

THE BUDDHISM OF THE SUN: ILLUMINATING THE WORLD

[8] "Reply to a Believer"

"Putting Faith Into Practice in Daily Life—Winning in Society With a Positive Spirit"

—General References—

go to www.nichirenlibrary.org to access the most up-to-date information:

- *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vols. 1 & 2
- *The Soka Gakkai Dictionary of Buddhism*
- *The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras*
- *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR THIS LECTURE

1. Background of "Reply to a Believer"

(<http://www.nichirenlibrary.org/en/wnd-1/Content/116>)

2. *Youth and the Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, "Work and Faith," pp. 17–34 (see attached)

BACKGROUND HIGHLIGHTS

- Nichiren composed this letter on April 11, 1278, a little more than four years after he moved to Mount Minobu.
- Recipient is unknown, but is believed to have been a samurai, who learned of a possible third exile for the Daishonin.
- Nichiren's disciples were facing mounting obstacles and persecution.
- In addition, epidemics were widespread in Japan.
- **SGI President Ikeda:** Let's study "Reply to a Believer" and learn how Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism of the Sun shines its brightest when its practitioners are actively engaged in people's welfare, based on the principles of putting Buddhism into action in society and faith into practice in daily life. (September 2016 *Living Buddhism*, p. 38)

OPENING POINTS

See September 2016 *Living Buddhism*, p. 38

- How do we uphold our convictions amid turbulent times?
 - By persevering with strength and tenacity, and putting our faith into practice every day.
- **Josei Toda:** Kosen-rufu is an arduous struggle that takes place in society. The more our movement spreads its roots in society, the more all kinds of obstacles will arise to obstruct our progress. Such obstacles attest to the validity of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, and there is absolutely no escaping them. Whatever difficulties may arise, therefore, we have no choice but to overcome them.
- Through becoming shining examples at work and in society, we gain respect and trust, and thereby spread our movement to establish the ideals of Buddhist humanism in our communities and the world.

KEY PASSAGE #1:

Even if I were to be exiled again, it would bring me a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times greater good fortune than if my teachings were to be accepted . . . I would far rather suffer

BASIC POINTERS FOR PREPARING A LECTURE ON THE WRITINGS

- Read the writing several times through.
- Read the lecture on the writing several times through.
- Create a concise explanation of the background:
 - when the letter was written, conditions of society and Nichiren's life at the time, the intent in composing the writing, etc.
- Make note of the title of the lecture—often the key message is conveyed in the title.
- Make note of the opening section(s) of the lecture—the key points are often included in the opening.
- Are there terms or concepts that need explanation?
- What are some key portions of the Gosho passage to emphasize?
- How do these key portions and correlating points connect to our lives today?
- What are some possible questions that might come up?
- What points do you want members to go home with?

persecution from this country's ruler for the sake of the Lotus Sutra and thereby free myself from the suffering of birth and death. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 905)

See LB, pp. 38–40

- Despite having endured numerous persecutions, Nichiren views the possibility of another persecution for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, no matter how outrageous, as an honor and opportunity to gain fortune.
- **Nichiren:** "It would bring me a hundred, thousand, million times greater good fortune" (WND-1, 905).
- **President Ikeda:** One can clearly picture his intrepid posture in taking on even the greatest hardship. He issues a powerful lion's roar, decisively banishing the fear and cowardice that can so easily undermine his disciples' morale and resolve. He makes a stirring declaration that instills in them unshakable conviction in faith. (p. 39)
- Nichiren had endured four major persecutions for spreading the Lotus Sutra and his teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo: the Matsubagayatsu Persecution (1260); the Izu Exile (1261); the Komatsubara Persecution (1264); and the Tatsunokuchi Persecution and Sado Exile (1271 to 1272).
- Nichiren used each persecution to establish the next stage in spreading his teachings.
- **President Ikeda:** Great obstacles arise due to opposition by devilish functions seeking to obstruct the spread of the correct teaching. Facing major difficulties and opposition, therefore, is proof that one is practicing the correct teaching. And surmounting them leads to dynamic progress. (p. 40)
- With this, the Soka Gakkai has overcome devilish functions vying to destroy Nichiren's spirit and legacy.
- For individuals, fierce struggles in life are opportunities for leading a more fulfilling life; they are trials to take on so that we can help others suffering from similar problems.
- **President Ikeda:** The example of our unflinching fortitude in the face of such obstacles is a source of courage and inspiration for our fellow members and others in our communities. In addition, each time we challenge obstacles, our life state expands dramatically and the world around us becomes brighter and more positive. (p. 40)
- In the face of great persecution, Nichiren remained unflinching.
- **Nichiren:** "Should it [a third exile] happen, the Lotus Sutra could never accuse me of being a negligent votary. I might well become heir to the blessings of Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions, as well as those of the countless Bodhisattvas of the Earth" (WND-1, 905).
- **President Ikeda:** His words brim with his profound conviction that another exile would be an ideal opportunity to prove that he was not a "negligent votary," but a genuine votary of the Lotus Sutra, and that the benevolent forces of the universe would definitely protect him. When he first proclaimed his teaching (in 1253), the Daishonin embarked on a solitary struggle with an unwavering vow to lead all humanity to enlightenment, fully prepared to meet with persecution. Buddhism is a living religion dedicated to people's happiness. A religion that has abandoned that commitment is a dead religion. (pp. 40–41)

KEY PASSAGE #2:

Above all, I will urge them [the heavenly deities] to protect every one of you. If you continue living as you are now, there can be no doubt that you will be practicing the Lotus Sutra twenty-four hours a day. Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by "No worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality." (WND-1, 905)

See LB, pp. 45–46

- Despite the possible dangers he faced as Nichiren's disciple, the recipient of this letter continued carrying out his duties as a samurai.
- That's why Nichiren says to him, "If you continue living as you are now, there can be no doubt that you will be practicing the Lotus Sutra twenty-four hours a day" (WND-1, 905), assuring him that applying himself at work is the same as practicing the Lotus Sutra.
- **President Ikeda:** It is vital that we put faith into practice in daily life and Buddhism into action in society. In addition, Buddhism is about winning. Those who strive with utmost sincerity in their Buddhist practice are certain to triumph in the end. (p. 43)
- **President Ikeda:** I worked for Mr. Toda when I was young, and he trained me very rigorously. He never allowed me to use Soka Gakkai activities as an excuse for neglecting my work. He sternly taught me the proper attitude as a practitioner of Nichiren Buddhism, declaring: "In faith, do the work of one; in your job, do the work of three." (p. 43)
- NOTE: President Toda's four guidances regarding the passage, "Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra" (WND-1, 905). (p. 43)
- **Nichiren:** "All phenomena are manifestations of the Buddhist Law" (WND-2, 841); "A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather, one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world is governed" (WND-1, 1121).
- Happiness of people must be the highest and ultimate aim of all social activities.
- Faith in the Mystic Law (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo) brings forth courage, wisdom and perseverance needed to face life's obstacles, and enables us to create value that leads to hope and happiness.
- **President Ikeda:** Whatever your job or your workplace, I hope you will strive for the welfare of others and the betterment of society in your own unique way, and earn the praise of those around you for being positive, trustworthy and dependable. This is the epitome of putting faith into practice in daily life and Buddhism into action in society. (p. 44)
- **President Toda:** Religion is a principle for living and must exist within our daily lives. (p. 44)
- During his first U.S. visit in 1960, President Ikeda offered three guidelines to Japanese women who had married American servicemen and were spreading Buddhism in a new country: 1) to gain U.S. citizenship and become a good American citizen, 2) to obtain a driver's license and 3) to master English.
- **President Ikeda:** At first glance, these may seem unrelated to Buddhist faith and practice, but leading a sound life and putting down roots in the community are the surest formula for achieving kosen-rufu. (p. 44)
- Kosen-rufu is being advanced by the numerous nameless ordinary people who while challenging various karmic obstacles and countless real-world problems.
- Pioneering SGI members, who strove with diligence and strength to carry out the spread of Nichiren Buddhism in their respective countries despite intense obstacles, have opened the way for today's new era of worldwide kosen-rufu.
- **President Ikeda:** What matters is making the sun of the Mystic Law rise powerfully in your own heart. Don't blame others or your environment for your problems. Focus on changing yourself. When you make the sun of the Mystic Law rise in your heart, you can illuminate your life with limitless hope and courage, as surely as the bright rays of the sun, even on rainy or stormy days, will eventually pierce the looming clouds. The light of your great human revolution can brighten the lives of others, your community, your society, the world and even the future. (p. 45)

Two

Work and Faith, Part 1

Soka Gakkai Young Women's Leader Yumiko Kumazawa: Youth division members across Japan have expressed their excitement and appreciation for the first installment of this new study series, "Chanting With the Shared Vow of Mentor and Disciple." Everyone is chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with a renewed sense of mission and taking action as proud Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Thank you very much, President Ikeda.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda: I'm very happy to hear that. I've also received reports brimming with firm resolve from youth division members in the United States and other parts of the world. Young people are standing up everywhere. A fresh momentum for the victory of our kosen-rufu movement has been set in motion.

The driving force for this is Nichiren Daishonin's writings. The Daishonin states: "Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism. You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others" (WND-1, 386). With that in mind, let's give our all to this study session.

Soka Gakkai Young Men's Leader Nobuhisa Tanano: Thank you very much!

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the tremendous encouragement you always give to the youth division behind-the-scenes support groups, including the Soka Group, Gajokai and Byakuren.

President Ikeda: They strive very hard under all manner of conditions. Where else in the world can you find young people working together with such pure dedication? Our network of Soka youth is truly refreshing. My wife and I chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo every day for their health and safety and that each of them without exception will become happy and victorious in life.

Ms. Kumazawa: With you and Mrs. Ikeda warmly watching over us, we are doing our best each day to create a golden history of achievement. Today, we would like to ask you to talk about work, a topic of great concern to many youth division members.

President Ikeda: That is indeed a very important subject, and one with which most earnest young people will invariably grapple. Nichiren's writings provide wisdom for triumphing at work. I'll never forget how inspired I was when, as a new member, I read the passage "Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra" (WND-1, 905). The Daishonin is encouraging us to view work as part of our Buddhist practice. Work provides us with an opportunity to elevate and expand our life state. The Daishonin's words give us courage and enable us to broaden our perspective.

Mr. Tanano: Speaking of a vast life state, we are all amazed by the great achievements you have accomplished.

President Ikeda: I've worked throughout my life. Even as a boy, I worked very hard. My father suffered from debilitating rheumatism, and my four older brothers were drafted into the army, one after another. As the oldest remaining son, I would get up before dawn and help with my family's seaweed farming business. When I'd finished with that, I'd then set out on my paper route. After coming home from school, I would deliver the evening paper. The Japanese verb for "to work" (*hataraku*) originally

means to bring ease (*raku*) to those around you (*hata*). I had a sense of the truth of these words from a young age.

It was also my job to deliver the seaweed my family harvested to the wholesaler. I remember proudly saying to him, “My family’s seaweed is the finest there is,” and him replying, “It certainly is.”

Because of these experiences, I have a deep appreciation for the challenges faced by the members of the Soka Gakkai’s farming communities and fishing communities divisions, as well as the pride and joy they put into their labors. Nichiren writes of “white rice grown with bone-breaking labor by the people” (WND-2, 752). The work of producing food, the very staff of life, is incredibly noble. The Daishonin understood this.

Mr. Tanano: Youth representatives of the farming communities and fishing communities divisions are sharing their experiences in faith at meetings throughout Japan. They are beacons of hope for their communities, which are facing the dual challenge of an aging population and young people moving away to work in bigger cities.

President Ikeda: I know they are making wonderful efforts. They are truly carrying out an important mission.

It’s Important To Work Hard

President Ikeda: During World War II, I worked using a hammer and a lathe at Niigata Steelworks in Kamata, in Tokyo’s Ota Ward. It was very grueling, physical labor.

After the war, I got a job at a printing company called Shobundo in the Nishi-Shinbashi area of Tokyo, and I attended night school while working. I remember I used to leave home at half past six in the morning. I visited customers to take their orders and was also responsible for proofreading. I gave my all to that job. The office had a warm, family-like atmosphere. I fondly

remember one of my seniors telling me that it was important to take risks in life and that courage was vital. The business owner, Takeo Kurobe, was very good to me. Unfortunately, I ended up having to leave because of my poor health. Everyone expressed how sad they were to see me go.

After that, I became a clerk at the Kamata Manufacturers Association, near my home. It was a small office, but it was engaged in meaningful work, helping revive local businesses as well as medium- and small-sized factories in the area. Then I met Josei Toda, and I soon began working at his publishing company, Nihon Shogakkan. I'll never forget the sincere send-off I received from my colleagues at the Manufacturers Association when I left to work for Mr. Toda.

I'm proud to say that during my youth, whatever my job and wherever I worked, I always did my absolute best. In the writing I mentioned earlier, the Daishonin cites a commentary by the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai on the Lotus Sutra, "No worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality" (WND-1, 905). This passage expresses the benefit of those who embrace the Lotus Sutra. Nothing in society or daily life is contrary to the true aspect of life. Though our efforts may seem ordinary, because they are based on faith, they shine with the light of the Mystic Law.

Nothing is nobler than striving to make the world a better place. There is no need to be overly concerned with the type of work one does, the size of the company one works for or one's position in it. Those who chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and endeavor each day to contribute to society are following the correct path to "attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime."

The Driving Force for Growth

Mr. Tanano: We will proudly follow your example. In the Soka Gakkai, it is often said, "In faith, do the work of one; in your job, do the work of three." How should we interpret these words and put them into practice?

President Ikeda: Basically, this refers to making effort. If you resolve to exert three times the usual effort, you'll become the driving force for growth and improvement in both your workplace and the community in which you live. Faith is what enables you to do so.

Mr. Tanano: So, as practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism, we should strive to exert ourselves that much harder.

President Ikeda: That's right. Start with prayer, and then make efforts that accord with your prayers. This is what is meant by "faith equals daily life." Every type of work requires its own kind of learning and training.

Mr. Toda was also very strict. As employees of his company, we sometimes had to go out during the day on business. It would always seem as though Mr. Toda weren't paying attention to our comings and goings, but he was. So if someone came back late, he'd bark: "You're late! Were you dawdling around somewhere?"

Once, when I returned to the office after picking up a manuscript from a writer, Mr. Toda asked me to describe the contents for him. This unexpected request made me break out in a nervous sweat. His point was that I should have used the time on the train coming back to the office to look through the manuscript and start forming an opinion on it. He was teaching me not to waste time and to work quickly and efficiently.

Ms. Kumazawa: He was always strictly training you.

President Ikeda: He was strict, but he was always right in being so. Work shapes one's character. For young people, the workplace is an important arena for doing human revolution. Those who can view things with this spirit are strong.

In his writings, Nichiren also taught his youthful follower Nanjo Tokimitsu the importance of one's attitude toward work. For example, he writes: "Being loyal to one's lord means that one never has anything to

be ashamed of in serving him . . . For though one’s trustworthiness may at first go unnoticed, in time it will be openly rewarded” (WND-2, 636).

Please don’t engage in behavior you will regret. Please always be sincere and honest, even if no one notices your efforts. That’s the key to being successful. Those who always strive to do their best at work, no matter what their position, win the greatest treasure of all—the trust of others.

Changing Poison Into Medicine

Mr. Tanano: Given the current economic crisis, people have many worries and problems where work is concerned. Some of our members are dealing with companies that are going out of business or restructuring. Others suddenly find themselves taking on heavier workloads due to staff layoffs. Still others have to work night shifts or are unable to take time off. In spite of these challenges, the youth are challenging themselves wholeheartedly with the spirit to never be defeated.

President Ikeda: I know what that’s like. In my youth, I experienced the collapse of Mr. Toda’s businesses. In the period of economic turmoil following World War II, many small- and medium-sized companies went bankrupt. I was in my early twenties. I know firsthand how tough it is when a company fails. Nevertheless, I stood up and ensured that the enormous debts that Mr. Toda’s businesses had incurred were repaid. I struggled furiously and managed to completely transform the situation in accord with the Buddhist principle of “changing poison into medicine,” thus opening the way for Mr. Toda to be inaugurated as the second president of the Soka Gakkai (in May 1951). I strove tirelessly, living the passage from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, “In a single moment of life we exhaust the pains and trials of millions of kalpas” (p. 214).

Mr. Tanano: Many of our members look to your youthful struggles as a source of inspiration as they face their own challenges.

President Ikeda: The present situation is extremely tough, especially for young people. With the sharp decrease in full-time job openings, things are very different from how they were just twenty or thirty years ago. In addition to individuals making efforts, we also need to evaluate and change the state of society. I can imagine the daily do-or-die struggles faced by those who run their own businesses. I'm constantly chanting for the protective forces of the universe to aid and support them.

Nichiren writes, "Iron, when heated in the flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword" (WND-1, 303). He also says, "Put into flames . . . gold becomes pure gold" (WND-1, 497). Every effort we make now will eventually become our greatest treasure. Facing and overcoming adversity causes our lives to shine like a jeweled sword or like pure gold.

Alexander Graham Bell (1847–1922), largely credited for inventing the telephone, was once asked by a journalist about the difficulty of his work. He replied: "It is pretty hard and steady work. But then, it is my pleasure, too."¹ When it comes to solving problems, there's no one ready-made magic solution. The only thing to do is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo earnestly, make efforts and steadily overcome each obstacle, one after another. The same is true in the workplace. In the end, we can transform everything into something positive and good. That's what is meant by "faith for achieving absolute victory."

Ms. Kumazawa: This resonates with the well-known passage from the Daishonin's "Reply to Kyo'o": "Misfortune will change into fortune. Muster your faith, and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?" (WND-1, 412).

President Ikeda: The Daishonin's words are never false. Through their courageous faith, your parents who are practicing and your seniors in faith have all shown great actual proof of victory.

Strive Heroically Amid Hard Times

Mr. Tanano: The passage you quoted earlier, “Regard your service to your lord as the practice of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-1, 905), is from Nichiren’s letter “Reply to a Believer,” written in 1278, at the height of the Atsuhara Persecution.

President Ikeda: That’s correct. Nichiren wrote this letter when it seemed as if he might face a third exile, following the Izu Exile (in 1261) and the Sado Exile (in 1271). Discussing the prospect of being exiled a third time, he wrote, “It would bring me a hundred, thousand, ten thousand, million times greater good fortune” (WND-1, 905). Such was the towering, lionlike state of life of the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. And while he himself was fully prepared to undergo further persecutions, he was deeply concerned about the welfare of his disciples, who were buffeted by the adverse winds of society. His words are imbued with his impassioned spirit, as if he were saying: “Look how your teacher stands at the forefront, facing persecution head-on! As my followers, fight courageously in the place of your own mission. Triumph in your work!”

Genuine disciples of the Daishonin are never cowardly or fainthearted.

Ms. Kumazawa: Courageously showing actual proof of our Buddhist practice in society is how we can repay our debt of gratitude to our mentor.

President Ikeda: Buddhist practice takes place in the real world, in society. Nichiren writes: “The true path lies in the affairs of this world” (WND-1, 1126) and “A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs” (WND-1, 1121). We practice Nichiren Buddhism so that we can develop and improve ourselves, and carry out our human revolution in our workplaces, in our families and in

our communities. We do so in order to create the greatest value where we are right now. Nichiren Buddhism is not about escaping to some other time or some imagined ideal realm. Doing so does not accord with the teaching of the Mystic Law; it is the shallow thinking of the provisional, pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. It is not reality.

Nichiren Buddhism is a living philosophy for changing reality. That is why one of the titles of the Buddha is “Hero of the World.” The SGI has followed this courageous path.

The actions of the business professionals division and executives division, striving heroically amid these hard times, are also perfect examples of this.

Mr. Tanano: A youth division leader in the Kanto Region,² who is working at a construction company, started out as a part-time employee at age nineteen. Eventually, he was hired on as a full-time employee and, in recognition of his contributions, has received several promotions, even winning the company’s President’s Award. In spite of his busy professional life, whenever he has been appointed to a new leadership responsibility in the Soka Gakkai, he has challenged himself to introduce even more people to Nichiren Buddhism.

President Ikeda: That’s wonderful. I’m very happy to hear stories like that. I know that hundreds of thousands, even millions, of young people are all doing their best in Japan and around the world. Nothing brings me greater joy.

Quoting a commentary by the Great Teacher Dengyo, Nichiren writes, “To discard the shallow and seek the profound is the way of a person of courage” (WND-1, 712). A true leader must be just such a “person of courage.”

Notes:

1. Robert V. Bruce, *Bell: Alexander Graham Bell and the Conquest of Solitude* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1973), p. 368.
2. In the Soka Gakkai organization, the Kanto Region comprises Gumma, Ibaraki, Tochigi, Saitama and Chiba prefectures.

Three

Work and Faith, Part 2

Soka Gakkai Young Women's Leader Yumiko Kumazawa: Many young women have shared with me their frustration at not having enough time to participate in as many Soka Gakkai activities as they'd like because they're too busy with work.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda: Challenging yourself to contribute to kosen-rufu, even in some small way, although you're extremely busy—that spirit is truly noble. The benefit you gain when you make an earnest effort to participate in SGI activities, even if it's only for a short time, is immense. Remember, the more challenging your circumstances, the greater the opportunity you have to grow and develop. As Nichiren Daishonin assures us, “A hundred years of practice in the Land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day's practice in the impure world” (WND-1, 736).

What matters is that your heart is directed toward kosen-rufu. The key is to have the attitude: “Even though I can't attend the meeting today, I'll do my utmost at work, regarding everything as part of my Buddhist practice”; or “I'm going to buckle down today so that I can finish all my work and have time on the weekend for activities”; or “No matter how busy or tired I am, I'll chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to support everyone's efforts, even if only a minute or two.” If you have this outlook, you have already won. Such strong inner resolve will activate the protective forces of the universe and allow you to move in a positive direction without fail.

Everyone has his or her own unique situations and circumstances. I hope leaders will talk with their members, listen attentively to what they're going through in their lives, and offer concrete encouragement that will enable them to move forward with hope and courage.

Soka Gakkai Young Men's Leader Nobuhisa Tanano: I've heard that when you were the young men's division First Corps¹ leader, you were very active in the old downtown area of Tokyo. You used to cycle through the narrow backstreets of the neighborhood to visit young men who were unable to attend meetings because they were busy with work. You would also sometimes go with them to the local public bath to talk with them. And you even held informal discussions at your apartment on Sundays for those who worked long hours of overtime during the week. Through such personal encouragement, you were able to foster one person after another into a first-rate champion of *kosen-rufu*.

President Ikeda: Sincerity touches the hearts of others. Sometimes a few simple, encouraging words can sustain a person throughout his or her life. That is why it's so important for leaders to offer unstinting encouragement to their members.

When I would travel between Tokyo and Osaka, often by night train, I would use that time to write postcards that I would send to encourage members. In those days, we didn't have cell phones or email! If you use your minds and imaginations—which tend to be especially creative when you're young—you can find any number of ways to encourage others.

Ms. Kumazawa: In the book *Kaneko's Story*, Mrs. Ikeda talks about the challenge of balancing work and Soka Gakkai activities. She says, "I am convinced . . . that the effort to balance both organizational and other responsibilities is important for one's future, because doing so expands one's state of life, brings good fortune and vitality, and becomes

the foundation for a broader, richer life experience.”²

These words are extremely encouraging and give us all something to aspire to.

President Ikeda: The Austrian thinker Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, with whom I held a dialogue, declared, “One actual step forward is worth more than a thousand imagined steps.”³ Courageously taking that first step forward in the place where you are right now is critical. Everything starts from there.

We Are Entities of the Mystic Law

Ms. Kumazawa: Some of our members are concerned because they can’t enshrine the Gohonzon owing to the nature of their job or living situation—for instance, having to share a room with someone in their company dormitory and the like.

President Ikeda: A young woman who had just started practicing Nichiren Buddhism once asked second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda about the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. He replied with a broad smile: “That’s a good question. When you get right down to it, you could say that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the life of Nichiren Daishonin, and your life as his disciple is also Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Live with self-confidence, pride and optimism.”

As practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism, we are entities of the Mystic Law. As such, there is no way that we will end up being unhappy. Of course, it’s important for those who are unable to enshrine the Gohonzon, at present, to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo earnestly to be able to do so in the future, but as long as they continue practicing Nichiren Buddhism and moving forward with their fellow members, they have nothing to worry about.

Mr. Tanano: In his treatise “The Object of Devotion for Observing the Mind,” the Daishonin discusses the relationship between Buddhism and worldly affairs, stating: “When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, one understands the meaning of all worldly affairs” (WND-1, 376).

President Ikeda: Having faith in and practicing the Mystic Law enables us to freely bring forth the wisdom and creativity to succeed in life, work and various diverse endeavors in society. This is the power of Nichiren Buddhism, which is an unsurpassed teaching of life and humanity.

In today’s society, where many people lack clear purpose and guiding values, you, the youth of Soka, are truly suns of hope illuminating the darkness.

Mr. Tanano: President Ikeda, you once conducted a dialogue with Karel Dobbelaere, the noted Belgian scholar of the sociology of religion. He has voiced the view that the SGI possesses one of the most essential characteristics of religion, namely, the ability to inspire people to live vibrant, joyful lives. He sees the daily practice of reciting the sutra and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as an important source of such vitality and energy. He also observed that the SGI fosters a sense of social responsibility and awareness, with members active in all spheres of society. It is promoting a movement, he said, that aims to build a global community of people who are not only interested in the development of their own societies, but also of the welfare of the world as a whole.⁴

President Ikeda: The growth of our SGI movement based on the principle that Buddhism is manifested in society is also significant from the standpoint of human history. Mr. Toda emphasized the need to foster people with a sound philosophical foundation for the sake of society, and warned us against becoming people whose faith and practice was divorced from the realities of society. He aspired for our members to develop into

leaders who would contribute to their country and the world.

Genuine Buddhist practitioners are concerned not only with their own happiness, but also the happiness of others and the welfare of society, and strive to work toward those ends.

The hearts of many people these days are empty and barren inside. There are also large numbers of young people who are suffering, feeling lost and alienated, trying to find their way in the darkness.

I would like each of you, our youth division members, to be the kind of people who can impart encouragement and hope to others of your generation. May your presence shine as a spiritual safe haven or safety net for those who are struggling. It is through realizing a growing solidarity of good people in society that we will be able to change the times.

Ms. Kumazawa: Young women's division members are active in all spheres of Japanese society today, including business, education, the arts and academics. They are winning respect and appreciation for the Soka Gakkai from their employers and co-workers through their splendid examples.

President Ikeda: Our young women's division members have a great mission. Nichiren writes that women open the gateway (see WND-2, 884).

Sarah Wider, Emerson scholar and professor of English and women's studies at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York, remarked in a message to the young women's division members, who are opening the gateway to peace in their communities and in society, that just being around them makes her feel happy and that their beautiful bonds of unity are establishing the foundation for a culture of peace.⁵

When young women practicing Nichiren Buddhism stand up with firm resolve, they can completely transform their environment. That is also why it's important that, as young women, your daily speech and conduct reflect both wisdom and gracious courtesy.

Ms. Kumazawa: It's as the Daishonin says, isn't it? "The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being" (WND-1, 852).

President Ikeda: In work, as in everything, winning in the morning is decisive. Start your day by chanting earnestly to the Gohonzon and then set off to work brimming with strong life force. Greet your colleagues with a friendly "Good morning!" As the Daishonin says, "The voice carries out the work of the Buddha" (OTT, 4). Be ready to use your voice to lift the spirits of your co-workers and brighten the atmosphere at your workplace.

You can't hope to win trust at your workplace if you frequently come in late or come in looking disheveled and unkempt. Winning in the morning is the key to winning in life.

Be Patient and Persevere

President Ikeda: Though these are troubled times, please don't allow yourselves to be defeated. Be strong and wise, and develop your abilities.

The Ikegami brothers, two of Nichiren's followers, were from a family that was engaged in construction and engineering projects for the Kamakura military government. Due to slander by their colleagues, however, they were not contracted to participate in the reconstruction of the Tsurugaoka Hachiman Shrine. In other words, they had lost a job they had been counting on.

The Daishonin wrote a letter to encourage the deeply disappointed brothers at that time, saying that this setback was surely "the design of the heavens" (WND-2, 950). In short, it definitely had some profound meaning or significance for them. He also advised: "Avoid any appearance of ill will or resentment [because of not obtaining the construction job] . . . Be sure to carry your saw and hammer in your hands or hook them at your waist, and always wear a smile" (WND-2, 950).

Don't despair when things don't go as you had hoped. Don't become

depressed and feel sorry for yourself. Be patient and persevere, putting down solid roots and creating the cause for more fortunate circumstances to present themselves in the future. Faith is about putting down roots of happiness in the soil of our present reality. Eventually sprouts will appear and flowers will begin to bloom in beautiful profusion signaling the arrival of a spring of victory and success.

I know that many of our youth division members, including those of the student division, are struggling to find jobs right now. I urge them not to give up but continue doing their best.

Mr. Tanano: We, youth, are encouraging and supporting one another as we continue moving forward together.

President Ikeda: In one of his writings, the Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo, who was facing various obstacles, “Live so that all the people of Kamakura will say in your praise that Nakatsukasa Saburo Saemon-no-jo [Shijo Kingo] is diligent in the service of his lord, in the service of Buddhism, and in his concern for other people” (WND-1, 851).

It is the quintessential power of faith that enables one to become a great victor in life on whom others can rely and depend—be it in the sphere of work, Buddhism or society. Becoming such a victor is also brilliant proof of one’s human revolution.

Notes:

1. First Corps: In the early days of the development of the Soka Gakkai in Japan, the young men’s and young women’s division members were organized into groups called corps, i.e. First Corps, Second Corps, etc. Daisaku Ikeda was appointed the leader of the young men’s division First Corps in 1953.
2. Kaneko Ikeda, *Kaneko’s Story: A Conversation with Kaneko Ikeda* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2008), p. 36.

3. Translated from German. R. N. Coudenhove-Kalergi, *Praktischer Idealismus* (Practical Idealism) (Vienna: Paneuropa-Verlag, 1925), pp. 164–65.
4. From an article in the January 13, 1996, *Seikyo Shimbun*.
5. From an article in the July 17, 2006, *Seikyo Shimbun*.