

## SGI President Ikeda's Essay The Magnificent Ceremony on March 16

I have fulfilled my vow to my mentor.

I have fulfilled my vow to my fellow members.

I have fulfilled all the objectives I pledged to achieve.

On that day, when we gathered at the foot of Mount Fuji, we entered a new stage in the progress of kosen-rufu.

It was a cold day. The grand peak of Fuji looked down on us from above, serenely witnessing the event.

The ceremony on March 16 was exhilarating. Mr. Toda announced that he was passing the baton of kosen-rufu to the youth division. The hearts of his young disciples burned with enthusiasm. Their proud sense of mission leapt up like dancing flames.

On that day in 1958, some 6,000 young disciples gathered with their mentor, Josei Toda, whose life was quietly ebbing away. Everyone celebrated that landmark day with joy and excitement. Brave young men and women dedicated to kosen-rufu had assembled from all over Japan. They shook hands, patted each other on the shoulder, and talked and laughed together. It was a joyful vision of future triumph.

Four decades of indestructible achievement have passed since that day.



Many events and activities were held at the head temple throughout March 1958, representing a culmination of Mr. Toda's life and efforts. Mr. Toda arrived at the head temple at the end of February. His health was dire, and a doctor had to be on constant call. But the voice of our leader in kosen-rufu remained as strong and as sharp as ever: "Daisaku, do not leave my side. Do you understand? Stay with me at all times." I recall how he used to say, "Where *I* am, that's where our Headquarters is." From the early dawn hours until late into the night, he was constantly asking for me.

Once he called for me at 3:00 a.m. When I came rushing to his side, he said, "Daisaku, you are as swift as a peregrine falcon." Sometimes after he called me in those pre-dawn hours, I would spend the entire day doing his urgent bidding, without a moment's sleep. I was determined to do all I could to support my mentor. When Mr. Toda collapsed the previous November, he also called out for me continuously: "Where's Daisaku? Where's Daisaku?"

My mentor overcame that bout of illness, and three months later, on Feb. 11, 1958, his 58th birthday, he threw a party to celebrate his return to good health. It was a miraculous recovery; the doctors were amazed. It was proof of the power of the Mystic Law. But his life was coming to its end. He was approaching death. The only ones who knew this were Mr. Toda and me, his closest disciple.



On March 1, Mr. Toda said to me: "The rest will be up to you, Daisaku. I'm counting on you." A few days later, he made a suggestion: "Let's conduct a ceremony that will serve as a trial run — a dress rehearsal — for kosen-rufu, in preparation for the future." Mr. Toda knew that he would never rise again, never again stand at the head of the march for kosen-rufu, directing its advance.

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Subject: World Tribune 03/27/98 n.3184 p.10 WT980327p10

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Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Life is limited, and we must not begrudge it. What we should aspire to, after all, is the Buddha land” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 132).

March 16 was a ceremony to eternally honor and pay tribute to the selfless spirit of Mr. Toda, who had lived in complete accord with these words of the Daishonin, and to pass that legacy on to the next generation. At the same time, it was a private ceremony between just the two of us — a ceremony of the oneness of mentor and disciple — in which Mr. Toda transferred the seal of succession, the mission to achieve kosen-rufu, to me.

Profoundly aware of the deep significance of this occasion, I took on full responsibility for carrying it out successfully.



Mr. Toda grew weaker day by day. He fought desperately against the hindrance of death so that he could live to March 16 and entrust the future of kosen-rufu to me and to the youth division members at that ceremony. I stayed with him constantly, serving his needs.

Time and again he called me to his side to speak to me about his important plans for the future of kosen-rufu. His every word was his last will and testament to me. Everything he said was a preface to the great ceremony of entrustment that was approaching.



A Japanese government leader was to attend the March 16 ceremony and tour the head temple. At the time, there was still some integrity among the priests of Nichiren Shoshu; today, all is corruption.

The government leader and Mr. Toda were friends. But on the morning of the ceremony he called to say he could not attend after all. Other parties had intervened and caused trouble. Mr. Toda was enraged. Over the phone he shouted, “Are you going to break your promise to all of these young people?!” When he hung up, he said softly, as if to himself: “Politicians! They always compromise. Now this one has let me down. That is the nature of Japanese politicians.”

The world is a harsh place, buffeted by praise and blame, but far too many allow themselves to be tossed this way and that by the fickle winds of public opinion and act only out of self-interest. They have no integrity, no greater purpose. And how conspicuous are the ones who utterly lack any thought of serving their fellow human beings! Mr. Toda clearly saw just what Japanese politicians were made of — backbiting, refusing to recognize merit and ability in others, thinking only they have the answer, locked away in their narrow island-nation mentality, ignorant of what’s going on in the larger world and drunk on their own petty privileges and self-satisfaction. He knew how unimportant politicians really were, and he took the cancellation in stride.

“No matter who attends or doesn’t, we’re going to hold this ceremony for our young people!” he said. He knew, in his heart of hearts, that as long as the young people who would faithfully inherit his legacy were there, that was all that mattered.



Even before the date for the ceremony had been set, Mr. Toda thought of ways to encourage the youth. He had plenty of hot pork soup prepared for the young members who would arrive at the head temple first thing in the morning, hungry and cold. Three hogs

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were butchered for the soup, and Mr. Toda gave instructions to keep their hides. After he died, I had the hides tanned and made into pen cases, which I presented to 107 youth division representatives. I wanted to be certain they would not forget their mentor's spirit, and that they would study hard and keep up the struggle for kosen-rufu for the rest of their lives.



“I will lead the gathering,” Mr. Toda declared. But by this time he was extremely weak and walking was very difficult for him. I instructed several trustworthy men to make a litter to carry Mr. Toda. When he saw it, he shouted: “It’s too big! It’s not practical!” To the very last, he poured every last drop of his being into instructing me. I wept in gratitude in my heart.

Finally, moved by his disciples’ sincerity, he agreed to ride in the litter, and from there he led the gathering with dignity. The young men who bore it shone with happiness, and golden sweat glittered on their foreheads. I record their names here:

Yoshizo Abe, Naondo Izaki, Takeji Ishii, Yoshiaki Endo, Takaaki Okayasu, Shin’inchiro Ogawa, Akira Kuroyanagi, Saburo Gunji, Akira Kobayashi, Hiroshi Kobayashi, Shin’ichi Kondo, Kazuo Sawada, Yoshio Shintani, Shosuke Takahashi, Naoma Takahashi, Soichi Tateoka, Yasuo Tsuboi, Kazuyuki Nishikata, Hideyo Hachiya, Yoshihiko Yabunaka, Ichiro Watanabe.



At the proud ceremony, Mr. Toda declared: “The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world.” This impassioned cry, this lion’s roar, is engraved forever in my being. At that moment, I vowed in my heart to see to it that the Soka Gakkai would indeed be king. “King of the religious world” means king of the realms of thought and philosophy. The Chinese character for *king* is written with three horizontal strokes, one above the other, intersected by one vertical stroke. Here are the “three” of the third month, March, and the “one” of 16. Where is the six? It is represented by the 6,000 young men and women assembled for the ceremony, and the fellow members — Bodhisattvas of the Earth — as numerous as the sands of 60,000 Ganges rivers who would follow in their wake. For us, the great ceremony on March 16 showed clear proof that “the assembly at Eagle Peak has not yet dispersed” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 757).



After the ceremony, I saw the members off. As they waited for their buses home, I had our brass band play for them. Eventually, it was time for the band members to leave, too. They came to say their good-byes to me, and I made a request of the band leader. “I’m terribly sorry, but could you play one more song? Mr. Toda is on the second floor. I’d like you to play one farewell song.”

The band members gladly opened their instrument cases and played with all their hearts. The song was “A Star Falls in the Autumn Wind on the Wu-chang Plain,” a song with so many memories for us all. [Lyrics by the Japanese poet Bansui Doi (1871–1952). A song about the death of the great Chinese minister Chuko K’ung-ming, the hero of the epic saga, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.]

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*The autumn wind, with deepening sorrow,  
Blows from Mount Chi,  
Gloomy clouds gather over the battleground  
Of Wu-chang Plain.*

.....  
*Should the great tree crash to the ground,  
What, then, will be the fate of the Han dynasty?  
The regent lies gravely ill.*

Repeating the lyrics in my mind, I cried out with my heart. “Sensei, please listen. The youth division, your disciples, are strong and spirited. Do not worry!”



Just a few days after the ceremony, Mr. Toda, who had a strong premonition of the corruption of the priesthood, said to me gravely: “You must never let up in your struggle against evil.” Mr. Toda clearly knew that the priesthood would degenerate. His words to me were a warning and an order.

The magnificent Grand Lecture Hall and all the other facilities that Mr. Toda had devoted enormous energy to building at the head temple could only become centers of Buddhist practice if they were used by the young people of the Soka Gakkai, the inheritors of the solemn spirit of Nichiren Daishonin. If they were instead appropriated by corrupt and degenerate priests of the kind the Daishonin described as “animals dressed in priestly robes” (MW-3, 215), they could only become a breeding ground for evil plots and schemes that would wreak destruction on both Buddhism and society.

That is why the Daishonin warned, “Rather than offer up 10,000 prayers for remedy, it would be better simply to outlaw this one evil that is the source of all the troubles” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 20). He is telling us that if we care for people’s happiness and security and for a society in which peace prevails, we must cut out at its very root the evil that poisons the world.



On April 2, 1958, 17 days after the ceremony on March 16, Mr. Toda’s noble life came to an end. March 16 had been a farewell ceremony, the passing of the baton.

It was said by some that after his death the Soka Gakkai would “disintegrate in midair.” But I was determined to make certain his words, his hopes and dreams, came true. I grasped that spiritual baton of the unity of mentor and disciple and I ran with it. I ran and ran.

Forty years have passed since then. In that time, the Soka Gakkai has soared to become the king of thought, the king of human rights, the king of peace.

Forty years have tested us severely. Those who would stop practicing Buddhism have stopped and have sunk in the swamp of remorse. And those who betrayed their faith and fellow believers cannot avoid suffering serious consequences for their offenses, as the Daishonin indicates when he says, “People who despised the votaries of the Lotus Sutra seemed to be free from punishment at first, but eventually they were all doomed to fall” (MW-1, 241).

The comrades who have struggled by my side over the years are all living wonderful lives of triumph and good fortune. I will always honor these noble friends, through all time.

Disciples are those who carry out the mentor's teachings. Disciples are those who fulfill their vows. I have done these things, and that is my greatest pride.

Nichiren Daishonin writes, "If you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 172). A powerful determination and our actions in the present moment determine the future. March 16 is the eternal starting point of true cause, when all disciples stand up to be counted. For me, each day is a day of fresh commitment, each day is March 16.



Today, the rising sun tints the great mountain range of the 21st century. Following the model of March 16, I have passed the baton of the Soka Gakkai spirit completely to the youth. Soon, yes, soon, their time for glory will be here.

March is the time when trees and shrubs begin to parade their fresh greenery and their lovely new blossoms. Youth, whom I will always love and trust, the 21st century is yours. Your time has come. It has, inexorably, begun.

**WT**