

**EXCERPTS**  
**Learning From ‘The Sun of “Jiyu” Over a New Land’**

*The following is excerpted from General Director Zaitso’s book My Reflections, pp. 58–85. In this section, the general director explores SGI President Ikeda’s guidance on diversity, which is found in his poem “The Sun of Jiyu Over a New Land.”*

Up to this point, we have been concerned with the poem’s introduction to its message. Now we are coming to the most important part.

*My treasured friends,  
There is no question that  
your multiracial nation, America,  
represents humanity’s future.*

The theme on which President Ikeda has based the message of the poem is that the key to the happiness of the human race in the future lies in the solution to this central issue of our time — diversity, or the multicultural character of modern society.

The United States has been a mixed society since its inception, and is not becoming less so. Japan, on the other hand, a nation known for its homogeneity, is undergoing a radical change in its composition, as every year more and more foreigners are going there to live. America is the leader of this trend for the whole world.

*As this century draws to its close,  
the soul of your idealism  
grieves at the stark realities of racial strife.*

We know that the [1992 Los Angeles] riots were steeped in hatred. But was it necessarily those who hated the most who suffered the most? In fact, it’s always the common people who suffer. They are the ones who work hard, pay the taxes, but in social upheaval, they are the ones who suffer the most.

This is why President Ikeda is always on the side of the common people, why he says the Soka Gakkai must always help the people.

*On what can we ground  
our efforts to open  
the horizons of such a renaissance?*

Serious discussions about diversity and the difficulties faced by members of different races trying to live and work side by side have led to new hope for unity in Los Angeles and, if success can be achieved here, for other parts of the world, more and more of which faces very similar problems.

Buddhism leads us to the fundamental solution. Nichiren Daishonin wrote a famous thesis, the “Rissho Ankoku Ron,” on the subject that misery and unhappiness are fundamentally caused by confusion in philosophy and the way people think. Hence a change in the underlying philosophy, which allows kosen-rufu to develop, will bring about beneficial changes in society. Buddhism benefits society. As Buddhism prospers, so does society.

*Your land holds secret stores  
of unbounded possibility...*

President Ikeda's viewpoint is always from a perspective of encouragement. He sees a vast potential in the United States for transforming the negative aspects of society into positive ones. If we can take what are popularly seen as the undesirable and difficult aspects of dwelling in a diverse society and convert them into a sense of trust and respect for individual human beings, this will create great energy.

We can find the key in daimoku. Theoretically, *jiyu* is our awareness, but to actualize it, we chant daimoku to change our life-conditions and polish our characters. Buddhism is humanistic. It enables us to make ourselves better human beings through the principle that faith manifests in daily life. Ultimately, we will cause our society to change through each individual's human revolution and convey the importance of always thinking about and working for other people's happiness, for this is the bodhisattva's heart.

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Not only in the United States but all over the world, what causes neighbors to fight — to not care about one another — looms as a major question to which we have yet to find the true solution. We face the challenge of finding a way for people from diverse backgrounds to support one another and live peacefully side by side, instead of trying to hurt each other. How we as SGI members can take the lead in doing this is the very subject of President Ikeda's poem.

People tend to fear and mistrust that which looks different. This fear in turn leads to suspicion and hatred. Therefore, we have to find a way to annul the fear. This is the purpose of dialogue — to try to understand what others are thinking. Society tends to judge things superficially, especially by appearance. Dialogue is our effort to get to know what is beneath the surface and to compare it with our own experience.

This reminds me of the Gosho passage "All disciples and believers of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 23). Respecting others is not always easy, but between fellow SGI members it can become less difficult because we share a common karmic relationship as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. I experienced this recently when I had the opportunity to spend time with members in the Caribbean. On the surface, we were totally different, coming from opposite sides of the globe; yet I could feel the bonds of our shared karmic link.

Fundamentally, the approach of humanism is to respect others regardless of differences. This is especially important to understand here in the United States, where so many cultures and subcultures exist side by side. To create harmony amid such diversity requires a strong will. As President Ikeda said in his speech at Harvard University in 1991:

Obviously, cultures do not always react amicably toward one another. Intercultural contacts on levels that probe and bring into question unique cultural practices deeply rooted in people's daily lives can easily evoke reactions of aversion or even hostility. Never is a deep, inner-generated spirit of restraint and self-control so required of people as when they are confronted with the confusion and tensions brought about by a collision of cultures. True partnership cannot be attained unless the effort to create it is based on mutual self-control at this inner, spiritual level.

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*Past, present, future...  
The causes and effects of the three existences*

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*flow ceaselessly as the reality of life;  
interlinked, they give rise to all  
differences and distinctions.  
Trapped in those differences  
human society is wracked by  
unending contention.*

Viewed from the standpoint of past, present and future, superficial differences — and the hatred and *onshitsu* (slander) to which they give rise — vanish. When “human society is wracked by unending contention,” people have a tendency to just fight it out. In our organization, on the other hand, when difficulties come up we make efforts through guidance and discussion to find a solution.

Inevitably there will be likes and dislikes. These are not necessarily the basis for what we call *onshitsu*. However, hatred and holding a grudge against someone is *onshitsu* and will hinder your practice and lower your life force.

Talking about relationships within the organization, President Toda used a humorous analogy of cleaning potatoes by shaking them together in a water-filled barrel. Mr. Toda would say that one potato points to another potato which, like itself, is filthy and grubby, covered with dirt and scraggly pieces of skin. As the shaking continues and the potatoes rub against one another, all the dirt and old layers of skin come off and they become smooth and glistening. Then the once dirty potato sees its fellow potato and says, “Look at you, you’re all clean and shiny!” The other replies, “So are you, you look wonderful!”

This, said President Toda, is how we help one another in the organization to become beautiful human beings.

*Awaken to the life of jiyu within!  
When the bright sun of “True Cause” rises,  
the stars and planets of  
past cause and effect grow dim  
and the supreme world of  
harmonious unity emerges —  
the unity of friends and comrades,  
each manifesting the life-condition  
of Bodhisattva of the Earth,  
offering timeless proof that indeed,  
“The assembly on Eagle Peak has not yet dispersed.”*

With this verse, we reach the heart of the poem, where President Ikeda makes it clear what he truly wants to say to us. Up to this point, he has been talking about diversity and the challenges we face living in a multicultural society, and that the solution to them lies in our developing the life-condition of *jiyu*. But, we may ask, how are the two connected in reality? From a practical point of view, what are we supposed to do? From this stanza on, he tells us exactly what to do.

First, we have to awaken to the life of *jiyu*, or Buddhahood. This *jiyu* is inherent in everyone as the inalienable, most fundamental right of the human being. We have to arouse it to solve the problems we have in daily life. Once we realize we innately have this life of *jiyu*, we can sense our own great potential. Our ability to create solutions, then, lies in the fundamental ability to awaken to the life of *jiyu* within.

In sum, the great discovery of Buddhism is that the source of happiness lies within each human being, that *jiyu* is the great potential everyone possesses. The problem is that people

are hardly aware of this great potential. Many people tend to be negative and think they are incapable of manifesting their potential. This leads to the tragedies with which we are all so familiar as people; especially the youth, who turn to drugs and crime, severely diminishing the dignity of their lives.

How can we enable people to understand that they do have great potential inside so that they can respect their own lives? We can accomplish this through dialogue. Your compassion and conviction will allow others to realize that the human being has great power.

According to Buddhism, life is a microcosm. Human life itself is the cosmos — in essence it is the same as the universe. And because the universe is unlimited, life must be unlimited as well. This is what we are trying to realize, not just theoretically, but so that we can actualize its promise.

The practical point is how to tap into it. For example, when we become sick, we actually possess the innate power to heal ourselves. Medicine helps to activate this function of Bodhisattva Yakuo (also known as Bodhisattva Medicine King) to work within our lives, and we become well. Or take poverty, which tends to cause us to depend on others. As long as we are seeking help from the environment, we cannot change our financial karma fundamentally. It would be like following a powerless teaching. The power to overcome the poverty is within.

First, we have to get energy and confidence to challenge the situation. Nichiren Daishonin wrote many times throughout the Goshō that great joy can be experienced in challenging a great hardship. The times when we fight are the best times. But when we lose the spirit to challenge, we cannot create fortune, and these become the worst times. The function of *shoten zenjin* does not work well when we are in a low life-condition.

Therefore, the fundamental solution is to elevate our life-conditions. In *The Human Revolution*, President Ikeda writes that strong prayers are the first step in achieving victory:

But are fervent, single-minded prayers enough? No, they are not. Listen carefully- so you won't misunderstand. Chanting is only the first step. The second factor is to use the best strategy and the most effective action. Without this second part we can never gain the initiative to win. Neither the first nor the second factor alone is enough. Only when both are perfectly harmonized can the impossible become possible.

We should not chant daimoku for a miracle, but for the wisdom to determine the best action to take, which will activate the *shoten zenjin*.

*the unity of friends and comrades,  
each manifesting the life-condition  
of Bodhisattva of the Earth,  
offering timeless proof that, indeed,  
“The assembly on Eagle Peak has not yet dispersed.”*

The Ceremony in the Air continues to exist within our own lives, and will exist permanently, manifested in each of us as Buddhahood. The Gohonzon depicts the Ceremony in the Air, which arose from the assembly on Eagle Peak. Shakyamuni expounded the Lotus Sutra in three ceremonies in two places — first at Eagle Peak, then at the Ceremony in the Air, and once again at Eagle Peak.

Discussing the genesis of the Lotus Sutra in the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” his lecture on the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren Daishonin made the profound revelation that as we practice, carrying out the original pledge we made during the assembly at Eagle Peak, we continue to take part in the Ceremony in the Air.

The fact that each of us is realizing the life of *jiyu* daily and keeping other people's happiness constantly on our minds — the fact that we are working to create a peaceful world — is proof that the Ceremony in the Air has not yet dispersed. The SGI movement itself is the Ceremony in the Air. We pledged to carry out our movement for peace and now we are putting our promise into action.

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People cannot live entirely alone. Even the most isolated individuals have relationships necessary for existence or survival. Relationships are important in the context of Buddhist practice because through them the dignity of human life can be discerned, an understanding essential to awakening one's mission for *jiyu*.

*The waves of egoism  
eat away at the shores of  
contemporary society.  
The tragedy of division  
wraps the world in a thick fog.*

*Egoism* is a word we hear used a good deal these days. It means that as long as you are happy, everything's OK and you don't need to care about other people. But this type of thinking is fallacious, for actually, happiness stems from the relationships you have with others. In the Western world, a general philosophy of life grounded in individuality allows such concepts as freedom, democracy and our modern civilization to emerge. But at the same time, it has created problems that are now seen as stemming precisely from people's egoism.

*Egoism* by definition is a lack of consideration for others. Its opposite is compassion, a concern that others may be unhappy. Why is it necessary to have compassion for others? Essentially because egoism leads to hatred. As human beings, we are dependent upon each other. Once people recognize their underlying connection to everyone else, they realize that happiness itself is deeply related to others. President Ikeda calls this the process of "the 'Me' generation becoming the 'You' generation." We could sum up the purpose of our SGI movement as the drive to let people know the importance of awakening an altruistic spirit. As we continue to influence society toward recognizing the dignity of human life, gradually egoism will turn into altruism.

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In the few verses preceding these stanzas, we reached the meat of President Ikeda's message. Now we cut through the meat to the bone, from the theoretical to the practical. From here to the end, President Ikeda tells us how we can take action.

The need for action is familiar to us as Buddhists, for we know that Buddhism itself is practice. Understanding without action is useless.

*First you must break the hard shell  
of the lesser self.  
This you must absolutely do.*

I feel these lines are his personal guidance to each one of us. We must break — smash, in fact — the hard shell of the lesser self. This lesser self manifests itself in the attitude "only me." Breaking this shell is the most important thing to do, and President Ikeda urges that we must do it. All of life's problems and disappointments, our complaints and negative life-conditions, arise from the lesser self. When people don't realize that their own lesser

selves cause their problems, they tend to blame others.

In the original Japanese version, the word President Ikeda chose for *break* is very strong and is followed by a string of exclamation points. It is a very strong and direct statement, which stems from his deep feelings for us. He is always straightforward and often talks about how important it is to be straightforward.

*People can only live fully  
by helping others to live.  
When you give life to friends  
you truly live.*

When we develop our Buddha nature, we naturally start to think about others' happiness. If you are concerned about other people, you can avoid becoming self-centered or arrogant. Learning to care for others is how we do our human revolution.

Why does it seem to be so hard to respect or care for others? In the Goshō, Nichiren Daishonin wrote about Ashura, who personified the life-condition of Anger, which is characterized as solely pursuing one's own interests. As long as we dwell in the lower four worlds, we can only exhibit the lesser self with all its ego and self-centeredness.

However, as our encounters within the SGI organization allow us to polish our lives, it becomes easier to realize that the real benefit of practicing is to attain enlightenment. This means to perfect our character, develop our personalities fully, reveal our fullest potential and enrich our life-conditions to the greatest degree. In other words, to become people who are great in the true sense will inevitably contribute to the happiness of society.

*And blossoms in delightful multitude  
exude the unique fragrance  
of each person, of each ethnicity,  
in precise accord with the principle of  
"cherry, plum, pear and damson."*

When we develop ourselves, we develop our uniqueness in a positive way. Each person displaying his or her own intrinsic value is the meaning of the concept "cherry, plum, pear and damson," the Japanese aphorism for which is *o bai to ri*.

As all people are different, when they come together without attempting to develop themselves, no real value can be created. They often end up fighting one another because of their differences. They may be trying to "bloom" but cannot.

With a foundation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, diversity can work. As everyone makes efforts to improve themselves, to develop their greater selves, *o bai to ri* is revealed. In this way, we can take pride in our unique heritages, trying to do our best, appreciating those of other ethnicities. In this verse, I believe, we can see President Ikeda's expectation most clearly.

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