

Benefactors of Humanity

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at a representatives leaders conference held in Japan on Dec. 21, 1996.

I commend you on your earnest participation in this leaders conference. I also thank you for all your hard work over the past year. I hope you will continue to do your utmost to warmly protect and encourage the members in the coming year. Please exert yourselves wholeheartedly once again to guide and foster capable people so that every person can enjoy a happy and prosperous life and show great actual proof of victory.

Our advance is not a shortsighted struggle. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, used to say that it would be 200 years before people recognized the significance of our movement. Regardless of what might be said of our organization today, he asserted, 200 years from now, humanity would acknowledge us as benefactors who widely propagated the Mystic Law.

What kind of a span are we looking at when we speak of 200 years?

If we go back 200 years, Japan was in the middle of the Edo period and China was in the middle of the Qing dynasty, while Europe saw Napoleon embark on his Italian campaign.

It was also exactly 200 years ago, in 1796, that the English physician Edward Jenner (1749– 1823) discovered a safe method of immunization against smallpox, a landmark in the eradication of that deadly disease.

Almost all Japanese adults bear the characteristic smallpox vaccination mark on one arm. Thanks to Jenner's discovery, we have been spared the threat of dying of smallpox or permanently scarring our faces. But from the dawn of history until just 200 years ago, humankind suffered unceasingly from the scourge of smallpox, which had an extremely high death rate worldwide.

In 1796, Jenner began his revolutionary experiments inoculating people with infected matter from a patient with cowpox, a relatively harmless disease that could be contracted from cattle, as a possible means of immunization against smallpox. His experiments were successful and the procedure of vaccination was widely adopted throughout the world. In May 1980, the World Health Organization declared that smallpox had been eradicated from the face of the earth. Thanks to Jenner, one blight that had long caused suffering to humanity was at last eliminated. Almost 200 years has passed from the time of his initial discovery. Today, Jenner is regarded as a great benefactor of humanity.

Enduring Criticism

In the beginning, however, Jenner was loudly denounced. Expert physicians did not recognize his work. The prestigious Royal Society of London turned down a paper that he had written describing his findings. And members of the clergy preached that infecting people with cowpox "violated the way of God."

One critic even wrote that if you were inoculated with cowpox your ears would become hairy like a cow's and you would grow a tail. And many were all too ready to believe it. Hearing this now sounds almost comical, but new ideas are certain to be attacked by people who are set in old ways of thinking. An association was even organized to oppose vaccination; Jenner was ridiculed and attacked from all sides.

But nothing is more eloquent than actual proof. As the effectiveness of vaccination became known, fair and open-minded people came to recognize the importance of Jenner's work. Inoculation with cowpox virus proved an extremely safe and effective means of

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protection against smallpox compared to the previous method of combating the disease — that is, inoculating a healthy person with a mild strain of smallpox virus, which sometimes resulted in death.

Napoleon, though in the midst of war with England, praised Jenner, an Englishman, for his work and presented him with a medal. He also had all his troops vaccinated using Jenner's method. Eventually, this means of vaccination spread around the world. Japan, however, due to the country's isolationist policy from the early 17th century, was among the last countries in the world to adopt it, finally doing so in the latter part of the 19th century.

Two hundred years from now, people will undoubtedly speak of us, today's SGI members, too, as benefactors of humanity who put a stop to the spiral of human misery.

Humbly Learn From the People

What led Jenner to discover a vaccination for smallpox using cowpox? It was the wisdom of the people. There was a high incidence of cowpox among people in dairy farming communities at the time. In most cases, cowpox produced only a red rash. It had become folk wisdom that if you contracted cowpox once, you would not get smallpox. Jenner discovered his vaccination for smallpox by scientifically investigating this popular belief.

Countless others had no doubt heard this piece of folk wisdom as well, but only Jenner, because of his humble willingness to learn from the people, wrote a new page in history based upon it. This was the key to his success.

The bottom line is that victory comes only to those who have gone through arduous, painful struggles. Without suffering, without agonizing, there is no victory.

Just as Jenner learned from the people, it is crucial for the leaders of the SGI to respect and learn from the members. We must take such good care of the members that they will really feel our sincere concern and consideration.

We must wholeheartedly protect them and pray for their happiness. These are the most essential requirements of SGI leaders. As long as the leaders have this spirit, the SGI will never become deadlocked.

As leaders, it is also vital to put utmost effort into nurturing the youth as capable successors for the future. We must foster the youth by working closely and rigorously alongside them so that they may become strong, wise and dauntless individuals. Let us resolutely forge a great path of absolute victory for kosen-rufu, a path of eternal advancement and unending development. And for our resounding victory 200 years hence, let us start by achieving total victory in all spheres in the coming year.

Please convey my best regards to all the precious members in your respective areas.

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