

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA THE DYNAMISM OF YOUTH CREATES PEACE

‘Some 450 valiant seekers of the Way traveled to Japan in high spirits from 50 countries and territories,’ SGI President Ikeda writes of the first SGI Youth Training Course of the 21st century. ‘The dynamic spirit of these youth will surely give rise to phenomenal contributions to peace on the international stage.’

When the 19th-century British astronomer Sir John Herschel was in his late teens, he suggested to his friends that they should “do their best to leave the world wiser than they found it.” Kanzo Uchimura, a Japanese thinker and writer who admired Nichiren Daishonin, cited these famous words of Herschel in *The Greatest Legacy to Posterity*.

Through the mystic workings of destiny, we, the 6 billion members of the human race, have been born together on this blue orb that is Earth! Yet the Earth cannot break free from the pall of violence, conflict and suffering enveloping it.

All people wish for happiness. All people wish for peace.

Many philosophers and religious figures have taken on the challenge of realizing these shared dreams of humanity and making the world a better place. Now we, the SGI members, have stood up resolutely! We have embarked on a journey toward our eternal goal of worldwide kosen-rufu, a movement based on profound compassion for all humanity.



On Sept. 9, the first SGI Youth Training Course of the 21st century came to a successful close. Some 450 valiant seekers of the Way traveled to Japan in high spirits from 50 countries and territories. Hearts blazed with a desire to learn about Buddhism and a profound, magnificent solidarity for peace forged by mutual bonds of conviction began to develop among them. This brought me tremendous joy. The dynamic spirit of these youth will surely give rise to phenomenal contributions to peace on the international stage.

I was deeply moved by them. They were so sincere. They were so courageous. They were so overflowing with wonderful seeking spirit. How first and second Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Maki-guchi and Josei Toda would praise them! How the Daishonin would applaud them!



Looking back, the first time a group of members from overseas visited Japan was in November 1961, when we welcomed 68 representatives from the United States. Many of them were Japanese women who had married Americans and gone to live in the United States.

In October of the previous year, I had made my first trip to North and South America, taking the initial step in my activities for world peace. Many of the Japanese wives I met on that occasion spent their days crying and feeling sorry for themselves, unable to adjust to life in a foreign country. But when they arrived in Japan a year later, having newly awakened to their mission as pioneers of kosen-rufu, their faces were radiant. They brimmed with truly admirable determination.

Everyone was impressed by them. Everyone was surprised by their sense of commitment. People talk about their visit even today. It was our first international training course, and it took place exactly 40 years ago.

We have many more conveniences now than we did back then, but it is still a challenge to travel all the way to Japan for the sole purpose of learning about the Daishonin's Buddhism. I am sure that behind the joyful presence of each of the 450 people on this year's SGI Youth Training Course, there were 450 unique, noble human dramas.

The Daishonin praised a female follower, who made the long journey to his place of exile on Sado, saying, "The length of the journey traveled in pursuit of the Law represents the strength of seeking spirit" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1223). I, too, have the highest praise for the youthful champions of kosen-rufu: May you always be in good health and enjoy brilliant triumph and success!



One day during the training course, the Japanese support staff offered to take some of the SGI youth to a famous sightseeing spot. The members, however, politely declined, saying they were in Japan to deepen their bonds with their mentor and their understanding of Buddhism, and that they had no spare time for play. I also heard of another overseas member who, when he learned that a leader he was speaking with was from Kansai, was overjoyed and exclaimed: "Oh! The Kansai spirit!"

The seriousness of the visiting youth conveyed an ardent, single-minded desire, almost like a prayer, to grasp the essence of the Soka Gakkai spirit and engrave it in their lives before returning home. When speakers at various sessions in the course opened the floor to questions, hands would shoot up immediately throughout the audience. Even during breaks between sessions, many youth would seek out leaders and ask for guidance on specific issues. Soon there would be small clusters of people scattered throughout the meeting room engaged in friendly discussions with the aid of interpreters.

The members were not only interested in solving personal problems; they also sought advice and answers for their fellow members back home. Some came from places wracked by political instability. Others came from places mired in economic crisis or recovering from the devastation of a major earthquake — situations causing suffering and hardship to great numbers of people.

Many of the youth came to Japan with the profound awareness that the future of their respective countries rests on their shoulders. "We want to learn the spirit of 'Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land!'" "We will realize peace and social prosperity for our countries!" With this resolve, they listened intently to every word that was spoken during the training course, so that they could confidently share what they heard with their fellow SGI members back home.



One respectable youth, with the support and encouragement of his fellow members, traveled all the way from Cameroon in Africa as his country's sole representative on the training course.

This young man joined the SGI five years ago. As the manager of a gasoline station, he carefully saved for the trip to Japan. During the entire week he was here, he says, his fellow members back in Cameroon were sending daimoku for his growth.

I am told that he diligently took notes throughout the training course, filled with a strong sense of mission to realize a Century of Africa. I can imagine him thinking: "My personal

development is directly linked to the advancement of peace in my country. It all depends on how much I can learn and make what I learn a part of me. It will all become the foundation for kosen-rufu in Cameroon!” How inspiring and praiseworthy!

The Daishonin said to one of his followers, “I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1117). Everything comes down to the individual. Everything comes down to the disciple. It is by basing ourselves on the inner resolve to personally take responsibility for the advancement of kosen-rufu that we embark on the path of mentor and disciple of the SGI.

This SGI spirit has begun to pulse vibrantly in the lives of youth across the globe. I say to the youth of Japan: “Learn from the rest of the world! Follow the example of the dedication of your fellow members overseas! Do not fall behind!”

The human revolution of a single individual can change history — when I contemplate this drama enacted by the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, I cannot contain the excitement in my heart.



On Sept. 8, at a gathering attended by these youth from around the globe and representatives of the future division in Japan, I received a national decoration from the Republic of San Marino, located in central Italy. I dedicate this honor, which I accepted together with those who will champion the cause of world peace in the 21st century, to all of our members in 177 countries and territories.

The Republic of San Marino, established 1,700 years ago, is renowned as the oldest republic in the world. I hope that our members will join hands with people everywhere and build a republic of humanity, where freedom and equality reign, in the 21st century.

The Italian reformer Joseph Mazzini said that in whatever land we may be, wherever people are fighting for right, for justice, for truth, there are our compatriots. The curtain has fully risen on the second chapter in our movement for worldwide kosen-rufu! The entire globe is the grand stage for your endeavors! Never forgetting that courageous fellow members are always struggling in earnest somewhere in the world, please continue to expand ever wider the SGI’s network of human harmony!

May you always enjoy good health and live long, fulfilling lives!