

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA THE SCHOOL OF MY YOUTH

‘The school of my youth was the private instruction I received from a master in the study of humanity, Josei Toda,’ President Ikeda writes. ‘I studied at “Toda University.”’

More than 50 years ago, in the spring of 1949, Mr. Toda was 49, and I was 21. It was then that he declared to us, as if it were his heartfelt last will and testament:

Be disciples who share your mentor’s fate!
Be disciples who share your mentor’s joys and sorrows!
Be disciples who share your mentor’s goals!
Be disciples who share your mentor’s triumphs!
Be disciples who share your mentor’s life and death!

His heart-rending plea still rings in my ears. It was a time when the Soka Gakkai was threatened with destruction. A storm of persecution by the three powerful enemies was brewing. Mr. Toda made his declaration to two or three of his direct disciples, of which I was one, in the old, wooden Soka Gakkai Headquarters, which I remember so well, in Nishi-Kanda, Tokyo.

The sad truth, unfortunately, is that when Mr. Toda and the Gakkai were in the direst of circumstances, many of his disciples abandoned him. If they did not desert him in body, they deserted him in spirit.

I, however, refused to leave him. I did not even quaver. From the beginning, I fought alongside Mr. Toda with the spirit to lay down my life if need be, and so I was fearless.

I have absolutely no regrets. Not now, nor will I ever, for the rest of my life.

The school of my youth was the private instruction I received from a master in the study of humanity, Josei Toda. He gave me a thorough, complete grounding in an encyclopedic range of subjects, including politics, economics, law, Chinese classics, chemistry and physics.

I studied at Toda University.



Mr. Toda often asked me: “What book have you read today?” “What are you reading now?” He then would demand that I summarize the book’s contents, really putting me on the spot.

Sometimes it was so tough that I was deeply mortified that I hadn’t studied harder. Sometimes my summaries would come out in a confused, jumbled manner.

But his reply was always the same simple words: “All right. I see.” That was all.



Once, during our study of Chinese classics, he asked me, “Who are the famous poets of the Tang dynasty?”

“Tu Fu and Li Po,” I replied.

“Any others?” he asked.

“Po Chü-i, Wang Wei....”

“Any others?” he pressed further.

My face grew pale, then red. There was a long silence.

“I thought you said you were a poet,” he chided.

After racking my brains, I thought of another. “I think there was also a poet named Wang Po.”

“All right,” he said, “do you know his most famous poem?”

I was desperate now. But finally, I squeezed these lines out of my brain: “If you have close friends throughout the country / Even the remotest parts are just like next door.”

And Mr. Toda smiled.



Another day, also during our study of the Chinese classics, he suddenly said: “There is a famous Chinese saying ‘Show sincerity, and lay a just path.’ Explain the meaning of that to me.”

I wasn’t sure I understood it fully, but I said I thought it meant to behave sincerely toward others and promote a path of integrity and fairness in the world.

“That’s close enough, I suppose,” he answered. He smiled, and without missing a beat asked, “And where is it from?”

“I think it’s from *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*,” I replied.

He said nothing, turned his head to the side, and nodded slightly.



Another time, he said: “You’re a poet, so I’m sure you’re familiar with Walt Whitman. Let me ask you a few questions about him.”

“I don’t really know...,” I stuttered, but nothing else came out.

Mr. Toda continued: “Tell me about Whitman. When did he live?”

“I think he was born in 1819,” I replied.

“Is that so? What are some of his best-known poems?”

“Well there are ‘Song of the Open Road’ and ‘Pioneers! O Pioneers!’ And ‘One’s-Self I Sing’ is also well known.”

“Recite me a few of your favorite lines.”

Beads of cold sweat rolled down my back. I recited a few lines of “Pioneers! O Pioneers!”

For we cannot tarry here,

We must march my darlings, we must bear the brunt of danger

Mr. Toda listened intently and then said with a keen expression: “That’s right. Whatever happens, we must march forward! I will march onward, and you do so, too! Onward, forever!” His words were strict and filled with fire.

I will write about my Toda University in greater detail on some other occasion, for the sake of posterity.