

Today's Youth Are Tomorrow's Leaders

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech when he was presented a certificate of commendation and honorary citizenship from Chin Chon County, the Republic of Korea, at the Youth Division Leaders Meeting at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Jan. 17.

Thank you all for traveling so far to be here today in spite of the cold weather.

I also express my heartfelt gratitude to Chin Chon County Chief Administrator Kim Young Wan, County Assembly President Cha Young Chul and the other representatives of Chin Chon here today. As one who ardently prays for friendship between South Korea and Japan, I regard the distinctions you have bestowed on me as a great honor. Thank you very much. I am determined to reply to your kindness with the deepest sincerity for the rest of my life.

Moreover, while by rights I ought to have traveled to your country to receive these honors, you have traveled all the way here to present them, despite your many official duties. I am humbled and grateful. And I am also delighted that I could receive you together with so many young people for whom, I know, you have great affection. I bid you a hearty welcome!

The Happiest Person in the World

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda proclaimed, "The passion and power of youth will create the new century." I share the same sentiments.

Excitement fills my heart when I envision today's youth division members making magnificent contributions on the global stage as great leaders of the 21st century. I am swept by such unsurpassed joy that I believe I must be the happiest person in the world. As long as I live, I will continue to chant for you.

Chin Chon County is a picturesque area, known for its fragrant breezes and brilliant moonlight. A place of great natural beauty, the people's hearts there are also beautiful. Since ancient times, it has been considered one of the most hospitable areas of Korea. At present, under the vigorous leadership of Mr. Kim, the county has garnered attention for its innovative initiatives in the sphere of environmental protection and education.

I wish to share the honor I have received today from this lovely region with our esteemed friends of the SGI of Korea as well as with our members of Korean descent living in Japan — indeed with all of the members of the youth division. For it is the youth division's mission to ensure that friendship between Japan and Korea continues to flourish in the 21st century and beyond.

There is an SGI training center located near a scenic lake in Chin Chon County. With this training center as the base for their activities, our friends in South Korea have been making unceasing efforts to contribute to the local community. They have undertaken a clean-up of the lake shore and organized a music festival and numerous other civic-minded projects and events.

SGI community centers have become centers of culture, friendship, peace and security in their respective areas. At the time of the Great Hanshin Earthquake [January 1995], the Soka Gakkai community centers throughout Hyogo Prefecture were opened to the disaster victims as emergency refuge centers and served as bases for the Gakkai's strenuous relief activities. This is well known to people throughout the world.

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By contrast, the Nikken sect heartlessly closed the gates of its temples to the earthquake victims.

Going Out and Mixing With People

Buddhism teaches that life at each moment embraces all phenomena. This is the doctrine of a life-moment possessing 3,000 realms, which is the Lotus Sutra's ultimate teaching and Buddhism's essence. Because of the profound way our lives interact with people around us, it is vital that we reach out to others, that we be engaged with our environment, with our local community. A self-absorbed practice or theory without action is definitely not Buddhism.

We need to go out and mix with people every day. Making our local community the base for our activities, we need to forge ties of friendship with others and work with them to create peace. Staying connected in this way to our town, city, state or country is a practical manifestation of our lives permeating all things. We embody the doctrine of a life-moment possessing 3,000 realms when we do our kosen-rufu activities.

I want to reconfirm with all of you today that the essence of this profound Buddhist doctrine is alive in our SGI activities.

One Person Is Enough

In the 7th century, the rallying cry of one courageous youth gave powerful impetus to the monumental unification of the three Korean kingdoms of Koguryo, Paekche and Silla. This was the famous Korean general Kim Yu Sin (595–673), who was born in what is today Chin Chon County.

There are a great many episodes that attest to Kim Yu Sin's valor. In 629, for instance, his native Silla suffered a devastating defeat. Countless soldiers fell and the troops were completely demoralized. At this time of crisis, when the country's future hung by a thread, it was the young General Kim who gallantly strode to the fore.

"In a struggle, one must have courage!" he announced. "I'll deal the enemy a crushing blow!" He then mounted a horse and charged off alone. Moved by his heroism, the entire army stood up with new vigor and succeeded in completely turning the situation around.

One person is enough. Even the impossible can be achieved if there is one person of outstanding leadership.

In the great spiritual struggle of kosen-rufu, taking initiative at a crucial moment and securing victory make a great leader, a person of true leadership. For 50 years, I have exerted myself in every instance with just this determination. And I have won. I hope that all of you will do the same.

The irresolute and cowardly, those who fail to rise to the challenge at the decisive moment — no matter how pleasant or amicable they may be — are, ultimately, undependable.

Strictly speaking, they are the same as enemies.

Buddhism's Essential Focus

It was not until General Kim's 70s that he realized his earnest wish to unify the kingdoms of the Korean peninsula. His life was a succession of fierce battles.

What was the leadership philosophy that enabled him to triumph over so many adversities? For one, he possessed invincible conviction that those who are determined to fight to the death without begrudging their lives are sure to win.

General Kim appealed to his forces: "If one person takes on a hundred, determined to fight to the death; if a hundred take on a thousand, determined to fight to the death; or if a thousand take on 10,000 determined to fight to the death — any battle can be won." I, too, have often said that one person of firm resolve is stronger than the greatest multitude.

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General Kim also knew well that those who unite in spirit are certain to prevail. One day, as he was preparing for battle, the emperor asked worriedly, “Isn’t it far too dangerous for such a small company of soldiers to face such a large number of enemy forces?”

General Kim replied, point-blank: “Victory is not decided by numbers, but by people’s resolve. We are now united in spirit and determined to live or die as one. Therefore, we fear nothing.”

The essential focus of Buddhism, too, is the human heart. The Daishonin clearly states, “The heart is what really matters” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1192). A group will not muster any strength if its members are at cross purposes or are detached from one another. But if they unite in heart and mind, in purpose, their strength will be multiplied many times over. This is also true in sports and in achieving family goals.

The following words, attributed to General Kim, contain profound meaning:

At first it may appear that a successor is doing fine, but to follow through to the end is extremely difficult. It is truly painful to see accomplishments that are the results of generations of work destroyed in the bat of an eye. Therefore, you must understand that while it is difficult to achieve initial success, it is even more difficult to maintain those achievements.

He also said, “It is important to stay close to people of lofty character while keeping mean-spirited individuals at bay.” In the realm of faith, we could say this corresponds to staying close to fellow members of sincere faith and integrity, while distancing ourselves from those partial to strategies and scheming, who fail to take any action themselves.

Construction vs. Destruction

Construction requires arduous effort. Destruction takes but a moment.

It is vital that we make unceasing efforts. The construction of kosen-rufu in the future will fall to those youth prepared to keep on striving with all their heart and being.

Those who make no effort, who are simply interested in appearances, will only end up a hindrance.

There is a saying — “To start an undertaking is easy; to maintain it is difficult.” Though creating something new may seem daunting, it is in fact easy when compared to the far more challenging task of carrying on an existing enterprise, to keep it going, to develop it further. When I met President Fidel Castro of Cuba [June 1996], I discussed this with him. I also asked him, “Now that Cuba has achieved stability, what are your thoughts on raising capable successors for the future?”

Everything depends on people, on capable successors. And our movement for kosen-rufu depends on you, my young friends. For that reason, I am determined to do all that I can right now to raise genuine successors in the youth division.

The Korean Joan of Arc

There is a famous Korean resistance fighter in the struggle against the Japanese occupation earlier this century, Yu Kwan Sun (1904–20). Known as the Korean Joan of Arc, she was a young woman of extraordinary courage. Though imprisoned and subjected to torture by Japanese authorities, she refused to capitulate. To the very end, she cried out, “Long live independence!” At the tender age of 16, she died a martyr in prison.

Whenever she heard her comrades complain, she would chastise them, urging them to be brave. “How can you sigh like that!” she would say. “I know it’s painful to be tortured, but isn’t it better than standing by in silence while atrocities are committed on our people? Let’s fight to the last!”

Her valor, conviction and commitment to the cause of justice live on eternally in the annals of history. All of you enjoy favorable circumstances compared with what Yu Kwan

Sun was forced to endure.

Our courageous first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who laid down his life for his beliefs, often declared, even in the face of persecution, “Multitudes of young people will definitely follow in my footsteps.”

Josei Toda succeeded President Makiguchi, and I carried on from President Toda. In all of you, I have hundreds of thousands of successors. I am confident that you will follow in our footsteps.

I hope you will resolutely continue to advance upon and perpetuate this path of mentor and disciple, while forging even stronger, deeper solidarity with the youth of South Korea, with the youth of all Asia and the world.

A little earlier, Mr. Kim mentioned the spirit of mentor and disciple that exists in the SGI. I am deeply gratified that he has discerned this most crucial point.

The mentor–disciple relationship is itself the essence of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and the foundation of the Soka Gakkai spirit.

In the famous letter “On Flowers and Seeds,” the Daishonin writes: “It is said that if a mentor has a good disciple, both will attain Buddhahood, but if a mentor fosters a bad disciple, both will fall into hell. If mentor and disciple are not of the same mind, they cannot accomplish anything” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 217–18). The mentor-disciple relationship, in short, depends on the disciple.

I Entrust Everything to the Youth

President Makiguchi’s incredible fortune was that he had a great disciple in Josei Toda. President Toda once explained:

I became Mr. Makiguchi’s disciple when he was 49, and I was 20. From the time I was appointed [Soka Kyoiku Gakkai] general director, I accompanied him like a shadow follows its body, even going with him to prison.

In my cell, I prayed solely for the safe release of my aged mentor, for I myself was still young. With this unchanging prayer in my heart, on Jan. 8, 1945, I was informed that Mr. Makiguchi had died in November the previous year. At that moment I cried out, “Who killed my mentor?” I then made a profound resolution to dedicate my life for the sake of the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Since I do not begrudge my life, no amount of slander or persecution directed against me matters to me in the least.

My feelings are the same. No matter what kind of stories people make up to smear me, it doesn’t trouble me in the least. They are all pure lies.

The path that I walk is the solemn one of mentor and disciple that transcends life and death. It is the true path of Buddhism, the path of the Soka Gakkai. Unless we are prepared to devote ourselves with the spirit of not begrudging our lives, we will not persist in advancing along the path of true disciples.

It is now 40 years since the dignified ceremony of succession took place on March 16, 1958.

As the Soka Gakkai’s third president, I have accomplished everything that President Makiguchi and President Toda set out to achieve. Alone, I have borne the brunt of persecution. I have persevered in the face of all obstacles. I have won. And this achievement is my great pride.

From here on, I entrust everything to the youth. There is no other way. My young friends in the youth division, from now on everything will depend on you! On that note, I conclude my speech.

Let us advance vigorously again this year! Let us create a great history!

All of your struggles for kosen-rufu will become your personal history and win you the Daishonin's boundless praise.

I also express my heartfelt prayers for the successful activities of Mr. Kim and our other distinguished guests, and for the further development of Chin Chon County. Together with all of you, I pray for the unending glory of South Korea, a country of great culture. Let me once again reiterate my profound gratitude for the honors bestowed on me today.

Kamsahamnida (thank you very much).

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