

## Brave and Vigorous

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following address at the 17th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Dec. 9, 1997.*

Once again this year, through the tireless efforts of members everywhere, we of the Soka Gakkai have overcome every obstacle, met every challenge and added another magnificent page of victory to the annals of our movement! I thank all of you from the bottom of my heart for your hard work.

### **A Happiness Beyond Compare**

We savor true happiness. As Nichiren Daishonin writes, “There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 161). There is no more joyous realm than the world of faith. Chanting daimoku is the key to attaining genuine happiness and fulfillment at the most fundamental level.

Worldly pleasures provide but momentary satisfaction destined only to fade and disappear. They are shallow and mere illusions.

As practitioners of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, we know a happiness beyond compare. In the depths of our being, we savor the singular joy of life, the joy of Buddhahood, that comes from genuine fulfillment.

The Daishonin also says, “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion” (MW-1, 119). We who chant daimoku are unafraid. There is nothing for us to fear. Whatever happens, we can move forward with optimism and hope. There is no happier life than this.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is also the great Law of eternal life — life unaging and undying.

*Nichiren Daishonin writes: “The time will come when... the Mystic Law alone will flourish throughout the land.... Realize that the time will come when the truth will be revealed that both the Person and the Law are unaging and eternal” (MW-1, 101–02), and “If one considers the power of the Lotus Sutra, he will find perpetual youth and eternal life before his eyes” (MW-1, 120).*

We who devote our lives to kosen-rufu remain forever youthful — our lives are unaging. Brimming with powerful life force, we know no deadlock. Throughout eternity, we vigorously pursue our mission — our lives are undying.

Next year [1998] I will be 70 years old, and I still feel as if the main thrust of my work lies yet ahead of me.

There is no deadlock in this faith. How truly fortunate we are! Let’s continue working together side by side!

### **Sights Set on the Distant Future**

The other day I received a letter from Philippe Moine, director of the Victor Hugo House of Literature, a facility I founded in Bièvres on the outskirts of Paris. He wrote that a French news program had reported that the Victor Hugo House was the most important place to visit in Bièvres. It was a popular TV program with a very large viewing audience. It’s such wonderful news that I wanted to share it with all of you.

Speaking of Victor Hugo, Professor Toru Tsuji, one of Japan’s leading experts on the great French writer, lectured at Soka University during the school’s annual festival last month [November 1997]. Dr. Tsuji is also the recipient of an honorary doctorate from Soka

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

University. I fondly remember discussing many subjects with him at the conferral four years ago [November 1993].

As an avid reader of Hugo's works since my youth, I had always held a tremendous respect for Dr. Tsuji, who has translated many of Hugo's writings into Japanese. I had long wondered what kind of person he is, and then he visited Soka University and I had the opportunity to speak with him. I felt a connection between us.

He is, as I had thought he must be, a man of deep convictions. Dr. Tsuji has translated Victor Hugo's novels *Les Misérables*, *Ninety-three*, *Notre-Dame de Paris* [The Hunchback of Notre Dame], as well as a large body of the French writer's poetry. He is also the author of *The Life of Victor Hugo* and *Victor Hugo: The Man and His Thought* [both in Japanese]. Today he is 81 years old, and his love for literature and for young people has not changed in the least. He remains vibrant and active, delightfully young at heart.

Dr. Tsuji isn't interested in fame. The vagaries of public opinion do not concern him. He just carries on quietly with his studies for the sake of humanity. He is making steady efforts for the young people who will come after him. This is a sign of genuine character.

Similarly, my mentor, the Soka Gakkai's second president, Josei Toda, used to say, "We are fighting now for 200 years in the future." I share his determination. I don't care whether we receive immediate recognition for our efforts or not; my sights are set on the distant future.

I think that people such as Dr. Tsuji are Japan's treasures.

Once Mr. Toda spoke with great indignation of how the Japanese military authorities had killed his mentor, Soka Gakkai founder Tsunesaburo Makiguchi — a person who was truly a most valuable treasure of Japan. He drew a stark comparison between this and the treatment that had been accorded the famous entomologist and educator Jean Henri Fabre (1823– 1915) by the French government. The French education minister personally made a long journey to visit Fabre to pay his respects.

*Mr. Toda referred to remarks made by Suketoshi Tanabe, a former lecturer of Nihon University, in a speech the latter made on the occasion of the publication of Mr. Makiguchi's Theory of Value. Mr. Tanabe had said: "When a French elementary school principal by the name of Jean Henri Fabre wrote his Entomological Souvenirs, the French education minister visited him on behalf of France, a country known for its culture, and personally expressed his appreciation. Now, in Japan, an elementary school principal named Tsunesaburo Makiguchi has announced his theory of value — a great theory of world importance. How will Japan repay him?"*

Such behavior is the hallmark of a culturally advanced nation. In contrast, how did the Japanese authorities reward Mr. Makiguchi, a great educator and person of learning and culture? With prison and death.

I believe the cultural backwardness that caused such a tragedy remains unchanged in Japan to this day. Surely a country should go out of its way to search out the nameless citizens who voluntarily serve society at the grass roots and do all in its power to honor them.

Dr. Tsuji sounds strong words of warning about Japan's spiritual poverty. The habit of forging character and inner strength through hard work and self-discipline has disappeared from Japan, he says, and this is a reason why young people are weak-spirited and apathetic. I totally share his profound disappointment.

During his lecture at Soka University, Dr. Tsuji said the following about freedom: "The fundamental freedom that Rousseau and others called for was the freedom to stand up

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

against tyranny and oppressive authority. In Japan today, freedom has become simply the right to indulge one's personal whims. Freedom is being abused. This is a terrible shame."

True freedom is the freedom to bring down tyranny, the freedom to cut the chains of oppression with one's own hands.

Dr. Tsuji continued, "In Japan reigns a freedom without discipline, a freedom without convictions, a freedom without moral conscience." This criticism also applies perfectly to the current state of freedom of speech in Japan.

I spoke on the subject of freedom in the first installment of the second series of "Discussions on Youth," and I am of precisely the same opinion as Dr. Tsuji. In other words, those who stand up to fight for people's freedom can savor a sense of genuine freedom in the depths of their lives. They are truly free. This is Dr. Tsuji's view of freedom, and Victor Hugo's as well. It is also Nichiren Daishonin's view.

I can state without hesitation, therefore, that we are the busiest but also the freest of individuals — free in the truest sense of the word. We are free to attend Soka Gakkai meetings. We are free to talk to others about Buddhism. We are free to work for kosen-rufu. There is no greater happiness than this. Without freedom, we cannot do any of these things. Not to appreciate this fact and instead feel stifled and trapped by the organization is a sad mistake and only a cause for suffering.

### **A Room Without Books Is Like a Person With No Heart**

Dr. Tsuji expressed another profound regret: "Japanese people today only watch television or read trashy literature. Young people in particular are not reading good books." It is true that young people of recent times don't read books. It's as if they have an aversion to the printed word. I also feel an urgency to encourage youth to read.

If we don't read books, our brains and our minds go uncultivated. Visual images alone are too transitory, too shallow, to cultivate our mental powers. On the other hand, if we do read books but only mindless ones, we will become mindless people. Making an effort to read good books is very important.

The other day a man who has been running a big book store in Shizuoka for 50 years said much the same thing to me. He was especially lamenting the fact that nowadays even teachers don't read. "When teachers and other adults are not reading, how can they teach children to?" he asserted.

Reading builds character. When I was in my teens, I adopted the motto "A room without books is like a person with no heart." Mr. Toda used to say: "Read epics. Read the great novels of the world." He was very strict in insisting that I read a great many books. And I did. Sometimes I would read on the train, and sometimes, seeking peace and quiet, I even read in a cemetery. I didn't care about having the right place to read or enough time to read. I simply gave a hundred percent whenever the chance to get some reading in presented itself.

A life without the company of good books is shallow and all too sad. That is why I have striven to write so many books in the hope that they might serve as spiritual nourishment for young people. And I am determined to write more still. Dr. Tsuji has shown a deep understanding of my efforts in this direction.

You may be wondering how it was that Dr. Tsuji came to have such a profound appreciation of the Soka Gakkai. One of his encounters with our organization was brought about by Keiko Ichiki, a women's division vice district leader living in his neighborhood in Tokyo, who delivered the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper, to his house one day. We must never forget the work of such sincere and dependable women within the Soka Gakkai. Great are not those who give orders but those who take action. They are the ones who make kosen-rufu possible. They deserve the deepest gratitude, the

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

highest respect, the utmost concern. This is a true realm of humanity, the world of Buddhism.

Incidentally, Dr. Tsuji's father was the famous Japanese Western-style painter and director of the prestigious national art association Nitten (Japan Art Exhibition), Hisashi Tsuji (1884– 1974). His painting *A Calm Day at Suma* is displayed in the reception room of the Seikyo Shimbun building, where it welcomes our guests from all over the world. I acquired this painting soon after becoming Soka Gakkai president because I wanted to present a small gift to adorn our headquarters.

### **Until Your Life Is Satisfied**

Though the health of Dr. Tsuji's father deteriorated seriously from the age of 80, he still retained a passion for painting. Dr. Tsuji once asked his father, then already in his mid-60s: "You have been painting for more than 40 years now. Don't you ever get bored?"

His father replied sternly: "Don't be silly. I have never, since I began painting, created a single painting that I am satisfied with. I don't know when I'm going to die, but my greatest worry is that I won't paint a truly satisfactory painting before I do."

These are the inspiring words of a person who has mastered the art of life.

To remain focused and committed to the path you have chosen in life, to pursue it with all of your energy, and to be able to say at the end of your life: "I'm satisfied. I have no regrets," is to be a victor in life.

I should like all of you to lead a life such as this.

Each of us must win our own happiness, through our own efforts. People may criticize us, but do those individuals have the power to make us happy? Do they have a solid philosophy by which to live? The fact is that in most cases such critics are themselves unhappy, dissatisfied people.

Once we understand this, it becomes clear just how foolish it is to be swayed by others. We have to create a life of happiness and great achievement through our own efforts. And faith enables us to do this.

Past 80, Dr. Tsuji still energetically pursues his lifework, seeing his writings on Victor Hugo translated into French, English, German, Italian and Spanish.

Our lifework as SGI members is kosen-rufu. Those who possess a great purpose are always youthful, always in the spring of life.

Let us continue to advance proudly with just such youthful vigor!

### **Deeds of Daring Dazzle**

Here is a passage from *Les Misérables* that Dr. Tsuji quoted in his lecture at Soka University as his message to the youth:

The onward march of the human race requires that the heights around it constantly blaze with noble lessons of courage. Deeds of daring dazzle history and form one of man's guiding lights. The dawn dares when it rises.

The morning sun cannot be stopped. It rises inexorably. Today's SGI is just like the morning sun. The passage he quoted continues:

To strive, to brave all risks, to persist, to persevere, to be faithful to oneself, to grapple hand to hand with destiny, to surprise defeat by the slight terror it inspires, at one time to confront unjust power, at another to defy drunken triumph, to hold fast, to hold hard — such is the example nations need, and the light that electrifies them.

I hope the youth division members, too, will advance with such courage and acts of daring. I pray they will shine as a brilliant sun of hope by confronting all challenges with perseverance and determination.

Youth in particular must speak up. As the Daishonin says, "The voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708). We cannot be emissaries of the Buddha if we remain silent.

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

We cannot fight injustice.

Mr. Toda would never silently tolerate anyone hurting Mr. Makiguchi's good name. Once, as he was leaving a discussion meeting held at the home of the Makiguchi family right after the war, Mr. Toda bumped into the man renting the downstairs rooms of the Makiguchi house. He had heard how this tenant had been damaging the property and disturbing the peace of his mentor's precious family. So as soon as he set eyes on him, Mr. Toda roared at him in a voice so loud that it seemed the entire house might come crashing down around them. Not about to be beaten, the man shouted back just as vocally.

Mr. Toda had already put his shoes on, but he took them off, and, with an even louder cry of rage, marched straight into the man's room and planted himself down cross-legged on the tatami. He then proceeded to rake the man over the coals, going item by item through his transgressions. Finally, the man bowed his head and apologized.

Youth who simply stand by in the face of injustice are cowardly and self-serving. Cowardice is the greatest enemy of justice. When something needs to be said, we must speak out loud and clear. Ability to do so is also the emblem of a global citizen. Courage and daring are the traits of a person of true character and substance.

I would like all the members of the youth division to become courageous and daring Victor Hugos of the 21st century.

### **A Sad Path of Decline**

This year [1997] we had many visitors from all over the world. There is a Mongolian proverb that "the person with an endless stream of visitors is happy." Mr. Toda also used to say that having many visitors was proof of lively development.

In that sense, those who make their homes available for discussion meetings are making a fundamental cause for the welfare and prosperity of themselves and their families. The more that people visit their homes, the more they will flourish. Similarly, those who actively go out to meet and interact with others lead lives that are always rich and open to new possibilities.

In the last seven years, the Nikken sect has been on a sad path of decline and dogged by dark rain clouds. The Soka Gakkai, in contrast, continues to go from strength to strength, our members irrepressibly high-spirited and confident of success. Buddhism is about winning, and I would like to announce here and now: We have won!

Recently, President Jerry Rawlings and his wife Nana Konadu Agyeman Rawlings of the Republic of Ghana visited Japan. On the very day of their arrival [Dec. 1, 1997] kindly called on the Min-On Culture Center and the Seikyo Shimbun building [both located in Shinanomachi, Tokyo]. They proudly celebrated the 40th anniversary of Ghana's independence.

*The Ghanaian president and first lady attended the opening ceremony of the "Ghana at 40" exhibition commemorating the 40th anniversary of Ghana's independence at the Min-On Culture Center.*

President Rawlings expressed delight that an SGI-Ghana culture center is going to be built. As you can see, the SGI has friends all around the world.

During my meeting with Mr. and Mrs. Rawlings, we discussed the first president and hero of modern Ghana, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909–72), and his belief in always placing the people first. It was people power, inspired by Dr. Nkrumah's leadership, that brought independence to Ghana in 1957 and heralded a dawn of hope for the entire African continent. From that time, I have been carefully observing Africa, and I have firmly come to believe that the 21st century will be the century of Africa.

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

## **Gongyo With a Lively Voice**

Who did Ghana's champion of independence, Dr. Nkrumah, trust and care about the most? It was the ordinary citizens of Ghana, especially women. The university-educated elite and people concerned only with social position and rank were not the ones who worked hardest for independence. Nkrumah was well aware that the majority of such individuals were interested only in themselves and cared little for their country, that it didn't even occur to them to think of the welfare of the general populace. Ultimately, he found that it was the women of his country whom he could really depend on.

During the drive for independence, women went from village to village, house to house, talking to people. They spoke passionately to awaken their fellow citizens and spur them to action. They encouraged people to speak out and to work for the prosperity of their nation, to bring peace and to defeat the opponents of independence. They called on people to join them in the struggle to free their country from the yoke of oppressive rulers. Thousands responded to the women's impassioned cry. People began to take action, to unite. And singing rousing songs of liberty, they marched purposefully toward their goal.

"The voice does the Buddha's work." The Buddha's work of kosen-rufu only advances when we speak out energetically, when we actively use our voice toward this end.

The same applies to gongyo. I hope you'll do gongyo with a lively voice filled with positive energy and joy, not a tired, lackluster, unenthusiastic voice. There is no greater happiness than chanting daimoku. A voice chanting the Mystic Law instantly reaches the farthest corners of the universe. The more we chant, and the more we teach others to do the same, the more we make it possible for ourselves to attain a state of life in which we can travel unhindered through the universe with perfect serenity and freedom. Daimoku is the source of good fortune and boundless life force throughout past, present and future.

## **Religion Should Serve People**

The life of Dr. Nkrumah, leader of Ghana's independence struggle, was threatened on several occasions. Once, when the authorities were searching for him and other leaders of the movement, two women put their own lives on the line to shelter Dr. Nkrumah and help him escape to safety.

Let me share some of Dr. Nkrumah's axioms:

There is one power which no force of arms can overcome, and that power is the enthusiasm and determination of a whole people.

\*\*\*

Let us remember always that in the final analysis the masses are the final arbiter. They will always choose freedom and justice, as against oppression and corruption.

\*\*\*

There is no force, however formidable, that a united people cannot overcome.

Nothing can match the power of the people. Consequently, those who stand on the side of the people can never be defeated.

The Vietnam War demonstrated the power of the Vietnamese people. Likewise, China's victory over the invading Japanese forces before and during World War II was rooted in the power of the Chinese people, who were armed with a fierce determination to win. The Japanese military, failing to recognize the power of the people of the land they were invading, thought that they had won when they defeated what was then the southern Chinese capital of Nanking. But they were wrong.

The SGI stands eternally on the side of the people. We will forever work on their behalf. That is why our movement will remain solid and flourish for all time.

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

This commitment is also why I have been devoting all my energy to the development of youth division members — in the hope that they may one day grow to become great leaders of the people. I wish to create a youth division whose members inspire trust and confidence in everyone around them and who can be relied upon to carry on our movement, no matter what circumstances may arise.

Let us of the SGI move ever forward as a great alliance of the people.

I congratulate the SGI organization in Taiwan for its receipt of Taiwan's Social Organization of Excellence Award for the sixth consecutive year.

*The Internal Affairs Ministry of the government of Taiwan confers the award annually on organizations that have made positive contributions to social welfare and public service activities in Taiwan. Of the 30 organizations honored this year, the SGI of Taiwan is the only one that has received the award six consecutive years.*

Mr. Makiguchi questioned whether there can be any social justification for the existence of religion apart from working for the happiness of humanity and making the world a better place. Unless religion serves people, serves society, it has no meaning. This is, in my opinion, the true teaching of Nichiren Daishonin.

I'm sure that Mr. Makiguchi would have nothing but the highest praise for the contributions that our members in Taiwan, and indeed all over the world, are making to society.

I particularly hope the members of the youth division will always advance fearlessly along the great path of humanism of the SGI.

We must never be cowardly. We who practice the Daishonin's Buddhism have nothing to fear. However, we must always be aware of the strict workings of the Mystic Law, the law of cause and effect.

### **We Must Use Our Heads**

The great Chinese hero Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925), who boldly proclaimed the sovereignty of the people, was always in exceedingly high spirits. One invariably finds that people who have firmly decided on the road they will take in life are positive and cheerful, that they are not in the least uncertain or afraid.

In 1905, Sun Yat-sen was in Tokyo working on the formation of the revolutionary coalition, the Alliance Society. One day, he and his colleagues called a preparatory meeting to mark the mobilization of a new force for change in China. During the meeting, something totally unexpected occurred. Was it raided by the police? No. Rather, what happened was that an unexpectedly large number of people turned up for the meeting, causing a portion of the floor in the rear of the hall to suddenly collapse under their weight.

The same thing actually happened to me once when I was involved in Gakkai activities in Tokyo's Bunkyo Chapter — the floor collapsed because we had so many people in attendance at our meeting! But let's get back to Sun Yat-sen.

No one was hurt by the accident, but they were startled and a little frightened. Many people at that time were still rather superstitious, and the floor's collapse seemed a very inauspicious beginning for the new movement. Sun Yat-sen nevertheless seized the moment and declared: "What a wonderful sign this is! It means we will crush our opponents underfoot!" Those few words completely transformed the atmosphere of the gathering. Everyone felt positive again, and they cheered and applauded.

We must speak out; we must use our heads. A few well-timed words by a leader can inspire confidence and hope in others, can transform people's mood and entire outlook. In the most positive sense, leaders must be clever in speech.

Title: Brave and Vigorous

Subject: World Tribune 02/13/98 n.3178 p.1 WT980213p01 Tokyo, Japan 12/09/97

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 12/09/97 12/9 Brave Courage Guidance Japan Messages News President Purpose Speeches Tokyo Vigorous

Of course, a leader who simply makes ridiculous and irrelevant remarks will not win people's trust or respect. It is important for leaders to speak intelligently, using wisdom and prudence in what they say so that they can guide people in a positive and constructive direction.

The prime movers of a revolutionary movement must never falter in their efforts, no matter what happens. If a dancer, for example, were to become upset by jeers and taunts from rude members of the audience and stop mid-performance, he or she could not deserve to be called a professional dancer. Similarly, we mustn't be overly sensitive and let the environment control our emotions. We should just press forward with a positive, resolute, optimistic outlook.

### **Decide What You Want To Do**

Having chosen to spearhead a revolution, Sun Yat-sen's life was filled with ups and downs, but each time he was knocked down he rose again. No matter how many failures or setbacks he experienced — and there were many — he never gave up. Each failure only fanned the flames of his fighting spirit. He lifted himself up once more. He faced the challenge. He fought bravely. By repeating this process over and over, he finally triumphed.

Even when he failed, he made new friends and broadened his alliances. Most people lose their momentum when they are defeated, but Sun Yat-sen was different. I, too, have fought as Sun Yat-sen did. Every leader should possess such a spirit.

Sun Yat-sen said: "If you believe in yourself, you can even move mountains and fill in the oceans; no matter how difficult the task, you will see the day when you succeed. If you do not believe in yourself, you will not be able to even lift your own hand or snap a slim twig; no matter how easy the task, you will never see success. This is how important the mind is. It is the origin of all things."

Sun Yat-sen's view has much in common with the Buddhist teaching "Faith alone is what really matters" (MW-1, 246). He taught people about the power of faith, of the mind; he taught them the spirit of transforming their destiny. That's why he triumphed in the end. He would have never achieved that great revolution simply by teaching techniques and strategies.

That's why I am so determined to teach others the importance of faith and of the spirit of challenge.

Next year, it will be 1998. Forty years ago, the last New Year's message written by President Josei Toda appeared in the editorial of the January 1958 issue of the Soka Gakkai's study journal, the *Daibyakurenge*. A few months later he would die. This message, therefore, is truly part of his last will and testament to his successors. Its title was brief and to the point: "Brave and Vigorous Exertion." This is profoundly significant, I think.

Nichiren Daishonin, too, was a person of brave and vigorous exertion to the very end. He died on his way to the province of Hitachi (present-day Ibaraki Prefecture in central Honshu, the largest of Japan's four main islands). *Hitachi* is a homonym for a word that means sunrise, or the place the sun rises. It seems to be symbolic of the Daishonin setting out on a journey to illuminate the world. And I find this fascinating indeed.

Mr. Toda said in his message:

The Soka Gakkai has grown tremendously, achieving more than 700,000 member-households and attracting the attention of all in Japan. For that very reason, the attacks of the three powerful enemies are bound to intensify. But no matter how strong they may become, you mustn't fear them, you mustn't succumb to them....

Repeat to yourself morning and night the Daishonin's words 'Do not spend this life in

vain and regret it for ten thousand years to come' (MW-5, 173) and exert yourself with faith that grows stronger day by day, month by month and year by year. This should be the basic spirit for all your endeavors in the coming year and throughout your life.

Start by deciding what you want to do! And once you've decided, push forward toward your goal bravely and vigorously!

Let's engrave these words of Mr. Toda in our hearts and press forward with courage and purpose!

### **If We Never Experienced Obstacles**

In many of his writings, Nichiren Daishonin stresses that encountering obstacles and persecution for the sake of Buddhism is to be regarded as a matter for rejoicing since they offer an opportunity for us to develop our Buddhahood.

In other words, "One should regard meeting obstacles as true peace and comfort" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). To cite a few passages, the Daishonin declares:

If I do not call forth these three enemies of the Lotus Sutra, then I will not be a true votary of the Lotus Sutra. (MW-4, 20)

\*\*\*

To seek enlightenment without repudiating slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water. (MW-1, 165)

\*\*\*

Should one but fail to denounce the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, one will be unable to attain the Way. (MW-6, 24)

We in fact dare to summon up persecutions so that we can fight against them. As votaries of the Lotus Sutra, we will become Buddhas without fail.

If we firmly establish the state of Buddhahood in our lives in this lifetime, we will be Buddhas for eternity. To do that, however, we have to endure some difficulties in this life. Some of you may experience hardships solely because you are SGI members.

But if we never encountered criticism or attack, we would never have the opportunity to challenge our Buddhist practice and develop ourselves. In the long term, you'll probably find that you've made a wide circle of friends and allies who empathize with the SGI's goals and aspirations and that you've developed a much higher life-condition — all thanks to these attacks.

I hope that all of you, as great actors on the stage of life, will fulfill your unique missions, your own starring roles, with courage and joy, opening your hearts in friendship to all around you.

May you all welcome the new year in good health and high spirits. I pray with all my heart for the happiness and well-being of all our members around the world.

Let's make "Brave and Vigorous Exertion!" the rallying cry for our activities in the coming year!

**WT**