

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA NO GREATER SOURCE OF PRIDE

On Feb. 11, the centennial of his mentor’s birth, SGI President Ikeda writes that ‘there is no greater source of pride than a life dedicated to serving a respected mentor. This has certainly been true for me. No youth can be as overflowing with vigor and vitality as one spent following the path of mentor and disciple.’

John F. Kennedy says, “A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.”

Today, Feb. 11, marks the centennial of the birth of our mentor in life, Josei Toda.

There is no greater source of pride than a life dedicated to serving a respected mentor. This has certainly been true for me. No youth can be as overflowing with vigor and vitality as one spent following the path of mentor and disciple.

It has been my unparalleled honor to have looked up to Mr. Toda as a father and to have walked the strict, demanding Buddhist path of mentor and disciple. I have lived my life with Mr. Toda, and I have fought to proclaim his truth to the entire world.

This has been my life, my life’s purpose.

From the time Mr. Toda set out to rebuild the Soka Gakkai after his release from prison, he was constantly engaged in a fierce battle. Every day was a relentless struggle, with no end in sight. Every time he fell down, he just picked himself back up and fought on. There was no escaping the harsh social and economic conditions of postwar Japan. There was no safe haven to retreat to.

Mr. Toda’s sole, all-consuming wish at that time was to fight, undeterred by any obstacle, to open up the Soka Gakkai’s future.



As SGI members, we fervently desire to achieve kosen-rufu. To realize that goal, we must create—patiently, without fear, without hesitation—the right time. The first step is to steadfastly take action to manifest our faith and the principles of Buddhism in our daily lives and in society. Without winning in the struggles of our daily lives, we can never advance the cause of kosen-rufu.



On Tuesday, July 6, 1943, Josei Toda, a great disciple, was arrested along with Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, a great mentor, for resisting the demands of the Japanese military authorities and trying to protect freedom of religion.

It was a dark age. Japan, in the embrace of arrogant militarism, looked down upon its fellow, peace-loving Asian nations—for which it should have held the greatest friendship and respect—and attacked and invaded them, treating them as slaves.

Mr. Toda occasionally talked of his experience in prison. With his characteristic humor, he related how lice were his only cellmates, and how the food was so rotten that he had to gulp it down with his eyes closed. “Most people wouldn’t last a week,” he would tell us.

“I was in prison for two years,” he said. “It was tough, but thinking about it now, I gained quite a lot from that experience. Without those two years of hard prison life, I would not have awakened to the great truth of Buddhism. I would not have been able to devote my

life to the highest, most noble purpose of all.”

Hell is itself “the place where the treasure is” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 136). There is no suffering in this world that is beyond endurance. Such is the power of Buddhism.



Mr. Toda was imprisoned on charges of lese majesty and violating the Peace Preservation Law, because he had converted many people to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism and instructed them to throw out the Shinto talisman that was distributed to all households under the directive of the militarist government.

There is a clear record, for example, showing that five months before he was arrested, Mr. Toda also came to Shinanomachi, the location of our present Soka Gakkai Headquarters, to propagate the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

Even when he was in prison, Mr. Toda talked openly about Buddhism to the investigators and prison guards, trying to convert them.

One of the guards on duty tells the story that whenever he passed Mr. Toda’s cell on his rounds, he heard Mr. Toda vigorously chanting daimoku. When the guard looked into the cell, he saw Mr. Toda sitting erect and chanting with prayer beads made of milk-bottle caps in his hands. On the low desk in front of him was a book.

One day, the prison guard opened the door to Mr. Toda’s cell and spoke to him.

“I have chanted daimoku, too,” he said.

“What daimoku would that be?” asked Mr. Toda.

“I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Mother of Demon Children (Jpn Kishimojin),” replied the guard.

“That’s wrong,” said Mr. Toda. “The daimoku I chant has tremendous power. My daimoku is the true daimoku. Your faith is very, very mistaken.”

After Mr. Toda was released from prison, the guard never spoke to him again directly. But, perhaps due to the connection with Buddhism he had formed through his encounters with Mr. Toda, he joined the Soka Gakkai in 1956.



While in prison, Mr. Toda read the Lotus Sutra over and over again, and chanted daimoku with all his being to grasp its essence. The book that the prison guard had seen on Mr. Toda’s desk was a copy of the Lotus Sutra.

His in-depth readings of the Sutra—twice, thrice, then a fourth and fifth time—resulted in his awakening to the essence of Buddhism while in prison. It was triggered by this difficult passage from the Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings, which is regarded as the Lotus Sutra’s prologue: “His body neither existing nor not existing, neither caused nor conditioned...”

Mr. Toda asked himself what this body, the body of the Buddha, which is described in the form of endless negations in this passage known as the 34 negations, really was. Though it is not this and not that, still it most assuredly exists—what could the substance of such a body be?

After long, deep contemplation, Mr. Toda suddenly realized that the Buddha is life itself. This took place in the early spring of 1944. In that moment, Buddhism was reborn in the present age.

Up until then, many people had regarded the Buddha as existing in another world, separate from our everyday reality. But the Daishonin repeatedly insists in his writings that we are all Buddhas, and that all living beings are entities of the Mystic Law. With the word

life as the key, the essence of the Lotus Sutra was suddenly rendered comprehensible and easily accessible to all.

At that moment, the heavy, difficult door to Buddhism was thrown wide open to people everywhere.



In the middle of November 1944, Mr. Toda experienced another profound realization. He recognized that we are a part of the assembly of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, numerous as the grains of sand of 60,000 Ganges rivers, who emerge from the earth at the Ceremony in the Air with the vow to carry out the propagation of the Lotus Sutra. With this realization, he vowed to make *kosen-rufu* his life's mission.

At just that time, the noble life of Mr. Makiguchi, who was still in prison, was drawing to its close. He died on Nov. 18, the date on which the Soka Gakkai was founded in 1930. Mr. Toda only learned of his death on Jan. 8, 1945. "Who murdered my mentor!" he screamed in grief and fury. As a true disciple, he resolved to devote his entire life to vindicating his mentor's integrity.

On July 3, 1945, just a few short weeks before Japan, which had killed Mr. Makiguchi, was to be defeated in war, a gaunt, exhausted Mr. Toda was released from prison. But, indomitable champion of justice that he was, once freed of the fetters that had bound him, Mr. Toda stood up resolutely, raising high the blazing torch of the Soka Gakkai spirit.

Today, his great faith and commitment resound powerfully throughout the world, and the praises of all are being showered upon him.

Feb. 11, In commemoration of the centennial of Mr. Toda's birth, Okinawa

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