

The Spirit of Selfless Devotion

'We are not the center around which things revolve. Central are the Buddhist teachings and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Central is the goal of kosen-rufu, the happiness and peace of all humanity. Central are our precious fellow SGI members. It is our place as SGI leaders to exert ourselves thoroughly for this nucleus of faith. Ultimately, selfless devotion means possessing such deep sincerity of purpose.'

— Daisaku Ikeda

SGI President Ikeda gave the following address at the 14th Headquarters Leaders Meeting and the 15th Chubu¹ General Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Aug. 27.

Chubu members, congratulations on your general meeting! Members of the brass band, thank you for the wonderful performance!

The Tokyo Brass Band earlier performed "Freudig begrüßen wir die edle Halle" from Richard Wagner's Tannhäuser.

A Surefire Method

In the aftermath of the French Revolution two centuries ago, people's hearts were in great turmoil. They had rejected the ossified and oppressive authority of the Church, but no new morality had yet arisen. Murder was rampant. The times were chaotic and devoid of standards.

The situation in Japan today, I feel, is quite similar in many ways.

A noted specialist on Western studies, Nitobe Inazo (1862– 1933), has shared the following anecdote. One day, a person dismayed by the state of French society visited the renowned statesman and diplomat Talleyrand (1754–1838). The latter, incidentally, served for a time as Napoleon's foreign minister but later turned against him.

The visitor told his influential host, "I have thought up a new religion that may bring an end to the disorder in the world."

After hearing him out, Talleyrand remarked: "I see. What you say is very good. But how will you promote this religion?"

The man answered: "That's why I have come to see you — to ask you to use your influence to have it promoted through all institutions of the state, including the schools."

Certainly, if this were done, then in time there wouldn't be anyone who didn't know of it; this would definitely cause a stir and get people to sit up and listen.

But Talleyrand flatly replied: "That's no good. You won't succeed just with that. If you truly wish to spread this religion, then there is only one path open to you."

A gleam of hope came into the man's eyes. "What would that path be? Please tell me," he entreated Talleyrand.

Talleyrand told him: "If you want to establish your religion as a genuine one, you'll have to get yourself crucified and die in the center of Paris. Short of that, there is no surefire method of promoting a religion."²

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To Give One's Life

The willingness to give one's life for faith is the very heart of religion. Christians and Muslims have endured endless persecution, often at the cost of their lives. In Buddhism, too, from Shakyamuni's time down to the present, untold numbers have laid down their lives to uphold the correct teaching. Despite persecution, people have continued to hold fast to their faith and, as a result, these religions have spread and become world religions.

A religion will not spread unless its followers give their lives to it. It will not capture people's hearts. Only a noble spirit of selfless devotion can elicit a powerful response in others' lives.

The first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, laid down his life for Buddhism. The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, also gave his life to the propagation of the Daishonin's teaching. And I, too, have practiced with this selfless spirit to ungrudgingly give my entire life. That's why this Buddhism has spread so widely throughout the world.

There certainly is no such spirit of selfless devotion within the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. On the contrary, the priests are consumed by Animality and driven by egoism and self-interest. Such people cannot possibly accomplish kosen-rufu.

Returning to the guest in Nitobe's anecdote, he had no thought of putting himself on the line or sacrificing himself. He simply thought he'd cleverly get someone else to make the painstaking efforts necessary to propagate his new religion. If he could woo the state authorities to support him, he calculated, his work would be made easy. But with his sardonic remark, Talleyrand crushed the man's naïve hopes.

The mentality of one getting others to do the hard work while sitting back and taking it easy — that is bureaucratism at its worst; that is not faith. The spirit of taking on the hard work oneself — that is faith, that is humanism. And that is the wonderful spirit of all of you who have worked so hard to make the Soka Gakkai and SGI what they are today.

We have no place among our leadership for those who cunningly manipulate others and put them to work, while neither making strenuous effort nor taking risks themselves. Such individuals are not practitioners of Buddhism.

Those members who have gained position and respect in society thanks to the support of fellow members have an obligation to exert themselves with utmost dedication and sincerity to people's happiness and welfare. This is the true path of humanism.

The Secret to Our Growth

Many years ago, a group of journalists asked me why the Soka Gakkai had developed to such an extent. "It's because we're giving it 100 percent," I told them. "We are waging an earnest struggle. It's because we've been working with all our might."

Of course, I could also have offered them a more in-depth explanation, detailing the Soka Gakkai's development in terms of the three kinds of proof: doctrinal, theoretical and actual. But, at the very core, the Soka Gakkai has developed because we exert ourselves wholeheartedly and single-mindedly in faith. This is our true history.

Those motivated in the slightest by an egotistic desire for fame, status, praise or personal survival cannot wage a genuine struggle for kosen-rufu. Such individuals are unlikely to fight against obstacles or endure persecution.

Someone once said to me: "Even though it has been slandered, persecuted and attacked to such an extent, the Soka Gakkai has not wavered in the least. This is truly amazing. It is incredible.... I'd vouch there is no other organization as strong and resilient anywhere in the world." These words are testimony to your greatness.

I also have not wavered in the least — no matter how fierce the storms that have assailed me. I have faced successive difficulties of a magnitude that might easily have caused someone else to fall sick, die, go insane or even commit suicide. But I have endured and surmounted all. This is the Soka spirit. This is practicing with the heart of a lion.

I have always striven with the determination to bear the brunt of all persecution personally so that my fellow members might be spared suffering or victimization. I want you to understand my spirit.

During these 50 years since taking faith, I have struggled with a spirit of selfless devotion. All of you have stood up heroically in response. The present development of our movement to spread the ideals and philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the direct result of our committed actions. Kosen-rufu can only be advanced through unselfish dedication. All other methodology is secondary.

Discarding Selfishness

There is nothing tragic or pathetic about selfless devotion. What it essentially means is to discard egoism and selfishness.

Some people are quick to complain about the organization or about their fellow members. But true Buddhist practice is never egoistic.

Our commitment should be such that even if forced to go to prison for our beliefs, we would do so without complaint. This is because we are the ultimate and prime beneficiaries of our practice. All our efforts in the sphere of faith bring us closer to attaining Buddhahood. In contrast, when we base ourselves on egoism, we erase and pull the plug on our benefit.

If we think that we are special, an exception from the rest; if we think we are better than others because we have graduated from a good school or because we hold a certain position in society; or if we have the attitude that activities are not important and that we'll just chant by ourselves without bothering with the organization — then we are ruled by ego and selfishness.

Master Your Mind

It may seem perfectly all right to put ourselves and our own wishes first, to simply follow the dictates of our emotions and cravings. But the truth is that there is nothing more unreliable than one's mind. Life doesn't always go like clockwork, and things will not necessarily turn out as we hope or plan.

Consequently, Nichiren Daishonin frequently stressed that you should become the master of your mind, not let your mind master you (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p.146). We mustn't allow ourselves to be ruled by a self-centered mind. Rather, we have to discipline the mind and gain mastery over it. This is the Daishonin's strict admonition.

We are not the center around which things revolve. Central are the Buddhist teachings and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Central is the goal of kosen-rufu, the happiness and peace of all humanity. Central are our precious fellow SGI members. It is our place as SGI leaders to exert ourselves thoroughly for this nucleus of faith. Ultimately, selfless devotion means possessing such a deep sincerity of purpose.

On the other hand, leaders who are not sincere, who are cunning and arrogant, are frauds. Leaders are making a big mistake if they think they can treat members as subordinates. In Buddhism, there is no such thing as a boss-follower relationship. It is the leaders' job to serve and support the members. Leaders are supposed to be there for the members — not the other way around.

On being appointed to a leadership position in the organization, some fall under the delusion that they are somehow special and cease to think about the genuine welfare of the members. Some become entirely absorbed with maintaining their popularity or protecting their position. There are also those who fail to go out and take action themselves but just call meetings. The SGI organization does not exist to allow such arrogant individuals to act in such a cavalier, egocentric fashion. Behavior of this kind is unforgivable.

The organization exists for the members. It exists to help people in suffering and pain become happy. It exists for the purpose of accomplishing kosen-rufu. Those in senior positions who have abandoned their faith and betrayed their fellow members were all self-centered individuals who used the organization, Buddhism and their mentor's trust to advance their personal agenda.

In society at large, too, there seems to be an absence of any appreciation that leaders should exist to serve the people. Too many leaders in society have clearly been doing just the opposite.

Out of Alignment

When we thoroughly dedicate our lives to Buddhism, we approach the condition of oneness of the Person and the Law; we move a step closer to the immense state of life of Nichiren Daishonin; we advance toward attaining Buddhahood; we become one with the Mystic Law.

On the other hand, a person who carries out a self-centered practice veers from the sure path of the Mystic Law and kosen-rufu. The Person and the Law are thrown totally out of alignment. The life of such an individual becomes confused and out of control. It careens into a crazy, downhill spiral.

A self-centered existence may seem free and uninhibited, but the truth of the matter is that it will only lead us to suffer in the life-state of Hell. In contrast, a life dedicated to Buddhism and the happiness of our fellow members will enable us to attain the state of Buddhahood, to achieve enlightenment.

Our Fellow Members Are Buddhist Gods

The Daishonin states, "The Buddhist gods will surely manifest as men and women and make offerings to the votary of the Lotus Sutra" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 738). Broadly speaking, "votary of the Lotus Sutra" indicates all those who are working for kosen-rufu. When we take action for the Mystic Law, the Buddhist gods — appearing as men and women — will function in various ways to protect us.

In some instances, "Buddhist gods" might indicate such beneficial functions of nature as water or wind. But that is not the only form they take. The Daishonin says that they "manifest as men and women." In other words, their functions are expressed through the actions of the people around us. Above all, no one offers us greater support than our fellow members. Their presence is deeply gratifying. Through their actions, they are truly Buddhist gods.

If we work hard to support and encourage a thousand of our fellow members, a thousand Buddhist gods will protect us. If we support 10,000 of our fellow members, 10,000 Buddhist gods will protect us. If we manipulate our fellow members for our selfish ends, however, the Buddhist gods will turn their backs on us in lifetime after lifetime. Do we exploit the members, or do we serve them? It comes down to this one point.

No Room for Bureacracy

The Soka Gakkai has made a fresh departure with new leaders being appointed in each region throughout Japan. Let's move forward! Let's advance! At this new juncture, it is vital that leaders stand in the vanguard and lead the way in high spirits.

Leaders should be second to none when it comes to prayer. Day and night, I am praying wholeheartedly for all of you — for your happiness and prosperity, for your lives to be free of accidents, and for you to succeed in your efforts to spread the Daishonin's teaching and advance kosen-rufu. Leaders who do not pray for their fellow members are leaders in name only.

Leaders should also be second to none when it comes to working hard and agonizing for the advance of kosen-rufu. All of your struggles for kosen-rufu are causes that will bring you eternal good fortune and benefit. There is no room in Buddhism for the bureaucratic mentality of making others do the hard work, while you take all the credit and occupy yourself with protecting your position.

Speaking of the *secret and mystic expedient* of "Expedient Means," the second chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the Daishonin says, "The term *secret* means strict and that it [the causal law of Buddhism] applies across the 3,000 realms" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 714). In other words, all phenomena in the universe are embodied in the 3,000 realms of a life-moment, and no one is exempt from this strict law of life.

No one gets any freebies or discounts. Before the uncompromising law of cause and effect, distinctions of leader and member simply do not exist. Thinking you can get away with something wrong or immoral just because you're a leader is utterly misguided. It will never work.

Rather, the higher your position, the greater is your responsibility. The magnitude of both the benefit for fulfilling your responsibilities and the retribution for failing to do so increase correspondingly.

Finally, leaders should be second to none in taking action. We have to take the initiative ourselves, encouraging those who are suffering and visiting those who are unwell and need to be cheered. We have to spring to action quickly — with a light step, warmth in our voice and a friendly, down-to-earth attitude. To the extent that we take action, kosen-rufu will advance in our local communities and the greater progress we will make in our human revolution.

I want to see leaders standing in the forefront in every activity. In this day and age, advancing SGI activities is hardly likely to place you in personal danger or have you thrown in prison. Failure to press ahead in times such as these would have to indicate a singular timidity or apathy.

Because of my leadership in this unprecedented movement, I was falsely arrested and detained in prison. My life has been constantly threatened. Nevertheless, I have continued advancing straight ahead on the path I have chosen.

It is only to be expected that a champion of the Lotus Sutra, of kosen-rufu and of the SGI will encounter difficulties. The Lotus Sutra states that its votaries will be subject to "curses and abuse" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 267). If we did not encounter obstacles, the Lotus Sutra would be a lie. Being subject to curses and abuse means being maligned right and left, and perhaps even being killed. To persevere in one's efforts to spread the correct teaching undaunted by such attacks — that is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra and the behavior of its true votaries.

The Soka Gakkai and SGI have always advanced with this spirit. That's why we have received such tremendous benefit. That's what makes the SGI so great. I look to you, my dear friends of the youth division, to carry on this proud tradition.

Start From Here — Start From Now

I want each of you to rise to the challenge of revolutionizing the area where you live into an ideal community and to do so with the determination to start from where you are right now. This means building a good SGI organization in your local area — and building it yourself with loving, painstaking care, the way an artist pours his or her heart and soul into creating a work of art.

It also means fostering capable people. Buddhism, after all, can flourish only if there are people who uphold and practice its teachings.

We cannot hope to succeed in our goals unless we actively strive to find, gather and nurture able members and widen our network of dedicated individuals around the world. If we just surround ourselves with flatterers, or people we can feel superior to, nothing will come of our efforts. We will simply find ourselves tumbling rapidly down the descending slope of defeat. Great leaders keep at their side people who are strong, talented and able to constructively voice contrary opinions.

By selflessly working to build an organization and foster capable people, we lay the foundation for our own happiness.

The history we leave behind in this lifetime depends entirely on our own determination and action. “I am a Bodhisattva of the Earth! I was born to contribute to the accomplishment of kosen-rufu. I will therefore take full responsibility! I will become the driving force for victory in all endeavors!” To stand up with such strong faith is the Soka Gakkai spirit. This is the strength of our organization. When we strive with such powerful resolve, we can come to understand our true mission and awaken to our true selves.

President Makiguchi cried, “Wage a ceaseless struggle!” And President Toda also urged, “Wage a ceaseless battle!” Now I say to you: “Create an eternal history!”

Since the days of my youth, my motto has been “The greater the resistance waves encounter, the stronger they become.” The bigger the obstacles I meet, the more vigorously I am determined to confront them and break through them. That is my spirit. I want the members of the youth division to carry on this spirit.

A Life of Boundless Exhilaration and Joy

Congratulations again to the Chubu members on the holding of this wonderful general meeting. Why has the Chubu organization become strong? Because you have stood up and declared to all, with pride and courage: “We will show you the true Soka Gakkai!” This is where Chubu gets its strength. You have surmounted the attacks and harassments of enemies that seek to destroy Buddhism and have emerged triumphant. You have won a resounding victory.

Today, along with ever-victorious Kansai, the Chubu organization has become a model for the entire world. Your victory is splendid. I applaud you from the bottom of my heart.

One other reason for Chubu’s strength is the rigorous pursuit of the path of oneness of mentor and disciple by its chief Kazuo Ono. He has resolved to walk this path, no matter what anyone else might say, and to create an organization permeated with the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple. Each morning for decades now he has been the first to arrive at the Chubu Headquarters and chant daimoku, creating the foundation for Chubu’s magnificent victory as a result.

I hope every SGI member will leave behind an indestructible history. I pray that your names may live on eternally in the annals of kosen-rufu. Striving to live to the fullest, please exert yourselves wholeheartedly, pursuing dialogue with as many people as you can and forging an exhilarating victory.

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Death will come to each of us some day. We can die having fought hard for our beliefs and convictions, or we can die having failed to do so. Since the reality of death is the same in either case, isn't it far better that we set out on our journey toward the next existence in high spirits and with a bright smile on our faces — knowing that in everything we did, we did the best we could, and thrilling with the thought “That was truly an interesting life”? This is the way I look at it. What do you think?

Let's continue to work together to make the SGI the foremost organization in the entire world! Let's really give it our best!

Please convey my warmest regards to all those whom I could not meet today. I hope all of you visiting from other countries will enjoy a pleasant stay. Members of the brass band, again thank you very much!

I look forward to seeing you again next month in high spirits!

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1. Located in central Honshu, Japan's main island. In the SGI organization, it comprises Aichi, Mie and Gifu prefectures.
2. This episode is related in Nitobe Inazo, *Tozai Aifurete* (At the Crossroads of East and West) (Tokyo: Jitsugyo no Nihonsha, 1929), pp. 384–85.

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