

## SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S OCT. 7 SPEECH—PART 2 REMAINING STEADFAST IN OUR COMMITMENT

**SGI President Ikeda says that the main thing is that we ourselves remain steadfast in our commitment to follow our mentor throughout our lives. This is the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is the SGI.**

*The following is part two of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 38th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Oct. 7.*

Three hundred and sixty-six years ago, in October 1633, a Japanese Christian died a martyr amid persecution by the ruling authorities. As they tortured him to renounce his faith, he cried out with unbowed pride, I am Nakaura Juli o, and I have seen Rome!

Fifty-one years before that, in 1582, when he was 12 or 13, Nakaura Juli o had set sail from the port of Nagasaki in Kyushu [the southernmost of Japan's four main islands; Christianity was first introduced to Japan there by Jesuit missionaries]. He traveled all the way to Europe as a youth envoy along with three other Japanese boys the same age.

*The young envoys, all students of a Jesuit seminary in Kyushu, participated in what is known as the Mission to Europe of 1582, which was the brainchild of Jesuit missionary Father Alessandro Valignano, who accompanied the mission.*

In those days, no one in Japan had been to Europe, so no one could tell their compatriots what it was like. The Japanese knew only Japan and its immediate environs. They were preoccupied with rivalries within the tiny country of Japan. Incessant internal warfare and conflict prevailed.

This was the background against which the Jesuit priests stationed in Kyushu decided to dispatch a mission of youthful envoys to Europe. The Jesuits had a completely different perspective from the Japanese.

### **Widespread support is won through cherishing each person.**

One of the objectives of the mission was to make the Japanese aware that there was a bigger world outside their country. By having the young teenage envoys see the big, wide world with their own eyes and become acquainted with its ways and customs, the Jesuits hoped that on their return the youth would awaken and educate the Japanese for a long, long time. The Jesuits probably concluded that this was their only hope of changing Japan.

*Other objectives behind the mission were the Jesuits wish to boost their propagation activities in Japan and to acquaint Europe with the Japanese to gain greater papal subsidies for the Jesuit society in Japan.*

Nakaura and the three other youth sailed first to Macau, India and then all the way to Spain, finally arriving in Italy—the brilliant birthplace of the Renaissance, home of Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci, and one of the most culturally advanced countries in the world at that time.

*The journey to Italy took more than three years, hence the youth were around 16 when they visited Rome.*

Speaking of da Vinci, a magnificent statue of this multitalented Renaissance genius, one of humankind's outstanding intellects, will soon adorn the main lobby of the new Central

Tower at Soka University, Tokyo.

But I declare that there are none more outstanding than you, the SGI members, who embrace the unsurpassed philosophy of Buddhism and are carrying out activities in all fields of society. You are da Vincis and Michelangelos of the Mystic Law. I hope that each of you will lead a life of such profound significance.

To return to the story of the four youth envoys, they were feted with great pomp and splendor wherever they went in Europe. Indeed, their trip had momentous import for the world. The young Japanese Christians were a symbol of unity between East and West, and the mission was highly acclaimed not only in Italy but in other parts of Europe.

In Rome, the youth met the aging Pope Gregory XIII, the highest authority in the Catholic Church. The pope is said to have warmly welcomed them and shown them sincere hospitality.

At the time, Nakaura was seriously ill with a high fever. Perhaps fatigue from the long journey had weakened his constitution. Learning of Nakaura's illness, the pope encouraged him. He also had six of Rome's best physicians brought in to treat the sick Japanese youth. Nakaura was deeply moved by this kindness.

Some historians speculate that the 83-year-old pope already knew that he didn't have much longer to live. And in fact, he died some two weeks after meeting with the youth delegates from Japan. Despite his advanced age and frail health, however, the pope summoned forth his remaining strength and sent messengers each day to ask after Nakaura's condition and convey his prayers for the young man's speedy recovery.

Such love and compassion, I believe, constitute the hallmarks of a genuine cleric. What do you say?

Widespread support is won through cherishing each person. Those who value and treasure them win the support of youth. When leaders put this into action, development follows.

### **Treacherous individuals are clearly recorded in history to warn future generations.**

Thanks to the pope's assistance, Nakaura recovered from his illness, and he and his three companions soon embarked on the long journey back to Japan.

*They set sail for Japan in April 1586 and arrived in Nagasaki four years later, in July 1590.*

By the time the young envoys set foot back in Japan, eight and a half years had passed, and they were around 21 years old. In their absence, Japan had changed dramatically. The previous ruling warlord, Oda Nobunaga, who had been supportive of Christian missionaries, had died, and his successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, who was less well disposed toward Christians, was now in power. Oppression of Christianity was on the rise.

The authorities of the day had no conception of freedom of religion.

*Oda Nobunaga, who had protected Christianity, died four months after the youth mission left Japan. For a time, his successor, Toyotomo Hideyoshi, maintained Nobunaga's policy toward Christians, but after conquering Kyushu in 1587, he issued a decree expelling all missionaries from Japan. This marked the start of the persecutions of Christians in Japan. The youth mission arrived back in Japan three years later. Hideyoshi, who initially thought he might make use of them and their knowledge for expeditions abroad received the youth. But when the youth refused to become his retainers, they were persecuted.*

Title: Remaining Steadfast In Our Commitment (2)

Subject: World Tribune 11/05/99 n.3267 p.1 WT991105p01 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan 10/07/99

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 10/07/99 Commitment Gakkai Hachioji Headquarters Ikeda Japan Leaders Major Meeting  
President Remaining Soka Speech Speeches Steadfast Tokyo Tribune World

To make a long story short, when Nakaura and his companions returned from abroad, virtually no one lent an ear to the valuable knowledge they had gained or opinions they possessed. On the contrary, these youth, who had been applauded by the European people, were subjected to an endless succession of persecutions in their homeland.

Then, as now, the blinkered worldview of the Japanese made them quick to swagger and look down on others, and rendered them incapable of imagining that a wonderful world could exist outside their realm of knowledge. As ever, the Japanese were sensitive to the trends of the times, but they lacked the sense of self to listen to others' opinions impartially, without fear of how the authorities might view their doing so. This kind of spiritual climate continues in Japan today.

Of Nakaura's three companions on that voyage, one died at an early age, one was forced to flee from Japan and later died in Macau, while another abandoned his faith and turned traitor.

Here I want to state that the names and evil doings of treacherous individuals are clearly recorded in history. And it is important that this be so, that this might serve as a warning and lesson to future generations.

How sad and angered Nakaura must have been by that comrade who abandoned his faith and betrayed his comrades!

As for Nakaura, he forged ahead with unwavering faith for more than 40 years amid a storm of persecution, staunchly protecting his fellow Christians throughout. He was absolutely determined to keep advancing on his chosen path and never betray his vows.

At age 64, like many Christians before him, he was finally arrested and subjected to hideous torture. He was suspended headfirst in a pit filled with excrement. Holes were bored in his earlobes, so the blood would drip from them a little at a time.

Compared to being burned at the stake or beheaded, death by this means was long drawn out and agonized. It was an unspeakably cruel form of torture thought up by the authorities. So unbearable was the pain that even one of the highest-ranking Portuguese Jesuit priests in Japan at the time recanted his faith when subjected to this form of torture.

*Even after Hideyoshi issued his anti-Christian edicts, many Christian missionaries went underground and carried on their activities clandestinely. Among them was the Portuguese Jesuit priest Cristóvão Ferreira, who later changed his name to Sawano Chuan. When Ferreira was captured and tortured by the authorities, he not only renounced his faith but became an agent of the Tokugawa government, assisting in the persecution of Christians. This treachery earned him the nickname Apostate Father.*

Nakaura, however, bravely endured this torture. Perhaps the vivid impression of the aged pope's kindness and devotion to faith to the end still lived in his heart. One can only imagine how profoundly moved he must have been by the concern and consideration shown him, an insignificant youth from a foreign land. He wrote in a letter in his 50s that he never forgot that kindness and that every time he thought of it, he was deeply moved afresh.

### **Encountering persecution for the sake of the Law is the highest honor.**

Nakaura never betrayed the vows of his youth. He fought for close to a half-century and gave his life heroically for his beliefs.

Christianity achieved the great development it did because its believers possessed this spirit to fight to the end, to give their lives for their faith if need be.

In the Soka Gakkai, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda gave their lives ungrudgingly for the

Law. And I inherited their spirit. Although I am reluctant to speak of myself, I wish to state the following for the benefit of the youth and for posterity: I do not think anyone can truly fathom just how much I have agonized, all alone, for the sake of kosen-rufu. I do not think anyone can fathom how much I have prayed, suffered and endured, while protecting my beloved fellow members from harm and striving to actualize the true will of presidents Makiguchi and Toda. But the Gohonzon is aware of it all.

What other people do or don't do is irrelevant. The main thing is that we ourselves remain steadfast in our commitment to follow our mentor throughout our lives. This is the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is the SGI. May the youth division members firmly inherit this spirit of mentor and disciple!

When the militarist authorities during World War II persecuted the Soka Gakkai, 21 top leaders, including Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, were arrested. Of these, only Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda did not abandon their faith.

In his essay *The History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai*, Mr. Toda writes: While gaining the great honor of experiencing persecution for the sake of the Law—a sign of being recognized by the Buddha—those who failed to realize the honored position they had attained discarded their faith. Nineteen out of 21 [of the top Soka Gakkai leaders who were arrested] abandoned their faith....

Encountering persecution for the sake of the Law is the highest honor. Yet, except for Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, the top Soka Gakkai leaders were afraid of persecution. They didn't want to go through hardships; they only wanted to receive benefits. Their faith was a sham, superficial and perfunctory.

### **The essence of Buddhism is to give one's life should one meet persecution in spreading the Mystic Law.**

In his *Precepts for Youth*, President Toda writes, For a person of wisdom, to be praised by fools is a disgrace, whereas to be praised by the great sage [Nichiren Daishonin] is the highest honor in life.

The minute Mr. Makiguchi was thrown in prison, people who had sung his praises and called him Makiguchi Sensei with respect and deference suddenly did a complete about-face and denounced him. Makiguchi the scoundrel, they cried. Makiguchi's to blame, they accused. He deceived us! Some even went to his home and showered abuse on his family.

On his release from prison, when Mr. Toda heard this, he was furious. He was absolutely livid. What a fine state of affairs! The curs! Those fake disciples! he railed. The Gakkai has no need for the likes of those who can't endure something as trifling as two or three years in prison. We don't need people who quiver with fear and indecision, worried only about what others will say about them.

Selfless propagation of the Law—the essence of Buddhism is to be willing to give one's life should one meet persecution in the course of spreading the Mystic Law.

If we did not encounter hardships or persecution, we would not be practicing the Daishonin's correct teachings. I am bearing the full brunt of such persecution. Therefore, those who fight alongside me will also be bathed in benefit.

On the other hand, there are those who shun hardships and avoid persecution at all costs. Such individuals try to look good at the expense of others and use their wits to get ahead. This is not true faith.

True commitment to kosen-rufu means casting away all self-interest and giving our

Title: Remaining Steadfast In Our Commitment (2)

Subject: World Tribune 11/05/99 n.3267 p.1 WT991105p01 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan 10/07/99

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 10/07/99 Commitment Gakkai Hachioji Headquarters Ikeda Japan Leaders Major Meeting  
President Remaining Soka Speech Speeches Steadfast Tokyo Tribune World

lives without grudging.

The Soka Gakkai is an organization of lions, a gathering of lions. We have no use for cowards! This is the eternal cry of Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda.

### **The judgment of history is harsh.**

I imagine Nakaura in the midst of persecution crying out similar sentiments: Compatriots! You persecute and try to bury me, a man who has seen the world with his own eyes. But mark my words, my friends — you who are like frogs in a well, ignorant of the vast ocean — no matter how you may strut around self-importantly in Japan, the rest of the world will pay you no heed.

Open your eyes! Today you may delight in torturing me, but your insularity will one day bring suffering to rain down upon your heads!

While weaker persons might have recanted their faith after only an hour of this cruel torture of being hung upside down in a filthy pit, Nakaura heroically endured that agony for four days. Then he died, a martyr to his beliefs.

Some historians believe that had the Japanese humbly listened and learned something from the knowledge and insights of Nakaura, a person who had visited some of the most culturally advanced countries of the day, Japanese history would have been very different. As it was, however, not long after Nakaura's death in 1633, Japan entered a period of national seclusion that lasted more than two centuries.

It is interesting to note that sometime earlier, in 1613 — a decade or so after the return of the youth mission — Dat Masamune, a feudal lord of the Tohoku region, dispatched a diplomatic mission to Europe. It was led by one of his retainers, Hasekura Tsunenaga. As with the youth envoys before him, however, when he returned to Japan, far from being given any opportunity to make use of the knowledge and experience he had gained, Hasekura was placed under house arrest. He remained there until his death a short time later.

*Hasekura led a diplomatic mission of 180 Japanese to Mexico City, Madrid and Rome, 1613—20. He was the first official Japanese envoy to visit the Americas. He was baptized in Madrid and met with Pope Paul V in Rome in 1615. In his absence from Japan, Christianity was banned by the Tokugawa shogunate and the country began moving toward national seclusion.*

This is what Japan is like. Its island-country mentality makes it ever preoccupied with short-term gain, always causing it to turn its back on the rest of the world. And each time it does, it is a tragedy for the Japanese people. The same thing is going on today. We Japanese have to get rid of this tendency; we have to bring about a revolution in our thinking.

Today, people throughout the world — and history, too — applaud Nakaura, who died a martyr to his beliefs, while they deplore and condemn the arrogant authorities who persecuted him. The judgment of history is harsh.

### **The SGI is a gathering of good friends.**

The curtain will soon rise on the 21st century. Thanks to your efforts, we of the SGI have won in all our undertakings in the 20th century. Let us also win in the century ahead!

The Daishonin cites these words from the Lotus Sutra: Part with bad friends and seek out good ones (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 213). They are an injunction, a message, he left to us.

Title: Remaining Steadfast In Our Commitment (2)

Subject: World Tribune 11/05/99 n.3267 p.1 WT991105p01 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan 10/07/99

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 10/07/99 Commitment Gakkai Hachioji Headquarters Ikeda Japan Leaders Major Meeting  
President Remaining Soka Speech Speeches Steadfast Tokyo Tribune World

The SGI is a gathering of good friends. We must part with and drive out bad friends, or negative influences, that seek to undermine and destroy our faith.

The Daishonin says, If practitioners of the Lotus Sutra practice according to the Buddha's teaching, they will surely, without a single exception, attain Buddhahood in the course of this lifetime (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 416). All who take action for kosen-rufu in accord with the Daishonin's teachings will attain Buddhahood. They will become great leaders, who will enjoy complete fulfillment throughout the three existences of past, present and future. This is what the Daishonin promises.

Let's do our best!

### **The important thing is that we center our lives on the Law.**

If you are happy, I am happy. If you are sad, I am sad.

Please live with bright enthusiasm and energy. Those who maintain unwavering faith in the Gohonzon are never deadlocked.

The Mystic Law is the eternal law of the universe. To possess the conviction I have faith in the Mystic Law, so no matter what happens I never have to worry! I will never be defeated! this is what faith is all about.

Despite the fact that they possess the Gohonzon, there are those who are quick to become pessimistic or discouraged. This is not faith. Such inner weakness is what causes people suffering.

Because I embrace the great, eternal law of the universe, I am certain to win, to become happy, to have a wonderful, enjoyable life with this determination in your heart, please advance with confidence.

Through devoting one's life to the Mystic Law, we become part of the life of the Buddha of the universe. Our lives begin to shine as entities of the Mystic Law. The Daishonin teaches us this wonderful secret.

The important thing, therefore, is that we center our lives on the Law. If we make ourselves the center, we will advance in the opposite direction from attaining Buddhahood.

May you lead joyous lives! If your life is joyless, make it joyous! If you have no hope, create some!

For the mind is free and untrammled; it is filled with limitless possibilities. This is all the more true of you who embrace the Mystic Law, the Great Law of Freedom.

I am sending daimoku to you with all my being. This, I believe, is my duty and responsibility.

I wish to reiterate my appreciation to the members from Tohoku and overseas who have traveled all the way to attend this meeting.

Thank you for your long attention.

## **TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS**

Title: Remaining Steadfast In Our Commitment (2)  
Subject: World Tribune 11/05/99 n.3267 p.1 WT991105p01 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan 10/07/99  
Author: Daisaku Ikeda  
Keywords: 10/07/99 Commitment Gakkai Hachioji Headquarters Ikeda Japan Leaders Major Meeting  
President Remaining Soka Speech Speeches Steadfast Tokyo Tribune World

## Good Friends

### From This Speech:

Nichiren Daishonin cites these words from the Lotus Sutra: “Part with bad friends and seek out good ones” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 213). They are an injunction, a message, he left to us. The SGI is a gathering of good friends. We must part with and drive out bad friends, or negative influences, that seek to undermine and destroy our faith.

- 1) Why do you think the Daishonin places so much emphasis on “parting with bad friends” as an important part of Buddhist practice?
- 2) What happens if we don’t part with bad friends?
- 3) What do you think the Daishonin means by “bad friends”? Who are our bad friends today?
- 4) SGI President Ikeda says that “the SGI is a gathering of good friends.” What do you think he means by that?
- 5) Do you think that it’s possible to have good friends in your Buddhist practice whom you don’t always get along with? Do you think it’s possible to have good friends whom you don’t even like?
- 6) How do we “drive out bad friends, or negative influences, that seek to undermine and destroy our faith”?

Title: Remaining Steadfast In Our Commitment (2)

Subject: World Tribune 11/05/99 n.3267 p.1 WT991105p01 Hachioji, Tokyo, Japan 10/07/99

Author: Daisaku Ikeda

Keywords: 10/07/99 Commitment Gakkai Hachioji Headquarters Ikeda Japan Leaders Major Meeting  
President Remaining Soka Speech Speeches Steadfast Tokyo Tribune World