

PUBLISHER'S COMMENTARY LIVING WHAT WE TEACH

WHILE in Los Angeles last year to speak at Soka University, Arun Gandhi, the grandson of India's Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi, related the following story about his grandfather:

A woman whose son was suffering the effects of a severe sweet tooth brought the boy to see the Mahatma. After the woman explained her son's affliction, Gandhi told her, "Please bring your son back in fifteen days."

When she returned fifteen days later, Gandhi called the boy into his office. From the time the boy emerged from his meeting with Gandhi, he stopped eating sweets altogether.

The woman had apparently tried in vain to get her son to stop eating sugar and was astounded at Gandhi's success. Later, Gandhi told her: "Before I talked to your son, I wanted to refrain myself from eating sweets for fifteen days.... I told him that I, too, would continue to eat no sweets until his condition was cured."

How can we really inspire youth to excel, to surpass us?

Civilizations and movements have either prospered or decayed based on whether this question was seriously addressed.

As Gandhi's example shows us, only by first living fully the principles we wish young people to learn can we hope to impart anything of value. Then, hoping and praying for their growth and victory, we must open our hearts to them, trust them, and watch over them; listen to them, share with them our own experiences, and sincerely offer our support. This is the spirit and tradition of the Soka Gakkai International in fostering young people, a tradition exemplified by its three founding presidents.

Recently, SGI President Ikeda has written of the founding of the Jr. and Sr. High School divisions in Japan in *The New Human Revolution*. He begins: "Youth hold limitless possibility. In their hearts spread the wings of boundless hope, passion surges and the desire to improve themselves flows forth like an abundant spring. Humankind's inestimable treasure is the power of those young people who are to shoulder responsibility for the next era."

I believe the youth of the SGI-USA are such a treasure. But in our organization there is also a generation gap, just as there is in every human group, community and society. It is a natural gap that is spanned only by wholehearted trust and sincere, determined interest. On the other hand, criticizing the youth with statements like "They're never around" or "I don't know what the youth are doing" demonstrates a kind of arrogant disinterest. If we truly care—if we are truly interested in their well-being, growth and future—we will find out.

Today, youth programs are springing up across the country, most spearheaded by adults who care about the future of young people and society. And it is natural that when those adults live by the ideals they wish to impart to the next generation, they will have the most success.

In a previous commentary, I mentioned creating an atmosphere in our organization that will allow young people to feel welcome and free to exhibit their potential. But in any setting, it is the adults who must create an environment in which youth can prosper. Then, as young people become inspired and grow, they inspire one another. I believe that President Ikeda's establishment of the Junior High, High School and Student divisions arose from his desire to do just that. Wherever we adults cherish hope for the future while seriously working at our own growth as well, young people will come around and amaze us with their ability and passion.

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