

Loyalty Is the Mark of a True Friend

SGI President Ikeda sent the following message to the closing meeting of the SGI Spring Study Session in Tokyo, April 21.

May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, will soon be here again. I am delighted to spend this profoundly significant time of year with all of you — friends and comrades from the remote past.

I sincerely commend each of you for your tremendous efforts in coming to Japan and participating in this SGI study session. Without a doubt, Nichiren Daishonin and the countless Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the 10 directions, along with President Makiguchi and President Toda, are rejoicing in and applauding your activities.

I hope that as leaders you will always express your appreciation for and do your utmost to support the many sincere members who are steadfastly exerting themselves in faith. The Daishonin says that when you see someone who embraces the Mystic Law, you should rise and greet them from afar, showing them the same respect you would a Buddha.

Today I will share a story involving the great French writer and poet Victor Hugo (1802–85).

Hugo had a friend who suffered a nervous breakdown. As minister of education, the friend had been working to reform France's education system. He came under such intense fire from all quarters, however, that he fell into a state of utter despair. I think that's understandable. The fierce attacks of the kind that I myself have endured could easily cause someone to become mentally unstable, fall ill, or even commit suicide.

Overcome by the pressures, Hugo's friend resigned and locked himself up in his home. When Hugo went to see how his friend was doing, he found him looking gaunt and his hair unkempt. His friend was so depressed that he could not even muster a smile for his guest.

Hugo tried to cheer his friend up, but the latter replied: "If you only knew what things they concoct; they are inconceivable.... These things, these villainies are secretly told and openly believed, and — no one defends me.... Victor Hugo, swear to me that you will not believe any calumny."

In reply, Hugo assured him of his firm friendship: "Doubt that the sky is blue, but do not doubt that the friend who addresses you is loyal."

Wishing to encourage him, Hugo went on:

You have your enemies; but who has not?... Have I not been for 20 years past hated, rended, sold, betrayed, reviled, hooted, taunted, insulted, calumniated? Have not my books been parodied and my deeds travestied? I also am beset and spied upon; I also have traps set for me, and I have even been made to fall in them.... But what is all that to me? I disdain it. It is one of the most difficult yet necessary things in life to learn to disdain. Disdain protects and crushes. It is a breastplate and a club. You have enemies? Why, it is the story of every man who has done a great deed or created a new idea. It is the cloud which thunders around everything, which shines. Fame must have enemies, as light must have gnats. Do not bother yourself about it; disdain. Keep your mind serene as you keep your life clear. Do not give your enemies the satisfaction of thinking that they cause you grief or pain. Be happy, be cheerful, be disdainful, be firm.

Thanks to these rousing words, his friend gradually regained his spirits and composure. This person remained a staunch friend of Hugo's throughout his life.

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Nichiren Daishonin: 'I Feel Immense Joy'

Nichiren Daishonin endured relentless persecution at the hands of the state and was maligned on every side. Yet he could view his imminent execution at Tatsunokuchi as an event of great fortune to be rejoiced. And in the face of equally daunting trials, he exclaimed: "I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 94), "I feel boundless joy" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 356), and "What good fortune! I am overjoyed to have lived with my life the sutra passage 'again and again we will be banished'" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 963).

We can find countless examples of such sentiments in the Daishonin's writings — the *Gosho* is filled with his optimistic voice: "How joyful!" "How happy I am!" The schemes of those ruling authorities and corrupt priests who sought to undermine him were utterly foiled. Let us, likewise, view with disdain, as Hugo suggested, the foolish ploys of those who try to hinder our progress, and continue advancing with confidence, composure and joy.

Take the First Step

The Japanese translation of a book for younger audiences by Rosa Parks, one of the great champions of the American Civil Rights movement, was recently published. Mrs. Parks wrote a special foreword for the Japanese edition, and the other day I received an autographed copy of the finished book from her. In the foreword, she writes:

My friendship with Dr. Ikeda, who is a Buddhist, has confirmed for me that as human beings who desire peace, we can overcome any racial and religious differences through friendship and spiritual exchange and create great value together. So doing will in turn set a fine example for our youth, on whom the future depends.

These are most gracious words. I believe she is saying that the noble path of friendship that all of us in the SGI are forging is the greatest hope for the world and the future of humankind.

In the same volume, Mrs. Parks also writes: "I have learned that in order to bring about change, you must not be afraid to take the first step. We will fail when we fail to try. Each and every one of us can make a difference."

The important thing is the courage to take the first step.

Expand the Flow of Kosen-rufu Eternally

The "Medicine King" chapter of the Lotus Sutra says:

In the last five hundred year period [i.e., the Latter Day of the Law] you must spread it [the Lotus Sutra] abroad widely throughout Jambudvīpa [the entire world] and never allow it to be cut off, nor must you allow evil devils, the devils' people, heavenly beings, dragons, yakshas or kumbhanda demons to seize the advantage! (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 288)

We must not allow demons to seize the advantage — this point is key. In light of this passage, Nichiren Daishonin says: "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken even a bit, demons will take advantage" (MW-1, 241–42). He said this to his followers at the time of the Atsuhara Persecution.

It is important, too, that we strengthen the flow of kosen-rufu "day by day and month after month," so that it lasts for all eternity. Unless our movement grows stronger with

time, developing solidly from one generation to the next, “demons will take advantage.” That’s because the Devil of the Sixth Heaven is always looking to catch us off our guard.

Right now, I am standing ever alert and resolute. But to ensure that the flow of kosen-rufu is not cut off in the years to come, it is vital that the youth rise and unite. This is the key to our future. It accords with reason and is also what the Lotus Sutra decrees. The Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin call out, “Youth, bravely stand up and carry on the task of spreading the Mystic Law!”

We have entered the age of the youth division. I hope that you will devote utmost energy toward fostering the youth wherever in the world you may find yourself.

The Buddha’s Injunction: ‘Advance!’

In the Goshō “On the Buddha’s Behavior,” the Daishonin writes:

Now we are at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law and I, Nichiren, am the first to set out on the worldwide propagation of Myōhō-rensō-kyō. These five characters are the heart of the Lotus Sutra and the source of the enlightenment of all Buddhas. During the more than twenty-two hundred years that have passed since Shakyamuni entered nirvana, no one has ever embarked on this mission, not even the greatest of his followers, Mahākāshyapa, Ananda, Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, Nan-yüeh, T’ien-t’ai, Miao-lo or Dengyo. My disciples, form your ranks and follow me, and you shall surpass even Mahākāshyapa or Ananda, T’ien-t’ai or Dengyo! If you quail before the threats of the rulers of this little island country and abandon your faith, how will you face the even more terrible anger of Ema, the King of Hell? You have proclaimed yourselves to be the messengers of the Buddha. But if you falter, there will be no one more despicable than you. (MW-1, 176–77)

To exert oneself completely in accord with these words is the noble spirit of the SGI. Because we of the SGI are advancing just as the Daishonin teaches, our benefit is boundless and immeasurable.

A ‘Golden Stage’ Shining in the Morning Sun

Kosen-rufu is a supreme, golden path extending throughout the Latter Day of the Law into the eternal future. Let us continue to advance boldly and intrepidly along this path as Nichiren Daishonin instructs. This is the only way world peace will be accomplished. If we do not widely spread the principles and ideals of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, there will be no hope for the peace and happiness of all humankind.

There are many dissolute, mean-spirited and directionless people in society. With the resolve to gladly undertake daunting challenges, let us courageously reach out to and go out among such people.

There is no place in the SGI for cowards or for egoists who are given to arbitrary and self-serving views. Our movement has no need for the fainthearted who are filled with doubt and who readily succumb to negative influences.

Let us strive for the Law and live with pride and dignity as members of the SGI! The 21st century shall be the essential phase of our movement. Bathed in the brilliant light of dawn, let us take our places on that golden stage and lead truly magnificent lives!

Members of the SGI: Please advance with the spirit of unity and goodwill, opening your hearts in friendship to all around you.

The Gohonzon encompasses the entire universe. Therefore, we who believe in and chant daimoku to the Gohonzon can live out our lives with the greatest serenity and composure. Please be confident that through faith in the Mystic Law we can definitely lead a wonderful

and unsurpassed existence.

When you return to your respective countries, please convey my warmest regards to your families and to all your fellow SGI members.

Throughout my life, I will continue to send daimoku for your happiness. Let's meet again soon! Again, thank you all for your untiring efforts. I am eternally grateful!

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