

## SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JAN. 6 SPEECH—PART 1 ENTERING AN AGE OF HOPE

**'I believe that we have entered an age in which we must let a philosophy of hope shine brightly like the morning sun,' SGI President Ikeda says, 'dispelling the darkness and illuminating the way forward for humanity a thousand years into the future.'**

*Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 41st Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Jan. 6.*

My friends, young heroes, future professors of life! My fellow members throughout the world! Happy New Year!

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda once gave this New Year's guidance: "The courageous lead the most brilliant lives, while the cowardly are like animals. Those who live their lives courageously are happy, while those who lead cowardly lives are self-serving and miserable."

A hundred years ago, the great geochemist Vladimir Vernadsky, a graduate of St. Petersburg State University, offered these well-known, inspiring words to the Russian people, who were living in extremely dark times: "We are on the brink of an unprecedented time in history. We are ushering in the dawn of a new life. No matter how painful the times may be now, people of later generations are sure to envy us."

I believe that we have entered an age in which we must let a philosophy of hope shine brightly like the morning sun, dispelling the darkness and illuminating the way forward for humanity a thousand years into the future.

It is a great honor to usher in this brand new dawn for our planet together with such illustrious guests. [President Ikeda was conferred an honorary doctorate at this meeting by guests from St. Petersburg State University, Russia.] St. Petersburg State University is a prestigious academic institute that ranks among the top in the world.

Rector Ludmila Verbitskaya has inherited the university's venerable 276-year tradition. The university's first woman rector, Dr. Verbitskaya, is a person of exceptional leadership. During the past six years—a period that has been one of the most difficult times in Russian history—she has steered St. Petersburg State University to remarkable development. It is a source of profound joy to welcome such an eminently fitting guest for the start of this new Century of Women.

### **Where learning is elevated, the people are, too.**

Most esteemed Rector Verbitskaya; Vice President Yuri Petrosyan of the St. Petersburg Scientific Center at the Russian Academy of Sciences, with whom I share fond memories; and Dean Ivan Steblin-Kamensky of the Faculty of Oriental Studies at St. Petersburg State University.

There is a saying, "Where learning is elevated, people too are noble." In accord with this spirit, St. Petersburg State University has created a great river of capable people, which flows powerfully like the timeless Neva River, on whose banks St. Petersburg stands.

Just now in her speech, Rector Verbitskaya introduced some of the famous graduates of St. Petersburg State University. Their names are known to people around the world.

As the recipient of an honorary doctorate from this distinguished Russian university, I

want to introduce a few of its renowned graduates.

First, there is the literary historian Dmitri S. Likhachev, who was widely respected as “the conscience of Russia.” Likhachev taught at St. Petersburg State University and is famous for such works as *Ethnic Awareness in Medieval Russia* and *Letters on Goodness and Beauty*.

Another graduate is the Russian-born U.S. scientist George Gamow. In my youth, I used a textbook written by Gamow in my studies with my mentor, Mr. Toda. It was the most modern textbook on science available in Japan at that time.

Physicist Aleksandr Popov is another graduate of St. Petersburg State University. He conducted the world’s first successful experiments in radio transmission and is regarded as one of the inventors of the radio.

In addition, among the great names who have taught at St. Petersburg State University are the literary critic Boris Eichenbaum and the philosopher Vladimir Solovyov.

The noted writer Nikolay Gogol also lectured on medieval history at St. Petersburg State University in his mid-20s.

Gogol’s short story “Taras Bulba” is one I remember well. It is an important work that Mr. Toda made us youth study earnestly and that he lectured on in depth.

As a student, Ivan Turgenev, later to gain fame as a writer, attended Gogol’s lectures. A close friend, the great poet Aleksandr Pushkin, is also said to have sat in on his lectures. Incidentally, Pushkin visited the university a short time before his death and sat in on a lecture on literature.

I understand that Russia’s current Acting President Vladimir Putin is also a graduate of St. Petersburg State University.

And, of course, all three of the distinguished professors we have with us today are outstanding graduates of this prestigious Russian school. So, too, incidentally, are my friends Dr. Margarita Vorobyova-Desyatovskaya, who is a leading authority on Lotus Sutra research and the supervisor of the Manuscript Department of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and Dr. Evgenij Kychanov, the institute’s director.

I first visited St. Petersburg State University 26 years ago, in September 1974, on the occasion of its landmark 250th anniversary. I had discussions with professors and students on education, life and other subjects. We shared our hopes and visions for the future.

Standing in the vanguard of the SGI youth, who will shoulder the 21st century, I humbly accept the great honor I have received today from this distinguished Russian university.

### **When we really grapple with life’s trials, a new way has to open before us.**

St. Petersburg State University was established on Jan. 28, 1724. In Japan, this date corresponds roughly to the Kyoho Era, 1716–36, in the middle of the Edo Period, 1600–1868. [This is the time during which the 26th high priest, Nichikan, lived.]

The history of St. Petersburg State University, an institution that has weathered and triumphed over countless trials and adversities, demonstrates the immortal philosophy that “The truly wise are those who fight for justice.”

Writes the great Russian poet Aleksandr Blok, another former student of St. Petersburg State University, “Life is a continual struggle; rest comes only in our dreams.”

When we bravely grapple with life’s trials, racking our brains, using our wisdom and striving with all our might to surmount these trials, a new, creative way forward opens before us. A Buddhist text states, “Regard meeting difficulty as true peace and comfort”

(*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). Another informs us, “The three obstacles and four devils will invariably appear, and the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 637).

The city of St. Petersburg, where this Russian university is located, is a center of learning, art and culture that Pushkin extolled as Russia’s “leading intellectual center.” It is a beautiful city of water, palaces and green, whose streets the Russian-born American poet Joseph Brodsky described as “the most beautiful on earth.”

In the towering work of his youth, *The Geography of Human Life*, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the Soka Gakkai’s first president and founder of value-creating education, discussed the construction of St. Petersburg and delved into the reasons why the city flourished as it did.

### **It is the hallmark of youth to stand up for justice when the time comes.**

This former imperial capital, a priceless treasure in itself, suffered the brutal assault of Nazi Germany’s forces during World War II. The madman Hitler issued an order to “wipe the city from the face of the earth.” In fact, the city of St. Petersburg, then known as Leningrad, was held under siege for close to 900 days and pounded by endless air and artillery bombardment.

When I visited the Russian city, I laid flowers at a cemetery and, as a Buddhist, prayed deeply for the repose of the victims — close to a million — who died in the siege. I prayed for lasting peace in Russia. This morning, during gongyo, I again offered solemn prayers for all those who died in this tragedy.

The proud citizens of St. Petersburg are known as the “people of light.” They bravely endured the relentless Nazi siege on their city, winning with great tenacity and fortitude. They launched a rigorous counterattack and finally succeeded in driving the aggressors into retreat.

Let us in the SGI, too, stand up and fight against injustice.

St. Petersburg State University became an invincible stronghold in the effort to repulse the Nazis. More than 2,500 students bravely rushed to the battlefield. Many women students volunteered for the perilous infantry division. Students from one of the world’s leading universities threw aside their pens, threw aside their books and went to the front as common soldiers.

It is the hallmark of youth to stand up for justice when the time comes — for the sake of their homeland, their fellow citizens, for peace.

I want you, the SGI youth division members, to also learn this spirit of giving one’s life for a cause. Though the times may change, the essential formula for fighting against evil and injustice remains the same.

Those who trample on human rights must be vigorously opposed and defeated without fail.

In my youth, I stood alone and shouldered the entire struggle for our movement. Wherever enemies of the Buddha appeared, I would immediately go to confront them. The important thing is not numbers but the presence of one person of earnest commitment and resolve.

I hope you will not be cowardly youth, who fail to fight for justice when the time comes to do so. If we do not stand up for justice now, Japan will again become a society in which the state blatantly represses human rights.

Some of the teaching staff at St. Petersburg State University also fought against the

invading German forces. A famous professor of literature volunteered to serve in the Baltic Fleet. He wrote: "I am happy that I am not on the sidelines in these decisive days." It was a source of happiness to him that he was taking action and not just idly standing by. He died in action, having fought with a courageous spirit that did not fear the prospect of death.

Unperturbed by the ceaseless onslaughts of the enemy, St. Petersburg State University kept the bright flame of academia alight. While enduring indescribably bitter cold and starvation, many researchers at the university continued to give lectures and pursue their research—in darkened classrooms, air raid shelters and cellars. Blazing with a determination to advance academic learning irrespective of the difficulties it faced, St. Petersburg State University refused to bow to the inhumane, violent forces of destruction that threatened it. The university remained steadfastly committed to developing the human spirit.

*(To be continued in the Feb. 4 issue)*

## **TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS LIVING COURAGEOUS LIVES**

From This Speech:

**Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda once gave this New Year's guidance: "The courageous lead the most brilliant lives, while the cowardly are like animals. Those who live their lives courageously are happy, while those who lead cowardly lives are self-serving and miserable."**

- 1) Why do you think President Toda gave such strict guidance at New Year's?
- 2) Why do "the courageous lead the most brilliant lives"? Can you think of examples of people in history or people you have known whose lives were inspiring due to the courage they had?
- 3) Why are "the cowardly like animals"? And why are cowardly people "self-serving and miserable"? Can you think of examples of people in history or people you have known whose lives were held back by their cowardice?
- 4) President Toda suggests that courage is a prerequisite to happiness. Have you found this to be true in your own life?
- 5) What in your life right now requires the greatest courage to face? How do you muster courage when it does not come forth naturally? Have you had the experience of changing cowardice into courage?
- 6) How do you encourage other people to have courage when they are facing big problems?