

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MESSAGE TO THE MILLENNIUM SERVICE 2000 MAKE YOUR LIFE A BEACON

The following is SGI President Ikeda's message that conveyed his respect for and solidarity with the participants of Millennium Sunday, A Gathering of Spiritual Awareness, held April 2 at the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta.

To all of you attending this Gathering of Spiritual Awareness, please allow me to express, on behalf of the Soka Gakkai International, my deepest respect, praise and sense of solidarity.

In the course of your 45-year struggle, since 1955, the birth of the civil rights movement, you have shown the world a powerful example of the victory of the spiritual over the material. In a world filled with violence and scheming, the struggle for nonviolence led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. has proved that morality is capable of transforming reality.

You have left behind a concrete example, showing that human beings can definitely solve the problems created by human beings.

Yours is a precedent that will remain vividly etched in the annals of history.

When Ms. Rosa Parks paid a visit to the campus of Soka University of America, I had the wonderful opportunity to join her in singing "We Shall Overcome." And I had the precious chance to speak with President Nelson Mandela during one of his trips to Japan about the principle that "justice is the ultimate victor." And today I would be honored to seize this golden opportunity to make a declaration together with all of you.

No matter how successful they may appear, those who go against the tide of humanity's advancement toward human rights will eventually fade like the setting sun.

On the other hand, those who have persevered in the face of hardship and suffering, and have struggled against oppression, will forever be showered in the triumphant and joyous light of the sunrise.

What is justice?

It is something only truly understood by those who have been abused and ostracized despite having committed no crime. It is you who know what justice is.

What is truth?

It is known only to those who have been besieged and pounded by the cunning lie called violence.

It is you who know what truth is.

Simply because you sought equal treatment as human beings and reached out to help the oppressed, you have been threatened, endangered and have experienced the loss of employment and even the deaths of loved ones.

What is endurance? It is you who know endurance. You have surpassed the limits of ordinary endurance, persevering in the face of maltreatment, and illuminated society's night with the brilliance of the spirit of nonviolence.

What is freedom? It is you who know freedom. Those who have had their freedom wrested away for crying out against the lack of freedom truly understand the value of freedom. They can understand how tyrants, or a society in which information is controlled by the privileged, can even go so far as forcing people to sing a false song of freedom.

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Your 45 years of struggle have inspired courage in minority groups everywhere. You have given courage to indigenous peoples around the world; to women, long the victims of discrimination; to activists opposing environmental pollution; and to those striving for reform in the universities.

You have instilled courage in the promoters of African independence. Your courage has also contributed to the groundswell of efforts for human rights around the world, and you have given courage to us in the SGI.

We of the SGI have advanced thus far with the conviction that “those who are most oppressed must become the happiest.” The Buddha Shakyamuni of India tended the ill and the suffering, and he called upon his disciples to do the same. He taught them that to “to serve the ill, is to serve the Buddha.” The essence of Buddhism lies in working voluntarily to help the suffering.

Nichiren Daishonin, who reawakened in Japan this spirit of Shakyamuni, stated, “All the sufferings of the people are without exception Nichiren’s own sufferings,” and “The sufferings of all living beings are Nichiren’s own sufferings.” Humankind is a single living entity. When one individual is wounded, the entire body of humanity is wounded. Humanity itself suffers the pain. So long as there are people in this world who are being treated inhumanely, our own human rights are being violated.

Those who look down on others are destroying the dignity of their own lives. The lack of this understanding gives rise to discrimination, war and poverty. All these problems grow from the same root.

Mathatma Gandhi said that religion which does not deeply ponder real problems and work to contribute to their solutions is not religion at all. This is our view as well. We also share Dr. King’s perspective that religion fundamentally concerns itself with the betterment of society. Religion should involve itself with both heaven and earth; with both the problem of eternity, and the very real concerns of society.

We of the SGI know all too well how a popular movement with this religious spirit will experience oppression from those in power who seek to protect the social evils they have a stake in. The Soka Gakkai’s first and second presidents were imprisoned for resisting Japan’s fascist government during World War II. Supporting this oppression were corrupt priests who betrayed the spirit of Buddhism. Our first president died in prison as a result of such persecution. Our second president emerged from his two-year struggle as a prisoner and initiated a movement to bring spiritual awareness to the people of postwar Japan.

Today, April 2, marks the anniversary of the passing of my mentor, our second president. Like Dr. King, my mentor had a dream. His dream, he stated, was to “rid the world of misery.”

Throughout his life, my mentor acted as the greatest ally of the sick and the poor. Amid the bitter divisions of the Cold War, he advocated the ideal of global citizenship and the abolition of nuclear weapons. For 42 years since my mentor’s passing, I have dedicated my life to bringing his dream closer to reality.

The esteemed campus of Morehouse College is the place where President Benjamin Mays and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. carved out a noble history together as mentor and disciple.

The ultimate and most glorious of human relationships is the relationship of spiritual successors. Even animals have relationships of parent and child. There are animals that share partnerships similar to marriage, and even those that enjoy friendships. However, the

relationship of mentor and disciple, of spiritual successors, exists only among human beings.

With this in mind, I ask that you join me in transmitting a message to our successors, our children:

Have a dream! If you have a dream you will someday approach that dream! Overcome your obstacles and advance! You have the energy and mission to make the world a better place. When you awaken to this fact, your talents will fully blossom. You will be surprised at how strong you have become.

Let us share this with our children:

Resist and oppose evil. Say an emphatic ‘No’ to drugs, to violence, and to destructive temptations. Only when you respect and cherish yourselves, will you gain the respect of others. Also, only when you care for yourselves can you care for others.

Children are envoys from the future. To speak with children is to talk with the future. Their problems will be different from those of our generation—they may face problems we can’t even begin to imagine. Therefore, let us support them and lend them a helping hand, so that they may stand up and move forward with courage.

And let us tell our children:

To witness evil and yet stand silently by is to be an ally to evil. To fail to do good yields the same result as doing bad. Each time you overlook evil, you allow another malicious weed to take root. To exclude others is violence. However, to ignore, disregard, or show no interest in challenging wickedness is another form of violence.

And let us share this with our children:

Don’t let your spirit rest! Give expression to the empathy and humanity you possess. Act! Break loose from the restraints of laziness and cowardice, and begin something new. Only in action is there growth of the spirit. Only in growth of the spirit does one find happiness. Happiness can never be bought.

Let’s convey to our children:

You must never forget!—never forget your predecessors who held high the torch of hope during the long, long night.

Never forget that your parents have struggled for their parents, who struggled and suffered before them; that they have struggled for you, their children, and for their grandchildren.

Let us teach our children:

What would make those who came before you the happiest?

If you were to carry on their struggle, to fight for the happiness of future generations as they have, to care for and serve those who are suffering. When you do so, you will begin to realize why your predecessors were able to hold their heads high and live with pride despite being surrounded by cruelty and lies.

You will then begin to understand why they never gave up on their dreams, no matter how often they were betrayed. You will begin to know why they stood tall and kept marching ahead, despite rocks being thrown and guns being aimed at them. You will realize that they have done so to provide you with a wonderful future!

And lastly, let us tell our children:

Love the people! Live splendid lives! Make your life a beacon that will illuminate the darkness ahead. Build a guidepost to mark the way for future generations!

Pool your energies and abilities to create the world of the 21st century, a world with no murder, a society where no one agonizes on account of being overlooked and neglected!

Build a monument of achievement that glows with the light of human fellowship!
Thank you very much for this opportunity to share my thoughts.

April 2, 2000
Daisaku Ikeda
President,
Soka Gakkai International