

DISCUSSIONS ON YOUTH TRUE COURAGE IS PEACE

SGI President Ikeda: The people in the spotlight, the people who always seem to be doing big, flashy things, are not always courageous. And it goes without saying that war and oppression are not acts of courage but of cowardice.

True courage means carrying out peaceful, just and beneficial activities. True courage is to live honestly and tenaciously. This is the most priceless courage. It is steadfast courage, sound and healthy courage.

The people who have no courage are the ones who steal, who oppress, who kill and maim, who threaten lives with weapons, who wage war. People do such evil things because they are cowards. They have no courage. Cowardice is dangerous.

Yasuyuki Itakura: When militarism raged in Japan, the Soka Gakkai's founding presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda refused to follow the crowd. They stood up to the authorities for what they believed was right, bravely calling for a return to the road of peace and freedom. That must have taken tremendous courage.

Ikeda: But at the time they were denounced as traitors, thrown in prison and labeled cowards for opposing the war. It was an insane time. And I'm worried that we're seeing a trend toward the same insanity in Japan today.

Itakura: Today's mass media spread the most ridiculous lies, but they remain unpunished. They violate people's human rights over and over, without shame or compunction. They brazenly sell their lies on street corners, and advertise them everywhere.

Our society has become abnormal. But living in the midst of this abnormality, people no longer notice just how abnormal it is.

Michiko Kanazawa: In that sense, it's just like it was in fascist Japan.

The other side of courage is compassion.

Ikeda: People who possess true courage aren't cowardly and base. They are honest and simple. That's why they are so frequently painted as villains or misunderstood.

On the other hand, there are individuals who are great manipulators and become famous and popular through self-promotion and clever plotting. People see their fame and popularity, and envy them. Many, unfortunately, are completely taken in.

But we shouldn't be swayed by others' praise or criticism. Those who do what they believe is right — even if they are misunderstood, scorned, persecuted — have a clear conscience and are true winners in life.

Kanazawa: Courage is a very down-to-earth thing, isn't it?

Ikeda: It's a matter of perseverance.

A mother's desire to raise her children into fine adults, no matter how hard she has to work to do it, is a noble form of courage. The other side of courage is compassion. They're two sides of the same coin — courage is the front side of the coin, and compassion is the

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back.

True courage is always backed by compassion. There is nothing evil or malicious behind it. If there is any malice or ill-intention, you can be sure it is not real courage. A mother's feelings for her children are the perfect example of courage and compassion.

By definition, courage must be backed up by justice and compassion. Mr. Toda used to say: "True compassion is very difficult for ordinary mortals. Emotions get in the way, or we just can't be bothered. Compassion is necessary, but it's hard for us to sustain it. We can, however, sustain courage. So though we know compassion is important, what we can actually do is be courageous."

In fact, if we act with courage, we find that our compassion for others grows deeper. Courage is the ultimate virtue that we can strive for.

Courage can be called the noble spirit to serve others.

Kanazawa: I want to introduce the experience of one of our high school division members from Shizuoka. At school, she was part of a closely knit group of seven. As they spent more and more time together, they became increasingly aware of each other's shortcomings and strong points.

Gradually, all of them, except for her, began to gossip about any member who wasn't present at the time. She tried to persuade them to stop this, and the other six used that as an excuse to turn on her and pick on her.

Itakura: We see that so often. It's really a dangerous tendency.

Kanazawa: In class, they would give her cold looks. They handed her letters filled with nasty remarks about her. Whenever they happened to touch her accidentally, they would scream, as if in horror, and run away.

Each day was agony: With each indignity inflicted on her, she felt as if her heart were being torn out. Whenever she had free time, she'd hide in the girl's bathroom to avoid the humiliation that her six ex-friends were heaping on her.

Thinking how wonderful it would be to find someone she could trust and unburden herself to, she finally summoned the courage to tell her mother about her school problems. After her mother heard the whole story, she gave her daughter a copy of "Discussions on Youth." The daughter read it very carefully, and as she did, she felt courage welling up inside her. Once she realized that by chanting daimoku she could transform all her suffering into fuel for becoming happy, she decided to take positive action to change her situation.

She continued to pray: "I won't be defeated! I will become strong!" Gradually she gained more and more courage. Going to school wasn't a problem anymore. Before that, she had only gone because her mother drove her to and from school.

Eventually, she made new friends. In the end, she even changed her relationship with the members of the original group that ostracized her for the better — she gets on quite amicably with them today. She actually feels grateful to them, for they motivated her to become stronger and more independent.

The secret, she says, to getting others to change is to become a stronger person yourself. "I absolutely recommend that everyone chant daimoku. Those with problems will find answers, and those without will improve themselves," she says.

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Ikeda: Daimoku is a powerful source of courage. It's the spark that starts the engine of courage. Chanting daimoku is an act of courage in itself.

Courage is the strength to live our lives the right way, to walk the right path. It can take many forms. For example, thinking what is the best way for your country and the world to achieve peace and then taking action to make that happen. That is the courage born of conviction. Or thinking what you can do to contribute to people's happiness and make society better, then working constructively toward that goal. That is the courage of love for humanity. Or, as a mother or a school teacher, thinking what you can do for the children in your care. Or thinking how you can help and support your friends. That is the unpretentious courage of daily life.

Itakura: Are you saying that there are different levels of courage?

Ikeda: It may appear that there are different levels, but they are alike in that all of them are courage. Great or small, courage is still courage. Both great and small embody the noble spirit to serve others. On the other hand, only looking out for your own interests is cowardly and base.

The sun shines wherever people of faith take action.

Itakura: I've always thought that faith is the greatest courage.

Ikeda: That's exactly right. There are courageous people in many different fields, but perhaps the realm of religion has the most. The Christian missionaries, especially, have always spread their religion no matter how harshly they were persecuted. Though their religious beliefs are different from ours, their lives, their actions, are truly courageous.

Buddhism is also courage. Nichiren Daishonin declares, "Nichiren's disciples cannot accomplish anything if they are cowardly" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 128). He continually stresses the importance of courage.

For the sake of our faith, we must not let any persecution defeat us. That is courage. That is the most noble way of life there is.

Those who follow it will be acknowledged by the heavens as true heroes. Not only will their names be remembered forever, but they will leave their distinctive mark on the humanity's history. They will inspire others to have courage and to become heroes, too.

Such individuals are great — they are bodhisattvas and Buddhas. Courageous are those who uphold correct faith and take action for the sake of their beliefs. They are heroes among heroes. Their hearts beat in accord with the fundamental rhythm of the universe. The sun shines wherever those people are — illuminating their lives, their families, their classmates, their society, their country and their world.

Whatever you may have to challenge, I say to you, "Have the courage to take a step forward!"

The conclusion of a discussion on courage among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Yasuyuki Itakura (Kansai young men's leader) and Michiko Kanazawa (young women's secretariat). Part one appeared in the April 16 issue. Part two appeared in the April 30 issue.

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