

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MARCH 9 SPEECH WITH A SPECTACULAR WINNING HIT!

In part 2 of his March Headquarters Leaders Meeting speech, the SGI president continues with the story of SGI-USA member Orlando Cepeda's 'winning hit' in life. 'Life is a struggle to win,' President Ikeda says. 'And so is Buddhism. I hope that each of you, in your own circumstances, will overcome all hardships to savor lives of great triumph.'

In March 1993, during a San Francisco visit, I received an award from the city's War Memorial Performing Arts Center recognizing my efforts to spread the ideals of the United Nations and promote international cultural exchange. The presentation ceremony was held at the center, where the United Nations was born. Mr. Cepeda kindly attended the celebration. I was touched by his sincerity, and I will never forget it.

Also, during a 1994 visit to Japan, Mr. Cepeda took time out of his busy schedule to visit Soka University in Tokyo and encourage the university's baseball team. Since that time, the team has gone from strength to strength, achieving eight league wins in succession. In addition, three of the students that Mr. Cepeda talked with have gone on to become professional baseball players in Japan.

How important it is to motivate and inspire young people!

In 1995, too, Mr. Cepeda extended a warm welcome to a delegation of students from Kansai Junior and Senior High Schools visiting San Francisco. He also travels from time to time to Soka University of America to talk with students there. He is a warm-hearted, kind person.

For my birthday this year, Mr. Cepeda sent me a copy of his new autobiography, *Baby Bull: From Hardball to Hard Time and Back*. On the flyleaf, he wrote: "1/2/99. To Sensei: Thanks for everything. Happy Birthday. Your friend, Orlando Cepeda."

Mr. Cepeda has dedicated an entire chapter of the book to a frank discussion about the greatness of Buddhism and the wonderful support he has received from his fellow SGI members. He writes: "The story of my life cannot be written without paying deference to Buddhism. More than baseball, more than the home runs and runs batted in, more than the Rookie of the Year Award and the National League MVP, Buddhism helped make me what I am today. I say this because all the records and cheers and the celebrity do not, and did not, create inner peace. Buddhism saved me spiritually and gave me the tools to turn my pain into medicine. It has helped me make myself a far better human being. And in doing so, it has made me a better husband, father, and friend" (p. 189).

Mr. Cepeda also talks about his mentor, President Ikeda, in his autobiography, introducing his activities to promote peace, culture and education, and mentioning proudly that the SGI leader has delivered lectures at respected universities around the world.

People who are obsessed with appearances have already lost out.

In response to Mr. Cepeda's election to the Hall of Fame, the San Francisco Giants announced that his old uniform number, 30, will be retired. On the day he was informed

of his selection, he told gathered journalists: “Fifteen years ago, I embraced Buddhist philosophy.... Our biggest victory is to win over ourselves. Today proves the validity of Buddhism and friendship.” He is proud of his Buddhist faith.

In Japan, many people are too cowardly or too worried about appearances to openly pay tribute to the Soka Gakkai and their Buddhist practice as important factors in their success. How different is Mr. Cepeda’s open acknowledgment! People who are obsessed with appearances have already lost — they cannot hope to adorn their lives with victory having such cowardice.

Life is a struggle to win. And so is Buddhism. I hope that each of you, in your own circumstances, will overcome all hardships to savor lives of great triumph.

Everyone has a vast palace within, their own Hall of Fame inside.

Entering the Hall of Fame is of course a wonderful achievement. But even more wonderful is entering the Hallowed Halls of Buddhism — the palace of life itself. Mr. Cepeda is a wise person and knows this.

In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings,” Nichiren Daishonin says, “To chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is to enter the palace of one’s own life” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 787). Everyone has a vast, unsurpassable palace within — a personal Hall of Fame, resplendent with the infinite treasures of the universe.

When we open the door to that palace, wherever we are — right there — we can find happiness. Consequently, there is nothing to fear and no reason to envy others for anything.

Buddhism expounds the principle of “attaining supreme enlightenment in one’s present state, without having to change one’s original status” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 50). In other words, people of the nine worlds [from Hell through Bodhisattva] can attain the state of Buddhahood without having to change their present form. This is the quintessential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.

Money, position, education and fame are irrelevant. A person of genuine faith can reveal the state of Buddhahood just as he or she is. Similarly, the mere wearing of priestly robes does not guarantee the attainment of enlightenment!

There’s no need to compare yourself to anyone else.

The Daishonin writes that even if we find ourselves in the hell of incessant suffering, we can transform it into a Land of Eternally Tranquil Light through the illuminating brilliance of the Mystic Law.

The Daishonin writes of the principle that “any place is, without changing its characteristics, in and of itself a Buddha land, the hell of incessant suffering immediately became the capital of Eternally Tranquil Light” (MW-4, 309).

In other words, even if we are in the depths of hell, the power of chanting enables us to change our circumstances into an enlightened realm. Each of you, without fail, can achieve a life of absolute victory and unsurpassed glory.

There is no need to put yourself down or feel envious of others. No one is leading a

more noble life than you who dedicate yourselves to the work of kosen-rufu. Please challenge yourself with pride and confidence wherever you are.

Those who resolve “This is the path I will follow!” “Watch me change my life!” are strong. No one can hold a candle to them.

Happiness is found within. There’s no need for you to compare yourselves to others.

For instance, though not everyone in the Arts Division may be basking in the spotlight right now, if there is even one who is, this amounts to the entire division enjoying popularity and success. The Lotus Sutra expounds the principle of consistency from beginning to end. A representative embodies the whole group he or she is representing.

If you support those who are in the spotlight, applauding them with all your heart and rejoicing at their success, you will, in accord with consistency from beginning to end, attain good fortune and an inner state of life equal to theirs.

The noble spirit is forged by taking on great sufferings for a noble cause.

Organizations and institutions of every shape and size are now making preparations to survive in the 21st century. I am now earnestly taking steps to extend the path of kosen-rufu even further. While consolidating the foundations we have built this century throughout the world, I am steadily making preparations to usher in the new century — the Century of the SGI.

I am confident that a wide, expansive path of kosen-rufu will be opened. We have as our powerful allies in this all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the 10 directions and the three existences of past, present and future. With a spectacular winning hit, let’s achieve a brilliant victory for the new century.

I want to dedicate the words of Nepali philosopher and popular poet Bhawani Bhikshu in “A Welcome New” to you:

*This health and this stern bravery
Are all standing on the way of your progress
Collecting and pouring...collecting itself
spontaneously*

*People who are growing and making progress are filled with vitality.
The Nepali poet Bala Krishna Sama writes in “My Bathroom”:*

*Remaining firm and resolute like the Mount Everest with
truth, beauty and eternity in my head,
I have ever to elevate the simple, sweet and soothing message
of peace for the welfare of humankind.*

Nepal — home to the world’s highest summit, Mount Everest. I still vividly remember the boisterous welcome I received from the students at Nepal’s esteemed Tribhuvan University when I gave a lecture there in November 1995.

The French writer Victor Hugo declares in his novel, *Ninety-Three*, which is set against the backdrop of the French Revolution, “Great sufferings swell the soul to gigantic proportions.” We undergo spiritual growth through problems and sufferings, through the

weight of the responsibilities we bear.

A vast, noble spirit is forged by daring to take on great sufferings and hardships for the sake of a noble cause — such as creating a better world, working for the happiness of humanity, and sharing and spreading the Daishonin's Buddhism.

By contrast, people who always take shortcuts, have a good time and try to impress others will find that their spirit dwindles, withers and decays.

It is wretched to have to work with leaders who lack passion.

I have a favor I want to ask of our SGI leaders: Please advance with a big heart and passionate spirit, determined to warmly support your fellow members, to build the very best organization for kosen-rufu and to create a better world. It is too wretched for our members, if they have to work with leaders who have little passion or heart.

It is also especially important that men show utmost respect for women. Men have absolutely no place berating our incredibly sincere, hardworking women's division and young women's division members.

Leaders, please do everything in your power to encourage everyone. Please love and cherish your fellow members and commend them for their efforts.

Leaders who let petty emotions get the better of them — and as a result go about blasting their fellow members and being spiteful and ill-tempered — are selfish and utterly contemptible. Save your disdain for corrupt government officials! Save your abuse for negative forces!

We must triumph in the struggle for kosen-rufu. We must succeed without fail. We are doing this for no one but ourselves — for our own growth and development, and to make this irreplaceable organization of the SGI, which is carrying out the Buddha's decree, truly rock-solid. We are doing this for no one but ourselves and our fellow members. Therefore, let's spiritedly, joyfully advance.

Self-pity, complaint and pessimism have no place in the Buddhism of the Daishonin. You're the one who will lose out if you let yourself succumb to them.

Let's overcome everything through challenging ourselves within! Let's achieve a happy, joyous victory! For the sake of kosen-rufu!

Please take care not to catch cold. Let's meet again in good health and high spirits! Thank you very much for today.

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 32nd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, March 9. Part 1 appeared in last week's issue.