

## **The Offering of a Mud Pie**

**By Daisaku Ikeda, SGI President**

I have the good fortune to have innumerable friends at home: we are linked by the ties of faith. I also have countless friends throughout the world. In this sense, I consider myself to be the happiest man in the world.

I often say jokingly that I can put the greatest trust in children and old people and that I can feel most at ease with them; the people in between are in the process of experiencing various human relationships and I sometimes find it difficult to grasp what is in their hearts.

There is a pleasant old man among my acquaintances. Let me call him Mr. O. Though he will soon turn seventy, he is still as hale and hearty as ever. He lives in Tokyo and runs a small Japanese noodle shop on a state highway which is heavily traveled upon.

Mr. O is crazy about flowers. He once donated a flower bed to the nearby railway station, by having saved what little money he could spare while eking out a living on a small income. One day several years ago, Mr. O hit upon a plan. He thought: "Why not plant flowers in the tiny amount of soil at the foot of the roadside trees? This neighborhood is so crowded with gray factories and housing complexes that you see very little greenery in it. Especially in those residential areas along state highways, green plants have all but died out, due to the exhaust fumes from continual automobile traffic. Only the sycamore trees lining the streets manage to survive. Wouldn't it be wonderful if this ash-colored landscape could be dotted with greenery?"

Mr. O started by planting five sunflower seeds beneath a sycamore tree growing in front of his restaurant. They all soon sprouted, but two of them rapidly withered and yellowed. A month later, another died as well. Because of his devoted care, however, the remaining two grew and put forth small buds. Though one of them faded just before it bloomed, the last one blossomed beautifully. Encouraged, Mr. O dedicated himself to a greening campaign in his local community. His activities have generated considerable response, as he was able to persuade the local ward administrative office and even the Ministry of Construction to support his efforts.

As I write about Mr. O, I am reminded of the painstaking efforts of parents who raise their children to be fine adults. Just as air is contaminated by soot from factories and waste fumes from automobiles, so the present educational environment is also a deteriorating influence. According to the Police White Paper of 1979, made public in mid-July, the juvenile delinquency ratio has risen to fourteen out of a thousand, representing the third peak since the Second World War. The first and the second peaks were in 1951 and 1964, respectively, but what is characteristic of this peak is the increase, in an affluent society, of so-called "play-oriented" offenses—impulsive shoplifting, bicycle and motorcycle theft, paint-thinner sniffing, use of stimulant drugs and sexual activity on the part of girls especially. Moreover, the children involved are younger in age each year.

Juvenile delinquency has, up until recently, been traced to comparatively clear causes: children were unable to continue their schooling because of poverty, or they had lost one of their parents. But the same is not necessarily true of the present situation. It goes without saying that the home can exert a profound influence, but beyond that, the

increasing dehumanization of the school environment and of society itself are being sharply reflected in the minds of children. We could say they are being exposed to “multi-leveled pollution” in the educational environment. No wonder parents have so many anxieties.

In one of the four Agama sutras, we find the story of the boy Virtue Victorious and the boy Invincible. This story tells about the previous lifetime of King Ashoka who peacefully reigned over all of India about a hundred years before the Buddha’s death:

At one time Shakyamuni Buddha went to a village to beg for food. There he found two small boys named Virtue Victorious and Invincible innocently playing in the dirt. Since Shakyamuni possessed all the thirty-two outstanding physical features characteristic of a Buddha, he must have seemed awfully majestic and dignified. Seeing the Buddha approach, Virtue Victorious wanted to make him an offering. Hurriedly he made a mud pie and placed it in Shakyamuni’s begging bowl. Invincible looked on with his palms joined in reverence. As the result of making this offering, Virtue Victorious was later reborn as King Ashoka and Invincible as his wife.

Nichiren Daishonin, citing this story, states in his writing that the Buddha is truly respectable and accepts any heartfelt offering, regardless of its material worth. We can also say that this story teaches the value of faith which transcends personal interest or calculation. If only one has the pure spirit of faith, he can gather unimaginable good fortune even by offering a “mud pie.” I firmly believe there is good reason why the sutras compare the sincere spirit of faith to the mind of a child. For there is originally no room in a child’s heart for selfishness or guile. A child has no evil intentions but spontaneously expresses his honest feelings. Children are not motivated by gain or loss, but by what captivates their interest. They are bursting with curiosity. They thirstily absorb everything new and unfamiliar just as parched soil soaks up rain. They are born optimists who dream only of the boundless future, and if they grow up straight, they will be complete strangers to delinquency and thoughts of suicide. Their storehouse of potential is too vast and rich to be confined, for example, solely to learning how to take exams.

I sincerely hope that parents will recognize the unaffected sincerity of their children, a sincerity such as Virtue Victorious showed by his offering of a mud pie. I also hope that they will listen open-mindedly to the hopeful message for the future contained in that spirit. I firmly believe that, if parents are affectionate and considerate in this way, then their children will be able to make their own way undaunted, no matter how evil the social environment may be. They will bloom just like the sunflower which sprouted and grew beautifully in front of Mr. O’s restaurant. (*Treasures of the Heart*, pp. 74–78)