

## One Individual Can Change Everything

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the 10th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, commemorating May 3, Soka Gakkai Day and Soka Gakkai Mothers Day, at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, April 21.*

Congratulations on May 3! Let's have an enjoyable meeting today. SGI members from around the world who have joined us here, thank you for your tremendous efforts in coming all this way. Since there are a number of members here from Brazil and Argentina, the countries farthest away from Japan, I will begin by speaking about Brazil.

I visited Brazil for the first time in October 1960. After being inaugurated as Soka Gakkai president, I lost no time in initiating efforts for worldwide kosen-rufu.

*The SGI leader became the third Soka Gakkai president on May 3, 1960. In October that year, he visited the United States, Canada and Brazil.*

At the time, I was 32. That was an incredibly busy period in my life. Often for days on end I didn't even have time to go home.

This marks my 50th year since embracing faith. For the past half-century, I have single-mindedly worked and steadfastly challenged myself for the sake of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI, the happiness of our members and kosen-rufu — without sitting back to rest even a moment. As a result, I have created a great history of kosen-rufu.

The good fortune I have accumulated will surely adorn my life and shine in it for all eternity. And I am confident that the same is true of all those who have joined me in this great cause.

The second time I visited Brazil was in March 1966.

*As a result of a 1964 coup d'état, Brazil was ruled by a military government when President Ikeda visited the country again. Under the repressive regime, many Brazilian cultural figures and intellectuals were persecuted and driven into exile.*

During that entire visit, my party and I were kept under close police surveillance, our every movement watched around the clock. Of course, we hadn't done anything wrong. This situation resulted from slander and false accusations directed at us. The prime cause can be traced to a handful of Japanese or Japanese-Brazilians who had gone around calling us communists and racketeers.

The surveillance was relentless. When we arrived at the gymnasium for our final meeting with the members, it was surrounded by some 200 police. There were officers posted at the entrance and the exits. As a result, we had to leave the country after just four days and three nights in São Paulo.

### **Eighteen Years of Steadfast Daimoku**

For the next 18 years, I was unable to enter Brazil. In 1974 I made plans to visit the South American country, but had to turn back en route when I was denied a visa. Throughout this long, difficult period, while weathering all kinds of hardships, there was someone who continued to chant steadfast daimoku to change this situation. That was Sílvia Saito, former Brazil-SGI women's division general chief, a truly admirable woman.

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Mrs. Saito was a former young women's division member from Kyoto who, after marrying and practicing for a time in Tokyo's Meguro area, moved to Brazil with her husband.

Despite the obstacles Brazil-SGI faced, Mrs. Saito exerted herself in earnest. She prayed continually to the Gohonzon with all her heart and being. She would encourage the Brazilian members, saying: "No matter what, let's welcome President Ikeda to Brazil! Let's continue advancing Brazilian kosen-rufu!" She chanted boundlessly — not millions, but tens of millions — no, hundreds of millions — of daimoku. Her daimoku became the driving force behind the great development that Brazil-SGI has realized today.

The prayer of a woman who has made up her mind is strong. Men, on the other hand, are often cowardly and resort to cunning strategies instead.

And so it was that, after a hiatus of 18 years, in February 1984 I at last visited Brazil a third time. Mrs. Saito was overjoyed.

*In response to mounting demands for democratic rule, Brazil returned to civilian rule in 1985.*

I visited the country again in 1993, at which time I had a leisurely talk with Mrs. Saito and her husband, Roberto, at the magnificent SGI Brazil Nature and Culture Center in São Paulo.

On my departure, Mrs. Saito accompanied me to the airport. Seeing me off, she said with gratitude and emotion, "Sensei, thank you so much!" Two months later, on April 28, she passed away. She led a splendid life during which she completed her mission. I can still picture her on that last occasion.

*Five thousand people attended Mrs. Saito's funeral, even though it was on a business day, including current and former congressmen, influential members of Brazil's Japanese community, cultural figures, intellectuals and persons representing all areas of society. Many telegrams of condolence were received. At the close of the service, participants broke into thunderous applause in praise of Mrs. Saito's sublime, noble life. A long line of cars followed the route to the crematorium; members lined the route to bid Mrs. Saito a final farewell. At dusk, there was a glorious sunset, the sun's majestic rays painting the sky a beautiful crimson.*

The kosen-rufu movement in Brazil has made remarkable strides. In terms of its vigor and momentum, it is perhaps second to none in the world.

In Curitiba, there is a Tsunesaburo Makiguchi Park and on the outskirts of São Paulo a Tsunesaburo Makiguchi Road. There are also plans for a Josei Toda Road in Curitiba and a Josei Toda Park in São Jose dos Campos, a short distance northeast of São Paulo.

Mrs. Saito's tremendous efforts in faith are the cornerstone of Brazil-SGI today. I am gratified to have had such a disciple, to know that such a person existed in the SGI. Her memory will always be with me. I hope her name will be remembered eternally, like that of Joan of Arc.

*In recent years, President Ikeda has received a number of honors and decorations from Brazil in recognition of his outstanding contributions to peace, culture and education. In 1990, he was conferred the country's highest honor, the National Order of the Southern Cross.*

*In 1993, the prestigious Brazilian Academy of Letters named him a nonresident member, the first Japanese to be conferred this honor. Other nonresident members of the academy*

*have included such great literary figures as Leo Tolstoy, Émile Zola and André Malraux and philosopher Herbert Spencer.*

*President Ikeda has also received honorary doctorates from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro and the Federal University of Paraná, and an honorary professorship from the University of São Paulo. He has been awarded commendations and citations from the states of São Paulo and Paraná, and the cities of Rio de Janeiro and Duque de Caxias, as well as from various cultural, educational and scientific organizations.*

## **A Poet of the World**

As a result of our efforts for peace, many conscientious people throughout the world have become staunch allies and supporters of the SGI. One such individual is Amedeu Thiago de Mello, a Brazilian cultural figure who warmly watches over and supports Brazil-SGI's activities out of profound sympathy with its goals. Mr. Thiago de Mello is regarded as modern Brazil's greatest poet and enjoys an international reputation.

We need to recognize true greatness in people — whether or not they embrace faith. Please do not forget this.

Mr. Thiago de Mello is a protector of the Amazon, who carries out his artistic activities in the depths of the Amazon in the city of Barreirinha. This in itself shows something of his greatness.

His representative work is the famous poem “Estatutos do Homem” (The Duty and Rights of Man), which has been translated into many languages. In 1992, he presented me with a beautiful poem titled “Um Ramo de Luz Para Daisaku Ikeda” (A Fresh Shoot of Light for Daisaku Ikeda). As a token of appreciation, I immediately composed a poem for him titled “Midorinasu Kigi no Kagayaki” (The Brilliance of Green Trees).

*In his dedication of his poem, Mr. Thiago de Mello describes being deeply moved on viewing a compilation of photographs taken by the SGI leader, saying he felt as though a ray of light had reached him in the depths of the Amazon jungle. He explains that his poem attempts to capture that light and translate it into a poem for Mr. Ikeda.*

Four years ago, when I spoke at the Brazilian Academy of Letters, Mr. Thiago de Mello, also an Academy member, journeyed several days from his home deep in the Amazon to be present.<sup>1</sup>

In 1992, Brazil-SGI held the “Environment and Development” exhibition in the city of Manaus, a major city in the Amazon region. Mr. Thiago de Mello kindly made a speech at the opening. He asserted that human beings need to learn more about how to love and care, suggesting that such a giving quality can be found in the hearts of SGI members and their wisdom.

*Mr. Thiago de Mello also commended the SGI leader, calling him a great thinker, philosopher, writer and poet who has planted love and compassion in people's lives and illuminated their hearts.*

And he urged those present to support the SGI in its life-affirming endeavors. Before an audience of distinguished guests, he declared that the SGI is dedicated to protecting life, the most precious treasure of all. He called on them to assist the SGI members, who are committed to such a noble cause.

We are truly fortunate to have such a friend. His views are in fact shared by many sincere individuals throughout the world. The situation here in Japan is a complete

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anomaly.

### **Exemplary Unity**

The SGI-sponsored “Human Rights in Today’s World” exhibition has been traveling around Brazil since last September. Mr. Thiago de Mello spoke on the occasion of its opening, in Brasília. He explained how the SGI is working throughout the world to improve human rights, protect the environment and realize peace, saying he felt very encouraged to take action with members of Brazil-SGI. The correct stance for those desiring these goals, he asserted, is to continue struggling to improve conditions in the world and to maintain firm conviction that a great future lies in store.

The development of the kosen-rufu movement in Brazil has been truly wonderful — Brazil has today become a model of kosen-rufu. The members are all on good terms with each other; they are sincere and straightforward; they do not resort to strategies. Each is forging broad, deep bonds of trust in society. They have exemplary unity.

The great driving force of Brazil-SGI is the women’s division. As a result of women’s profound prayers, the organization in Brazil has opened a path for kosen-rufu where none existed.

Brazil’s victory has been won by the women’s division.

### **Treachery Is Most Heinous**

Mr. Thiago de Mello composed a beautiful poem in praise of the great hero of Brazilian freedom and independence, Tiradentes, whose real name was Joaquim José da Silva Xavier (1746?–92). I discussed Tiradentes once before on Jan. 28, 1990.

During the latter half of the 18th century, when Brazil was under Portuguese colonial rule, Tiradentes launched a struggle to bring independence to his homeland. However, as a result of base treachery, he was arrested, tortured and, finally, hanged. He was 46 when he died.

No realm is free of traitors. Moreover, the greater someone is, the greater the risk of betrayal. The Daishonin suffered outrageous betrayal.

That people advancing along the same path could betray their friends or mentor well illustrates the precarious nature of the human heart, how changeable and frightfully uncertain it is. For this reason, Simón Bolívar (1783–1830), the great liberator of South America, says, “To forget one’s indebtedness is the greatest crime a person can commit.” In other words, nothing is more heinous than treachery.

Today, April 21, is the anniversary of the day in 1792 on which Tiradentes died for his convictions with great courage and dignity. In Brazil, today is a national holiday, Tiradentes’ Day. Even now, the people of Brazil still proudly sing his praises.

### **A Hero Lives On**

Saluting this great hero who died more than two centuries ago, Mr. Thiago de Mello writes:

*You now make your way, Tiradentes,  
To an encounter with death —  
Recalling your hopeful comrades  
And also those who disappeared  
In the disgrace of treachery.*

*Noble and serene,*

*You make your way toward a life of truth,  
Because with you goes the dream you planted  
In the Brazilian soul:  
The great dream of independence,  
Of justice and liberty.*

*Two centuries have passed  
And still you continue to make your way  
Through your native land,  
Bravely, without fear  
Of the brutality of injustice.*

*Time cannot erode you: you improve.  
You grow within us.  
Time preserves the brilliance of your martyrdom.*

(“Cântico a Tiradentes” [Ode to Tiradentes])<sup>2</sup>

This is a famous poem. Reading it is deeply moving — I feel as though he is describing the martyrdom of the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi.

We who follow in the footsteps of President Makiguchi will also shine with ever greater brilliance and live eternally. A life dedicated to the path of mentor and disciple becomes more immense and radiant as time goes by. This is Buddhism.

The key to attaining such an existence is to struggle wholeheartedly right now. Unless we do so, we will have regrets.

A little earlier, the Tokyo Wind Ensemble performed the Offenbach operetta *Orphée aux Enfers* (Orpheus in the Underworld). If you persevere in faith, you will manifest the world of Buddhahood. But if you abandon faith, you will fall into the state of Hell. The law of cause and effect is extremely strict.

## **A Sun of Hope**

Tiradentes cherished a great dream and planted it in people’s hearts. Our great dream is kosen-rufu.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda said, “It is the Soka Gakkai’s mission...to pave the way for the lasting happiness of humanity by drawing up a grand hundred-year plan, no, a grand plan for peace encompassing several millennia.”<sup>3</sup> He urged that we make a great plan for peace — not for two or three years, not for two or three decades, but for hundreds, thousands of years.

We have to work, he said, for the lasting happiness of all humanity. This is the SGI’s mission. This is the task that President Toda bequeathed to us. I have advanced in exact accord with his words.

Given the chaotic state of society and the world today, this is an age in which the “sun” seems to be disappearing. In such a world, the SGI and Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism shine brilliantly as a sun of hope.

I will continue to advance along the path of kosen-rufu that presidents Makiguchi and Toda showed us. Only people of courage can proceed along this path. Cowards are unable to. Therefore, those of you with courage, join me on this noble path!

Because this meeting commemorates May 3, the Makiguchi and Toda families are present today. I am delighted to see you; I pray that you always enjoy the best of health.

Also with us today are members of the Association for the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu, the Association of Priests Concerned for Nichiren Shoshu and Protection of the Law and the Association of Youthful Priests Dedicated to the Reformation of Nichiren Shoshu. They are true priests who have rejected and broken ties with an erroneous sect and denounced its errors. They are true comrades of ours.

We are also joined by overseas SGI members and various groups' representatives, including those who deliver our publications each day and arts division members. I am delighted to see all of you.

### **The Path of Mentor and Disciple**

President Toda was imprisoned in a great suppression of our movement during the war. What did he pray about each day in his tiny, solitary cell, the size of only three tatami mats? He left behind clear statements about this, for example in his speeches at memorial services for President Makiguchi and his treatise "History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai."

He prayed: "I am still young, but Mr. Makiguchi is old. May my mentor leave prison as soon as possible!" "It doesn't matter how long I stay here. Please let my mentor go free soon!" "Let all of the responsibility for the charges brought against President Makiguchi fall on me. May he return home even one day sooner!"

Mr. Toda wanted to single-handedly bear the full brunt of the persecution. His sole desire was to somehow protect the aged President Makiguchi. This is most solemn and sublime. Herein lies the path of mentor and disciple in the SGI and the attitude of a true disciple.

Let us always remember this solemn spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

### **To Be Praised by Fools**

In "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin says, "To be praised by fools — that is the greatest shame" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 188). It's exactly as he says. In his "Precepts for Youth," President Toda declares, "For a person of wisdom, to be praised by fools is the greatest disgrace, whereas to be praised by the great sage [Nichiren Daishonin] is the greatest honor in life."

The Lotus Sutra says that its practitioners will be cursed and spoken ill of (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 193) and will encounter hatred and jealousy even more severe than in Shakyamuni's time (LS, 164). "This sutra is hard to uphold," the Lotus Sutra also says (LS, 180). In the Gosho, citing these sutra passages, the Daishonin repeatedly explains that those who propagate the Mystic Law in the Latter Day will be assailed by many difficulties.

This certainly has been the case in my life. I am living Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with my entire being. I have borne one attack after another. I have inherited President Toda's spirit and withstood all. No one but I could have endured what I have. I am living solely to safeguard the legacy of President Makiguchi, to protect the SGI and the members who are so dear to me. Today, at this gathering to commemorate May 3 — which represents the prime point of the Soka Gakkai and the SGI — I want you to understand this earnest, unwavering spirit that guides my life.

### **A State of Life Vast As the Universe**

In exile at Izu, the Daishonin writes, "In the *saha* world system, there are ten billion Mount Sumerus, ten billion suns and moons, and ten billion groups of four continents" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 935; MW-5, 3).

*The implication is that Japan is one tiny island among a vast number of lands and worlds.*

The scale of the Buddhist view of the universe is vast. From a lofty perspective, the Daishonin observed the affairs of the tiny land of Japan with imperturbable calm and composure. He had an immense state of life. Faith is the effort to strive for and attain such a vast state of life.

The noted astronomer Dr. Chandra Wickramasinghe, with whom I have spoken on the mysteries of the cosmos and life,<sup>4</sup> told me it is now known that within the Milky Way alone there are billions of stars similar to our sun. Moreover, there appear to be a great many planets in the galaxy with conditions suitable for sustaining life. The recognition of the existence of life throughout the universe, he predicted, will have great significance to humankind's advance.

The insight of Buddhism perfectly matches research on the forefront of astronomy. The outlook of science seems to be steadily approaching that of Buddhism.

### **Rejected From the Pure Lands**

The Gosho that I just read from continues:

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. In contrast, this world is inhabited by people who were rejected from the pure lands in the ten directions.... For these offenses they fell into the three evil paths, and only after dwelling there for countless kalpas were they reborn in this world. Yet the residue of the evil karma formed in their previous existences has not yet been eradicated, and they still tend to perpetrate the ten evil acts or the five cardinal sins, to revile the worthies and sages.... (MW-5, 3–4)

In another Gosho, the Daishonin writes: "The slanderers of Buddhism who were people of incorrigible disbelief were still being confined there by the guards of hell. They proliferated until they became the people of Japan today" (MW-1, 38).

The Gosho clearly describes the piteous state of those inhabiting this strife-filled *saha* world — in particular the country of Japan. I hope that by viewing the facts in light of the Daishonin's teachings, you can wisely discern the pattern of persecution.

*For example, in "The Four Debts of Gratitude," the Daishonin writes, "The Devil of the Sixth Heaven, scheming to prevent the people of this world from [attaining Buddhahood and] going to other pure lands elsewhere, seizes every opportunity to carry out his perverse acts [creating various obstacles and thereby seeking to cause people to abandon their faith]" (MW-5, 4).*

The SGI members with us today are from a total of 56 countries and territories outside Japan. I am delighted that you have traveled so far to gather here in this beautiful citadel of Soka. Thank you so much for your tremendous efforts.

### **Wishes of the Mentor**

Also, to commemorate the 46th anniversary of the *Seikyo Shimbun*, representatives of those uncrowned friends who daily deliver our publications are gathered here in high spirits from throughout the country. Thank you for all your hard work day in and day out. Please accept my heartfelt gratitude.

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President Toda said, “My wish is for all people in Japan to read the *Seikyo Shimbun*.” This was one of his great dreams. You are taking the lead in making that wish a reality.

I also delivered a daily newspaper when I was a boy. There were many days when it rained or the weather was just plain lousy. But the fresh morning air — that was an irreplaceable treasure.

In the early morning most people are still sleeping. Though it must be a challenge to get up and make the rounds each day, you can savor the clear, fragrant air that those still asleep do not know. And you can see the brilliant sunrise. Morning’s drama is a grand ceremony of life. Those who experience it are the most fortunate.

At any rate, I hope everyone will treasure and appreciate those who every day deliver our publications. My wife and I press our palms together in appreciation each morning around when the newspaper is delivered. When I take up the paper in my hands, I always feel a deep sense of gratitude to all our noble deliverers.

Being a leader does not make you great. Having a position in the organization does not give you elevated status. The greatest people introduce others to the Daishonin’s teachings and go visit each of their members offering warm encouragement and advice. One isn’t great merely by virtue of position. There must be no confusion on this point. I want to make this clear once and for all.

### **Our Activities Promote Health**

Doing SGI activities is good for our health. Walking around and meeting lots of people — this promotes good health. Doing gongyo and chanting daimoku are wonderful ceremonies in which we fuse with the universe. Everything we do is pervaded by profound reason.

The Daishonin states, “Buddhism is reason” (MW-3, 238). No effort we make in faith is wasted — of this you can be absolutely certain. We lead the most wonderful lives. With tenacity and endurance, together let us cheerfully advance along the supreme, most correct path in life.

Thank you for today. Thank you! See you again soon! *Xie xie! Danke!*  
Let’s look forward to celebrating May 3 again next year in high spirits!

**WT**

1. President Ikeda’s speech on this occasion was “The Dawn of Hope for Humanistic Civilization.”
2. Translated from Portuguese. Thiago de Mello, *De uma Vez por Todas: Verso e Prosa* (Once for All: Verse and Prose) (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1996), pp. 138–39.
3. From a speech in Osaka, 1955. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Works of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1989), vol. 4, p. 372.
4. Their dialogue is currently available only in Japanese: *Uchu to Ningen no Roman o Kataru* (The Cosmos and Human Life).