

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S ESSAYS LIKE THE MAJESTIC MOUNTAIN

A spectacular sunset behind Mount Fuji causes the SGI president to reflect on the spectacular character of his mentor, Josei Toda. 'Mr. Toda's character was much like the majestic mountain,' President Ikeda explains. 'He stood absolutely unwavering in the midst of storms of criticism and insult. He was a brave figure of great faith and commitment.'

By DAISAKU IKEDA
SGI PRESIDENT

It was a crimson sunset. The sky blazed scarlet, the clouds transformed into golden waves, and the town and the people were all bathed in amber light. Beyond and above the city's buildings, Mount Fuji stood majestically, cloaked in violet hues. Its beauty took my breath away.

It was the first time I had seen Mount Fuji against such a spectacular sunset. It was the evening of Nov. 7, 1998, and I was looking out from the Soka Culture Center at our Headquarters in Shinanomachi, Tokyo.

As I was drove around the neighborhood a little later, the dusk spread and deepened. It was like a painter's masterpiece. I felt as if the heavens were celebrating the Soka Gakkai's Day of Founding, which was approaching on Nov. 18, with this gift of natural beauty.

I remember Mr. Toda suddenly saying to me once, "Let's go look at Mount Fuji." I accompanied him to a bridge, where Mount Fuji was often visible. Unfortunately, that day the sky was hazy, obliterating Fuji's noble peak from view. I still remember the expression on Mr. Toda's face as he sadly murmured, "What a shame that we can't see it!"

He was very fond of Mount Fuji. The Gakkai song "Song of Comrades," which he wrote the lyrics for, contains the lines "Can you not see Fuji's summit? / Rally now, quickly, in growing numbers!" Mr. Toda's character was much like the majestic mountain: He stood absolutely unwavering in the midst of storms of criticism and insult. He was a brave figure of great faith and commitment. Like the broad foothills of Mount Fuji, his wide, compassionate embrace enveloped all humanity.

The name Mount Fuji is also written with the Chinese characters meaning oneness, indivisibility and not two. I have accepted Mr. Toda's towering example into my heart and proudly walked the road of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Today, given the increase in cars and high-rise buildings in Tokyo, it is more difficult to glimpse Mount Fuji from Shinanomachi these days, but earlier in this century, it seems, the famous peak was often visible. The caption for an illustration labeled "Shinanomachi Station" in the 1903 book *New Edition of Illustrated Famous Places of Tokyo* says: "This is an elevated area, so the views are especially fine.... Mount Fuji and the mountains of Hakone can be seen in the distance and enjoyed in all four seasons."

The Shinanomachi area was one of the most scenic in all metropolitan Tokyo and a quiet, residential neighborhood. Such literary figures as Takizawa Bakin, who wrote the famous historical novel *Satomi and the Eight Dogs*, and the poet Saito Mokichi lived here,

as did the social activists Sakai Toshihiko and Hiratsuka Raicho, and the political leader Inukai Tsuyoshi.

Even today, Shinanomachi is quite beautiful throughout the four seasons. Greenery is provided by Meiji Shrine Outer Garden and Shinjuku Gyoen National Garden. And with sports facilities like the National Stadium, the Jingu Baseball Stadium, the Jingu Swimming Pool and the Tokyo Gymnasium here, Shinanomachi is a popular gathering spot for young people.

It is nearly the center of Tokyo's 23 wards, close to the new metropolitan center in Shinjuku and easily accessible by public transportation. I have heard that in the future a new station on Subway Line No. 12 will be opened at nearby Sendagaya, not far from the Soka International Friendship Hall.

The Soka Gakkai Headquarters moved to Shinanomachi from Nishi-Kanda, Tokyo, in 1953. For its new base, the Gakkai had bought and renovated a Western-style stucco building that had previously been used as the residence of a foreign ambassador.

Five months before his July 1943 arrest by the military authorities, Mr. Toda had visited the vicinity of Shinanomachi Station to teach others about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I cannot help sensing some deep connection between this place and Mr. Toda.

And I am awed by his foresight in having chosen this location for the Soka Gakkai Headquarters.

I will always remember how excited and happy everyone was when the decision was made to move to Shinanomachi, some exclaiming how apt it was that we should be moving here, as the Chinese characters for Shinanomachi can be read to mean the Town of Strong Faith.

When you exit Shinanomachi Station, you find yourself in front of Keio Hospital. There's a famous story about a bombing raid on the hospital during World War II: At dawn on May 24, 1945, this area was the target of a concentrated fire bomb attack — so fierce and intense that bombs fell at a density of one per every 4 square yards. The students lodged at the hospital as a volunteer corps, and the nurses and medical staff all worked together to fight the fires while also trying to evacuate the patients.

Most involved in the rescue effort were young men and women, and the newspapers of the time recorded that some of them even cleared away the fire bombs that had landed on the hospital roof with their hands. Due to these young people's valiant struggle, every single one of the 180 patients was safely evacuated without so much as a scratch.

In addition, they saved the hospital annex, its library and its preventative medicine department from being consumed by the fierce flames. The newspapers praised the efforts of these young people with this headline: "Victory Achieved Due to the Efforts of Young People; All Keio Hospital Patients Safely Evacuated."

Today, our World Youth Center stands in Shinanomachi, and SGI youth from all around the world gather there joyously with the shared commitment to safeguard the future of humanity. How bright are their smiles!

Many other buildings dedicated to promoting peace and culture, such as the Min-On Culture Center and the Josei Toda International Center, have also risen around the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Shinanomachi.

Now, Shinanomachi has become a headquarters for kosen-rufu, a source emanating

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peace, culture and happiness. I am deeply committed to building on the fine tradition of Shinanomachi and, working together with members of the local community, creating an “International Shinanomachi,” an eternal capital that will shine with brilliant light in the 21st century.

To be continued

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