

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MAY 22 MESSAGE STRONG PRAYER AND DETERMINATION CAN CHANGE EVERYTHING

'A leader's strong prayer and determination will infuse everyone's lives,' SGI President Ikeda writes to this leaders conference. 'Please do your utmost to help our fellow members practice with boundless confidence in the justice and eternal victory of our movement.'

SGI President Ikeda's message to a nationwide prefecture leaders conference, held at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, Shinanomachi, Tokyo, May 22.

My sincere thanks to everyone for attending this nationwide prefecture leaders conference.

Today, I will be meeting with President Olusegun Obasanjo of the Federal Republic of Nigeria at the Akasaka State Guesthouse in central Tokyo. President Obasanjo is a champion of democracy who has long struggled for his convictions. Not even three years in prison or a death sentence could deter him. This will be our fourth meeting.

President Obasanjo has expressed deep understanding for the SGI's movement for peace, culture and education. He has also identified the spirit of Buddhism as rejecting servility and oppression, and observed that Buddhism has the power to elevate humanity.

Leaders must have a clear focus and their own goals.

President Obasanjo, who has steadfastly fought for democratization while undergoing repeated tribulations, has argued that leaders must have a clear focus and their own goals. Otherwise, they will be readily swayed by others and pulled off course.

I hope that all of you, as kosen-rufu leaders, will establish clear objectives and advance with indomitable courage. If you wage a half-hearted struggle, you will not be able to achieve anything. We have to take resolute action and realize complete, unequivocal victory.

President Obasanjo has told me that he wants to give the people of his country self-confidence. He wants to restore their faith in themselves, their government and their country.

A leader's strong prayer and determination will infuse everyone's lives. Please do your utmost to help our fellow members practice with boundless confidence in the justice and eternal victory of our movement.

Carelessness is a great enemy in our Buddhist practice.

Nichiren Daishonin prayed with all his heart for the peace and safety of his disciples. And he repeatedly reminded them to be as careful as possible in conducting their daily lives.

He admonishes Shijo Kingo: "When returning home [from work late at night], you must exercise prudent caution. For that is when your enemies will seize the opportunity to attack you" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1176).

As SGI Deputy President Einosuke Akiya mentioned at the 6th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, I hope members of the young women's division and women's division, in particular, will be careful to avoid returning home late at night.

The Daishonin says, "The protection of the gods depends on the strength of one's faith" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 953). If we let down our guard, then even the Buddhist gods will desert us.

Carelessness is a great enemy. We must avoid carelessness at any cost.

We live in an evil world defiled by the five impurities. While reminding one another to be careful, while watching out for one another, let us continue advancing based on the principles that faith means not causing accidents, and that suffering no accidents is itself victory.

In the 21st century, women will finally gain the supreme respect they deserve.

The 21st century will be the Century of Women. A most interesting article on this point appeared in the *Haerbin Daily*, a newspaper in China, Japan's neighbor to the west. The article notes that in Chinese, the feminine pronoun *she (ta)* was only coined in the 20th century. By comparison, it explains, the corresponding English pronoun has been in use since the 12th century.

Even the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen* (1789), the manifesto of the French Revolution, used the term *man* in the gender-specific sense. In other words, the rights of women were excluded. And it is well known how a woman who protested this discriminatory treatment was executed. [In 1791, in protest against this declaration, Olympe de Gouges announced a Declaration of the Rights of Women and Female Citizens. Branded an anti-revolutionary, she was sent to the gallows in 1793.]

In the 21st century, women will finally gain the supreme respect they deserve as women and as human beings. It will be an age when the power of women is manifested to the utmost.

The newspaper article further predicts: "The 21st century will be an 'age of knowledge economics.' It will not be a time when people compete through 'hard power,' as they have in the industrial age to date. It will be a time when people compete in such 'soft power' areas as drawing up plans and expanding their scope, providing services, working together in harmony, promoting exchange and pooling people's strengths.

"In other words, it will be an age when the sensitivity, subtlety, flexibility, tenacity, mercy, attentiveness and intuition — qualities that women possess in abundance — will be highly prized and utilized to the fullest."

Whether we are talking about a country, a company or an organization, it is those bodies where the talents and abilities of women are given full, free rein that will thrive. This is a global current.

The SGI has taken the lead in this movement. And I want to emphasize that we must continue to do so in the future.

The beautiful country Luxembourg is known as "the green heart of Europe" and as a "green diamond." Under the leadership of a female central figure, the path of kosen-rufu in Luxembourg has splendidly developed.

I visited Luxembourg in June 1991. At that time, I oversaw the formation of what was then referred to as the world's smallest chapter.

Immediately after the ceremony marking the chapter's inauguration, a great rainbow appeared in the sky. It was as though the Buddhist gods were celebrating the event. I immediately gave the chapter the nickname Rainbow Chapter.

The leader of Rainbow Chapter was Chizuko Asanuma Breden. A native of Tokyo, she determined to play an active part in world kosen-rufu while still in the high school division. I will never forget how she heroically threw herself into activities with her newborn child in arm.

At the time of the chapter's formation, her husband, John Breden, was a high school math teacher. While he is not himself an SGI member, he has profound understanding for his wife's faith and warmly supports her activities. Out of appreciation, I asked him to become an advisor to the chapter and to protect his wife and the members.

In the 10 years since, our friends in Luxembourg have steadfastly, sincerely and tenaciously advanced along the path of kosen-rufu. My wife and I have continued to send them our earnest daimoku.

During this interval, the Luxembourg membership has increased fourfold, and the organization has won remarkable trust in society. I recently heard the wonderful news that the SGI organization in Luxembourg has gained legal status as a non-profit corporation. The announcement was carried in the April 28 issue of the country's official gazette.

Now that SGI-Luxembourg has been officially incorporated, it has been reorganized as a headquarters. Mrs. Breden has assumed the post of general director of the organization, as well as headquarters leader. The two key people supporting her are also women. Their success is a delightful symbol of the Century of Women.

At present, Mr. Breden is serving in the post of deputy mayor of Luxembourg, the capital. He also graciously accepted appointment as an honorary headquarters leader. I heartily applaud their achievements. Long live the Rainbow Family!

Mrs. Breden takes pride in having her roots in Tokyo, the prime point of kosen-rufu. In a message, she writes: "I am praying for Tokyo's total victory. Please extend a great rainbow of victory over Tokyo. And please also convey my warmest regards to all members of the women's and young women's divisions in Tokyo and throughout Japan."

It is an infinite source of pride to be a member of this remarkable organization.

At present, I am conducting a dialogue for eventual publication with the American futurist and activist Hazel Henderson. We are planning a wide-ranging discussion on a number of themes that will become a focus of the 21st century, including the environment, the energy problem, creating a solidarity of global citizens, women's activities and peace, culture and education.

In the exchange, which we have only just begun, Dr. Henderson states that the most important lesson of the civil rights movement was persistence in reaching out to people—even powerful politicians and business leaders—appealing to the divine, or higher self, within each individual. Dr. Henderson continues: "This is what I admire about you and about members of the SGI I have met around the world. They are the best, most organized, most persistent group of people. I know lots of groups of people who are spiritually motivated who cannot make anything happen in the world. But it impresses me a great deal that SGI people actually make things happen, such as their great work for peace and to ban nuclear weapons."

These are the words of a noble champion who, as the leader of various popular movements, with an unyielding, indomitable spirit has struggled to overcome many difficulties and ordeals. And the Soka Gakkai and the SGI are the organizations that she regards as the strongest, most effective popular bodies in the world. It is an infinite source of pride to be able to struggle as a member of such a remarkable organization.

If the 'one evil' is simply ignored, calamities are bound to occur.

In his treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," the Daishonin says, "Rather than offering up ten thousand prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil" (WND, 15). He is saying that rather than offering many kinds of prayers to eliminate various sufferings from the world, one should instead concentrate on removing the fundamental cause of society's misery.

"One evil" means the fundamental evil. It is because of the distorted spiritual foundation

of human beings and society that all well-intentioned actions and strategies are futile.

What, then, is this fundamental evil? The Daishonin clarifies that it is slander of the True Law and correct teaching. It is a force that tries to destroy kosen-rufu, which is the great wish of the Buddha. It is jealousy toward, and betrayal of, the fundamental good that causes the infinitely noble lives of all people to shine, that inspires them to realize a peaceful society based on the principle of the sanctity of life.

Acting in league with those in power, people affected by such negative forces trample on the true teaching and persecute people of justice. This devilish function is itself the one evil, the fundamental evil. In the modern age, the slanderous actions of Nichiren Shoshu are a case in point.

The Daishonin declares that if this one evil is simply ignored, the calamities of internal strife and foreign invasion are bound to occur. In other words, this one evil will ultimately drag the country down the path of war, which causes the greatest suffering to the people. For this reason, the Daishonin strictly admonishes that this one evil must be eliminated.

Buddhist practice means struggling against evil amid the realities of society.

The SGI today stands tall as a genuine force for peace that functions to hold in check the tendency toward war. Well aware of this, intellectuals around the world look to us with trust and expectation.

At this time when dangerous undercurrents toward war continue to tug at society in Japan and other countries, let us boldly work to expand our solidarity with the awareness and pride that our determined advance represents the greatest hope for peace.

The practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism in essence means struggling against evil amid the realities of society and taking action to accomplish good for society. A religion that does not battle evil will be swallowed up by the polluted currents of an evil age. This is the reality of the Latter Day of the Law.

I have cited this passage many times in the past, but in the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" the Daishonin teaches, "The *ku* [of *kudoku* (benefit)] means to extinguish evil, and *doku* means to bring forth good" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762). Benefit cleanses our life, rendering it pure and unsullied. Benefit wells forth when we chant daimoku and battle evil. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, strictly admonishes, "I will never trust a person who does not fight enemies."

And the Daishonin declares, "Though evils may be numerous, they cannot prevail over a single great truth" (WND, 618). "A single great truth" refers to the Daishonin's disciples who wage a united struggle to accomplish good. Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, this can only refer to us, the SGI members.

We must resolutely defeat the one evil that seeks to take advantage of and destroy the SGI—a supremely noble body that is working to accomplish the Buddha's will and decree.

We have the unity of many in body, one in mind. Nothing is stronger. Burning with a spirit of justice, a spirit to refute evil and a spirit to accomplish the widespread propagation of the Law, let us wage an exhilarating struggle. And let us win in every respect.

Please convey my heartfelt respect and gratitude to all of our noble comrades who are day in and day out exerting themselves as emissaries of the Buddha. I pray that all of your family members will enjoy longevity, safety and peace, along with great happiness and prosperity.

With courage and in good health, together let us set our sights on the Soka Gakkai's 75th anniversary in 2005.