

SGI President Ikeda's Essay
The Art of Writing
By HO GOKU

In this essay series, SGI President Ikeda uses his pen name Ho Goku — as he does in The New Human Revolution — to write the story-behind-the-story. This series is published as “Thoughts on The New Human Revolution” in the Seikyo Shimbun, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper.

People often ask me how I mastered the art of writing. I never engaged in any special study to improve or develop my writing skills; I did not have the time. Nor do I feel my writing is particularly good.

What I have done, since my youth, is a great deal of reading of the literary works of many different authors. And while walking along the seashore or beneath the cherry blossoms, I would jot down my impressions and feelings. Those two things no doubt helped me build the foundations of my writing ability.

When I worked as an editor for a children’s magazine in Mr. Toda’s company, I also had to write poems or essays on the spur of the moment when our regular contributors failed to deliver their articles on time.



When the *Seikyo Shimbun* was established in 1951, Mr. Toda began to write his novel, *The Human Revolution* (under the pen name Myo Goku), which was serialized along with his regular column of pithy sayings titled “Epigrams.” He encouraged us, the youth division leaders, to write for the paper.

Having run a publishing company for so long, Mr. Toda was an excellent judge of writing. I still fondly remember his strict criticism of my writing: “This will not move people!” “Your point is unclear!”

He often used to pass me an installment of *The Human Revolution* that was only half-finished and, after sketching the plot outline of the piece, say to me: “You write the rest. And if you see anything you’d like to change in what I’ve already written, go right ahead and do it.” It was an arduous challenge to say the least, and where my real training started. Upon reflection, how grateful I am for my mentor’s lessons.



When we were late in finishing our writing, Mr. Toda would frequently remind us of the story of the poem in seven steps, which appears in Eiji Yoshikawa’s *Sangokushi*, a Japanese version of the ancient Chinese classic *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.

Two brothers, Ts’ao P’ei and Ts’ao Chih, fought over who would succeed their late father, Ts’ao Ts’ao. When the elder brother, Ts’ao P’ei, ascended the throne, he threatened his younger brother, Ts’ao Chih, who was a gifted poet. “Compose a poem,” he demanded, “in the space of seven steps. If you fail, I shall kill you.”

Ts’ao Chih composed the following poem on the spot:

*They were boiling beans on a beanstalk fire;
Came a plaintive voice from the pot,*

*“O why, since we sprang from the selfsame root,
Should you kill me with anger hot?”*

Ts’ao Chih found a clever metaphor to express the sadness of strife between brothers. Ts’ao P’ei was moved by his plea and deeply regretted his actions.

“Speed is of the essence in the struggle to communicate the truth,” President Toda would say. “If you were Ts’ao Chih, you’d be headless by now!” I still remember Mr. Toda’s face as he would roar with laughter.



I think the greatest writing practice I had was writing letters of encouragement and advice to my friends. Wherever I went, I carried stationery, envelopes and postcards. Whenever I had a few moments, between meetings or when riding a train, I would write words of encouragement to friends and fellow members.

In the short time I had, I would think long and hard what approach to take to best bring hope, inspiration and renewed energy to the people I was writing to. When I lifted my pen and moved it across the paper, I wrote with all my concentration, wanting to touch them with my very life and being.

Many of our friends are facing great obstacles or personal struggles. Sometimes a single postcard can change a person’s life.

It was not some intellectual pastime. It was a spiritual struggle amid harsh reality, a struggle in which I focused on the task of drawing forth a thread of the most appropriate words to encourage and inspire each recipient.

Even while traveling overseas, I wrote dozens of letters and postcards each day. I also composed short poems on a daily basis and sent them to my friends, to cheer them and encourage them. Some years I have written nearly a thousand poems annually.



If I could, I would write a letter of appreciation and encouragement to every one of you. But I am only one person. There is a physical limit to what I can accomplish.

So instead every day I write an installment of *The New Human Revolution*. It is my daily letter to you all.

I am always embarrassed to read what I have written. I know there are many infelicities in *The New Human Revolution*. I can’t begin to measure my chagrin. I wish I had more time to polish and refine the manuscript to my full satisfaction, but I’m afraid the harsh demands of a novel written in daily installments won’t allow it.

Tokyo is blanketed in snow this eighth day of January. Hachioji has become a wonderland of gleaming white. Tranquillity.

Ho Goku pushes his pen forward. Every day, another day of striving to perfect the art of writing.

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