

WHEN ONE PERSON TAKES A STAND

In part 2 of his December Headquarters Leaders Meeting speech, the SGI president talks about U.S. Congresswoman Jeannette Rankin. She courageously opposed war and proved that “when a person earnestly committed to a cause takes a stand, he or she can manifest the strength of two, three, 10 or even 100 people.”

Jeannette Rankin, the first woman elected to the U.S. House of Representatives, also voted against the United States’ entry into World War I. But on that occasion, she had been one of 50 Congress members who had done so.

This time, voting against entry into the Pacific War, she was the sole dissenting vote.

She had no allies in the House for her decision. The press clamored for war, and Rankin’s constituents threatened not to reelect her if she wouldn’t support the war motion. But she refused to break her resolve.

She declared that although one could physically kill others, one could not kill their thought and ideology. Killing people is completely opposed to life and denies the possibility of rich, blossoming growth, she believed.

Rankin was an intelligent woman. She knew very well that a certain segment of politicians and businessmen would profit handsomely from the war. There are countless examples of the keen intellect of women penetrating right to the heart of the matter.

In June 1941, before the House, she submitted for the congressional record a national defense creed that struck a powerful chord with her own deepest convictions. The eight-point creed reads in part: “I believe in national defense against those who use patriotism as a cloak in order to reap profits from the present tragic world suffering.... I believe in national defense against political demagogues and all vested interests which tamper in any way with those rights of freedom of speech, press, and assemblage as guaranteed by the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.”

But in the war climate, Rankin’s pacifist stance was condemned. She was criticized and ridiculed relentlessly, and viewed with cold, judgmental eyes. Yet she continued on her way undeterred. She continued with pride, strength and dignity. Her story reminds me of the valiant struggles for justice by our women’s division members.

And what sustained Rankin throughout this solitary struggle? Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolence and moral resistance to injustice.

Philosophy is what powers and sustains one’s struggle. Principles are what support one’s unwavering commitment to justice and prevent one from being swayed by morally wrong or destructive currents.

Drawn to Gandhi’s pacifism, Rankin visited India several times after World War II. Gandhi, unfortunately, was killed before she could meet him — a fact that she greatly lamented. But she did meet with Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Leaders must search out the forgotten who stand up for justice — this fairness is the basic requirement of a leader.

For a long time after World War II, Rankin was all but forgotten by the public. There

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was one person, though, who gave this courageous woman her due. It was John F. Kennedy.

In 1958, the future U.S. president, who regarded courage as the highest virtue, wrote an article titled “Three Women of Courage” in *McCall’s* magazine. And the first story he chronicled in the piece was Rankin’s.

It is the mission of leaders to search out and applaud those who stand on the side of justice, those who are worthy of our greatest respect and admiration. Fairness is the basic requirement of a leader.

In this respect, Kennedy was right on the mark. By contrast, someone obsessed with personal gain and preoccupied with praise or blame, someone who judges people based on emotion or a biased viewpoint, cannot be expected to lead society in the right direction.

Incidentally, a short time after I became Soka Gakkai president in 1960, President Kennedy conveyed to me his wish that we meet. But before anything could be actualized, he, like Gandhi, was assassinated.

To hold on to your ideals is to stay forever young.

Rankin continued to campaign against war until her death at 92. She remained a staunch, committed pacifist throughout her life — a life of tumultuous struggle.

In 1968, only a few years before her death, Rankin led a march of 10,000 women in protest of U.S. involvement in the Vietnam War. She was putting Gandhi’s teaching of nonviolent resistance into practice.

The renowned U.S. consumer advocate Ralph Nader saw this spirited crusader as “a future-directed person, tireless in the pursuit of her ends.” He wrote in her praise, “If aging is the erosion of one’s ideals, then Jeannette Rankin is young forever.”

To be tireless in the pursuit of our ends — this is the SGI.

To be future-oriented — this is the Mystic Law.

From the present to the future. From now to tomorrow. Let’s always advance with our focus on the present and the future.

Our body and spirit wither away when we have no ideals and no sense of purpose. But those who always fight for a cause, who always strive for an ideal, are forever young. Their minds are alert; they are full of vitality.

This is all the more true of those who uphold the Mystic Law, which is unaging and undying. Faith is the foundation for developing a youthful inner glow. No amount of makeup or cosmetics can compare to what faith can do. Our Buddhist practice enables us to become beautiful from within, cleansing and purifying our lives.

So let’s always advance with young, vigorous hearts toward realizing a world of peace and human triumph.

The great drama of human revolution always starts with one person.

Today, a bronze statue of Rankin stands in the U.S. Capitol Building, where she was once greeted with such hostility and derision. On the statue’s base is the inscription, “I cannot vote for war.” How simple this declaration is, yet how profound, how immortal!

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At a time when none of her male colleagues in Congress supported peace, one lone woman, Jeannette Rankin, stuck to her pacifist convictions.

It all comes down to one person taking a courageous stand. The great drama of human revolution always begins with one person.

This is the truth that President Toda demonstrated with his life and the creed by which Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the Soka Gakkai's founding president, lived and died. Taking a stand is an act of supreme moral right. When a person earnestly committed to a cause takes a stand, he or she can manifest the strength of two, three, 10 or even 100 people.

Women are much stronger than men, as far as moral strength goes.

Gandhi observed: "Women are clearly weaker than men when it comes to purely brute strength, but when it comes to moral strength, women are infinitely stronger than their male counterparts. If nonviolence is indeed a doctrine that should be upheld by humanity, then we will find women steadily taking over the role of shapers of the future."

Women can't compete with men in terms of physical strength — some of the men here might heartily disagree with that statement, thinking, "It's the exact opposite at our house!"

All joking aside, Gandhi asserts that women are definitely superior in terms of moral and spiritual strength, both of which are nonviolent in nature. I agree with him. Compared to men, who tend to shirk hard work and sometimes can be less than truthful, women are generally out and about, taking action steadily, day in and day out.

Our women's division members are doing the real work in advancing the kosen-rufu movement. They are working quietly, diligently, their efforts often going unnoticed. How praiseworthy they are! No men's division leader can hold a candle to them.

You, the women's division members, are creating a new world of nonviolence and humanism. I applaud the fact that, just as Gandhi foresaw, women — and certainly, none more than you, the women of the SGI — are now indeed shaping the future. I hope that you will be just as courageous as Jeannette Rankin in voicing a resounding "No!" should men try to embark on any erroneous course, whether it be at home, in the organization or in society.

Every time that Gandhi was imprisoned, his spirit soared higher.

1998 marks the 50th anniversary of Gandhi's martyrdom. Three months before he died, he wrote the following lines of verse, which may be considered his last spiritual declaration:

*It is by my fetters that I can fly;
It is by my sorrows that I can soar;
It is by my reverse that I can run;
It is by my tears that I can travel....*

These lines contain profound meaning. They strike a chord with the Buddhist teaching that earthly desires and sufferings lead to enlightenment.

Gandhi was imprisoned countless times. But each time, his spirit soared higher. He strove to reach an ever-higher summit of spiritual attainment.

What's the meaning of our lives if we just watch television all the time?

Dr. N. Radhakrishnan says: "If everything always goes smoothly, people grow lazy. You, the members of the SGI, have braved many trials and tribulations. That is why you endure. Undergoing various tests and challenges is proof that you are growing and becoming even stronger. This is a law of the natural world."

People who suffer great hardships grow and develop as a result. Those who avoid difficulties by dint of clever maneuvering bring about their own downfall.

And the higher the positions such people rise to, the more immoderate their personal tastes and desires become. The more selfish and decadent they grow. Their lives lead ultimately to defeat.

The truly great strive with all their might — like people who propagate Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, who brave criticism and harassment, who work to the point of exhaustion for the people's happiness. Despite the present hardships that they face, such people will definitely win in the end.

The Daishonin tells us that "one should regard meeting obstacles as true peace and comfort" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). Without encountering difficulties, we cannot strengthen or develop ourselves; we cannot forge a life-condition of true peace and comfort.

In all things, stimulus gives rise to growth. If we splash our face with cold water when we wake in the morning, it quickly dispels our sleepiness. When we venture into the wind and cold, it braces us and gets our circulation going.

What is the meaning of our lives if we just sit around mindlessly watching television all the time, devoid of stimulus, failing to challenge ourselves? We can't expect to feel any real joy.

When we lead busy lives, it's only natural that we want to have some time to ourselves occasionally. Watching television, I feel, is actually more enjoyable when we just watch a little bit in the snatches of free time we find in a busy schedule.

In any event, what's important is to challenge trials and confront hardships head-on. To overcome them one by one. This is the true path of human beings. It is the path of Buddhism, the path of victors. Having the strength to surmount all obstacles constitutes true peace and comfort.

Japan and many other parts of the world continue to be plagued by a serious economic recession. The news is full of gloom and doom with little to brighten or relieve the darkness. Everything is gray, bleak. People's desolation and despair is at a crisis point.

And no solution is in sight.

Therefore, let us of the SGI illuminate and brighten the world with sun-like brilliance. As the Daishonin states, "Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 246). There is no greater strategy than the Lotus Sutra's.

Let's prove this! Let's win!

Attacks by decadent priests figure into a standard formula of human society.

Dr. Radhakrishnan says something very important: that Gandhi's struggle was a continuation of Shakyamuni's struggle; Gandhi was conducting a political experiment based

on the Buddha's message.

Gandhi and Shakyamuni are connected on a profound level.

Dr. Radhakrishnan says that Gandhi gives a "modern interpretation to Shakyamuni's teachings." Similarly, the SGI is now giving a modern interpretation to, and putting into practice, the teachings of the Daishonin, who revealed the essence of Shakyamuni's highest teaching, the Lotus Sutra. This is one of the reasons why our organization is great.

Gandhi proclaims Buddhism a human-centered, humanistic religion. Gandhi was not a Buddhist; he was a member of the Hindu faith. His cultural background and life were rooted in Hindu tradition and religion. Nevertheless, he unstintingly praises Buddhism as a religion centered on the human being. He once even said, "India has fallen not because it accepted Shakyamuni's teaching, but because it failed to live up to it."

Gandhi also mentions the significance of Shakyamuni being persecuted by the decadent priests of the established Brahman order, lamenting that "the priest has ever sacrificed the prophet." Corrupt priests, driven by self-interest, invariably attack and seek to do away with leaders who possess a fresh, vital, dynamic spirit. This is a standard formula in human society. The actions of the Nikken sect priests bear this out.

Gandhi and Hitler are exact opposites

Gandhi strove to implement government based on Shakyamuni's spirit. Dr. Radhakrishnan explains that Gandhi includes politics without principles among his list of seven sins.

The others are wealth without work, pleasure without conscience, knowledge without character, commerce without morality, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice.

Gandhi regards a political system devoid of religion as dead. What happens when people with no deep knowledge of the human heart, no profound view of society, the world or universe, gain political power? They become self-serving politicians. They only pay lip service to working for the people. And this is not a living political system, Gandhi declares.

Many political leaders exploit religion for political ends, and many religious leaders exploit politics for religious ends. But Gandhi falls into neither category.

Religion and politics are naturally of two quite separate dimensions. Based on that premise, Gandhi believes it vital to make full use of the insights and teachings of religion in politics. Otherwise, politics, given the corrupting nature of power, sacrifices the people and bring the nation to ruin.

Gandhi says: "Politics bereft of religion is the noose that will hang the nation. In all cases, politics should follow the path of truth taught by religion. On the other hand, religion that abhors politics does not even deserved to be called religion."

Indeed, politics devoid of religion brings ruin upon a nation. And if a religion is genuinely committed to people's happiness, it will be involved and engaged in society and politics.

It is clear, in light of Gandhi's words, that the Soka Gakkai is advancing on the correct path.

Someone who says the exact opposite of Gandhi was Hitler. The dictator declared that religion should not meddle in politics and took measures to silence any opposition. As a result, Germany marched headlong down the path of nationalism.

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It was the same with Japanese nationalism leading up to World War II. Religious leaders who criticized the government were thrown into prison. This was the case with Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda — the former dying behind bars. Both were victims of Japanese nationalism!

Dr. Radhakrishnan cites the words of the 18th-century English lexicographer and author Dr. Samuel Johnson: “Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel.” Today, the insidious forces of nationalism, forces which seek to oppress freedom, are steadily resurfacing.

The path of Gandhi or the path of Hitler? Which is correct? There is, of course, only one right answer, don’t you think?

In *The Adventures of Don Quixote*, the Spanish writer Cervantes writes, “Ingratitude is the daughter of pride.” And a philosopher observes that treachery is the evil manifestation of envy and vanity.

Let’s forge ahead resolutely, laughing off schemers and fools. In “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin writes, “To be praised by fools — that is the greatest shame” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], p. 188). Mr. Makiguchi also insists that “to be despised by fools is the greatest honor.” And Mr. Toda declares, “For a person of wisdom, to be praised by fools is the greatest disgrace, whereas to be praised by the great sage [the Daishonin] is the greatest honor in life.”

Let’s make this our creed.

The late Madame Deng Yingchao, wife of Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai, said, “As long as there is breath in my body, I will not stop fighting.”

Let’s win in 1999 with a unity as solid as gold.

Let’s succeed in each of our challenges for kosen-rufu in 1999 with a unity as solid as gold. Let’s advance in a spirit of warm friendship and cooperation.

Let others say what they will. All that matters is that we receive the applause and praise of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the 10 directions — just as the Daishonin promised.

Buddhism, after all, is the realm of the eternal. It’s as vast as the universe itself.

Let’s continue to astound those who would slander the Law and malign our great movement. Let’s astound them by achieving victory in all areas in the proud SGI tradition!

I conclude my speech today by expressing my deepest gratitude and shouting “Viva SGI members!”

Thank you again. Happy New Year!

This concludes SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the 29th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Dec. 8, 1998. Part 1 appeared in last week’s issue.