

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA JUNE 17 MESSAGE WHAT IS HAPPINESS, ANYHOW?

SGI President Ikeda writes to the YWD members that 'it is extremely important to understand just what happiness is.'

To the 1 million Soka Gakkai young women's division members, who are advancing into the 21st century with newly appointed leaders.

What was the first country in the world where women won suffrage? It was New Zealand, an island-nation that gleams like a jewel in the South Pacific. The year was 1893.

Rotorua was the first city of that pioneering land of gender equality to issue a declaration for the abolition of all nuclear weapons. On June 16, my wife received an honorary citizenship from that beautiful city of forests and lakes. She was the first woman to receive such a distinction from the city. And it was also the first time, I have been told, that a husband and wife were both so honored.

Rotorua bestowed honorary citizenship on President Ikeda in November 1998.

My wife's award was conferred to coincide with Soka Gakkai Women's Division Day, June 10. Both my wife and I regard it as an accolade given to her as a representative of all the women of the SGI around the world, and we are both filled with deep appreciation for this honor.

My wife met first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi at the age of today's junior high and high school division or very young YWD members. So from an early age, she received encouragement from Mr. Makiguchi.

After the war, under the leadership of second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, she fought hard as a YWD member and later as a member of what today we call the young mothers group of the women's division. How wonderful it must have been to meet both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda!

What a proud, unsurpassed history of life one can write, when one participates energetically in SGI activities from one's youth! All of you, the YWD members who are dedicating yourselves to your great mission, are so important.

I am confident that 30 years from now, 50 years from now, you will be admired and looked up to by all as shining examples of world citizens and pioneers of the new century of women. And I am confident that you will be wholeheartedly enjoying lives of supreme good fortune, repute and success.

I want to mention the subject of happiness. The fundamental goal of life is happiness. It is also the goal of faith. It is the goal of Buddhism.

It is extremely important, then, to understand just what happiness is. I think it is fair to say that people in all times and all places have desperately sought the answer to the question "What is happiness?" And yet the question remains fundamentally unanswered.

There are many people who possess great material wealth but are unhappy. Some of them might be mean or do nothing but fight and quarrel with others. Likewise, it is certainly possible to be very poor and yet be pure of heart, to see beauty in all things with the

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spirit of a poet and to enjoy great happiness.

Happiness is something very personal. Of two people in similar circumstances, one may be unhappy and the other happy. People are all different and perceive things differently. The reality of people's lives is infinitely diverse.

For instance, there are many women who, though they seem to have good fortune when they are single — possessing youth, beauty and wealth — end up extremely sad and unhappy when they get married. Living like a princess in a palace, eating food from plates of gold and wearing lovely, spotless finery is not happiness. In fact, it is stifling and boring, illusory and empty.

Though such a person may seem to be very happy, it is all a show. In reality, their happiness is extremely fragile and fleeting.

On the other hand, there are also many people who may appear to be suffering misfortune, but are, with strong determination and dignity, forging a life-condition of immense happiness — a life-condition like a magnificent painting to behold.

This month, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, the SGI Hong Kong Culture Centre held an exhibition of the paintings and calligraphy of Chinese artist Fang Zhaoling. Madame Fang, noble mother of art, is 85 this year. Her works of the last three years have been especially well received as breaking new ground and achieving a new level of strength and beauty.

Madame Fang's husband died early, leaving her with eight small children to raise on her own. Throughout, she continued, like a pure, inexhaustible wellspring, to produce beautiful works of art. Her life epitomizes a drama of golden triumph, showing us that by surviving the tragic misfortunes of youth and experiencing many times the hardship of others, we can lead lives that many times richer. She also shows us how, in the final chapter of our lives, we can live with tremendous vitality and spirit.

If everything always goes our own way, we'll never fully savor real happiness. It goes without saying that the treasure of happiness cannot be found in a life of ease and idleness. The diamond of happiness can only be found by making our way into the deep mountain recesses of life with great effort and exertion. It is not to be found in idly seeking fun and pleasure amid the bustle and bright lights of the city or in some lazy existence.

In "Epistle to Davie, A Brother Poet," the renowned Scottish poet Robert Burns had this to say about happiness:

*If happiness hae
not her seat
An centre in the breast,
We may be wise,
or rich, or great,
But never can be blest!
Nae treasures nor pleas-
ures
Could make us happy lang:
The heart ay's the part ay
That makes us
right or wrang.*

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In other words, all happiness and unhappiness is to be found within us. Our heart, as the Daishonin says, is what matters most (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 246).

The Daishonin also says, “There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 161). Chanting daimoku is the way to supreme happiness.

Our happiness throughout the three existences of past, present and future is determined by what we base our lives on, what we take as our fundamental ideals in life. Through the very act of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we do our human revolution and accumulate good fortune and benefit. We can also chant for the eternal happiness of the deceased.

In “The True Object of Worship,” the Daishonin writes, “[The world of] Buddhahood is the most difficult to demonstrate” (MW-1, 53). The only way to achieve the state of true happiness that is Buddhahood is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and work for the sake of the Law, for others and for society. The essential conclusion of the Buddhism of Shakyamuni and the Buddhism of T’ien-t’ai is the same as the Buddhism of the Daishonin.

In Buddhism, those who have compassion are happy. And those who propagate the Law are the most praiseworthy of all. Compassion, put another way, is courage. To courageously chant daimoku and spread the teaching of Buddhism is compassion, and it is happiness.

There are no impasses in Buddhism. As its practitioners, we possess an eternal path of infinite hope, a garden of eternal youth. We must never forget that we embrace the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the Buddhism that teaches how true inner happiness is the source of inexhaustible hope.

Reality can be ugly. There are many lowly, craven people. This is only to be expected, since we live in the evil age of the Latter Day of the Law.

That we of the SGI are often attacked and discredited, and that hatred and jealousy toward us abound, accords exactly with the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin’s writings, which warn of the persecutions that will befall the Mystic Law’s practitioners.

The SGI, which has won one resounding victory after another while undergoing persecution because of our efforts to propagate the true teachings of Buddhism, is a champion of the highest justice and truth. You, the YWD members, who are living lives of unsurpassed happiness and a sound, productive youth together with the SGI, must have the wisdom and discernment to see through to the heart of things and never be swayed or frightened by anything.

In “Repaying Debts of Gratitude,” the Daishonin writes, “A hundred years of practice in the land of Perfect Bliss cannot compare to the benefit gained from one day’s practice in this impure world” (MW-4, 272). I hope you will deeply ponder this passage, and engrave it in your lives.

In closing, let me share with you the words of Katherine Mansfield, a well-known New Zealand author: “We’ve got, in the long run, to be our own teachers. There’s no getting away from that. We’ve got to win through by ourselves.”

To all of you, my beloved YWD members, I offer this prayer: May you enjoy good health! May you be filled with hope! May you be sunny and bright! And may you be victorious!

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Topics for Discussion Meetings

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Happiness

From This Message:

The fundamental goal of life is happiness. It is also the goal of faith. It is the goal of Buddhism. It is extremely important, then, to understand just what happiness is. I think it is fair to say that people in all times and all places have desperately sought the answer to the question "What is happiness?" And yet the question remains fundamentally unanswered.

1. How would you define happiness?
2. How do you believe the personal goals you are working on now relate to your future happiness?
3. In the future, are you confident that you will be a lot happier than you are now?
4. What makes you happiest in your life today?
5. How do you think that we can make a happier society and world?

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