PART V: THE FUTURE
CHILDREN ARE TREASURES OF THE FUTURE

The following are excerpts from Daisaku Ikeda’s three-volume series on parenting Dialogues on Mother and Child in the Twenty-first Century (Niju-isseiki heno haha to ko o kataru), Daisanbunmeisha, Tokyo, 1999–2000.

Contributing to Society

A common trait among parents raising their children well is their determination to raise them to contribute to society. Being overprotective is a bad trait for a parent. The same is true of not being protective at all. These both stem from the parent’s ego, when one considers a child as “my possession.” Parents who vow to raise capable individuals who can contribute to a peaceful and happy society will not fall victim to such egoism. Also, they tend not to give up no matter what happens to their child.

Because of my own vow, which I made to our second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, I advanced. Facing the great ocean in Atsuta Village, his hometown, President Toda reminded me that there are continents lying on the other side of the ocean. He asked me, on his behalf, to light a torch of the Mystic Law from the Orient to the world. I pledged to fulfill my mentor’s desire to spread the Mystic Law. And with this pledge, I have continued to exert myself intensively to this day. Amid storms and blizzards, I have chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo everywhere in the world—in planes, hotels, cars—to fulfill my vow. Because I made that vow to my mentor, I have never thought of giving up on it. I believe something similar applies to child rearing.

The spirit to contribute to others makes a vivid impact on a child’s mind, and seeds are planted even without the parents uttering a word. Herbie Hancock, a world-renowned jazz musician, describes his parents as follows: “Having lost all hope, many [people] fell into despair, their families plagued by discord and violence, juvenile delinquency and drug abuse. My mother, however, had great dreams and vision for the future. She was determined to break free of those circumstances and live a meaningful life, and she wanted the same for us children. And my father gave his all to making her dream a reality” (Living Buddhism, April 2002, p. 39).

Mr. Hancock’s mother was born and raised in Georgia, where racism was rampant. It was a challenging environment in which to live. She upheld great dreams and a vision for the future for her children and family. Mr. Hancock described how her determination created miracles. I hope that you will also continue to encourage your children so that they can live powerfully.

Sharing Feelings With Others

Children’s hearts are naturally pure until polluted by the muddy, egoistic society of adults. It takes genuine kindness to understand the pain of others, and it is also necessary to be strong if we are to help others regardless of what we may face. Those who can understand others’ hearts and take action on their behalf have true strength. Instilling such strength of heart is the greatest and most crucial education we can give our children at home; and it is through the parents’ way of life that the child’s mind is tempered. In the world of human beings, the heart is what matters, not money, status, or fame. That is why we should thoroughly strive to reply to sincerity with sincerity.

Compassion is decreasing in the world today. The Japanese word for compassion is jihi; ji means “to relieve suffering,” and hi means “to impart joy.” Actually, the Sanskrit word for hi originally means “to lament.” In short, compassion is to feel the suffering of others and lament and grieve together. The foundation of compassion is to feel others’ pain as if it was our own.
Without hearts of such compassion, our society will come apart. This is why at homes, at schools, and in our communities, we must foster compassion in the hearts of our children. No matter how much knowledge children accumulate, if they are cold-hearted, unable to feel anything, even while seeing others suffer, everything would be a waste. Children with cold hearts cannot savor the joys of life.

**Learning Good and Evil**

The first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, cried out, “Any teacher worthy of the name, worthy of respect as a teacher, must prove his or her ability to judge between right and wrong and to make a difference by choosing the right, not just giving lip service to it. The superior teacher, is, in effect, the embodiment of moral value” (*Education for Creative Living*, p. 135). This is a guideline for educators. But I believe parents should raise their children with the same awareness and sense of responsibility.

What is good and what is evil? A parent’s responsibility is to teach these with conviction. And as President Makiguchi stressed, parents must courageously take action while guiding their children on how to live.

**Becoming Strong**

While it is important to be ready to do anything for the sake of your children, if you try to prevent them from having unpleasant experiences, it will do more harm than good. When your child is about to falter, it is only natural to want to lend a hand. But that is child rearing based on minor good. Child rearing of major good means helping your children to acquire the strength to live out their lives on their own.

Children cannot grow if they are always with their parents—they can become afraid of others, ultimately developing an escapist approach to life. True education means developing human beings with the strength to interact with anyone and overcome any obstacle. The reason the SGI is strong is because it is made up of numerous types of people and personalities. Among them, we can polish our humanity. A harmonious body of practitioners depends on us mutually working to develop ourselves.

When children actively engage in various activities, their experiences will enable them to establish the foundation of their character. It may seem like they are merely accumulating trivial experiences, but actually, children learn much from any activity. The Chinese character *iku* in *kyoiku*, the Japanese word for education, denotes “rearing.” This does not imply parents simply protecting their children beneath their own wings. One responsibility of parenting is to educate children to cultivate the strength to live out their lives, to cultivate self-reliance.

If parents constantly prohibit their children from doing things, saying, “Don’t do this or that,” it may rob them of cheerfulness and liveliness. President Makiguchi’s hope was to enable children to grow into people who can take action to create good. Herein lies the great purpose of Soka education, of creating value.

Human beings become stronger by experiencing a variety of things. If parents spoil their children, they will grow up always blaming others when things do not turn out as desired. If children blame others all the time, they cannot develop the core of their lives or live victoriously.

The important thing is not absence of failure. It is a mistake to think that in our long lives, everything will be a smooth ride. Many things will not turn out as we wish. What’s crucial is that we never give up, that we are never defeated in the face of any obstacle. With a firm resolution, we can transform everything into food for growth. An undefeated spirit is the key to leading worthy and fulfilling lives.
Deciding on the Future

Child rearing must be based on what’s best for the child’s future rather than for the parent’s ego and must be considered from a long-term perspective. It’s important to not only satisfy your children in the present but also firmly set your gaze on their future. Children reflect their parents like mirrors. Child rearing is a lofty endeavor in which parent and child grow together.

True victors in life are those who never give up and continually challenge themselves without losing sight of their goal. There is more to life than just advancing along the “track of success,” based on where one went to school or where one works. Even if one should advance on that track, whether that person can lead a truly fulfilling life is a separate matter. Quite a few graduates from famous universities only end up getting involved in scandal and ruining their lives.

Children possess a “bud” they must nurture on their own. When a child finds a path in life, a parent must wholeheartedly support that decision, based of course on thorough discussion. The parent should not flinch or be perplexed. No matter what others may say, it is crucial to be an ally to your children and support them to the utmost.

The eyes of children are directed toward the future because it is filled with possibilities. Parents and teachers should not limit children from achieving their potential. President Toda often said that it is only natural for youth to embrace dreams that are too big. While it is necessary to provide appropriate advice based on your life experience, I truly hope you will respect your children to the greatest extent.

Children ultimately open their own future. Regarding which path your children should take, discuss it thoroughly with them. I am sure that parents have their own way of thinking, but so do their children. Parents should not dismiss their children offhandedly and push their own ideas on them. Strive to keep open the channels of dialogue to ensure your children will be guided in the best direction. What is crucial is to win in life.

What kind of dreams do we provide for our children? Do we enable them to envision a grand future? The actual future depends on these questions. Poet John Milton asserted that just as the morning shows what kind of day lies ahead, one’s childhood shows what kind of human being one will grow into. Indeed, childhood represents the “morning of life.” What kind of seeds do we plant and what kind of light do we shower upon them? Depending on those elements, life can vary significantly. It is important that we plant the seeds of courage and cultivate them in children’s hearts with the sunlight of encouragement and vision.

We can never tell what motivates children to grow; their world is overflowing with a variety of stimuli. Also, many elements can drag them toward corruption and evil. We must help them steer instead toward growth and goodness. We can be good friends to our children and help them advance on the correct path. The key is to provide our children with numerous motivational opportunities to grow and do their best.

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