dewey and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi!’

SGI President Ikeda’s acceptance speech upon receiving a commendation from the Center for Dewey Studies of Southern Illinois University at Carbondale. The ceremony was held at the Soka International Friendship Hall in Sendagaya, Tokyo, on June 6.

I want to thank our women’s division members from throughout the Kanto Region for traveling such long distances in this rainy weather to join us today. My thanks also to the student division members.

In the midst of the struggle for women’s suffrage in the United States in the early 20th century, activists held a parade down Fifth Avenue in New York City. They marched cheerfully and energetically, calling out for the right of women to participate in government.

Among the many women in the parade was a tall older man carrying a placard, marching enthusiastically along with the rest. The placard said: “Men Can Vote! Why Can’t I?” People lining the street laughed and applauded at the humorous sight of a man carrying a placard obviously designed for a woman. The man had picked up the placard without stopping to look at what it said.

This unaffected, cheerful champion of human rights was none other than the great American philosopher and educator, John Dewey.

As our distinguished guest, Director of the Center for Dewey Studies Larry Hickman, has pointed out, John Dewey and Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi have much in common. One important point of resemblance that deserves special attention is how both men were dedicated to raising the curtain on an age of women. They both conferred closely with women and joined them in their struggles.

Most esteemed Dr. Hickman, honored guests and fellow members: On this auspicious day, the 130th anniversary of Makiguchi’s birth, I humbly accept on behalf of my illustrious predecessor the honor that has been conferred on me by the Center for Dewey Studies. As the third Soka Gakkai president, nothing could make me happier. Thank you very, very much.

**The more people are deceived by lies,
the more rampant the abuses of authority become.**

Assembled today are representatives of the Kanto women’s division, the Soka Gakkai’s strongest alliance for peace. To all our members from Saitama, Chiba, Ibaraki, Gumma, and Tochigi prefectures [which comprise the Soka Gakkai’s Kanto Region], thank you for your tremendous efforts. I deeply appreciate everything you are doing.

The victory of Kanto will determine the victory of Japan. That is the age we have now entered.

At the same time, in all regions across Japan, our members are advancing

enthusiastically, determined to realize victory in our endeavors.

Congratulations, too, to the young men and women of the student division who are here today—representing students from Soka University and 127 other colleges and universities throughout Japan—on this commemorative meeting celebrating the division's establishment [on June 30, 1957]! I am confident that in the future, great political leaders, Nobel Prize-winning scholars and top leaders in all fields will emerge from your ranks.

I will leave a record for posterity of the names of all the noble Kanto women's division and student division members in attendance at this historic gathering.

Recently, my wife and Yoshiko Hirakawa, Kanto women's division leader, proposed making this profoundly meaningful day, June 6—Makiguchi's birthday—Kanto Women's Division Day. This proposal has now been adopted, and I want to take this opportunity to announce it to you all. Congratulations, Kanto women's division members! My dearest wish is that each of you, without a single exception, will become happy.

The Buddhist scriptures tell us that the number six represents perfect endowment (see *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 249–50, 365). I pray that the lives of our Kanto women's division members will be fully endowed with benefit, good fortune, wisdom, brilliance, strength, health, longevity, harmony and happiness.

My wife and I will keep chanting strongly that, from the ranks of the Kanto women's division and from among the successors whom they raise, many incredibly talented, capable individuals—Tsunesaburo Makiguchis of the 21st century—will appear and take their place on the world stage.

Some 80 years ago, John Dewey, a model of global citizenship, visited Japan and China [from 1919–21]. The American educator expressed strong indignation at the arrogance with which Japan treated its neighbor China and at the way it attempted to conceal that iniquity with lies and deception.

Dewey was quick to recognize deception and stern in his reaction to it. That is only right.

The more people there are who are deceived and led astray by treacherous lies, the more rampant the abuses of authority become. Those in power then manipulate the blindfolded masses and defame decent, upright individuals by means of false accusations inspired by jealousy. And then begins the reckless dash toward nationalism that tramples on friendly ties with other nations.

That is why malicious lies and deceptions must never be left unchallenged. This is history's lesson to us. We must be vigilant in this regard in Japan today.

During Dewey's visit to Japan, the Japanese government wanted to bestow a decoration on him, but he firmly rejected the proposal, saying that the system of conferring those awards was undemocratic. This is a fact that is on record.

Incurring slander and abuse in spreading the Law is the highest honor.

Like Makiguchi, Dewey did not write an autobiography. However, Dewey's spiritual legacy is being perpetuated and disseminated worldwide through the energetic efforts of the Center for Dewey Studies and its director, Dr. Hickman. Let us give Dr. Hickman, who has pursued the most noble human path of a spiritual successor, a magnificent "decoration of the heart"—a sincere round of applause that symbolizes the profound trust and respect of the people.

Dewey and Makiguchi were both dedicated educators whose lives were guided by a philosophy of action. Burning with principle and courage, always striving to create something of value toward a better society, they fostered the growth of young people, heirs

to the future, in a vital, free and creative manner.

In the fight against political corruption, Dewey participated in political campaigns. To strengthen democracy, it is crucial that citizens and students keep a close watch on government and make their voices heard.

Dewey also fought head-on against dictators of the likes of Hitler and Stalin—and, indeed, against any authoritarian force, whether of the right or left, that threatened democracy. He became the target of unjust personal attacks because of this. However, persecution is an honor for those who are fighting for what is right.

In the realm of Buddhism, incurring slander and abuse as a result of our efforts to spread the Law is the highest honor. It is actual proof that we will attain Buddhahood. Nichiren Daishonin teaches that we must never fear such persecution.

The most important value for Dewey, which he dedicated his life to defending, was democracy. In his view, democracy was not merely a political system. It was something that extended much further—it was a way of life.

Our discussion meetings are strongholds of ‘creative democracy.’

To Dewey, democracy meant that people should not discriminate against others or be discriminated against because of their color, birth, religious beliefs or other personal beliefs. It meant each individual believing in the possibilities of human nature and, based on close exchange and dialogue, leading lives of mutual growth and self-improvement. It meant each individual becoming strong and wise, resolutely opposing the enemies of democracy, and triumphing in that struggle. It meant everyone contributing and working continuously to create a more humane world.

Dewey called this “creative democracy.”

What did Dewey regard as the strongholds of this living democracy? They were not the parliaments of power or the authoritarian cathedrals of organized religion. Instead, they were the street corners where neighbors gathered and discussed events, the living rooms of houses and apartments where friends and family freely conversed with one another. This was the conclusion of one of the world’s great educators.

Soka Gakkai discussion meetings, which are held in every town and city throughout the land, are precisely this. The Soka Gakkai is leading the way in championing the true principles of democracy in Japan.

During World War II, Makiguchi was constantly tailed by Japan’s infamous “thought police”—the Special Higher Police—and though they ordered him to stop his activities time and again, he courageously continued to engage in a dialogue for the sake of peace and justice. He also traveled energetically throughout the Kanto area.

When my wife was a child, Makiguchi attended a discussion meeting at her home [in Tokyo]. She is a witness of his tireless efforts. His lion’s roar is indelibly engraved in her life.

I declare proudly together with all of you that our indomitable alliance of humanity, which originates from our noble predecessor Makiguchi, truly represents the practical application of Dewey’s creative democracy.

Women have great power to solve problems that others have given up on.

Dewey had profound respect for the well-known American social and peace activist Jane Addams. They worked together for various causes, and she was a source of immense

inspiration to him.

A native of Illinois, the location of the Center for Dewey Studies, Addams was the first American woman to win a Nobel Prize [the Nobel Peace Prize, in 1931]. She was a great American woman who fought all her life for humanitarian causes and peace.

Everyone today praises the members of the Kanto women's division as the "great women" of the Soka Gakkai. Kanto shines with the spirit of valiant struggle. Keep up the good work, Kanto members!

Addams engaged in grassroots work to help the poorest and most disadvantaged in society. Fighting against self-serving politicians, she helped win the struggle for women's suffrage. She brought about tremendous reforms that benefited the lives of many ordinary people, solving problems that others had given up on as hopeless.

Women have great power.

Addams said [referring to one of the initiatives she launched with her colleagues]: "The undertaking 'marched,' as the French say, from the very first, and always on its own feet. Although there were difficulties, none of them proved insurmountable."

"On its own feet"—this is a perfect description of all of you, who are "marching" energetically for peace, without any thought of personal reward or praise.

Addams also said that however long and difficult the path to establishing justice might be, justice will only be secured if we keep working for it ceaselessly. This has much in common with the untiring spirit of "brave and vigorous exertion" expounded in Buddhism.

Fundamental to victory in life is having patience and perseverance.

In life, struggles and challenges lead to growth—they add zest to life. When we stop challenging ourselves, we stop growing. Stagnation sets in. Life feels empty and meaningless. Those who engage in Soka Gakkai activities are positive and filled with life.

As Dr. Hickman says, a happy person is one who is always growing. In other words, not advancing is regressing. The important thing is to win in the task or challenge at hand—to win without fail.

Life means struggle. Animals, plants and all living things are engaged in an earnest struggle to live and survive.

Democracy, too, is something that is won through continuous struggle. Through our determined efforts to ensure that democracy triumphs, we can create a solid cause for the eternal growth, victory and prosperity of ourselves, our families and all with whom we have a profound connection.

When he was 80, Dewey said, "My philosophy of life is based essentially on the single word patience." Fundamental to victory in life is patience. No one can compare to a person who has patience.

The Soka Gakkai has encountered countless challenges and difficulties over the years, but it has overcome them all. None of the intrigues launched against us by the authorities has been able to bring us down. The Soka Gakkai has triumphed through patience and perseverance.

May all of you, too, live your lives with tenacity and patience. Whatever challenges you may face, please proceed with composure and dauntless conviction—following the examples of Dewey and Makiguchi!

Walking the path of the disciple makes all the difference in our lives.

There are many paths in life. There are paths leading to decadence and corruption, and

paths leading to unhappiness and misery. May you, my friends, walk the path of truth and justice, the path leading to growth and fulfillment. Growth and fulfillment are to be found in carrying out Soka Gakkai activities.

May you also walk the path of dialogue and hope. Please meet and interact with all kinds of people. As our personal network of dialogue expands, so does our state of life and our happiness. Hope and happiness are found in the midst of this noble activity. Hope is something we create for ourselves.

And may you always walk the disciple's path. The Soka Gakkai is strong and has achieved the development it has today because the mentor-disciple relationship underpins it. Whether or not we have this relationship makes all the difference in our lives.

Let us advance together cheerfully on the path leading to the triumph of democracy!

The Soka Gakkai is bright and positive—that is why it attracts so many people. It is filled with joy—that is why it has grown and developed! It is here that the path of kosen-rufu, of world peace, unfolds.

I close my speech with the earnest prayer that you will continue to advance together joyfully and harmoniously with friends who share our commitment to justice and truth, forging strong bonds of unity and trust.

Thank you so much.