

THE CENTURY OF SOKA STARTS NOW! BY DAISAKU IKEDA

The start of this year is the start of the 21st century, the Century of Soka, President Ikeda believes. He shares New Year's memories of his mentor, President Toda, at this time of new departure.

*The brilliance of the timeless sun
The light of the eternal moon
Fill the heavens.
Gazing at Mount Fuji
In its pristine white armor,
I enjoyed a magnificent New Year
Of glorious skies.*

On New Year's Day, I was traveling by car with my wife to the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji. As we passed the area of Mitaka on the Chuo Expressway, the serene form of Mount Fuji, blanketed in snow, seemed to step forward to greet us.

It is indeed a beautiful mountain, solemn and majestic and, at the same time, emanating an aura of joy, grace and steadfastness. Shining with a calm and quiet light, standing valiant and resolute, it seems to gaze down sternly on the folly of humankind.

From Tokyo, it is rare to have a clear, unobstructed view of Mount Fuji day after day in succession. But since the start of the new year, we have been able to see its regal form every day, as breathtaking as a master painting. It is as if the mountain were taking the immortal lead in proclaiming the start of the Century of Soka.

I pray that in the momentous year that lies before us, not a single one of our precious comrades in faith will find themselves alone or isolated; not a single one will stray from the front lines of our struggle for the Law; and that each and every person will infuse their lives with infinite benefit and vitality.

*When you stand
Then Soka will stand
With jubilant cheers*

The ethereal glow of the full moon adorned the heavens over New Year's, embracing our hopes and prayers in its gentle light and filling impassioned hearts with peace and tranquillity.

To celebrate the New Year, I sent many Japanese poems to my precious fellow members, my dear friends. And before I knew it, I had written more than 100.

At New Year's, I am always strongly reminded of the New Year's that I spent together with Mr. Toda. He would always recite a poem he had specially composed to celebrate the year's start. When I recall those poems, his voice reverberates again in my heart. In 1957, the year before he died, he sent this New Year's poem to the youth division:

*Like gallant whales forging ahead
Through stormy seas*

*This gathering of youth
Dedicated to propagating Buddhism
How inspiring!*

Nor could I ever forget the poem he composed at the start of 1955:

*The journey to propagate
The Mystic Law
Is long
Let us encourage each other
And advance as one*

In the predawn hours of that New Year's Day in 1955, I left with other representatives of the youth division, my dearest friends and inseparable comrades, for the head temple, Taiseki-ji. Mr. Toda arrived later, toward evening. At a young men's and young women's division leaders meeting held that night, Mr. Toda called upon each person to stand up and recite the above New Year's poem aloud.

Gazing at the young people as they did so, Mr. Toda could clearly tell which of them would remain at his side, constant in faith, holding fast to the spirit of mentor and disciple, and complete the long journey of kosen-rufu, and which would not.

Incidentally, when Mr. Toda reprimanded his disciples, he could be harsh. Several rebellious disciples were angered by his censure and turned against him, leaving the Gakkai.

This principle is just as true today as it was then. Strict admonitions on the part of the mentor actually constitute critical guidance in faith that has the effect of sorting the genuine from the counterfeit in terms of faith and commitment; they represent a moment of profound importance that can decide the entire direction of the disciple's life in this and future existences. But all too often the disciple fails to realize this crucial fact.

Mr. Toda earnestly sought selfless and invincible disciples who could endure scorn and insult and who would share his concern for humanity and the world.

And he found one such disciple — a disciple who could walk by his side along the lofty path of the oneness of mentor and disciple. He knew exactly who it was and went on to train that person to become a disciple of the firmest commitment, a person who could achieve the impossible. He forged that individual into a disciple who could withstand even the onslaughts of a million powerful enemies.

When the meeting on Jan. 1, 1955 came to an end, I discerned tears of emotion glistening in Mr. Toda's eyes.

Around 1955, the Soka Gakkai's membership had grown to some 170,000 households. In response to the surging growth of this bold new people's movement based on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the "three powerful enemies" had already begun to reveal their insidious presence as predicted in the Lotus Sutra. Mr. Toda realized that the Soka Gakkai's path would be increasingly fraught with peril and difficulty, and he resolved to foster disciples of iron conviction and to create a network of people solidly united in purpose.

In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," Nichiren Daishonin writes, "The word together means that when one is together with Nichiren, one will reach the place where the treasure is" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 734). Always together with the Gakkai, the organization that is in complete accord with the Buddha's wish and decree, always togeth-

er with our wonderful fellow members — this is the unforgettable Gakkai spirit, indeed, the Gakkai spirit that we must ensure is never, ever forgotten. The year that I personally began to compose and dedicate New Year's poems annually to my fellow members was 1980 — the year after I became honorary president of the Soka Gakkai and just after the completion of the seventh of the seven seven-year periods of the Gakkai's development since its inception. (These seven-year periods were known as the Seven Bells.)

On New Year's Day of that year — in which we could celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding — just as Mr. Toda had predicted would someday happen after his death, a number of treacherous disciples began to make their move, and a group of corrupt, self-serving priests launched a plot to gain control over the Gakkai. These individuals formed an unholy alliance with the most unscrupulous elements of the mass media, and on that New Year's Day in 1980, I was confronted with their base scheme to bring me down and a raging storm of persecution they had engineered against me.

Nevertheless, I wanted to encourage and reassure our members, even if with just a few words, and I took up my pen and wrote:

*Let us once more cross
Countless mountains and rivers
Together
Holding the banner of kosen-rufu
Bravely aloft.*

Twenty five years had passed since Mr. Toda had written, "The journey to propagate / The Mystic Law / Is long..."

Another poem by Mr. Toda that I can never forget is:

*To the people of Asia
Who pray for a glimpse of the moon
Through the parting clouds
Let us send them, instead,
The light of the sun.*

When I heard that poem in 1956, I engraved it in my heart as Mr. Toda's will and testament to me. I have since devoted my life to propagating Buddhism throughout Asia, throughout the entire world. Forty-three years have passed. I have built one golden road after another, establishing a firm and solid base for the development of worldwide kosen-rufu in the new century.

Over the years, many people of note around the globe have praised our noble movement. And our members, through their valiant struggle and selfless efforts, have forged lives of indestructible happiness.

Buddhism teaches that wherever such endeavors to spread the Law are found, that place is itself the land of Eternally Tranquil Light. Here, the joyous song of kosen-rufu has begun to resound, transcending time and space, and the cheers of jubilation have begun to ring out above the rainbow of peace, high into the sky.

We have broken through the angry waves of the raging storm; we have crossed the perilous peaks and rushing torrents. We have faced and triumphed over every tempest. Now our great procession of victory and honor marches forward with the morning sun, advanc-

ing with dignity and joy.

*Thinking always of my fellow members
The light of their noble mission shining in their eyes.*

— *With my palms pressed
together in reverence.*

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