

## **'We Must Cultivate Our Garden'**

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the 2nd session of the Nationwide Representatives Conference in Japan, Nov. 23, 1996.*

Just as a ceaselessly flowing river is clear and pure, the life of a person who continuously takes action and advances will always exhibit true beauty. Buddhism is victory or defeat, and kosen-rufu is an eternal struggle. Precisely for that reason, leaders must continue to take action with the spirit to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for the happiness of all humankind.

In the Goshō, the Daishonin says, "[The generals in a tumultuous age] develop strategy behind drawn curtains, and victory is decided thousands of miles away [from the field of battle]" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 183). It is important that leaders always ask themselves: "What can I do to advance kosen-rufu in my community?" "How can I encourage and protect the precious members in my organization?" These points should be the constant focus of their thoughts and prayers. It is also vital for leaders to gather to discuss matters in earnest; to be united, openly sharing information and pooling their wisdom. Such efforts will pave a fresh path toward victory. Leaders must carefully weigh the various issues confronting them and act appropriately.

### **Voltaire's Conclusion on Life**

Our local communities represent the True Land.<sup>1</sup> We are deceiving ourselves if we think that we can advance kosen-rufu and practice Buddhism correctly while neglecting the community we live in.

The French writer and philosopher Voltaire (1694–1778), whose ideas greatly influenced the French Revolution, wrote the novel *Candide*, a tale of life's vicissitudes. He closes this work with a passage that could be said to sum up his philosophy: "We must cultivate our garden."<sup>2</sup>

The French word *candide*, which is also the name of the story's protagonist, means "naïve" and "ingenuous." Upon reaching adulthood, Candide faces a succession of bitter ordeals. First, he is driven from the fine castle in which he grew up and is later arrested in a foreign land. He manages to escape his captors, but no sooner has he done so than he is shipwrecked in a ferocious storm. And then when he thinks at last he has been saved, the town where he has taken refuge is rocked by a sizable earthquake. He is flogged by an officer of the Inquisition and, after fleeing to South America, is forced into a nomadic life, wandering from one place to another.

Candide experiences love, war and illness; separations and reunions; philosophy and doubt. After overcoming these many travails, what conclusion does he reach? They are the novel's last words: "We must cultivate our garden." In other words, rationalizations are all very well and good, but life doesn't always go according to well-ordered logic. It is impossible to know what the future may hold, or how the world may change. That is why he avowed that it is far more important to diligently tend the garden of one's life.

### **Make Your Mark Here and Now**

From our standpoint as SGI members, the communities in which we live, our areas of specialty, our occupations, our families — all are our garden of kosen-rufu. We must cultivate and develop this garden. By so doing, we cultivate our lives and enrich ourselves

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in body, heart and mind.

Elsewhere, Voltaire relates his conviction that he will never be discouraged by sickness or old age. He declares that he will still leave behind a lasting achievement, even though he might end up cultivating a grove of no more than 20 trees.

The world we live in drifts along like duckweed floating down a river. We should not allow our lives to be swept along aimlessly. We are developing an eternal golden path, the true greatness of which will definitely be recognized 200 years hence.

Pioneering takes steady, dedicated effort; it is advancing surely one step at a time. True Buddhist practice lies in such activities as visiting members, giving personal encouragement, talking to our friends about Buddhism and introducing others to faith.

It is not enough to simply gather a lot of people together and give a speech. Buddhist practice is about taking action. How many members do you take the time to visit and encourage in a month? In a year? True pioneering lies in making precisely such efforts. Our challenge is to deepen the understanding of friends and fellow members toward the philosophy and activities of the SGI through our encounters with them.

A certain large company has this motto: "Treat everyone as you would a customer." One way they put this motto into practice is seen in their reply to unsuccessful job applicants. If an applicant fails the interview screening, then the manager responsible writes a courteous letter informing the applicant of the decision so that he or she is not left in the dark or with hard feelings toward the company. The continuous effort to treat people with consideration and respect has enabled the company to establish a solid foundation of trust.

All you have to do is to show a little consideration and sensitivity. Someone who has genuine concern for others is great. An organization whose leaders have true compassion for the members will produce solid results. Where the leaders are always ready to offer encouragement and spare no effort, there is growth. Where the leaders are idle, decline is inevitable.

Incidentally, Voltaire was also well-known for the disdain in which he held the clergy. There is a scene in *Candide* where the protagonist arrives at the fabled South American land of Eldorado. There, struck with wonder at the fact that there are no priests, Candide exclaims: "What! You have no monks to teach, argue, govern, intrigue, and burn at the stake everyone who disagrees with them?"<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, in the Eldorado of the human spirit that we are striving to create, there is absolutely no need for any nefarious clergy.

### **'When the Skies Are Clear, the Ground Is Illuminated'**

Japan is presently in the middle of an economic recession. In the Goshō, the Daishōnin writes: "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, he understands the meaning of all worldly affairs" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishōnin*, vol. 1, p. 82). Citing these words, the second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, once offered this encouragement:

We who embrace faith in the Gohonzon should not simply lament the poor economic conditions. Rather, we should strive to break through these difficulties by manifesting great life force, carefully considering what we need to do and working hard. This is what is meant by the Goshō passage: "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, he understands the meaning of all worldly affairs."

Quite often, people take the easygoing view that, just because they embrace the Gohonzon, their business will definitely flourish without making any efforts or thinking about such things as sales technique. This is a grave mistake. Irrefutably, such an attitude

is a form of serious slander against the Law....

Not noticing the weak areas or deficiencies in your business or realizing the need for improvements, for example, might be excused in the first one or two years of practice. But if the situation continues after three or four years, it is cause for serious reflection. You must constantly study and make tireless efforts to ensure the success of your business.<sup>4</sup>

### **The Power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds**

The Lotus Sutra talks about a bodhisattva named Perceiver of the World's Sounds (Jpn Kanzeon). Broadly speaking, this bodhisattva represents the wisdom and vitality to be able to keenly sense changes in the world and people's feelings and to respond swiftly to their needs. By chanting daimoku, we can develop the power of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds in our lives.

Faith means making 100 percent effort ourselves — in our daimoku and in our actions. When we practice in this way, the Buddhist gods will lend us their protection. We mustn't have a complacent, dependent attitude in faith, chanting haphazardly without definite goals and making only halfhearted efforts in the belief that we'll automatically be protected.

Depth of determination and unshakable character are vital. Those possessing these qualities are second to none in faith. This is something I learned from President Toda. Accordingly, the SGI is strong and self-reliant. If we depend on others, then we ourselves will be unable to grow.

I hope that leaders will earnestly pray for the prosperity, safety and happiness of the members who are all so infinitely noble and praiseworthy. May you also never forget to develop yourselves and pray to become people who are liked and trusted by the members and who can work unstintingly for the members' happiness and well-being.

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1. True Land: the "Life Span" (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra clarifies that the strife-filled *saha* world is itself the True Land in which the Buddha has always dwelt and taught the Law.
2. Voltaire, *Candide, or Optimism*, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 77.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.
4. From the editorial of the August 1955 issue of *The Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai study journal.