

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JULY 3 SPEECH WE HAVE A MISSION!

My dear friends from 52 countries, a warm welcome to you! You are all people who will go down in the future histories of your countries. You are worthy of the highest respect. You are noble leaders who are praised and protected by Nichiren Daishonin and the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the 10 directions.

Right now, you may be unknown. You may have no money. You may be laughed at and ridiculed by people ignorant of the Daishonin's Buddhism. But when viewed from the perspective of the eternity of life, you are all supreme victors, people who will achieve unsurpassed success in life.

There is no doubt that in future existences, each of you will enjoy an expansive life-condition, far surpassing that of presidents, business tycoons or eminent scholars. The Daishonin assures us of this in his writings. If it were not true, the Daishonin would be a liar. And that just isn't possible. The Daishonin never lies.

On July 1, I joined SGI representatives in welcoming Minister of Foreign Affairs Amara Essy of Côte d'Ivoire in Africa to the Seikyo Shimbun Building in Tokyo. Seeing the warm camaraderie evident among our friends from around the world, he exclaimed, "Here is the world of the future!" As I watched Mr. Essy shake hands with members of the welcoming party, I wanted to shout, "Three cheers for our global SGI family!"

Never sever a bond of friendship.

Members from the Dominican Republic have also joined us today. I am delighted to see friends from a place that brings back many fond memories.

There is a poem that I wish to share:

Nothing can tear my flag!

.....

I will fill my life with heroic drama!

And with a passion flamed by anger

Set my heart on fire!

This is a verse from a poem by the poet-statesman Joaquín Balaguer, former president of the Dominican Republic, jewel of the Caribbean.

I visited the Dominican Republic in 1987. It was a magical land, shining with emerald waters, blue sky, vivid flowers and luxuriant green, as well as people of beautiful hearts. At the president's invitation, I visited his office, where we met and had a conversation.

Dr. Balaguer is an outstanding leader, who built a proud, prosperous, democratic nation. Never married, he has devoted his life to serving his country. He has literally made the Dominican Republic his lover and spouse, and its people his children. Once called the president without a savings account, he is known throughout the world for his high principles and modest lifestyle.

Many of you may not have much savings, either. Why don't you take it as a sign of greatness similar to Dr. Balaguer's!

As president of his country, Dr. Balaguer put great energy into improving education. He

raised student enrollments at the Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo, one of the oldest, most prestigious institutes of higher learning in the Americas, from a mere 4,000 to 60,000.

The Universidad Autónoma de Santo Domingo was founded in 1538. President Ikeda has been made an honorary professor of this university.

While in office, Dr. Balaguer was extremely busy every day, devoting himself tirelessly to his many responsibilities. He is renowned for having established many educational facilities, such as elementary and junior high schools in small towns and villages at the request of local citizens.

Cataracts on his eyes have left him with almost no vision, but the eyes of his heart have been keenly honed and are very sharp.

He is also a well-known poet and cultural figure. During our meeting, which was held in the president's office — a room adorned with magnificent paintings — I recited a poem that Dr. Balaguer had composed in his youth. "Mr. President, please allow me to recite one of your poems," I proposed. Surprised, the president listened intently as I began my recitation. My wife was there, too. Knowing that Dr. Balaguer's eyesight was so poor that he must no longer be able to read even his own poems, I hoped that my reciting some of his poetry would give him a short respite from the constant pressures he faced. He seemed to be delighted by my small gesture.

One of his aides later said that they had never seen him look so happy. Like an unforgettable drama, that scene is engraved in my mind even now.

My friendship with Dr. Balaguer — our beautiful heart-to-heart exchange — has continued since that time. It is important never to sever a bond of friendship with someone once you have made it. Instead, you must work with deep sincerity and goodwill to treasure and further expand such ties. This is kosen-rufu. This is the human diplomacy of the SGI.

Dr. Balaguer expressed the hope that I would visit his country again, and that we could meet once more at that time. The former president honors the SGI with his friendship and a profound understanding of our efforts to promote cultural exchange and greater unity among the world's people. He also refers to me, a person 20 years his junior, as a close friend, and we have great mutual respect. Last year, on reading a translation of my poem "An Ode to the Noble Mothers of Kosen-rufu," Dr. Balaguer sent a letter sharing his impressions of it.

Dr. Balaguer writes: "The sentiments of love and respect that you teach through this deeply spiritual poem are completely different from the trend that prevails in the world today. I wish to congratulate and applaud you for your wonderful poem and for your lofty and selfless efforts to unite humanity."

Dr. Balaguer stepped down as president three years ago. In September, he will turn 92. He is in vigorous good health and continues to publish one written work after another.

No matter what his age, no matter what his position, he continues unceasingly in his value-creating efforts for those of younger generations who will follow him. A lively, fighting spirit knows no deadlock.

A person of genuine character is free of self-interest.

Actually, I hear that Dr. Balaguer is being urged to run again in next year's Dominican Republic presidential elections. A few months shy of 92, he is like a youth, blazing with an immense, selfless passion to fight for the welfare of his country and fellow citizens. To possess great passion, free of all self-interest and cunning — such is the heart of a person of genuine character. Such is the life of a hero. This is a prerequisite for genuine faith.

To someone who is more than 90, people in their 50s and 60s must still seem like children!

It is nothing but laziness to think about retiring and taking it easy at an early age. Older and far more active people will regard you with disgust. Of course, as you age, you may experience various illnesses and physical ailments. Since life is a long battle, rest and relaxation are necessary — but if you let old age get the better of you and grow old inside, too, it signals a spiritual defeat.

We have been born with the mission to lead people to happiness. What good will our faith and Buddhist practice be, if we — the very people who are supposed to be working for humanity's happiness — collapse into immobility! We must not become soft and spoiled. We must not be cowardly.

The SGI tradition is to always advance with a vibrant, youthful spirit. Let us emulate the spirit of Dr. Balaguer, who in his 90s continues to fight with such vigor!

Happiness and victory lie in store for those who advance on the path of kosen-rufu.

A verse in one of Dr. Balaguer's poems reads:

To walk and keep

walking —

That is your destiny

For your feet never rest.

At the end of one road

Starts another even longer.

Traveler: your road

Begins together with your hope!

Dr. Balaguer writes of a traveler. In my youth, I also wrote a poem about a traveler.

The 21st century is almost upon us. A wide, new road of kosen-rufu, leading to a new era, opens before us. Happiness and victory lie in store for those who advance on this path.

There are many paths: hope-filled paths, evil paths, green paths, concrete paths and muddy paths. There are paths of frivolity and temptation. And then there is the noble, shining path of mission. We of the SGI follow the unsurpassed way. It is the supreme path taught by the Daishonin.

It is a path that enables us to lead lives of utmost dignity, joy and happiness. In other words, it is the path of happiness, the path of peace and the path of justice. We are advancing upon this supreme path. Let us continue striving with all our might.

The Mystic Law is the wellspring of life-force and vitality.

Title: We Have A Mission! (1)

Subject: World Tribune 07/30/99 n.3253 p.1 WT990730p01 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan 07/03/99

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 07/03/99 Daisaku Encouragement Gakkai Guidance Hachioji Headquarters Ikeda Japan Leaders Major Meeting Mission Organization President Soka Speech Speeches Tokyo Tribune World

The Mystic Law is the law of perennial youth and eternal life. It is the wellspring of boundless life-force that enables us to live with unending youthful vitality. We can bring forth powerful life-force to strive for our own happiness and that of our families and fellow human beings, and to devote our lives to working for the Law. If we practice in accord with the Daishonin's teachings, we will definitely attain such a state of life. That is why faith is so important.

Everything is determined by faith. The Daishonin writes: "Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month. Should you slacken even a bit, demons will take advantage" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 241–42). This is the spirit he is talking about: "I have grown again this month. Next month I'll do so, too. Today again, I have moved forward. And I'll do the same tomorrow." This is the spirit of faith.

If we are off guard for even a moment, demons will take advantage and enter the opening we have given them. Demons, or the negative forces inherent in life — which includes the devil of illness — attack us in all sorts of shapes and sizes. We must not let them defeat us. Not being defeated is faith.

The Daishonin repeatedly urges his followers to exert themselves harder, to redouble their efforts. He says, "You should therefore strive in faith more than ever to receive the blessings of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 9). Benefit is something that we have to win for ourselves. No one can give it to us.

The Daishonin also writes, "Above all, strengthen your seeking mind for the Way even further, so that you can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime" (MW-6, 263). Our aim is not to attain Buddhahood after death. If we do not become a Buddha while we are alive, how can we possibly become a Buddha by the mere act of dying? In other words, we cannot become a Buddha without struggle and effort.

Only by fighting against devilish forces can we defeat them. Only by exerting ourselves can we receive benefit.

Whether or not the people we introduce start practicing, our benefit is the same.

Shakyamuni encountered and triumphed over countless persecutions during his lifetime. How old was he when he began to expound the Lotus Sutra, the teaching that represents the ultimate purpose for which he appeared in this world? He was said to have been 72. He preached the Lotus Sutra for the next eight years, in what was a momentous struggle.

In comparison, we are all still young. A time of the great flourishing of the Mystic Law lies before us. It will be a golden time of glory. Let us stay in good health and live to a ripe old age, so that we may enjoy this brilliant era together and lead wonderful lives.

May you be increasingly vibrant, cheerful, strong and joyful! It is far better to live with a bright, positive and confident spirit, no matter what happens.

You may not always be successful when trying to introduce people to the Daishonin's Buddhism. But because introducing others to this practice is so difficult, when you actually *do* succeed, your joy will be all the deeper. Because it *is* such a challenge, the benefit you receive through trying is also great.

It's like sitting for school entrance exams. The exams to get into a good school are usually difficult, but precisely because they are, you study diligently, thereby gaining knowledge and ability. And how great is your joy when you actually pass!

The Daishonin teaches that, even if we introduce people to Buddhism and they don't

begin to practice at that time, we receive the same benefit as when we introduce people who are inspired to embrace faith.

I wish to extend a warm welcome once again to the SGI members who have traveled from abroad to be here. Thank you so much for coming. You have saved up your money and made a long journey for the sake of Buddhism. Immeasurable benefit will definitely accrue to your lives as a result.

There are, however, some who live in Tokyo yet grumble, “Why is the Makiguchi Memorial Hall so far away?” What would our overseas members think, if they heard you?!

A steady stream of successors will continue to follow in our footsteps in the future. All of you are opening the way for them. I hope that you will treasure, respect and care for your juniors. This is the spirit of a Buddha. This is our path to glory. Let us magnificently open and adorn this path for those who will carry on after us.

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the 35th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, July 3 (Day of Mentor and Disciple). Part 2 will appear in an upcoming issue.

Topics for Discussion Meetings

Introducing Others

From This Speech:

You may not always be successful when trying to introduce people to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. But because introducing others to this practice is so difficult, when you actually *do* succeed, your joy will be all the deeper. Because it *is* such a challenge, the benefit you receive through trying is also great.

1. How do you feel when you introduce a friend to this Buddhism?
2. When a friend you introduce doesn’t want to practice, how do you keep your friendship going with that person?
3. When a friend doesn’t want to practice, how do you encourage yourself?
3. What’s the greatest benefit you’ve received from trying to introduce a friend?
4. Have you ever had a friend whom it took several years to introduce to this Buddhism?

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