

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA AWAKENING TO OUR MISSIONS

'Life itself is an untapped treasure trove,' writes SGI President Ikeda. 'As each of us truly awakens to our mission and stands up resolutely, a sense of gratitude and joy wells forth.'

The Nobel Prize-winning American author Pearl Buck wrote that the secret of life is “to begin a new day with courage and with the belief that it can be made the best of all days, whatever change it brings.”

It was July 6, 1945. The climb up the hilly street in what is now Nishikata in Tokyo's Bunkyo Ward was painful and exhausting for our mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda. It was only three days after his release from prison.

President Toda was on his way to confer with a friend living in Bunkyo about restoring his businesses — the first step to building a new foundation for the Soka Gakkai, which had been almost completely destroyed by the repressive policies of Japan's militarist government.

Two years in prison had seriously impaired President Toda's health and sapped his strength. The summer suit he wore hung loosely on his tall, thin frame. But his eyes were fixed firmly on the future and burned with fierce determination.

It is fair to say that Bunkyo is the place from which President Toda launched his great, lifelong struggle for kosen-rufu. Indeed, not only President Toda, but also Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the Soka Gakkai's founder, had a connection to Bunkyo Ward.

President Makiguchi regularly visited the home of the famous educator and writer Nitobe Inazo in Kohinata, Bunkyo Ward, to attend meetings of the Kyodo-kai, a study and research group on the subject of Japanese regional and folk culture.

In addition, exactly 100 years ago, when President Makiguchi published his landmark work, *A Geography of Human Life*, at age 32, he was residing in Bunkyo's Komagome area. This epic volume was completed after many indescribable challenges and hardships while living there with his family in cramped quarters.

Bunkyo thus can claim profound ties to both our first and second presidents.



Fifty years ago, in April 1953, I was appointed acting chapter leader of Bunkyo Chapter and threw myself headlong into creating a fresh groundswell for kosen-rufu there.

Bunkyo was one of the 12 original Soka Gakkai chapters, but at that time its growth had stagnated. There wfaith. Chapter Leader Tsugiko Tanaka was extremely concerned, and she tearfully explained the distressing situation to President Toda.

He always took swift action. “I will dispatch my right-hand man,” he said, and immediately appointed me acting chapter leader.

No one must fall by the wayside in the long journey of kosen-rufu. We must all climb the summit of victory together. For that reason, it is crucial that we encourage those facing the most painful struggles, those in regions where the situation is the most challenging.

On that unforgettable night, I turned off Shinobazu Avenue onto a side street and, after

wandering through winding, narrow alleyways, visited Mrs. Tanaka's very old, almost ramshackle home. I remember with nostalgia how hard it was to find.

My "Bunkyo Revolution" started the moment I walked into that room where the Bunkyo Chapter leaders had gathered. When I led them in chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo three times, the members' voices were not together. This was a sign they were not united in their struggle for kosen-rufu. I repeated chanting three times again and again until they could do it in unison.

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not some empty formality. It is the most important weapon of spiritual champions, the most powerful weapon in the universe. When we chant in unity, with a common purpose, we can create an invincible alliance dedicated to the cause of good and justice. Distracted chanting is like an out-of-focus camera lens. When members' minds are not united, they cannot summon their full strength or produce positive results.

True unity is not achieved by self-sacrifice, demanding that we suppress or kill our individuality; rather, it is attained by expanding our inner state of life, breaking out of the tiny shell of our lesser ego. It is a struggle in which we unite in purpose toward a lofty goal, each of us striving to make the most of our unique talents and abilities. That is why faith based on the principle of "many in body, one in mind" leads to development, victory and happiness.



More than anything, I wanted our Bunkyo members to have self-confidence. I reminded them that we were engaged in realizing kosen-rufu, a momentous endeavor beyond the abilities of the most powerful political leader, the richest tycoon. There could be no greater source of pride or glory than this.

Just because the Bunkyo members could not introduce Buddhism to as many people as they wished, there was no reason for them to become dispirited or depressed. They were all Bodhisattvas of the Earth. They were worthy champions of kosen-rufu gathered with a mission from the beginningless past. (See "The Bodhisattvas Who Emerged From the Earth," p. 3).

Stand tall, my friends! Fight on, with no regrets!

At our first meeting, I suggested an unprecedented goal. "We can do it!" I told them. "You have not tried your hardest yet. Besides, you have the Gohonzon. United in our struggle under President Toda's leadership, there is nothing we cannot accomplish!"

It was not that the members were incapable. The problem was negativity and failure to use the capability they possessed.

The human brain, in the cerebral cortex alone, is said to have some 14 billion neurons. Its potential is unlimited. But we usually employ only a tiny portion of that potential — some scientists suggest less than 10 percent.

Life itself is an untapped treasure trove. As each of us truly awakens to our mission and stands up resolutely, a sense of gratitude and joy wells forth along with an inexhaustible fighting spirit.

My role in seeing that this took place was to offer sincere encouragement and inspiration to our Bunkyo members.



I traveled to each area of Bunkyo Chapter. I wanted to do everything I could to encourage my fellow members, with whom I had deep ties.

Each was a precious person for kosen-rufu. Each had a profound mission. I wanted everyone, without exception, to stand up as a great champion of kosen-rufu.

At times, I would place my hands on the shoulders of a young man and, in a way to shake his very being, say: “Let’s work together! Let’s win in life and raise a cheer at our success!” And at other times I would say to a woman, “Please become a victor for your family’s sake and help them all lead happy lives.”



Nameless, ordinary citizens helping others — nothing is more wonderful than this.

Many people have succumbed to apathy and hopelessness in these dark times. How admirable is the sight of nameless heroes plunging into society’s midst and striving to turn people’s hearts in the direction of happiness and joy — far more admirable than the splashy but essentially empty displays of many celebrities.

Victory or defeat in life is determined at the final moment. In life’s final chapter, the verdict is strictly delivered. People of faith who have unequalled pride in their profound mission are certain to complete their lives in brilliant triumph.

My friends, never grow cowardly and seek to escape reality. For all that will remain is eternal regret. Please let the splendor of your lives, the light of your struggles, shine forth amid the raging waves of society.

My friends, do not fall prey to fear and become prisoners of misfortune. Become happy! Become victors! Become heroes who illuminate all with the light of joy!

Even when a new day dawns, society, with its harsh realities, remains dark. Life is about triumphing amid that bleak, merciless gloom.

No matter how dark the depths of your karma may seem at times, use the power of profound faith to overcome your weak-heartedness and summon forth your courage. It is vital that you win, that you fight on bravely to surmount all obstacles, cherishing bright hope in your heart.

Toss baseless criticisms to the wayside. Ignore jealous rumors and move on. This is the way of a true champion.



Bunkyo Chapter was reborn as a beautiful family allied for truth and justice, going on to establish a record among our chapters for introducing the most new members — a golden achievement in Soka Gakkai history that shines even more brightly today.

A life dedicated to kosen-rufu is magnificent indeed, a victorious drama of incomparable pleasure and enjoyment! My beloved Bunkyo members, the second chapter in the Bunkyo revolution has now begun with immense vigor.

Rise up as great philosophers! Take action as outstanding thinkers!

It is crucial that not one of you be defeated. Rather than chasing dreams of idle pleasure, triumph as great spiritual champions who win life’s highest honors!

‘THE BODHISATTVAS WHO EMERGED FROM THE EARTH’

In this essay, SGI President Ikeda calls the Bunkyo Chapter members “Bodhisattvas of the Earth” and “worthy champions of kosen-rufu.” This is a reference to the bodhisattvas mentioned in the “Emerging From the Earth” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Daishonin frequently referred to his disciples as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The Lotus Sutra states:

After I have entered extinction, these persons will be able to protect, read, recite and widely preach this sutra. (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 213)

Firm in the power of will and concentration / with constant diligence seeking wisdom / they expound various wonderful doctrines / and their minds are without fear. (p. 220)

Nichiren Daishonin writes:

The sutra describes the bodhisattvas who emerged from the earth, numerous as the dust particles of a thousand worlds, and who declared, “We ourselves wish to gain this great Law, true and pure.” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 357)

Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remote past. (WND, 385)

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION CREATING TRUE UNITY

From This Essay:

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is not some empty formality. It is the most important weapon of spiritual champions, the most powerful weapon in the universe. When we chant in unity, with a common purpose, we can create an invincible alliance dedicated to the cause of good and justice. Distracted chanting is like an out-of-focus camera lens. When members’ minds are not united, they cannot summon their full strength or produce positive results.

- 1) Can you remember a time when you chanted with great purpose, compared to when you chanted like an “out-of-focus camera lens”?
- 2) How can we create true unity while also striving to make the most of our unique talents and abilities?
- 3) Why is unity so critical to sharing Nichiren Buddhism widely, realizing happiness for ourselves and others, and improving our society?