

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA SIX STORIES HIGH AND FULL OF HOPE

At a 1982 culture festival in Kansai, YMD members built a six-story human pyramid that touched the hearts of all Kansai members. 'The pyramid of youth that rose so bravely and so high into the bright skies of Kansai marked a momentous turning point,' President Ikeda remembers, 'opening the way for the Gakkai's unflinching counterattack against the threats and schemes of a corrupt priesthood.'

*Eternal, boundless, undecay'd,
A thought unseen....*

These are the words of the poet and revolutionary Lord Byron.

An unforgettable event took place 17 years ago, on March 22, 1982: The first, historic Kansai Youth Peace Culture Festival at the Nagai Track and Field Stadium in Osaka.

This festival, commemorating the 30th anniversary of the kosen-rufu movement in Kansai, began at 1:29 p.m. with a parade of 10,000 youth — all new Soka Gakkai members — marching into the stadium.

Then, at 2:48, after members of each division had thrilled the spectators with wonderful performances, 4,000 youth came dashing onto the field. They were the young men's division gymnastics team. They formed eight five-story human towers that together unfurled as beautifully as an eight-petal lotus flower.

Then, in the center of the field, a group of young men began to array themselves in a new formation. The eyes of all spectators — the eyes of all their fellow Kansai members — were upon them, looking on and praying for the success of this "tower of the people's triumph," a six-story human pyramid.

The 60 people forming the pyramid's base placed their arms over one another's shoulders. Twenty people forming the second layer climbed on top; 10 more climbed on top of them to form the third layer; then five more on top of them to form the fourth; another three climbed on top of them to form the fifth; and then, finally, one person climbed to the very top. All but those in the base were at this point in a crouching position. Slowly, the second layer began to stand up.

For several years, the Soka Gakkai had been subjected to harsh criticism and abuse, which Nichiren Daishonin's writings predicted would befall those who practiced in exact accord with the Buddha's teachings. The attacks leveled against us were utterly false and baseless — they were nothing more than waves of malicious, destructive verbal violence.

Our Kansai members never quailed before these onslaughts of the three powerful enemies of Buddhism. In particular, the women's and young women's division members continued to exert themselves diligently in their Gakkai activities with the gentle smiles of heavenly emissaries. No matter how vile the slander and abuse directed at them, no matter how stabbing and heart-rending those verbal attacks, the Kansai members never forgot to act and speak out with dignity and courage.

These members, who had turned the rain-drenched Kansai Culture Festival of 1966 into a rousing success, were strong. And now the youth division, fearless and undaunted,

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burned with enthusiasm to create a truly outstanding gathering of youth in Kansai.

In November 1981, after a memorable guidance tour to Shikoku, I returned to Osaka to attend the Third Kansai General Meeting. At that time, our young Kansai members, hearts blazing and brilliant as the sun, told me that “we’re going to make our culture festival an event that will let the world know that the Gakkai is here! And that our mentor is as vigorous as ever! A hundred thousand Kansai youth division members are waiting for you, Sensei!”

Right after the New Year of 1982, I went to snowbound Akita Prefecture to offer guidance and encouragement to our members, and there launched a battle against the three obstacles and four devils there. I threw myself into the forefront of the struggle, like a lion, determined to topple the malign forces that sought to destroy Buddhism. That initiative was a signal to all our members, inspiring them, too, to fight and speak out.

It was at the same time that our youthful Kansai members were beginning to practice for the culture festival, enduring the cold winter winds in Osaka Castle Park and other places. The group working on the six-story human pyramid often borrowed the gymnasium of Kansai Soka High School in Katano — but up to the day of the festival, they had only succeeded in making the pyramid once.

My eldest son, Hiromasa, then a teacher at the school, had been with them when they succeeded and shared their elation. “I will never forget that thrill and that moment in history as long as I live!” he declared.

Just before the culture festival, a gymnastics team member died of an illness. He was the best friend of the youth who was to stand at the very apex of the pyramid. Now, the pyramid had also become a memorial, a tribute to that young man who could not participate in the festival.

The evening of March 21, 1982, I arrived in Osaka. It was raining fiercely, and the first day of the festival had been canceled. I dropped in on the event-staff meeting to encourage and rally the young people, who I was sure must be disappointed. I told them that it was too much to expect to successfully achieve the six-story pyramid, a feat requiring the greatest precision and concentration, two days in a row.

It was good that it had rained, I said. And I urged them to give us a high-spirited performance the next day.

Under clear blue skies, the six-story pyramid was formed on that historic, noble ground. Members in one section of the stands held up cards to spell out a colorful, giant “Youth, Scale the Mountain of Kosen-rufu of the 21st Century!”

The fourth level of the pyramid rose.

Slowly and surely, the fifth rose.

At 3:06 p.m., the young man alone on the top stood up and lifted his face to the heavens. He cried out the name of his deceased friend and shouted, “We did it!” Holding up both arms, he was a picture of life’s boundless dignity.

At that instant, members in the stands, with their cards, spelled out in scarlet letters on a golden background, “The Kansai Spirit.” The pyramid stood triumphantly against the cloudless blue skies of Ever-victorious Kansai as tumultuous cries of victory rang out.

At that instant, the sun of the Soka Gakkai shone with brilliant splendor! Cheers filled the air — a wave of voices heralding like trumpets, a chorus of enthusiastic approval.

The youth’s mighty tower of victory and justice was magnificent, truly magnificent, ris-

ing high above those obsessed with personal fame and profit. It radiated the great light of hope. A very well-known non-Japanese guest at the event declared that the six-story human pyramid was most certainly a feat without parallel in the world.

When this stunning performance was finished, the tens of thousands of spectators and performers fell silent; everyone present had witnessed the shining glory of victors. Kansai Youth Division Leader Masato Onishi (now a Soka Gakkai vice president) came to the microphone: “My friends, a hundred thousand strong, disciples of President Ikeda from all over Kansai!” he began. With these opening words of a declaration for peace, a declaration infused with the pledge of a true disciple, ringing out, a solemn atmosphere enveloped the stadium.

“We vow to elevate the Buddhism of the Daishonin to the spirit of our age,” he said, “to the spirit of the entire world and, based on the ideals of respect for the dignity of life and peace for all humankind, to advance our movement for lasting peace in accord with the principles of *rissho ankoku*.”

I made closing remarks, in which, after expressing my thanks to the high priest and the distinguished guests, I called out to the youth: “Peace is the true wish of humanity. Surmounting all slander and abuse, we must continue to press onward for peace. I entrust this path to you, my young friends!”

As I recall, it was two or three days after the culture festival that I received a message from the head temple to go immediately there. The high priest, infamous for his vindictive jealousy, had summoned me.

I was scheduled to visit our members in Kyoto and Shiga, but I changed my plans and hurried to the head temple, taking President Akiya and other top leaders with me. That was March 25, 1982.

The high priest awaited us, as puffed up with anger as an *asura* (contentious demons of Indian mythology). He shouted imperiously about the youth division’s vow to “elevate the Buddhism of the Daishonin to the spirit of our age, to the spirit of the entire world.” He charged that it was disrespectful to suggest that something already as elevated as the Daishonin’s Buddhism could be elevated further.

And he had complaints about the wording of my speech. In thanking him for attending, I had addressed him as “His Eminence Nikken Shonin,” when I should have said “His Eminence, the High Priest.”

This was all he had to say after witnessing that marvelous festival! How foolish and sad was his pathetic attempt to assert authority! With painful clarity, Nikken was revealing himself as a faithless priest, who was cloaking himself in the high priest’s robes, who was ruled by devilish forces, who had lost his mind with jealousy. This incident made us indignant. Its sheer absurdity made us laugh — but without mirth.

The Daishonin writes, “The *asura* demon who shot an arrow at the sun had his head split into seven pieces” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 195).

The pyramid of youth that rose so bravely and so high into the bright skies of Kansai marked a momentous turning point, opening the way for the Gakkai’s unflinching counterattack against the threats and schemes of a corrupt priesthood.

From that day, from that moment, beginning in Ever-victorious Kansai with its ever-fresh commitment to *kosen-rufu*, the great advance of our alliance for justice and truth

began — and we headed for the triumphant summit of Soka in the 21st century!

When the new Kansai Headquarters Building is completed, a statue of the six-story human pyramid will boldly adorn it.

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