

## **Young Lions, Be Victorious!**

*The following is SGI President Ikeda's essay from the "Our Brilliant Path to Victory" series, published in the July 18 edition of the Seikyo Shimbun, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper.*

*The golden efforts  
of youth  
shine in the morning sun.*

The efforts of youth are golden. Their noble exertions, brimming with hope, passion and a sense of mission, seem to me to shine with a golden light.

This July 3, the Taiwan Soka Association (SGI-Taiwan) held a grand opening ceremony for its magnificent new, seven-story Taoyuan Culture Center. A delegation of Soka Gakkai representatives from Japan traveled to Taiwan to join in the celebrations. At Taoyuan Railway Station, they found young men of the behind-the-scenes Soka Group on hand to welcome the arriving participants. They said the Soka Group members made a very gallant sight, waving Soka tricolor flags as they thanked everyone for coming and directed them to the new center.

Members of the young women's division behind-the-scenes Furong (Lotus) Group (the equivalent of the Byakuren Group), meanwhile, were brightly and confidently guiding and assisting the members inside the culture center. I was not only impressed by reports of the success of the opening of this splendid new center, but also deeply moved when I heard about the cheerful and dedicated efforts of the youth who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to ensure that everything went smoothly.

The Taiwanese members have for many years been making admirable contributions to their local communities and society as a whole, earning the Taiwan Soka Association the recognition of the Taiwan government as an excellent community organization for 16 consecutive years. The youth division's quick response to aid those affected by natural disasters in Taiwan has been particularly noteworthy.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Soka Gakkai youth division. The Soka spirit that second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda passed on to the "young flag bearers" of the youth division is vibrantly alive around the world.

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I still have a vivid recollection of the day when the young men's division was established—Wednesday, July 11, 1951. I was 23 years old. I rushed into the old Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Nishi-Kanda, Tokyo. While my clothes and shoes were soaked by rain, a fire burned inside me, knowing that we were making a fresh departure.

On that day, 180 enthusiastic young men gathered around their mentor, President Toda, for the ceremony establishing the new division. Mr. Toda opened his speech with the totally unexpected words: “The next president of the Soka Gakkai is certain to come from among those of you assembled here today. I wish to offer that person my heartfelt congratulations. Kosen-rufu is a mission that I must fulfill without fail. I hope that each of you will be aware of your noble role in this endeavor.”

It was a great declaration of the shared struggle of mentor and disciple, a united vow to realize kosen-rufu. It was a solemn ceremony of the mentor entrusting the future to his disciples. I absorbed every word he spoke that day with my life.

Mr. Toda continued: “Our objective is not so small as to be limited in scope to the single country of Japan. Nichiren Daishonin instructs us to spread the Great Pure Law [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] to distant India [the birthplace of Buddhism] and beyond.”

It is important for young disciples not just to follow their mentor, but also to share the same sense of responsibility—for them to make their mentor’s heart their own and take personal initiative to open a great path for the future.

Nichiren writes: “Nichiren’s disciples, like Nichiren himself, should invariably practice the correct principles” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 2, p. 909). In Nichiren Buddhism, making a vow as a disciple means rising to action with the same courageous spirit as our mentor, ready to challenge the obstacles that will inevitably appear. When we strive with this spirit, we can break through the limited confines of our small, lesser self and boldly tap the boundless Buddha wisdom within our lives.

The establishment of the youth division was also the birth of a truly youthful Soka Gakkai. That youthful Soka Gakkai is continually being reinvigorated through the fresh vows of capable young successors, giving it new life and vitality.

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*My young friends,  
ever deepening your  
understanding  
of the essential principles  
of Buddhism,  
become a driving force  
of the times  
and the treasure of the world.*

July 3, a day that we annually celebrate as the Day of Mentor and Disciple, is also the Day of Tohoku. On this very important day this year, the historic

First New Era Tohoku Youth Division General Meeting was held, with each of the participants overflowing with the spirit of “The Aoba Pledge.” Members of the Tohoku young men’s, young women’s and future divisions gathered together, determined to show everyone in Tohoku and the entire world their bright, young, indomitable spirit not to be defeated by the many challenges confronting them in the wake of the March 11 earthquake and tsunami.

At the meeting, a young men's division member related how he had lost everything in the disaster—his home, belongings and place of work—and the valiant efforts he has been making to rebuild his life, becoming a source of hope and inspiration for others in his community. A young women's division member also shared a moving experience about rising above the grief of her father's death in the tsunami, and introducing a friend to Nichiren Buddhism.

The unity of the Tohoku members, who in the four months since the disaster have striven with such incredible courage and stoicism day after day, is truly praiseworthy. Each of them is the Soka Gakkai's greatest treasure and pride. As long as we have noble youth like those in Tohoku, there is nothing to fear.

In one of his famous novels, the Tohoku-born Japanese writer Kenji Miyazawa (1896–1933) writes, “Really, however bitter a thing is, if it finds you walking on the right road, whether you're going up or down, either way you come step by step nearer to true happiness.”

Today, the youth of Tohoku are courageously and tenaciously taking one step forward at a time, undeterred by mud, rubble or obstacles of any other kind. Their footsteps resound with hope, leading the way for others to the joyful summit of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. Their footprints will serve as path markers that bring courage to countless others who will walk the same path with deep appreciation for those who have opened the way before them.

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Every revolution has its music. The Soka Gakkai has also forged ahead with rousing music and song of its own.

The well-loved Soka Gakkai song “Song of Crimson,” which was originally a young men's division song in Shikoku, was composed 30 years ago this year. Many of the young men who sang this song in their youth are now striving earnestly as veteran men's division members.

The current young men's division song (in Japan), “Young Lions, Be Victorious,” debuted on July 20, five years ago (2006):

*We will fulfill our vow  
as disciples,  
eternally following this path  
together with our mentor  
to bring happiness to the  
people,  
a supremely noble journey.*

This song retains the music of the earlier young men's division song “Challenge New Frontiers,” which was originally composed in 1973, and features a new title and lyrics. As young men, many of our present men's division members sang this earlier version—which opened with the lines “Proud to be unsung heroes, / drenched in the sweat of hard work”—together with their fellow members to encourage one another in their youthful struggles.

I can't help but feel that both these enduring melodies—"Song of Crimson" and "Young Lions, Be Victorious"—are symbols of the unity of the young men's division, who will shoulder the future of the Soka Gakkai in the 21st century, and the golden pillars of the men's division, who have opened the way for our present development.

In recent years, too, the Gajokai, a young men's behind-the-scenes training and support group, has been working in tandem with the corresponding men's division's Ojokai Group [in Japan] in fulfilling the important mission of safeguarding our facilities.

"Walk upright betimes!" wrote the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) in a call to live with integrity and dignity. Now is the time for the members of the men's and young men's divisions to unite their efforts and open a new page of kosen-rufu—combining the rich experience and conviction of the former, and the passion and initiative of the latter.

If the two divisions work closely together, their strength will not merely double, but multiply exponentially. This will provide even greater momentum to kosen-rufu and, without a doubt, play a decisive role in building a youthful Soka Gakkai.

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Youth is a time of struggling with various problems. The more seriously young people are committed to realizing a great purpose or mission, the more earnestly they will ponder and give thought to how best to tackle the many challenges that will inevitably arise along the way.

In 1961, the young men's division was making an all-out effort to increase its membership to realize a gathering of 100,000 members—a goal that we had promised Mr. Toda we would achieve. The young men were doing everything they could to spread awareness of the Soka Gakkai's lofty cause and the greatness of Nichiren Buddhism in their communities and society at large, and were accomplishing remarkable results. But trying to introduce others to Nichiren Buddhism can at times be a very challenging endeavor, and there were more than a few members who fretted over why they were having so little success.

At the beginning of that year, on my return to Japan after a trip abroad to other parts of Asia, I immediately went to visit my dear fellow members in the Chubu region in central Japan. I followed that visit with one to Tohoku in the northeast, where I attended the joint inaugural meeting of the Sempoku and Ishinomaki chapters (in Miyagi Prefecture), as well as the inaugural meeting of Hachinohe Chapter (in Aomori Prefecture).

The first of those meetings in Tohoku was held at the Sendai Civic Hall (in Sendai, Miyagi Prefecture). Before the event began, a sincere young men's division member came to the room at the hall where I was waiting and frankly told me about his struggles. He said that while everyone else seemed to be having such great success in their propagation efforts, no matter how many people he spoke to, none of them wanted to start practicing Nichiren Buddhism. He was anxious and concerned, and even beginning to lose confidence in himself. He was very genuine and pure-hearted. I praised his dedicated efforts. Then, asking someone else in the room to open the window for us, I pointed outside and said: "Look! Just by opening the

window, we can see that there's a landscape out there entirely different from what we see in this room. . . . Don't become caught up with small things. Throw open wide the window of your heart!"

The most important thing is to have the courage to talk to others about the unsurpassed teaching of Nichiren Buddhism. If we do so, then, whether they decide to embrace faith in the Mystic Law, we will still have succeeded in planting the seed of Buddhahood in their lives. Someday, that seed is certain to sprout and come to fruition. This is what the Buddhism of sowing means.

Worrying about not being able to help others embrace faith in the Mystic Law—pondering and agonizing over how we can share our Buddhist practice with others—this itself is the noble heart and struggle of a Buddha. Since Nichiren Buddhism teaches that all our problems and struggles represent a springboard to attaining enlightenment, the more earnestly we chant and grapple with various challenges, the more we can expand and elevate our state of life.

You are all young lions. Whatever happens, therefore, just keep forging ahead with pride, confidence and optimism.

The Daishonin declares: "Nichiren's followers are like roaring lions" (WND-1, 997). My young friends, do not be defeated! Speak out with courage!

Young lions, be victorious!