

**THE RESPONSIBILITY OF TRUE FREEDOM
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Ten years ago, SGI President Ikeda gave the ‘clear mirror’ guidance to women that became what I believe is our emancipation proclamation. Seven of us came from Washington, D.C. to attend the meeting with President Ikeda at Soka University of America, Calabasas. It came at the end of his 17-day stay in the United States and the whole country was aware that great changes were already underway. The experience so profound, I determined to let every part sink into my life—I would think about it later. Now, 10 years later, tears of joy still come to my eyes when I recall that day.

Feb. 27 is Mrs. Ikeda’s birthday. I believe he chose that day as another way to encourage us and experience a little of the great partnership they share. As we arrived at the Calabasas campus, we saw the top men’s division leaders and Soka Gakkai vice presidents there to greet us—one of many surprises that indicated a new organization was emerging in the United States.

“Society and daily life are the ‘great earth’ for our faith and practice of the True Law. The steady development of kosen-rufu can be ensured only when, based on faith, we carefully attend to the affairs of society, our daily life and our families. ‘Faith manifest itself in daily life’—this is our eternal guideline.”

From this point, there was a groundswell of change that happened in every woman I knew who was practicing in the SGI. We had to seriously examine how we were living our lives and take total responsibility for both our sorrows and joys. With the freedom of realizing we held the power to great change within the realm of our own lives, we had to accept the responsibility that came with such freedom.

Most of us at that time were not completely happy with the direction our lives had taken, but what were we going to do about it? “Understanding the subtle working of one’s mind is the key to faith and to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. You cannot blame others for your misfortunes. In the world of faith, it is necessary to realize this all the more clearly.”

My life has changed in unimaginable ways since 1990. To say I have visited all Ten Worlds would be an understatement. I think that is also true of the women from Washington, D.C. I was with that day. We have all gone in very different directions, but we were all very different people to begin with, and that is the point really—to be able to display our individuality with full splendor.

The line leaders, pioneers of Washington, D.C. kosen-rufu, stayed behind and sent the seven of us to be with President Ikeda that day. We became the next wave. I talked to one of my friends since about being the “bridge generation.” We have both practiced more than 25 years. The challenge lies in understanding the passion of the pioneer fused with the vision of an American nation that can truly embrace the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. President Ikeda gave us the blueprint that day. The courage to take the action is up to us.

I have thought for a long time that President Ikeda knew what was going to happen in the world of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, and he made every effort possible to shake us awake in 1990: “The purpose of Buddhism is not to produce dupes who blindly follow their leader. It is to produce people of wisdom who can judge right or wrong on their own in the clear mirror of Buddhism.”

This guidance set women free. Feb. 27 is our “Independence Day.” It is the day that

women all over the world can mark with pride. He encouraged us to find our own voice, speak out against injustice and never be afraid. When I read the women's division letter of remonstrance to Nikken a year later, I was filled with unimaginable pride in being one of the women of the Soka Gakkai. It gave me such courage to never retreat from any difficulty and to look at every problem as an opportunity to expand my life.

I now live in Florida, not far from the Florida Nature and Culture Center. The fortune and happiness that I have with my husband and three daughters is a source of continual encouragement. The deep bonds of friendship that are renewed with each new conference at the FNCC only prove the greatness of President Ikeda's words 10 years ago: "Let the flowers of the Law / Bloom with beauty and purity / Throughout this land of / America."