

## In Praise of Women

*SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at a conference commemorating May 3, Soka Gakkai Mother's Day, in Tokyo, April 25.*

Congratulations on May 3, Soka Gakkai Mother's Day! And welcome to the members from Brazil, Peru, the United States, Canada, France, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Italy, Yugoslavia and Kenya. Thank you so much for coming from so far! I am delighted to celebrate this auspicious occasion with you.

I am convinced that Nichiren Daishonin has utmost praise for all the women around the world working so tirelessly for kosen-rufu. Allow me to base my remarks today on various passages from the Daishonin's writings and dedicate these to our women's division members.

### **Showing What Kind of Faith We Have**

First I'll share a passage from the letter "The Supremacy of the Law," which the Daishonin sent to the mother of Oto Gozen, generally thought to be Nichimyo Shonin. Together with her small child, she visited him on numerous occasions.

While I was in Kamakura, aside from the evident heresy of the adherents of the Nembutsu and other sects, I had no way of determining whether the faith of individual believers in the Lotus Sutra was deep or shallow. This I came to know only after I had incurred the displeasure of the authorities and had been exiled to Sado. Though no one else came to visit me, you, a woman, not only sent me various offerings but personally made the journey to see me. It was almost too amazing to be true. And in addition, you have now called on me here in Minobu. I know of no words with which to thank you. Certainly the Buddhist gods will protect you and the Ten Goddesses will have compassion for you. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, pp. 196–97)

The Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that our behavior reflects our faith. And true faith is manifested in our behavior at a crucial moment.

### **In Wind, Rain and Storm**

In another Goshō, the Daishonin praises the same follower's great efforts in making the arduous journey to Sado Island to see him: "Above all, your having come here is an expression of your profound spirit of faith.... I feel immensely indebted" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 1222).

In the Soka Gakkai, an organization established in accordance with the Buddha's will and decree, it has always been the women's division members who stood up resolutely and took action in difficult times. I will never forget these great efforts. I will continue to support and praise the women's division members for eternity.

In a letter to Shijo Kingo and his wife, Nichigen-nyo, Nichiren Daishonin writes the following:

Persons like you...do not fully comprehend the Buddhist teachings, and it pains me to think how greatly you must regret that you ever elected to follow Nichiren. And yet, contrary to what one might expect, I hear that you two are even firmer and more dedicated in your faith than I myself, which is indeed no ordinary matter! I wonder if

Shakyamuni, the lord of teachings, himself may have entered and taken possession of your hearts, and it moves me so that I can barely restrain my tears. (MW-6, 56)

Who is most precious and respectable? It is all of you in the women's division. You who never cease in your endeavors for world peace, who advance unflagging in wind, rain and storm. Leaders should never forget to accord you the same respect and courtesy they would a Buddha.

### **Buddha Beheld With Joy by All Sentient Beings**

In another letter, the Daishonin praises a follower named Myoho-ama Gozen for her strong resolve, for maintaining pure, steadfast faith despite opposition. Widowed and alone, she was criticized and maligned by others because she practiced the Daishonin's teachings. The Daishonin writes:

But now you, born a woman in the evil world of the latter age, have been reviled, struck and persecuted by the barbaric inhabitants of these islands [of Japan], who are so ignorant of reason, and have endured it all to propagate the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha on Eagle Peak surely perceives that you far surpass that nun [Mahaprajapati, who raised Shakyamuni and became the first Buddhist nun]. The name of that nun [when she attained Buddhahood], the Buddha Beheld with Joy by All Sentient Beings, refers to none other; it belongs to you, Myoho-ama Gozen of the present time. (MW-6, 313)

I am sure that if the Daishonin were here today, he'd applaud your efforts and bestow the title Buddha Beheld With Joy by All Sentient Beings upon all of you, the SGI women's division members, you who continue to struggle courageously among the people to propagate the Daishonin's teaching in this defiled world, rife with corruption and evil.

You will be praised, respected and loved by all as humanistic leaders in lifetime after lifetime. You are living the most noble and respectable lives as you dynamically carry out your kosen-rufu activities.

### **Disciples Forged and Tempered**

Our precious youth division members have risen at last. The stage on which they will carry out their 21st century activities is set.

Nichiren Daishonin states, "When great evil occurs, great good will follow" (MW-5, 161). And "Do not expect good times, but take the bad times for granted" (MW-1, 242).

Strong are disciples who have been forged and tempered by persecutions, hardships and struggles.

Other schools of Buddhism in Japan have grown weak, bowing to authority. Fearing persecution, they have stopped propagating their teachings and abandoned their missions. The Nikken sect is a leading example.

### **Respect and Gratitude for Mothers**

In closing, I dedicate to you a Brazilian poem in praise of mothers. It was composed by the renowned writer Henrique Maximiliano Coelho Neto, who was a member of the Brazilian Academy of Letters.

*To be a mother is to advance, weeping with a smile,  
To be a mother is to possess the world and have  
nothing of one's own.  
To be a mother is to suffer in paradise.*

This poem is full of spirit and meaning. It displays the vibrant strength of mothers determined never to be defeated. It represents the wise philosophy of mothers who quietly perceive and rise above the fleeting vanities of power, fame and fortune. It depicts the courage and compassion with which mothers challenge every hardship and give their all to the welfare of their families, the future and humanity.

I want to once again express my deepest respect and gratitude to the mothers of kosen-rufu, and I hope everyone will join me in doing so.

I pray that you will enjoy long lives, excellent health and wonderful activities for kosen-rufu. Thank you so much for coming today! Congratulations!

**WT**