

DISCUSSIONS ON YOUTH HOLD FAST TO WHAT YOU BELIEVE

SGI President Ikeda encourages youth to 'hold fast to what you believe is right and true' in this conclusion to his discussion on standing up for justice.

Misaki Taguchi: One of the biggest problems in Japan today, I think, is that people are embarrassed by such words as good and justice. They say these words sound pretentious and don't like them for that reason.

SGI President Ikeda: To be generous, one could say that this is due to the purity of young people's ideals. The well-known Japanese author Osamu Dazai wrote a novel called *Right and Laughter*, which takes the form of the diary of its 16-year-old narrator, Susumu Serikawa, who wants to become an actor. He writes: "Perhaps I am a terrible hypocrite. I must be very, very careful. According to some theories, a person's character is formed between the ages of 16 and 20.... But at the same time, I must not become too rigid and serious. 'Do the right thing with a smile on your lips!' — how I love those words! This is the first page in my diary."

We're not talking about doing the right thing with a grim frown on your face. You should go about doing what is right in a natural way; you should be relaxed in such efforts.

Taguchi: Some people say that doing the right thing just to look good is better at least than being bad. They assert that though you may simply be making a show of doing what's right at first, in the course of continued efforts, you will eventually end up really caring about what's right and working for good with genuine commitment.

Ikeda: I want all of you to bear in mind who created this atmosphere of ridiculing what is good and right. It was adults — adults who were doing bad things and wanted to keep on doing them.

Adults who have no personal morality may spout fine-sounding words, but their hearts are dark and corrupt. They have decided that justice and truth are lies, that there is always an ulterior, selfish motive behind them. That way they can feel better about themselves and their behavior. That way, they feel they don't have to change.

Takashi Nade: Those are the kind of people who publish slanderous magazines, constantly violating the human rights of the people they report on.

Ikeda: Nothing could be more foolish than allowing yourself to be influenced by such people into thinking that it's embarrassing to talk about what is good and right. You mustn't let slanderous adults take advantage of you.

It may seem easier to dismiss and ignore what's right and good, but if you do, you will never experience the true depth of life, true joy, fulfillment, self-improvement, value or happiness. Your life will be that of an animal's, driven solely by momentary desires. What a mindless way to live!

Just hold fast to what you believe is right and true. If you stumble, pick yourself up and keep going. By continually challenging yourself in this way, you will find that you are

walking the road of the highest good.

Nade: I have a question here from one of the members: “Why is that the good and right are persecuted?”

Ikeda: Precisely because one upholds what is right, one is persecuted.

This is an important question, past and present, and relevant to all countries of the world. Until the entire human race has undergone a fundamental transformation in its attitudes and thinking, this incomprehensible, illogical, but very real situation will continue. This is the dark reality that we must face. I hope each of you will think about this problem — about the actual examples of it you encounter.

Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States during the Civil War, freed the slaves, abolished slavery, and then was assassinated. Though of course it was right to give African Americans equal rights, he was persecuted and killed for it.

Mahatma Gandhi of India rose up against the colonial powers who were oppressing the Indian people. He opposed the high tax on salt, a daily necessity for even the poorest people and was imprisoned on several occasions. Even though he always acted in the best interests of the people, he was, like Lincoln, assassinated.

Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda fought for what was right, opposing war because it caused terrible suffering for the people, and they, too, were persecuted. Mr. Makiguchi died in prison.

History chronicles the stories of countless individuals who were persecuted for doing what was right. And there are far, far more people whose names have not been remembered but waged similar struggles.

Almost everyone who achieves something of value endures some form of persecution.

Taguchi: I think that in Japan, especially, people tend to attack anyone who is different or poses a threat to the status quo. “The nail that sticks out is pounded down,” as the saying goes. This tendency is often used to serve the vested interests of the government and the media.

Ikeda: Almost every famous person in Japan who has achieved something of value and has a modicum of integrity has endured some form of attack or persecution. It’s the sly people who only care for themselves, who curry favor with the authorities, who get by unscathed. They don’t make any waves.

The same is true in other countries, as well. It’s a real tragedy that the media only focuses on the surface of events and doesn’t bother to look into what’s behind them — to consider their deeper implications.

Nade: The spurious Nobuhira lawsuits are a perfect example.

The Nobuhira lawsuits, filed by Mrs. Nobuko Nobuhira and her husband in 1996, alleged that she was sexually assaulted by President Ikeda on three separate occasions since 1973. Mr. And Mrs. Nobuhira are former Soka Gakkai leaders who were dismissed from their leadership positions for failing to return large sums of money borrowed from

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fellow members in Hokkaido. On July 22, the Tokyo High Court presiding judge, Shigeki Asao, rejected an appeal from the Nobuhiras, upholding a Tokyo District Court ruling that invalidated all charges brought by the plaintiff, Mrs. Nobuhira, and one charge brought by her husband on the basis of the statute of limitations. The Nobuhiras decided not to appeal.

And the media behaved just as irresponsibly in reporting on the sarin gas attack in Matsumoto that claimed several lives. The media quickly labeled the first person to report the attack as its perpetrator, though he and his family were actually victims. [The attack was eventually found to be perpetrated by members of the religious group the Supreme Truth sect.] The point is, I think, that neither the media nor people in general really make any serious effort to find out the truth. They only make a lot of noise.

To protect the people, a firm sense of what is right and wrong is important.

Taguchi: In such a situation, you begin to ask yourself just what right and good are.

Ikeda: Different ages have different standards of right and wrong, good and bad. The ruling forces of each age decide what most people of that era regard as right and wrong.

During World War II, for example, General Hideki Tojo was considered a hero in Japan. After the war, he was a criminal. During the war, General Douglas MacArthur was called a demon and the enemy in Japan, but after the war he was praised as a defender of justice.

Depending on who is in power, the same action may deem one either a saint or a villain. Thus the concept of justice and right is unclear and complicated.

Nade: There are cases where terrible suffering and harm are inflicted on people in the name of right or good.

Ikeda: That's true. During the war, it was regarded as right to go to war against others. This is frightening, when you think about it. That's why a firm sense of values that tells you what is truly right and wrong is so important.

The absolute minimum definition of what is right is that it benefits the welfare of others, society, and humanity as a whole—that it contribute to happiness and peace. What constitutes wrong? Killing, stealing, lying, envy, framing the innocent, selfishness, destruction—in other words, thinking only of oneself or one's limited group.

What is eternal, unchanging right? That's the question we have to try to answer. The conclusion we reach is this: to live our lives in accord with the Mystic Law, the law of life as eternal as the universe itself, and to strive to realize universal respect for the dignity and sanctity of life. This is the eternal, highest right and good.

In other words, kosen-rufu is the highest right and most just of causes.

Nade: We have an incredible mission, don't we?

Ikeda: That is why it is crucial that we succeed in our endeavors. Unfortunately, what is right does not always win. When it does not, that is a tragedy. Only when it is triumphant

does right shine with its true colors.

Buddhism teaches the principle that life inherently possesses the functions of good and evil—that good and evil are essentially one. No matter how right a cause may be, if it is defeated by evil, it only ends up aiding evil and being counted as evil itself. Because right is defeated by evil, our world continues to suffer as it does.

We must put a stop to this. We must change the wheels that move the world and set them in motion toward fundamental change. We must do so on all levels: individual, family, group and nation.

The French Revolution was an uprising against the corrupt, absolute power of the monarchy. The French people put an end to the monarchy and established a republic of the people. The history books tell us that right won in this case, but if the people had not succeeded, their cause would probably not be described as just. There are many things you can say about what is right on the conceptual level, but in reality and practice, right is only proven when there is a decisive victory.

Taguchi: My seniors are always telling me: “You mustn’t be defeated! That’s the invincible Kansai spirit!”

Ikeda: Our organization in Kansai is strong because the members there burn with that spirit. That’s why Kansai never loses. We must never lose in any struggle.

There are countless anonymous, unseen struggles in the cause of right. And there are many struggles that go down in history, too. There are struggles on all kinds of levels.

For example, your mother may have introduced Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings to many others. No one may be aware of those efforts, but they are admirable efforts for a great right cause.

Taguchi: What does doing right mean for high school division members?

Ikeda: Well, in school, the right thing to do is to study. And the wrong, bad thing to do is to prevent others from studying, to break things or to vandalize school property. The purpose of school is study, so the right thing to do is direct your energies toward that end. To be selfish and, just because you don’t like to study, hinder other students or vandalize property is wrong and bad.

It is also wrong to witness evil or injustice and stand by in silence. In cases like that, good people should join forces to prevent bullying and other bad acts.

Nade: When you look back on it, the Osaka Incident occurred because true democracy hadn’t taken root in Japan. Maybe the political authorities couldn’t believe that there could be an organization that just wanted to improve Japan, without any hidden agenda or self-interest. At the time, vote buying was rampant in Japanese elections among the established political parties, and it often went hand in hand with door-to-door campaigning. It was just the accepted convention of political life then.

Ikeda: In fact, many say that door-to-door campaigning is a perfectly normal activity in a democracy. To go door-to-door and discuss politics with your fellow citizens is the most democratic behavior there can be. In the United Kingdom and the United States, door-to-

door campaigning is regarded as the foundation of grass-roots democracy.

But it is banned in Japan; this is a way of controlling people who would abuse door-to-door campaigning to try to buy votes. It goes without saying that vote buying must never be condoned.

Elections are an important way in which we ordinary citizens exercise our democratic right.

Taguchi: Several of the high school division members had comments on this. One says: “The very least a democracy should do is protect people’s human rights. It’s indefensible for authorities in a democratic government — authorities whose very reason for existing is to defend those rights — to frame people and accuse them of crimes they didn’t commit. I can’t believe that the Osaka Incident could take place in a democracy. Such a thing could only happen in a dictatorship.”

Another says, “Japan, even today, is a country without principles.” And another says: “I thought that, now that the war was over, we were at peace, but recently I heard that people in our government are denying that the Rape of Nanking ever took place. I can’t believe it! It’s fashionable in Japan today to show no interest in government or politics, to pretend it has nothing to do with you. But that’s just a sham. We, the Japanese people, have to become more informed and intelligent.”

Ikeda: The reason that Japan’s government does not improve is that people don’t care enough and are not aware of their responsibilities. They are quick to vent their feelings, but their talk isn’t accompanied by action. Things happen here that would cause riots, or very strong opposition, in other countries, but we have a long tradition of silently obeying the authorities. And so we don’t act.

Japan has tossed aside the spirit of democracy that positions the people as sovereign. Most Japanese people are closed up in tiny, egocentric shells and don’t have the capacity to join forces and work for a great positive cause. A weak, self-serving national sentiment prevails. People criticize and complain, but they don’t come together enough to change things. This is one of the greatest failings of the Japanese people. The problems besetting Japan’s democracy will not improve unless people make greater efforts to oppose government abuses of power and hold the authorities more strictly accountable for their actions.

Another problem is that we don’t have any political leaders with strong principles and the courage and determination to carry those principles out. They’re all puffed up with their own importance.

Elections represent an important way in which we, ordinary citizens, exercise our democratic right as sovereigns of the nation. We need a grass-roots movement to make the Japanese people aware that they have the power to lead their own country.

Mr. Toda used to say: “I ask that you, the youth, keep a close watch on the affairs of government. You can’t put the blame on anyone else [when the country is badly governed]. It’s the responsibility of each citizen.”

By the same token, trying to correct bad government by launching a coup or a violent revolution only results in chaos. It is essential that each citizen take action to move the nation in the right direction through democratic means.

Recent polls show that from 60 to 70 percent of Japanese citizens have no hope for the

future. This is a terrible tragedy for Japan.

When the realm of politics deteriorates, it gives rise to an age in which corrupt people flourish and good people decline. We must not let that happen. To prevent that, we must each act—we must each do what we can in our immediate realm of influence.

We must never forget that the vast ocean begins with a single drop of water, and a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. The tallest mountain is made up of earth and stones; it is the accumulation of one grain of earth piled on top of another. And a peaceful society can only be built upon a solidly unified alliance of the people, upon a truly representative government that works for the welfare of all.

The people must produce political leaders from their own ranks, who will live, work and die with, among and for the people.

Taguchi: Roberto Baggio, the Italian soccer star, once told a group of high school division members: “We are together with a great mentor, President Ikeda. We are living in a wonderful age, when we can receive his guidance. I hope all of you will treasure this golden time and not waste it, as you do your very best.”

Ikeda: Mr. Baggio is a fine person. Four years ago in Milan, I told him, “You must always fight your hardest, to the very last moment.” And he has done just that. He has overcome daunting obstacles and is still fighting today. I am so happy for him.

Don't ever let yourself be swayed from your fundamental beliefs.

Nade: We have another question from one of the members: “Why are you, President Ikeda, so bravely able to challenge and overcome any difficulty? To tell the truth, I don't think I could do what you do. How can I become strong like you?”

Ikeda: There is no better education than adversity, as the saying goes. The more persecutions and attacks a person endures and survives, the stronger and greater they will become as a person.

My personal commitment has always been with the people and for the people. Each day is a day of further personal growth and development, and I firmly believe these efforts lead directly to the growth and development of all other things.

I am not afraid of insult or criticism. I am not afraid when treacherous individuals appear. When you try to become a person who faces every situation fearlessly, you end up creating an indomitable self.

In life and in the various challenges we undertake, there will be times when we advance and times when we take a step backward. There will also be times when it's just best to rest. Life is full of changes. In the process of achieving your goals, it's natural to go through many changes.

Wisdom is important. Knowledge is important. You need the wisdom to correctly comprehend your relations with others and with society. Please develop sound insight. That is why it is so vital that you cultivate the capacity to study and learn.

In the midst of such ceaseless change, there's one piece of advice that will never change: Regardless of the times or what other people say, don't let yourself be swayed from your fundamental beliefs. It's important to have conviction as firm and unmoving as Mount

Fuji.

I want each of you to develop a self as unshakable as a majestic mountain, a self possessing courage, perseverance and ability.

The conclusion of a discussion on standing up for justice among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Takashi Nade (young men's secretary for the Kansai region) and Misaki Taguchi (young women's secretary for the Kansai region. Part one appeared in the Aug. 20 World Tribune.

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