

## **FROM 'MY DEAR FRIENDS IN AMERICA' WALKING THE PATH OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE**

**'When one is completely dedicated to the path of mentor and disciple,' SGI President Ikeda says, 'he or she experiences no doubt or confusion, no uncertainty or fear.'**

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at an SGI-USA representatives conference, Los Angeles, July 3, 1996.*

I am delighted to meet with my friends in the United States on this significant day, the 51st anniversary of July 3, the SGI's Day of Mentor and Disciple. On this day in 1945, at 7:00 p.m., my mentor, Josei Toda, was released from prison. Alone, he courageously initiated a struggle to prove the righteousness, truth and greatness of his mentor, Tsune-saburo Makiguchi, who had been unjustly incarcerated and humiliated by those in power and who had died in prison.

On the same day, 12 years later, July 3, 1957, also at 7:00 p.m., I was jailed on entirely groundless charges. I went to jail to protect President Toda and the sincere and courageous Kansai members. [SGI President Ikeda, then Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff, was arrested on trumped-up charges of violating the election law filed by the Osaka District Prosecutors Office. He was later cleared of any wrongdoing.]

When one is completely dedicated to the path of mentor and disciple, he or she experiences no doubt or confusion, no uncertainty or fear.

During the reconstruction of Japanese society following World War II, President Toda appreciated deeper than anyone the debt the Japanese owed the United States for introducing freedom of religion and other democratic institutions to Japan. Out of my desire to repay this debt, I founded Soka University of America.

Celebrating this occasion with us is Dr. Alfred Balitzer, an honorary president of Soka University of America [now dean of faculty at SUA, Aliso Viejo]. In fact, on May 3 this year, the Day of the Soka Gakkai, Dr. Balitzer sent me a sincere congratulatory message. I'd like to share part of it: "The Jewish tradition is replete with examples of the mentor-disciple relationship. This unique bond adds to the learning process motivation, commitment and loyalty, thus making education a transforming experience, completing the purposes of nature in man. It is, as I understand it, the soul of a Soka education...."

"The mentor-disciple relationship is not a slavish relationship but, rather, is one that raises both mentor and disciple to a new level of humanity. A long time ago I knew this lesson but had forgotten it until I came to know you and the Soka Gakkai. For this great gift, I wish to add my thanks on your anniversary day. Also, you have taught me how this relationship can impact humankind so substantially as to alter the conditions that produce peace and happiness. It is in this sense that your anniversary marks the progress of humankind."

I am humbled by his generous words. I have taken the liberty of introducing this message to preserve for later generations an example of the trust and expectations people of goodwill the world over place in the mentor-disciple relationship as we know it in the SGI.

**It is not up to others—everything depends on ourselves.**

Like the indomitable lion seeking no companion, President Toda launched a new struggle for kosen-rufu on July 3. He relied on no one but himself. Physically he was

extremely weak. His businesses were in complete ruin. And in the majority of cases, the whereabouts of the former Soka Gakkai members were unknown. Under these adverse circumstances, President Toda started anew, based on strong and earnest prayer.

Nichiren Daishonin says: “I am praying that, no matter how troubled the times may become, the Lotus Sutra and the ten demon daughters will protect all of you, praying as earnestly as though to produce fire from damp wood, or to obtain water from parched ground” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 444). Such was the prayer of the Daishonin, determined to resolutely protect his followers while exiled on Sado Island.

It’s not up to others—everything depends on ourselves. As leaders of kosen-rufu, we should first pray ourselves. Being a leader is not a matter of getting others to do things; it is to become an engine and set oneself in motion. This is the key to victory in all endeavors.

It is important that youth, in particular, actively seek challenges to forge and strengthen themselves. Those who enjoy material luxury from a young age and do not work hard cannot become people of outstanding character. They cannot become great leaders who protect the people.

I hope you will work hard, sparing no effort, and develop yourselves as indomitable champions whom nothing can shake or dishearten.

### **Practicing Buddhism means being victorious.**

Today, a commemorative youth division gathering is taking place at the SGI-USA Headquarters in Santa Monica. I am delighted to see the growth of so many strong successors in the U.S. youth division.

I praise them for their strenuous efforts in creating another momentous page in the history of our movement with the New York culture festival and the SGI General Meeting in Florida. It is my sincere wish that, in the workplace, at home and in the community, the youth will fully and freely manifest all that they have gained from this valuable training.

During an air raid not long after his release from prison, President Toda wrote to his wife’s younger brother: “Chanting daimoku develops the state of Buddhahood. And developing the state of Buddhahood means devoting yourself confidently to your work while leading the most reasonable, sound and cheerful daily life. This sounds easy enough, although putting it into practice is difficult. But it is possible! If this practice did not enable us to do so, it would not be a genuine faith. I would like you to be a person who can succeed in this. A young person’s life, in particular, should manifest the true power of faith. I, your older brother, have awakened to an eternal life, blazing with a vibrant, youthful spirit, and I am living vigorously and cheerfully.”

Practicing Buddhism means being victorious. In advancing one step at a time amid the realities of daily life while showing concrete actual proof and in becoming victors and successes—people who enjoy abundant good fortune—we demonstrate with our very beings the validity of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and serve as a source of hope and inspiration for those who will follow us on the path of faith.

I hope that the youth division members, while encouraging and supporting one another, will work courageously and cheerfully to realize the great American dream of the 21st century.

### **The purpose of exchange should be to enhance the lives of both ourselves and others.**

Tomorrow, July 4, is America’s Independence Day. Two hundred and twenty years have passed since the signing of the Declaration of Independence, which upholds the ideals of

liberty and equality.

Tsuneshaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda both recognized the humanism that pulses in America. President Makiguchi discerned a need for humanity to move beyond military, political and economic competition and toward what he termed “humanitarian competition.” His perceiving this in his *Geography of Human Life* as early as 1903 shows remarkable foresight.

Regarding both individual and international relations, Mr. Makiguchi asserted: “The purpose of interaction or exchange should not be simply to promote self-interest but to protect and enhance the lives of both ourselves and others. We have to choose a way to bring benefit to ourselves while working for the welfare and benefit of others.”

Where did Mr. Makiguchi find the seeds of this humanitarian formula of seeking the happiness of oneself and others? In America.

### **We must never lose the spirit to respect and trust one another.**

All my American friends are cheerful. They have a good sense of humor and are warmhearted and hard-working. In these qualities, I, for one, perceive the ideal characteristics of the human being. I deeply respect and treasure my American friends, who possess such pure and beautiful hearts.

As leaders, please strive to be great pilots of kosen-rufu who guide all of your fellow members without exception toward health, prosperity and happiness. The members are central. Their happiness has to be the prime concern and objective.

“Accord the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra with the same respect as you would a Buddha”—this, as the Daishonin says in “The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” is the “ultimate transmission of the Lotus Sutra” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 781). We must never lose the spirit to respect and trust one another.

It is vital for leaders to bravely take action at the forefront, ready to bear the brunt of any onslaught. It is the role of leaders to unfailingly provide courage, hope and peace of mind to the Buddha’s children. Only by advancing with a stand-alone spirit—no matter what happens—and resolutely leading the way toward victory can we fulfill our mission. This is the spiritual flame that infuses July 3.