

Treasuring People Is the SGI Spirit, SGI President Says

COURTESY OF SGI NEWSLETTER

Okinawa, Japan, Feb. 27

“Nothing is more precious than the people,” began SGI President Ikeda at the 2nd Okinawa Executive Conference here today. Treasuring the people and working for their happiness, he stressed, is the fundamental spirit of the SGI.

He then shared a story about an elderly follower of Shakyamuni who had suffered great hardship while in domestic service. After encountering Shakyamuni and embracing faith in Buddhism, all of her sufferings were transformed into compassion and wisdom to relieve the pain of others. Through her deep concern and common sense, she converted a Brahman, a member of ancient India’s highest caste, who was practicing austerities in the hope of lessening his negative karma.

She had much in common, Mr. Ikeda said, with members of the women’s division and the Many Treasures Group, adding that the devoted efforts of countless hardworking, ordinary individuals have been the source of the kosen-rufu movement’s development.

With spring just around the corner, the SGI leader said he hoped that the members would use this time to breathe new life into their activities. He quoted a passage from the Lotus Sutra: “A fragrant wind blew away the withered flowers, / whereupon fresh and beautiful ones rained down” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 137). By engaging in dialogue with and encouraging our fellow members, he said, our faith is revitalized. And those whose faith is always fresh and vigorous function as a “fragrant wind” themselves, he added. In connection with the World Peace Youth Culture Festival that will be hosted by Okinawa in the year 2000, Mr. Ikeda said he wished that the members, especially those of the youth division, would unite to make it a landmark event raising the curtain on a new era of peace from Okinawa’s shores.

Turning to the German author Goethe’s semi-autobiographical novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, the SGI president emphasized the importance of experiencing sufferings and hardships in life to strengthen character. The novel’s protagonist, the artistically inclined and deeply sensitive Werther, was consumed by a passionate but unrequited love for a certain young woman, which in the end drove him to suicide.

Discussing this work, Goethe once said that people of any era can relate to facing obstacles and having one’s desires or ambitions remain unfulfilled. Mr. Ikeda said that though life indeed is a succession of trials, each challenge must be overcome if we are to lead happy and fulfilling lives. He stressed that faith is the driving force behind such a struggle and reminded the members of the Buddhist principle of earthly desires leading to enlightenment.

President Ikeda then quoted Dr. Aleksandr Yakovlev, the Russian architect of perestroika, who once said that the teachings of Mahayana Buddhism enable people to transform any gale of suffering into a favorable wind of creativity. The SGI leader added that when we cherish the great desire for kosen-rufu — a desire that finds expression in our concern for others and for society at large — we can transform our sufferings into positive sources of energy and elevate our life-conditions. He concluded by reaffirming that those who embrace and work to spread the Mystic Law throughout their lives will, at the last moment of their lives, feel a sense of deep and abiding satisfaction.

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Subject: World Tribune 04/04/97 n.3133 p.4 WT970404p04 Okinawa, Japan 02/27/97

Author: SGI Newsletter

Keywords: 02/27/97 Fundamental Guidance Japan Messages News Okinawa People Practice President Says Speeches Spirit Treasuring