

THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA GREEN LEAVES OF OIRASE

Oirase is an area surrounding the river Oirasegawa, which flows through the eastern part of Aomori prefecture near the northern tip of Japan's main island, Honshu.

Looking up, I see sunlight glimmering through the leaves.

The trees of Oirase stand like venerable, wise persons.

Looking up from the streambed where I stand, I see deep-green leaves of August, filled with life, extending from treetops and branches toward small patches of blue sky.

Nothing is more deserving of praise than a single tree — a survivor.

Beauty approaching divinity.

Not a thing is missing. Perfection. Massive trunk. Thick bark.

In Japanese it is called *mizunara* — water oak.

Its name derives from the large amount of water it stores.

These trees grow to 100 feet in height; I am told that their average age is around 300 years.

As I gaze upward, the constant murmur of the mountain stream cleanses my ears.

A sound punctuated from time to time with the chirping of birds.

Could there be a bird that does not sing?

Could there be a tree that does not reach toward the heavens?

The tree stakes its very existence on just one thing. It wants only to fully display all the power it holds hidden within.

“I want to live my life! I want to fully extend and perfect my life!”

Without confusion or hesitation, proud, majestic, the tree lives life as it is, true to itself.

And in this land of Oirase, such noble trees line the streambeds in “green groves.” And the name Aomori, the prefecture in which Oirase is located, means “green groves.”

It was my first visit to Aomori in 15 years. Summer, 1994. I had flown from Sapporo on Japan's northern island of Hokkaido to the airport in Misawa. From there, I went to the Soka Gakkai's Tohoku Training Center.

My last visit had been in January 1979. At that time the Gakkai, and I personally, had been forging ahead through an intense blizzard of opposition and difficulty. It was a time in which those characterized in the Lotus Sutra as “the devil and the devil's people” were running amok.

But the members endured that long, long winter.

They gritted their teeth and persevered for 15 years. Before the indomitable light of the sun of justice, the filthy ice of evil melts to nothing. The “grove” of capable and victorious friends now sparkles with richness.

About 1,000 feet below the grounds of the training center flows an Oirase mountain stream.

While talking with my precious friends of the Tohoku region, I walked among this beautiful natural setting, which was like masterpiece of nature.

A cool, clear stream. Glistening spray emerging where it meets the mossy rocks. As the waves of current strike boulders, they yield white foam, then once again calmly returns to

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a glassy green pool.

The contours of the earth form rapids, pools, waterfalls — constantly changing vistas.

On the sloping banks of the ravine, yellow and white flowers bloom, drooping toward the current. Fallen trees lie dampened by the flow.

In places, the growing trees have come up against heavy boulders, sometimes displacing them, or else breaking them or even lifting them upward.

What tenacity! They simply keep pressing skyward, straight toward the heavens, whatever might get in their way. The taller they grow, the deeper they sink their roots into the earth.

In this way, a tree is a bridge that connects heaven and earth. Though small, this bridge is thoroughly alive — a living antenna by which the earth converses with the cosmos.

All in the universe is a win-or-lose struggle. So it is with the growth of plants and trees. Winning that struggle, they grow green and flourish.

In the growth rings of this oak are engraved a history of all its hardships, of all its struggles, all its glorious triumphs. Recorded here are winters when its branches drooped under the weight of snow, as well as joyous and abundant summers.

The cracks in its bark give it the appearance of the wrinkled, sun-tanned skin of a mature man. To this tree, I ask in my heart, “Wouldn’t you like to go somewhere else some day?”

But the tree seems to smile warmly and reply: “Of course not! This is my place! It is here that I have struggled and won! Could there be any greater place than this?” Ah! Precious tree — always endowed and ever abiding in the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. Your proud form reminds me of a great philosopher who is awakened to the truth of the universe.

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