

Youth, Build the New Century!

“ When you look within your heart, and when you reflect on your present actions, you should be like the earth illuminated by the rays of the morning sun. You should feel the directness and purity of the morning’s light. Leave the realm of petty concerns to others. You are better than that. Pass through that realm lightly, with a smile on your lips.”

— José Martí

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the 6th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Dec. 16, 1996.

My thanks and deepest appreciation for your many efforts this year. Thank you! I also thank the musicians for their wonderful performance.

Earlier, the Tokyo Wind Ensemble performed a rousing medley of Soka Gakkai songs.

Let’s always keep singing Gakkai songs together! Let us move forward, joined in jubilant song!

All day today, from this magnificent “Makiguchi Castle,” we had a glorious view of snowcapped Mount Fuji. The sight of the beautiful, inspiring peak of Mount Fuji always moves me to press my palms together and bow my head in reverence.

The gesture of joining one’s palms together in prayer or reverence, incidentally, symbolizes the mutual possession of the ten worlds.

Make Mount Fuji Your Model

Mount Fuji reminds me of the novel *Miyamoto Musashi*, an account of the 17th-century master swordsman of that name, written by the well-known Japanese writer Eiji Yoshikawa (1892– 1962). My fifth-grade teacher, Mr. Hiyama, read it aloud to our class.

I will quote a passage from the book that has remained engraved on my mind since that time. These words contain a deep truth, and I have mentioned them many times in my speeches:

Rather than worrying about your future, thinking, “Perhaps I should become this. Perhaps I should become that,” first be still and build a self that is as solid and unmoving as Mount Fuji.

Never court the favor of people in society. If you become someone who is looked up to by others, then the world will naturally accord you the value you merit.¹

Never be shaken, no matter what happens or what others say. Never be flustered. Never lose confidence. This is the way we should strive to live our lives. Doing so is a sign of genuine character.

Developing a resolute self is even more crucial for SGI members, given that the essence of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings is to selflessly dedicate our lives for the sake of the Law. We must make a firm commitment to wholeheartedly devote ourselves to our chosen spheres of endeavor, to keep striving in our fields of mission until our last breaths.

Once, when I was still a youth division member, Mr. Toda and I were alone, gazing up at Mount Fuji, and he said: “Daisaku, Mount Fuji seems to be still and serene, but its summit

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is buffeted by raging winds. Likewise, anyone who stands at the top must also brave raging winds.” I will never forget those words as long as I live.

In any event, I wanted to share that stirring passage from *Miyamoto Musashi* with all of you today.

Mr. Toda declared, “A new century will be created by the power and passion of youth.” In just a few years, the 21st century will be upon us. The Soka Gakkai and the SGI have entered the time to entrust the members of the youth division with kosen-rufu’s future. The youth division has become a presence of decisive importance in our movement.

Times change. They must. Unless they do, a new age will never dawn.

In that spirit, I call upon the members of the men’s and women’s divisions to make every effort to support and train the youth division members, so that the youth can blaze a truly magnificent path as successors.

Fresh Focus on Youth Division Leaders Meetings

I hope the members of the youth division will also advance with that determination. And I hope that they will brilliantly carry on the mission of the Soka Gakkai — an unrivaled organization that has appeared in accord with the Buddha’s will and decree, a noble organization dedicated to making kosen-rufu a reality.

Toward that end, I would like to make a proposal: From next year [1997], in our lead-up to the 21st century, how about starting the youth division monthly leaders meetings again, kicking off the new year with the 1st All-Japan Young Men’s Division Meeting and 1st All-Japan Young Women’s Division Meeting? [A joint young men’s and young women’s division meeting was held Jan. 11.]

If possible, I ask all of the top leaders, from Soka Gakkai President Akiya on down, to attend these meetings and lend their full support to the youth.

Making these meetings milestones in your advance for kosen-rufu, please build a solid tradition that will endure into the coming century; please foster a great river of capable people. I am also counting on the members of the youth division to open the way to a wonderful new age of the SGI.

‘Wealth of the Spirit’ Is True Beauty

I visited Cuba this year [June 1996]. It was a most memorable visit. José Martí (1853–95), the Cuban writer, is admired by the people of that country as a national hero for his tireless struggle to free his homeland from Spanish colonial rule. In the last two years of his life, Martí wrote a series of encouraging letters to a young girl, from which I’ll share some excerpts with you today.

Martí writes:

A person who possesses wealth of the spirit has no need for physical adornment. Those who care only for their physical appearance are often spiritually impoverished, and try to conceal that poverty with exterior trappings. Those who are aware of their inner beauty don’t seek borrowed beauty from outside. They shine with the knowledge of their inner beauty.

They also make an effort to cheer up others and to make them happy. That is because they know it is their duty as a human being to bring joy, and not sorrow, to others.

Moreover, those who are aware of their own beauty see beauty in others. That allows them to respect and value both themselves and others.²

On another occasion, he writes:

Love and cherish your mother. You should be proud of the fact that this woman who is your mother brought you into the world. When you look within your heart, and when you reflect on your present actions, you should be like the earth illuminated by the rays of the morning sun. You should feel the directness and purity of the morning's light. Leave the realm of petty concerns to others. You are better than that. Pass through that realm lightly, with a smile on your lips.³

His words resound with profound truth. The "realm of petty concerns" is of no interest to us, either. Our gaze is focused on the profound and noble realm of the eternal. Buddhism is a search for eternal happiness. Please calmly survey the ever-changing, evanescent world from the lofty perspective of faith and remain true to your beliefs and convictions.

We must follow our chosen path. Let's continue to make our way on the great road to eternal happiness and development.

The Courageous Example of Mrs. Sats

Recently, I received a book from Moscow, an autobiography of Natalia Sats, who is regarded as the mother of the children's arts movement in Russia and beloved by children the world over. She died just three years ago [1993], at the age of 90. Viktor Prokhorov, president of the Moscow State Children's Musical Theater, which Mrs. Sats founded, sent me the book.

The bonds of friendship that Mrs. Sats and I cultivated while she was alive continue to this day. I, and indeed the SGI members, have many such friends around the world. In her autobiography, Mrs. Sats also writes of her memories of our meetings.

President Ikeda and Natalia Sats met seven times, the first being in May 1981 in Moscow. The Moscow State Children's Musical Theater also visited Japan twice at the invitation of the Min-On Concert Association.

Mrs. Sats once said that the Buddhist view of eternal life she had learned from me had given her boundless hope. Today, members of the SGI organization in Russia, who began their activities as a chapter just two years ago [1994], are applying themselves diligently to the two ways of practice and study. If Mrs. Sats were still alive, I know they would find a sympathetic supporter in her.

When Mrs. Sats was young, her husband, though innocent of any crime, was executed during one of Stalin's purges. She herself was falsely accused of a crime and sentenced to five years in prison, a substantial part of which was spent in labor camps in Siberia. Yet in spite of such persecution, she refused to renounce her principles and fought dauntlessly against her oppressors.

In her autobiography, she recalls her experiences in Siberia. Her interrogators were devious and cruel. They promised her she would be released and returned to her family if she would make false statements incriminating her friends. She told her interrogators simply: "I'm sorry, but I was taught from childhood to respect the truth. That's why I would never purchase the happiness of my loved ones with a lie."⁴ She proudly upheld her dignity as a human being. She lived a brave and noble life.

We are people of faith — faith is the ultimate conviction. Nothing could be sadder or more shortsighted, therefore, than complaining or giving up when we encounter some small obstacle in our path. The Daishonin writes, "The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 240). We don't want to be thoughtless. A genuine Buddhist is a person of wisdom and conviction.

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Encouraging Others

There were several other innocent female prisoners in the cell where Mrs. Sats was incarcerated. They were all numb with fear and sadness at their plight. Though Mrs. Sats was in an equally dismal predicament, she did not withdraw into her sorrow. She immediately began to think of how she could raise the spirits of her despairing cellmates. By thinking of others, the sun of hope began to rise in her heart.

Women are strong. Women are like the sun. The Japanese feminist and social activist Raicho Hiratsuka (1886–1971) expresses a universal truth when she writes, “In the beginning, woman was truly like the sun.”⁵

Mrs. Sats also writes in her autobiography: “I should help them and myself to survive. I need to switch my thinking, try to believe that this present reality is by no means the end....”⁶ Her resolve was that no matter how wretched her present circumstances appeared, her life was not over — and she would fight to the very end.

Turning Defeat Into a Cause for Victory

Mr. Toda once told me: “You can make a defeat the cause for future victory. You can also make victory the cause for future defeat.” The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is the Buddhism of the True Cause, the Buddhism of the present and the future. We don’t dwell on the past. We are always challenging ourselves from the present toward the future. “The whole future lies ahead of us! We have only just begun!” — because we advance with this spirit, we are never deadlocked.

The SGI is an order of believers dedicated to carrying out the Buddha’s will and decree, a body created in accord with the wish of the original Buddha. It will advance for eternity. We shouldn’t allow ourselves to be overly preoccupied by the minor concerns of the present. Gazing down on the praise and criticisms of others from a higher perspective, we should always look to the future and have a firm commitment to eternal progress.

When we change our attitude, we can change our circumstances. Buddhism teaches the principles of the oneness of life and its environment and that a life-moment possesses 3,000 realms.

When Mrs. Sats looked around her, she noticed that people of diverse talents were occupying her cell. Nothing was to be gained by sitting around moping. She decided to make use of the women’s abilities by organizing a school — a classroom in the cell where they could share and exchange the knowledge each possessed.

One woman lectured on chemistry, another on medicine. Mrs. Sats, with her rich theatrical background, sang for them. On one occasion, she recited a Pushkin poem with a clear, vital voice that inspired courage in the hearts of her listeners.

The cell was dark and isolated — which made it a perfect place to study! It also served as a theater in which the women enjoyed the arts.

Your attitude can totally transform your situation. The thing is to decide to spend each day happily and productively — wherever you happen to be. A wise person can create value under any circumstances.

Giving Courage, Hope, Whatever One Can

Buddhism, of course, teaches that “the mind is like a skilled painter” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 133). Like a skilled painter, the mind can freely draw and portray anything at will. Consequently, life itself is a great painting created by the mind. It is a work of art that our minds produce.

In offering guidance to members, too, we can relate any number of beautiful dramas of faith, if we set our minds to it.

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If a person is hungry, we should give him or her bread to eat. When there is no bread, we can at least give nourishing words. To a person who looks ill or is physically frail, we can turn the conversation to some subject that will lift his or her spirits and fill him or her with the hope and determination to get better.

Let us give something to each person we meet: joy, courage, hope, assurance, philosophy, wisdom or a vision for the future. Let us always give something.

For instance, there may be some people who, for one reason or another, have no room in their hearts to enjoy the beauty of flowers. They come home after work, complain about their day, and go to sleep. We can try to help them change their mind-set by drawing their attention to the beauty of flowers or of a work of art. That often is enough to get them to open their hearts and minds to all sorts of new possibilities.

Please become outstanding leaders who can use your minds with precision and sensitivity just as the hands of a great artist use a brush.

History Is Made in Inconspicuous Places

Mrs. Sats' cell was small, but a great history was created there.

Small gatherings are important. There is nothing special about speaking at a large meeting and being applauded by a huge audience. Small, inconspicuous gatherings — discussion meetings, home visits and personal guidance — are what really matter. Large meetings tend to be like a one-way street, with all the talking coming from one side. They don't allow everyone to participate and cultivate their true abilities.

Truly capable leaders can engage others, on a one-to-one basis, in inspiring dialogue and move them with warm-hearted encouragement to set forth with renewed determination in faith. Determinations inspired in this way tend to last. They become catalysts, causing ripple effects that spread out to touch many, many other people.

But only steady efforts to visit one member after another and to conduct sincere heart-to-heart dialogue can produce such ripples. Such efforts have been the secret to the SGI's development to this day. So if we resolve to redouble our commitment to such efforts, we can create another powerful ripple effect. It is along this path that the eternal development of kosen-rufu lies.

Mrs. Sats and her fellow prisoners decided that it was wrong for people to suffer by themselves. Alone, our suffering only deepens. Hope disappears. Human beings need to be with and among other human beings. Engagement with others forges our characters and enriches us.

There may be times, certainly, when being a member of an organization seems bothersome and we just want to be alone. But how sad it is if we are left alone without any support and then lose our faith. True growth comes from striving together with our fellow members in the living realm of human beings, ourselves experiencing the rich gamut of human emotions.

The Purpose of the Organization Is To Deepen Our Faith

Mrs. Sats was a great philosopher and humanist. Humanism is not some grand, high-sounding theory. It means having faith in human beings and forging links with others. This is true humanism. In other words, it is making friends.

Friendship is strong. Friendship, camaraderie and unity in faith lie at the heart of the SGI. They come before the organization. We must never make the mistake of thinking that it is the other way around. The organization serves as a means for deepening friendship, comradeship and faith. To confuse the means and the end is a terrible mistake. When an organization begins to exist for its own sake, it will lapse into the vice of all failed

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organizations — authoritarianism.

As a result of our SGI activities to spread friendship in our local communities and throughout society, we are accumulating valuable treasures in our lives day after day.

Everything Starts With Our Human Revolution

We are practitioners of the Daishonin's Buddhism. I hope that each of you will live in such a manner that others will look at you and say, "She is a wonderful person!" and "I want to be like that!" I hope each of you, in your unique way, will script the wonderful drama of your human revolution.

What is human revolution? When a person who has spent all his or her time playing and goofing off suddenly starts to study, that's human revolution. When a person who has hardly ever opened the Goshō begins to read it; when a person who didn't work very hard gets up early and starts to work — that, too, is human revolution.

It doesn't matter in what area, but just keep working on your personal revolution to transform and improve yourself in the way most natural for you. The important thing is that you change in some positive way. There is surely no more exhilarating life than one in which we write our unique history of human revolution each day. And the growth and transformation we achieve in this way can convince people of the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism more eloquently than anything else.

If We Attain Buddhahood in This Life, We Attain Complete Freedom

Allow me now to share with you a passage — a famous passage — from the "The Opening of the Eyes" that I have cited many times:

Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood. Do not have doubts simply because heaven does not lend you protection. Do not be discouraged because you do not enjoy an easy and secure existence in this life. This is what I have taught my disciples morning and evening, and yet they begin to harbor doubts and abandon their faith.

Foolish men are likely to forget the promises they have made when the crucial moment comes. (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 180)

"We will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood" — if we keep up the struggle during this life, we will attain Buddhahood, the Daishonin assures us. So whatever difficulties you may meet, he urges, work to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime.

As the Daishonin writes in another Goshō: "This life is like a dream. One cannot know if he will live until tomorrow" (MW-4, 283). This is the truth, and there is nothing we can do about it. But attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime means creating a self of utter freedom throughout eternity. This is the purpose of faith. Whether we attain such a state of being or not is the measure of our victory in this lifetime.

Transforming one's inner state of life cannot be done through science, economics or politics. Only the Daishonin's Buddhism enables us to do this. And we have had the good fortune to encounter this Buddhism in this lifetime.

Once we attain Buddhahood in this life, on this planet, we can be born in a Buddha land other than the Earth. This Earth is not the only place where human beings live. There are infinite lands throughout the universe. Of all of them, this strife-filled *saha* world is one of the worst.

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In “The Four Debts of Gratitude,” for example, Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Since all the lands in the ten directions, with the exception of those in the *saha* world system, are pure lands, their people, being gentlehearted, neither abuse nor hate the worthies and sages” (MW-5, 3).

Going back to the passage from “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin instructs us not to doubt the great benefit of the Lotus Sutra, for in the long term we will definitely be protected. Even if we appear to suffer temporary setbacks, he says, we can always turn poison into healing medicine.

The Daishonin also tells us not to be discouraged if our lives aren’t of ease and comfort. If they were, we would never be tested or forge inner strength. If one can eat and sleep whenever one wants, one only grows lazy and spoiled.

We can only achieve a brilliant, indestructible, diamondlike state of life through struggling with obstacles and hardships. That is why the Daishonin declared, “One should regard meeting obstacles as true peace and comfort” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750).

Our Buddhist practice entails much hard work and effort, but there is also the tremendous joy of human revolution that can never be derived from merely leading a life of idle pleasure. That is why the Daishonin sternly warns that we must not forget the promises we have made when the crucial moment comes.

Let us join together to make 1997 another year of magnificent triumph!

Please give my warmest regards to all your fellow members. And thank you once again for your hard work over the past year. I wish all of you the very best of health and a very happy New Year!

Cheers for the youth division!

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1. Eiji Yoshikawa, *Miyamoto Musashi* (Tokyo: Rokko Shuppan-bu, 1965), vol. 5, p. 8.
2. Translated from Spanish. *José Martí Epistolario* (Havana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1993), vol. 5, p. 148.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
4. Translated from Russian. Natalia Sats, *Zhizn — Yavlenie Polosatoye* (Life — Striped Pattern) (Moscow: Novosti, 1991), p. 293.
5. Raicho Hiratsuka, “*Seito*” *Josei Kaihoron Shu* (Compilation of Essays on Women’s Emancipation from *Seito* magazine), ed. Kiyoko Horiba (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1991), p. 18.
6. Natalia Sats, *ibid.*, p. 288.

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