

**AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA
SAN FRANCISCO: OVERFLOWING WITH POETRY**

***Remembering his first visit to San Francisco, SGI President Ikeda declares.
'How beautiful and overflowing with poetry is San Francisco in each of the four
seasons!'***

*The winds of the Future wait
At the iron walls of her Gate.*

This is how the acclaimed American poet George Sterling described San Francisco in “The Cool, Grey City of Love.” It was into those “winds of the Future” that San Francisco-bound United Airlines Flight 98 headed as it took off from Hawaii’s Honolulu Airport at 9:00 a.m. on Oct. 3, 1960. As we rose high in the sky, I looked protectively down on Hawaii — tranquil island of peace, realm of eternal calm — and chanted daimoku.

Having arrived there at 11:00 p.m. two days before, I had actually only spent a day in Hawaii. However, during that short stay, I put all my energy into sowing the seeds for the widespread propagation of the Mystic Law throughout the world for the 10,000 years and more of the Latter Day of the Law. I prayed that the sun of the Mystic Law would shine forever, just as the immortal sun shines day after day. As Nichiren Daishonin says, “Even a single seed, when it is planted, will grow and produce much fruit” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 971).

Hawaii, brilliant starting point of my travels for worldwide kosen-rufu, has shown astonishing growth since my first visit. The single district I established then has grown to 93 districts. And membership has increased at a remarkable pace, too, from the dozen or so members in 1960 to a dynamic force of more than 10,000 Bodhisattvas of the Earth today.

Among those who came out to greet me on that first trip was a family with a big, strong, 10-year-old boy. I remember shaking his hand. Today that young boy, Bert Kawamoto, is leader of the Pacific Zone, which includes Hawaii, Guam, Saipan and Samoa. He is exerting himself at the forefront of the kosen-rufu movement.

After five-and-a-half hours in the air, we were greeted by the Golden Gate Bridge. San Francisco is two hours behind Hawaii. When we landed in this city known as the most beautiful in the United States and often called the Paris of the West, the clock in the airport lobby read 4:35 p.m.

I was accompanied by five fellow members: Youth Division Leader Einosuke Akiya (current Soka Gakkai president), Vice General Director Hiroshi Hojo (now deceased), Director Yasu Kashiwabara (current Executive Advisory Council vice leader), Director Yoshihei Kodaira (current senior adviser) and Director Tsugio Ishida (now deceased).

Several local members had come to greet us, and we began a brief conference right there about schedules and other subjects. A member who had originally belonged to Tokyo’s Kamata Chapter was present, and she spoke with some nostalgia of my wife and children attending discussion meetings in Kamata.

The scale of America is so big that it dwarfs the sufferings of a single individual; it is as expansive as the spirit that burns with noble aspiration, soaring into huge, open skies. The vibrations of America’s youthful vigor resounded in my heart, seeming to call out,

“Friends from Japan, look intently at this land overflowing with unlimited potential and future promise!”

I also realized that we must not rush kosen-rufu in the United States. It is important to start by raising one person who will have a solid commitment to faith. The key is for that one person to truly experience and understand just how joyous, fulfilling and wonderful the world of the Daishonin’s Buddhism can be. In this way, this individual will become a nucleus.

From this one person, the message of Buddhism will spread to another and then another, expanding outward exponentially and bringing forth an unending stream of capable people who will propagate the Mystic Law. This was my firm conviction and passionate determination based on the principle of emerging from the earth.

That night, together with some local members, we ate in a cheap diner that served Japanese food. The diner was dimly lit and nearly empty. In those days, strict foreign exchange regulations in Japan limited the amount of U.S. currency Japanese travelers could purchase to just \$35 a day per person. Our motto on the trip was “Thrift,” and we did everything we could to save money. We wanted to keep as much aside as possible for the purpose of encouraging the local members we were visiting.

At our next stop, Seattle, we decided to eat inexpensive steaks for nourishment. They were as tough as leather, and I remember that I came down with a terrible rash, partly as a reaction to the food and partly due to the strain of our demanding schedule.

Certainly, no one could have imagined that decades later the high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, Nikken, would be exposed for his involvement in a deplorable scandal that took place in Seattle on his first overseas trip back in 1963.

In San Francisco, as elsewhere, everything started from a discussion meeting. I announced the formation of a district in San Francisco to the 30 or so members gathered. I also decided to establish a district in the neighboring state of Nevada. That district would be led by the energetic and committed Joseph and Yaeko O’Rayeh, who had driven five hours to join us in San Francisco.

I appointed two women as leaders of San Francisco District: Sachiko Garcia as district leader and Kiyoko Thoma as district women’s division leader. The Daishonin says, “There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 93). I also appointed their husbands, who were both Americans, as district advisors. One of them was not yet a Soka Gakkai member, and his appointment surprised some. But in the world of the SGI, every individual is equally precious. I wanted our friends in America, land of the free, to value and respect each other, and to live wonderful lives filled with optimism, vitality and unhindered growth.

The majority of those attending this discussion meeting were Japanese women who had moved to the United States. I urged them to achieve three practical goals: become American citizens, obtain driver’s licenses and learn English.

When we dedicate our lives to fulfilling our mission, there is no time for wallowing in self-pity. It is vital that we attain happiness for ourselves and others where we are right now. The teachings of Buddhism provide us with the golden wisdom to set concrete goals for our self-improvement and advancement.

The next day, I had a photo taken with these mothers of kosen-rufu in the New World

in front of the statue of Columbus atop Telegraph Hill, overlooking the sea. Their eyes were shining. They sparkled with hope, with strength, with a dynamic enthusiasm to move forward.

As the fresh sea breezes caressed us, I told them that 20 or 50 years later, we would mark this day as an important anniversary of kosen-rufu in the United States. True to my promise, 20 years later, my wife and I stood on that same hill and joined these women, their faces shining with victory, in a commemorative photograph, creating another page in the unfolding story of the journey to propagate the Mystic Law.

When I was in the United States in October 1960, a world-famous scientist was summoned to testify before a U.S. congressional subcommittee. He, along with other scientists, had prepared a petition against nuclear weapons testing. They collected some 13,000 signatures and presented them to the United Nations. Now, he was being asked by the subcommittee to name those who had assisted in the petition.

Who was this scientist? None other than the father of modern chemistry, Linus Pauling. Dr. Pauling remained steadfast in the face of the harshest intimidation. Both he and his wife, Ava Helen, maintained their firm commitment to justice and humanity.

Because of these qualities, Dr. Pauling insisted that the power of the people must be used to ensure that the political authorities stayed on the right course. And that to achieve and maintain peace, citizens should unite to put pressure on those authorities. He recognized the Soka Gakkai as a leader in that direction, and he continued to support us to the end of his life.

I met with Dr. Pauling four times, our final meeting taking place in San Francisco. Dr. Pauling, although 92, traveled specially there to see me. It was at that meeting that I suggested the holding of a Linus Pauling exhibition, and Dr. Pauling gladly agreed to my proposal.

The “Linus Pauling and the Twentieth Century” exhibition that was realized as a result opened in San Francisco last year and is now beginning to tour the United States. It is being received with high praise from many areas of society, including the U.S. Congress.

The parliament of humankind, the United Nations, also began in San Francisco. I visited San Francisco again in March 1993, on the last leg of a trip to nine cities in six North and South American countries. It was my fifth visit since my very first, 33 years earlier.

On that occasion, I was invited to the War Memorial Performing Arts Center, which had been the scene of the historic adoption of the U.N. Charter. Together with my fellow San Francisco members, I accepted honors for my contribution to spreading the ideals of the United Nations and promoting international cultural exchange.

Among the members who joined me at the ceremony was Orlando Cepeda, the former major league home-run king, who was this year elected to the Baseball Hall of Fame. He is a proud district leader in the Bay Area.

During the ceremony, a youthful leader in San Francisco politics pointed out that the SGI and San Francisco, which has always opened new frontiers in history, have three things in common: a respect for cultural diversity, creative energy and the power to inspire hope in all people.

Only our actions can stir the winds of the future. The Daishonin says of the inevitable progress of kosen-rufu: “Though the trees may desire to be still, the wind will not cease to blow; though we may wish spring to linger, it must give way to summer” (MW-5, 201).

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How beautiful and overflowing with poetry is San Francisco in each of the four seasons! I am sure that today again, from the city's steep roads, from friends' homes commanding a view of the Golden Gate Bridge, our youthful members in San Francisco, with smiling, confident faces, are sending forth the fragrant, sunny breezes of joy and dynamic progress toward the 21st century.

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