

## **SIGNIFICANT DATE: President Makiguchi's Birthday — June 6**

### **A Life of Conviction**

**By JEFF FARR, Associate Editor**

SGI President Ikeda recently compared the life of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, first president of the Soka Gakkai, to the sun's travel across the sky. In Makiguchi's youth he devoted himself to improving education "with a vigor like that of the morning sun" and in his later years "brought his life to a most solemn, magnificent conclusion, just as the crimson orb of the setting sun radiates a golden light."

Makiguchi's life was indeed like the sun's steady travel across the sky in that he maintained his convictions throughout.

But it would seem strange to call his life a sunny day. It was full of problems, more than most people experience. Makiguchi's sunrise, his youth, included his parents' divorce when he was just 6, his subsequent adoption by an uncle and his having to work straight out of elementary school.

His sunset, likewise, was not what most people would consider a beautiful one: When the Japanese government tried to force religious groups to cooperate with the war effort, Makiguchi, then Soka Gakkai president, refused, was imprisoned and died at 72 in a closet-sized cell.

His 40-year career as an educator, too, was one difficulty after another. His progressive educational ideas and practices enraged school administrators, local politicians and parents. Recently, a Soka University graduate discovered seven long-lost articles by Makiguchi, one of which details one of these incidents. In 1919, authorities removed Makiguchi as a school principal when he refused to give preference to the child of an influential local figure, although a group of young teachers and some parents came to his defense.

Makiguchi, born June 6, 1871, thus set an example for us all. Living fearlessly for his convictions, he showed the way a Buddhist should live. Although he faced constant opposition from those who disagreed with his belief in a people's movement in religion and education, he never gave in.

When he took faith at age 57, his study, especially of Nichiren Daishonin's letters, fortified his commitment to such a people's movement. One of his favorite quotes was from Nichiren Daishonin's letter "The Opening of the Eyes": "To be praised by fools — that is the greatest shame" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 188). This quote describes exactly how he lived his life — true to his beliefs, seeking only the praise of those whom he considered wise, namely 1) Nichiren Daishonin and 2) the common people.

Makiguchi's life shows us what a serious thing — and a wonderful thing — it is to live for our convictions. His efforts live on in the SGI organization and the Soka School System. But many people today, especially young people, not only seem to lack the fortitude to live for their convictions but do not know what their convictions are. One reason for this, it has been pointed out, may be that today's youth, unlike generations past, have not faced serious obstacles like wars, or had great causes to fight for.

Another of Makiguchi's favorite Gosho quotes explains the importance of each of us awakening to our convictions: "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, he understands the meaning of all worldly affairs" (MW-1, 82). Through Buddhist practice, our innate Buddhahood rises like a sun in the skies of our hearts. Then what we should do, the best way for us to go in this world, becomes clear. We can thus live with great conviction — even in an age lacking in conviction — just as Makiguchi did, setting new examples for coming generations to follow.

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