

EDITORIAL
DIALOGUE IS THE HEART OF RELIGION
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People’s happiness is the purpose the founding Soka Gakkai presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, had in mind on Nov. 18, 1930, when they began our movement.

At the time, however, the Daishonin’s Buddhism was hidden away at the Nichiren Shoshu head temple, cut off from the people. Makiguchi and Toda, awakened to the profundity of the Daishonin’s teachings, knew that the situation had to be corrected — that this great Buddhism of the supremacy of ordinary people must be spread throughout society.

Makiguchi and Toda had taken to heart the Daishonin’s injunction that “You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386). Those “others” now include all of us who practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism in the United States and the SGI members in 177 countries and territories around the world.

Our organization has grown into what it is today because of thoroughgoing dialogue based on this teaching. Without dialogue, religion is dead — this was the founding spirit of our organization.

Without dialogue, how can religion help people? How can it bring about change in the world? Dialogue is the very heart of religion.

Thus, sharing their conviction in the Daishonin’s teachings with as many people as they could, Makiguchi and Toda listened to people’s sufferings with the spirit to both share their pain and provide the means to overcome it. The humanity, confidence and passion beginning with these two pioneers first spread to tens, hundreds, then thousands and eventually millions of people who discovered a new way to live.

There were people whose hearts had been broken and who had given up on caring about anyone else. People who were depressed about the unchecked egoism and brutality that they saw all around them. And people who were so intimidated by the darkness of the times — the wars that they saw destroying innocent people’s lives — that they just wanted to hide. But one by one, they found hope and revitalization in the movement for peace started by Makiguchi and Toda.

Over these 71 years of the Soka Gakkai’s history, the world has witnessed dramatic change. But the SGI, under the leadership of SGI President Ikeda, has always kept alive this spirit to give people hope through sincere dialogue, as is evidenced by next year’s SGI theme, the “Year of Expanding Dialogue.” In an age when the three poisons — greed, anger and foolishness — have seeped into every aspect of human life, the SGI has countered them with a Buddhist practice that empowers ordinary people to rise above poisonous times, transforming them into a new age where hope for genuine peace is born.

Such people, Buddhism teaches, are essentially Buddhas. Each district in the SGI-USA is ultimately a gathering of Buddhas — a gathering of people who can change the world.

As we commemorate Nov. 18 this month with our district general meetings, we can celebrate who we are: people who follow in the footsteps of Makiguchi and Toda, people

of courageous dialogue, people who have appeared in a most fearful time to teach others how to move beyond fear.

Precisely because the world has taken a turn for the worse since Sept. 11, the activities of each district of the SGI-USA, each district meeting and each district member's role are more important than ever. The world's future, Makiguchi and Toda call to us, depends on the dialogue each of us initiates with others.