

EDITORIAL: The Real Person, Imperfections and All

By JEFF FARR

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I love the story of how SGI President Ikeda joined the Soka Gakkai: He first met President Toda on Aug. 14, 1947, when he was 19. And he decided right away, at that evening's discussion meeting, to become Toda's disciple. Ten days later, on Aug. 24, he started practicing this religion.

There's a significance to this distance of 10 days, this week and a half between his deciding to follow Toda and *then* to follow Nichiren Daishonin's philosophy: Buddhism comes down to the person. President Ikeda came to trust Buddhism because he was first impressed by the person, the personality, the behavior, of Josei Toda. As the Daishonin teaches: "The real meaning of Shakyamuni Buddha's appearance in this world lay in his behavior as a human being. How profound!" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 240).

In their dialogue, *A Lifelong Quest for Peace*, President Ikeda and the late Dr. Linus Pauling also talk about the importance of personality. President Ikeda shares with Pauling how, when the 29-year-old Toda attended a lecture by Albert Einstein, it was, again, Einstein's personality that moved him most — more so than the five-hour explanation of his groundbreaking theories that Einstein offered. It was his "words and gestures," in which Toda saw Einstein's character, that he never forgot.

After sharing various personal memories of his relationship with Einstein, Pauling concurs that the great scientist's "reasonableness and his remarkable sense of humor impressed me most..." So much for the theory of relativity! Personality is more impressive.

When I went to San Francisco recently to help cover the opening of the "Linus Pauling and the Twentieth Century" exhibition, what interested me most was Pauling's desk — here, I thought, was Pauling's personality somehow expressed: an old typewriter, Dictaphone and adding machine; bottles of Vitamin C; his glasses and a magnifying glass; stacks of books, notes, letters; molecular models. The ordinary items on Pauling's desk were the props for his great drama, I felt; they suggested his inquisitive mind at work. This simple desk was the stage on which his new ideas in the fields of science, peace and health first appeared in the world.

I had the feeling that Pauling had just been working at his desk, minutes previous. Maybe he had just been distracted from his work for a moment and would soon return.

Dr. Pauling's desk showed me something that I couldn't get from the two Nobel prizes also on display — a glimpse of Linus Pauling the real person.

Part of being a real person, of course, is being imperfect, and I was glad to find out when I was in San Francisco that Dr. Pauling wasn't perfect. Linus Pauling Jr. shared with us anecdotes about how his father didn't always practice what he preached health-wise: how he loved his deserts; how he sometimes drank a little too much. Hiromasa Ikeda, President Ikeda's son, responded that it wasn't Linus Pauling's methodologies for good health that impressed — it was the vigor with which he lived, it was the proof he thus showed of a healthy life. This was another way, I thought, of saying that Pauling's personality, imperfections included, was what most moved the people he met.

In a tribute at the Pauling exhibit, Dr. John Byrne, a former Oregon State University president, decried how historians and biographers frequently lose the human side of a figure like Pauling in resurrecting him or her post-mortem. Then, Byrne argued, such figures are no longer as effective as we would like in inspiring future generations. They become inhuman, essentially. Dr. Byrne reminded us to "think of Dr. Pauling as a human

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being — not as this genius who did these genius-type things.”

And so I waited there at his desk for Linus Pauling the human being to return. But, of course, he didn't. I was sure that he was still somewhere nearby, though. He was working on something important, some great new idea. His personality was still alive.

That reassuring feeling made me want to keep working on important things, too. I felt lucky to be a human being, imperfections and all.

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