

An Educator and a World Citizen

Dr. M. Satish Kumar, Cambridge, England

THROUGH my research and in my role as an academic, I have been able to forge strong bonds of friendship all over the world. Through my writings I have been able to share with my friends and students the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. This sixteenth year of my practice has become a landmark for showing actual proof in my life.

In 1997, I secured the prestigious Commonwealth Academic Award to Cambridge University. I was also recently elected to a Visiting Fellowship at Fitzwilliam College, Cambridge University, for another year to pursue my research. I became the first geographer from India to get this recognition. All of this has come about because I never compromised my mission as an educator and my responsibilities as a world citizen.

Tsuneshaburo Makiguchi used to say the purpose of education and human life are the same—to be happy. While science declares that everything is replaceable, poetry on the other hand insists that each and everything is unique. Indeed, my encounter with Nichiren Daishonin's life philosophy began when I read Daisaku Ikeda's humanistic poems and essays.

In one writing Mr. Ikeda declared that a great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of all humankind. With these words deeply etched in my heart, I began my Buddhist practice on July 23, 1983. At that time I had embarked on my Ph.D. program at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.

As a student my aspirations were limited. I was an atheist, but by this time I was yearning for a philosophy as an anchor. Through the writings of Mr. Makiguchi, I understood that the creation of value in life was fundamental not only to achieving happiness for oneself, but also for the sake of others. I had a dream, a blueprint, a painting in my heart of what I wanted to achieve. Part of this dream was realized when I finished my Ph.D. and secured a job at the premier Asian university, Jawaharlal Nehru University, in 1991. I taught, conducted research and was also responsible for much administration at this early stage in my career.

I never begrudged the efforts I made for the sake of others' happiness, and this benefited me, in turn, by rooting me firmly in reality. Working to enhance a sense of compassion and humanism became the focus of my practice. This was a difficult exercise since I have always had to deal with my ego and often suffered greatly from its ill effects, but by breaking through my lesser self, I find I am able to reach out to more people. I believed with my whole heart that prayers based on the Mystic Law would definitely be answered. Josei Toda said once: "Youth ceaselessly strive for self-improvement. You must cultivate dignity and intelligence in order to establish an even greater self." True to my conviction, working to support President Ikeda in the kosen-rufu movement had already brought me instant recognition in every sphere of my life.

I felt greatest pride when my Ph.D. student Kalyan Das, also a practicing member,

was awarded the President of India Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma Gold Medal Award for the most outstanding student at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. I learned to apply Mr. Makiguchi's firm belief in the capacity of an individual to transform his or her inner life. Along with my students, I, too, have learned to remove the passive, observer attitude in favor of a vision-based, hopeful future.

I now have a strong philosophy by which I can judge my actions and thereby create value and I feel I have achieved waves of victory in my daily life. I am more confident and optimistic than ever before. I am appreciative of others' efforts and instinctively reach out to them. I am constantly goaded by a clear sense of purpose in my daily life. I am keen to become a source of hope and happiness to all I meet. □

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Author: M. Satish Kumar

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