

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA ENCOUNTER WITH A MENTOR

SGI President Ikeda shares UCLA professor Bernard Weiner's view that encountering a mentor leads people to self-motivation.

Recently Masao Yokota, president of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, reported to me on his interview with Dr. Bernard Weiner, professor of psychology at the University of California, Los Angeles. Dr. Weiner is well known as one of the world's leading motivational psychologists.

What does Dr. Weiner identify as playing a very important role in motivating an individual and cultivating his or her spirit of initiative? The encounter with a mentor.

From that perspective, Dr. Weiner expresses a strong understanding of how SGI members deepen their faith and expand their movement for world peace based on the mentor-disciple bond. Dr. Weiner remarks: "President Ikeda always attributes everything to his mentor, Mr. Toda. He's always saying how much he learned from him: 'Everything I know is from Mr. Toda.' He believes in mentorship because he's so grateful for his own mentor. That's important. If you have a mentor, you realize how important it is to pass on. If you don't have a mentor, you may not understand the importance of that relationship."

When the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, was imprisoned for his opposition to Japanese militarism during World War II, the attitude of his disciples — who until then had treated him with respect and regarded him as their mentor — changed abruptly. Suddenly, instead of "Makiguchi Sensei," they were saying "That idiot Makiguchi" or just calling him "Makiguchi," without even a "Mister." The fickleness of people's hearts is a frightening thing indeed.

My mentor, Josei Toda, would often relate the following to me: "After I became second president of the Soka Gakkai, there was an arrogant group of troublemakers in the organization who declared they weren't Toda's disciples but the disciples of President Makiguchi. I had never particularly asked them to be my disciples in the first place. So why were they suddenly proclaiming themselves to be Mr. Makiguchi's disciples? In short, because it suited their vanity. 'Mr. Makiguchi's disciples' had an impressive ring to it. But were they actually doing anything in their actions and behavior to show that they were Mr. Makiguchi's disciples? No. They were simply running away from reality and living in a dream world. In other words, they were using Mr. Makiguchi. They weren't really his disciples at all.

"Had they been true disciples of Mr. Makiguchi, they would have inherited his spirit and joined me, the person who was doing his utmost to propagate the Daishonin's Buddhism. That was Mr. Makiguchi's profound guidance, after all.

"In Buddhism, mentor and disciple are one. Given this principle of the oneness of mentor and disciple, for Mr. Makiguchi's disciples to support and follow the second president who had inherited Mr. Makiguchi's spirit would have been a way of repaying the profound debt of gratitude they owed their departed mentor. I am not particularly referring to my case, but I believe that Buddhism must always be based on the mentor-disciple relationship as a core principle and as a formula for perpetuating the Mystic Law."

All those who called themselves Mr. Makiguchi's disciples and refused to follow Mr.

Toda eventually abandoned their faith, betrayed the organization and drifted away from Buddhism. No matter what excuses they might have made to justify their behavior, their words were clearly nothing more than the false, empty arguments of shallow individuals ignorant of the true depth of the mentor–disciple relationship.

In 1950, a year before becoming the second president of the Soka Gakkai, Mr. Toda, whom we all respected as our mentor, suddenly resigned as general director, at that time the top position in the organization, and handed it over to another person. His resignation was prompted by his wish that the dire financial situation of his business might not cause any trouble for the Soka Gakkai.

But I simply couldn't conceive of the Soka Gakkai without Mr. Toda. I immediately went to see him and asked, "If you resign as general director, who will be my mentor?" Without hesitation, he replied, "Although I cause you nothing but hardship, I am, and always will be, your mentor." I wrote about this exchange in *The Human Revolution*. For me it was an unforgettable scene in the drama of mentor and disciple.

It goes without saying that we regard Nichiren Daishonin as the original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. Based on that foundation, the Daishonin's Buddhism teaches the importance of the mentor–disciple relationship.

The Daishonin's successor, Nikko Shonin, says: "The Daishonin teaches following the correct path of mentor and disciple to attain Buddhahood. If one makes even the slightest mistake in the way of mentor and disciple, then, even if one upholds the Lotus Sutra, one will fall into the hell of incessant suffering."

Consequently, not seeking out a mentor who practices the Law correctly, instead being intent only on getting others to obey and follow you in a relationship resembling that between a boss and his underlings, is not the correct path of Buddhism. This is because practitioners of the Mystic Law work together in the unity of "many in body and one in mind" (*itai doshin*). All are equal.

For this reason, Buddhism is a teaching of mentor and disciple, expounding as it does the oneness of the Buddha (mentor) and living beings (disciples). The Lotus Sutra is a great path that provides the underpinnings for the solemn principle of mentor and disciple — a path that, when this principle is faithfully followed, leads to our eternal development as human beings.

Dr. Weiner's observation that the SGI owes its growth to the relationship of mentor and disciple is certainly incisive.

The Goshō repeatedly urges us to "part with bad friends and seek out good ones" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 213). We must steer away from bad friends. We mustn't associate closely with people or leaders who pretend to have faith but are actually driven by personal ambition, self-interest and arbitrary views.

The Daishonin warns: "Bad friends use honeyed words to deceive and flatter. They are so skilled in the use of words as to know instinctively how to pander to the ignorance in people's hearts and destroy their goodness and integrity" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 7).

We must have the wisdom and discernment to see through the deceptions of such individuals.

In "The Opening of the Eyes," the Daishonin writes, "To call a person a good friend means that he is neither one's teacher nor one's disciple" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 113). The

Daishonin is teaching us that, as comrades, we must be good friends to one another, encouraging one another and learning from one another.

Soka Gakkai leaders are nothing but good friends. In a sense, the future presidents of the Gakkai may be regarded as standing at the forefront of these good friends.

Moreover, it is essential that the presidents of our organization strive to be people who can be esteemed as mentors with respect to the depth of their faith and their sense of mission in thoroughly devoting themselves to kosen-rufu.

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