

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S AUG. 1 SPEECH—PART 1 RELIGION EXISTS FOR THE PEOPLE

‘Human beings do not exist for the sake of religion,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Rather, religion exists for the sake of human beings. Genuine religion is committed to the welfare and benefit of humanity, to contributing to society and to championing the cause of justice.’

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech the 8th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, Aug. 1.

Thank you for gathering today in this hot weather! Congratulations on your remarkable victory!

In his inaugural speech 140 years ago, on March 4, 1861, President Abraham Lincoln called on the nation to have “confidence in the ultimate justice of the people.” People who are puffed up with self-importance and conceit have no understanding of the concept of justice.

Hesiod, the ancient Greek poet, says, “They who...go not aside from what is just, their city flourishes, and the people prosper in it.” Our victory is proof that we have steadfastly pursued the path of truth and justice.

And our good friend, the French writer Victor Hugo, declares: “Look at all of history. The great have been insulted far more than you.”

Sugamo, where this Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium is located, is where both Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the Soka Gakkai's first and second presidents, were imprisoned during World War II as a result of persecution by the militarist authorities. As such, it is a place that is a site of persecution undergone for the sake of the Law and is simultaneously a Buddha land.

Today all of you, praiseworthy members from throughout Japan and countries around the globe, have gathered here, filled with pride and joy at our unprecedented victory. There is no prouder history than this. Ours is a victory of nameless, ordinary citizens, a victory of the people.

Let us all join in applauding one another on our noble efforts and rejoicing together at our magnificent achievement, a tribute to human endeavor. I am sure Nichiren Daishonin would be filled with delight and praise at our successive victories.

The Buddha appears in this world to lead all living beings to happiness.

As you know, the Tatsu-nokuchi Persecution took place 730 years ago, on Sept. 12, 1271. On this day, before the events at Tatsunokuchi unfolded, the Daishonin wrote a letter to Hei no Saemon-no-jo Yoritsuna (see “The Day Before Last,” *Gosho Zenshu*, pp. 183–84). As the most powerful political figure in the Kamakura military government, Hei no Saemon wielded control over military, police and state affairs.

At the time, corrupt and envious priests plotted and schemed to ingratiate themselves with the government for their personal advancement and enrichment. These priests, who by all rights should have cared only about helping others, were consumed with the thought of protecting their own interests instead. This is the behavior of degenerate clergy in every day and age.

In contrast, the Daishonin rebuked the erroneous ways of the government head-on, for the sake of people's happiness and for peace in the land. In the first few lines of his letter of admonition to Hei no Saemon, he declares, "The Buddha appeared in this world solely to save all living beings" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 183). The Buddha did not appear in the world to act like some big important figure or to receive alms. He did it to lead all living beings to happiness. This was his fundamental purpose. The Daishonin clarifies this profound, essential point.

Human beings do not exist for the sake of religion. Rather, religion exists for the sake of human beings. Genuine religion is committed to the welfare and benefit of humanity, to contributing to society and to championing the cause of justice. I assert that none other than the Soka Gakkai is actually doing this today.

Historically, too, we can see that when nations have advanced based on true Buddhist humanism, they have prospered. Their culture has flourished and peace blossomed. This was the case in ancient India during King Ashoka's time, in China during the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai's time and in Heian-period Japan during the Great Teacher Dengyo's time.

In his letter to Hei no Saemon, the Daishonin continues: "One who knows the Law and is concerned about his country should, by all rights, be praised and honored to the highest degree. But because the followers of false doctrines and heretical teachings slandered and defamed me to the authorities, I have not yet been able to carry out even the smallest part of the great desire to save this country that I have embraced for so long" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 183).

The jealous slanders and malicious lies that swirl about in this realm of human existence are "savage bullets" that seek to destroy their targets.

Driven mad by envy, priests of heretical Buddhist schools resorted to defamation to impede the great struggle of supreme justice waged by the Daishonin, the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. As a result of their erroneous claims, the Daishonin, without being granted a proper investigation or trial, was sentenced to execution, and—when that failed—to exile on Sado Island, tantamount to a death sentence.

The human world, seething with jealousy, is frightening indeed. How difficult it is to uphold and propagate the great Law!

We of the Soka Gakkai have never retreated a single step, regardless of the attacks and abuse to which we have been subjected. We have always advanced along the path of justice and truth, in complete accord with the Daishonin's teachings. And now we are striving steadily to make the Daishonin's dream a reality.

How happy the Daishonin must be! President Makiguchi and Toda, whose portraits hang in the auditorium, are also smiling in approval.

We cannot allow ourselves to ignore lies or let them go unchallenged.

Exactly 600 years after the Daishonin was exiled to Sado, Mr. Makiguchi was born, in 1871, in Niigata Prefecture, of which the island is a part. The Soka Gakkai's founding president continued to speak out for what he believed was right and just even in prison here in Sugamo.

He also continued to study the writings of the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant right up to the very end. President Makiguchi is our great predecessor in faith. [In his last letter from prison, dated Oct. 13, 1944, President Makiguchi writes: "I am avidly reading the work of Kant. When I reflect on how I produced *Theory of Value*, a theory that

scholars of the past century sought in vain, and then connected it to faith in the Lotus Sutra and enabled several thousand people to realize actual proof, I am surprised at my achievement. It is only natural therefore that the three obstacles and four devils should have assailed me; it is just as the sutra states.”]

Kant writes, “Lying is the throwing away and, as it were, the obliteration of one’s dignity as a human being.” That is why it is so important to fight head-on against all lies.

The French writer Romain Rolland, who battled against the Nazis, says, “The true revolutionary spirit is that which does not tolerate any social lie.” Lies can be more dangerous than a lethal weapon.

We cannot allow ourselves to ignore them or let them go unchallenged. This is absolutely key in our struggle. President Makiguchi fought with this revolutionary spirit throughout his entire life.

I also fought with all my might, with the passion and sense of justice of youth, under the leadership of President Toda. In those days, the Soka Gakkai was constantly subject to libel and slander. We faced much prejudice and misunderstanding from society.

As the young chief of staff of our organization, I handled our public relations and bore the brunt of such attacks. I would go alone to talk with people in the media and set the record straight.

Even those who had attacked the Soka Gakkai often said that I was a fine young man. All of this was part of my efforts to ensure that the truth about our organization was widely communicated in order to defend my beloved fellow members and my mentor.

Kosen-rufu is an undertaking that we pursue in the real world.

This year marks the 730th year since the Daishonin’s Tatsunokuchi Persecution and the 130th year since President Makiguchi’s birth. The Soka Gakkai has, in complete accord with the Daishonin’s teachings, refuted the slanders of distorted doctrines and erroneous teachings, shattered all lies and spurious accusations, and boldly triumphed.

Establishing a peaceful and prosperous society based on the correct teaching of Buddhism (Jpn *rissho ankoku*) was the Daishonin’s cherished dream and one that was shared by President Makiguchi. We have devoted ourselves energetically to constructing a peaceful global society, thereby steadily transforming this great ideal into reality, one step at a time.

What other organization in the world is working as actively and widely for peace? It is an achievement of the people that will shine eternally in the annals of history. I declare that the achievements of the people, of the SGI, will endure for all time.

Kosen-rufu is an undertaking that we must pursue in society, in the real world. If we stand apart from society and just utter fine-sounding rhetoric, it will have no value.

Kosen-rufu is an indomitable struggle for peace and justice in which we must fight unceasingly against the negative, destructive forces found in the real world. Waging such a great struggle leads to the attainment of Buddhahood. Waging a great struggle is proof of our eternal victory in life.

We must not retreat even a single step. This is the Daishonin’s stern injunction.

If we work hard to realize kosen-rufu, we benefit. In lifetime after lifetime, we will be reborn in the life-state of absolute happiness that is Buddhahood.

According to one theory, there are several billion planets in the universe that can support intelligent life, as the Earth does. Our lives are eternal throughout past, present and future. Therefore, no matter where we are reborn, we will enjoy the most wonderful state of life

we could imagine. We will lead lives of deep fulfillment and continue working to propagate the Mystic Law far and wide.

Life passes by in an instant, which is why it is so important for us to keep striving and challenging ourselves.

During the Daishonin's lifetime, cowardly disciples discarded their faith and turned against him. There is nothing more pitiful and despicable.

We must never abandon our faith. We will only lose out if we do so. Since we are here on Earth, let us live our lives striving to achieve kosen-rufu and accumulate immense good fortune and benefit.

Let us joyfully encourage and support one another in our efforts, filled with confidence and compassion, and together advance toward fresh growth and development.

Through our struggles in this lifetime, we forge ourselves into Buddhas.

The Lotus Sutra speaks of "hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of blessings" (p. 291). [This expression appears in a description of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound, who is replete with benefits due to his offerings to countless Buddhas.] Referring to this, President Toda once said: "You can attain 'hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of blessings.' You can bring forth 'hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of blessings.' And the means by which to do that is to work for kosen-rufu. Hasten to join our movement for kosen-rufu! Hasten to introduce the Daishonin's teachings to others! If you do not, you will be the one to lose out."

Both the Daishonin and President Toda stressed the importance of advancing with the conviction that our struggles in this lifetime are the means by which we forge ourselves into entities of indestructible happiness, into Buddhas, throughout eternity. Let us engrave this in our hearts and strive with all our might to meet life's challenges. Please have deep confidence that "hundreds, thousands, tens of thousands of blessings" will well forth in the lives of all who dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu.

You are carrying out kosen-rufu, the noble work of the Buddha. Those who malign or inflict suffering on you will receive strict retribution in accord with the law of cause and effect, just as the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin's writings state.

If they did not, the Buddha's words would be false. Without fail, the lives of those who do evil will end in miserable defeat.

Unless we fight against the foes of justice, we become identical to them.

The theories of good and virtue propounded by great thinkers, past and present, resonate with the teachings of Buddhism.

Victor Hugo declares that those who commit evil will not prosper forever. Kant says, "Vices, the brood of unlawful dispositions, are the monsters which he [man] has to combat." And what is needed to combat these monsters? Moral strength. Kant continues: "In [the possession of moral strength] alone is a man free, healthy, rich, a king."

Unless we fight against vice, we become a party to it. Unless we fight against the foes of good and justice, we become identical to them.

"We must fight! Armed with the moral strength to combat iniquity!" This is what the Daishonin taught and what both presidents Makiguchi and Toda rigorously practiced.

We must resolutely challenge the twisted idea that the nation is more important than the people. We must stand up to those who trample on truth and justice with their lies.

I do suggest, however, that the men refrain from fighting with their wives—or they may

find themselves in a living hell at home, instead of the Buddha land it should be!
[Laughter.]

The Soka Gakkai has become the “king of the religious world” because it has fought continuously against every kind of vice. It is a champion in the realms of religion, philosophy and the spirit.

As members of this great organization, let us work to erect a spiritual pillar for the realization of peace and happiness in today’s society, which is so bereft of sound philosophy. To do this, we must make friends and allies of all sorts of people. If we display wisdom, courage and daring, we can turn even our opponents into allies.

To be continued in the Sept. 14 issue.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS BUDDHISM’S PURPOSE FROM THIS SPEECH:

Nichiren Daishonin rebuked the erroneous ways of the government head-on, for the sake of the people’s happiness and for the peace in the land. In the first few lines of his letter of admonition to Hei no Saemon, he declares, “The Buddha appeared in this world solely to save all living beings” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 183). The Buddha did not appear in the world to act like some big important figure or to receive alms. He did it to lead all living beings to happiness. This was his fundamental purpose. The Daishonin clarifies this profound essential point.

1) SGI President Ikeda says, “Nichiren Daishonin rebuked the erroneous ways of the government head-on, for the sake of the people’s happiness and for the peace of the land.” Why does the Daishonin’s Buddhism place so much emphasis on speaking out for truth and justice? Is it possible to practice Buddhism correctly without actively confronting erroneous views? If not, why not?

2) The Daishonin says, “The Buddha appeared in this world solely to save all living beings” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 183). Can you think of ways that this compassionate spirit of the Buddha, which places the happiness of human beings as the sole purpose of the Buddhist teachings, could be distorted? Can you think of examples where human beings have been subordinated to the interests of religion? How do you think we can prevent this essential purpose of Buddhism from being lost?