

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MARCH 24 SPEECH—PART 1 THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

'To pray through every problem, to pray fully with all of your being—this is the secret to success,' says SGI President Ikeda.

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 44th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, March 24.

Nothing is as strong or as deep as the prayers of our women's division members. To pray until victory is achieved, to pray with all one's might—this is the spirit of the women's division. The shining crown of victory adorns all who have such faith.

To pray through every problem, to pray fully with all of your being—this is the secret to success.

The question of what it means to be human will be an important focus in the 21st century.

In February this year, there was a written exam for an "Introduction to Buddhism" class at Harvard University. One of the essay questions on it was about my book *The Living Buddha*. The question was in two parts: first, students were asked why they thought the book was titled *The Living Buddha*. And second, they were asked to state their views on who the living Buddha is.

Dr. Charles Hallisey, the associate professor who is teaching the course, used *The Living Buddha* as one of his textbooks and then made it the topic of the essay question for his students.

Masao Yokota, president of the SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, reported on this in detail, and I want to share his account with you:

Why did Dr. Hallisey choose *The Living Buddha* as a subject of study for his class? He said that he appreciated the way in which I look at the events of Shakyamuni's life from a human, personal perspective. The question of what it means to be a human being, he observed, will be an important focus in the 21st century. *The Living Buddha* attempts to apprehend Buddhist philosophy from the perspective of Shakyamuni as a humanist and, in so doing, according to Professor Hallisey, offers a guide to the values that should direct us in the future.

Dr. Hallisey also stated that the personal approach President Ikeda adopts in the biography of Shakyamuni—in which the SGI leader tries to understand the inner life of Shakyamuni through identification with his own life—serves to illuminate the more profound aspects of Shakyamuni's life. Moreover, through this approach, President Ikeda pursues the question of what it means to be human. According to Dr. Hallisey, this type of Buddhist study, rooted firmly in humanism, is very valuable.

Dr. Hallisey said that the students' essays revealed a richly nuanced, enlightened understanding of the Buddha. Some recognized, for instance, that the Buddha, rather than existing as some supernatural being, is to be found in the effort of self-transformation and self-development.

Neither Dr. Hallisey nor his students are SGI members, yet they have an accurate appreciation of our guiding philosophy and ideals. They are pursuing the same humanism that is the SGI's goal. This is the age we are living in. The humanistic ideals of the SGI will continue to spread far and wide in the new century.

President Ikeda has been invited to lecture at Harvard University on two occasions: In 1991, he delivered a lecture entitled "The Age of 'Soft Power' and Inner-Motivated Philosophy." And in 1993, he spoke on the subject of "Mahayana Buddhism and 21st Century Civilization."

Another Harvard professor, Dr. Christopher Queen, dean of students and lecturer of religion at Harvard's Division of Continuing Education, introduced the latter address at an American Academy of Religion conference in December 1993. Dr. Queen is also using the booklet Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter, published by the Boston Research Center, in a seminar he teaches, "Buddhism and Social Change."

The SGI's philosophy resonates strongly with basic American ideas about the individual.

According to Mr. Yokota, Dr. Hallisey said that he appreciated my efforts and accomplishments in terms of my presenting Buddhism as a teaching for the here and now, and my emphasis on the inner transformation of the individual as a key ingredient for social change and human happiness. Dr. Hallisey found in my thought the kind of religious teaching that people have been increasingly seeking in the 20th and 21st centuries. I am honored by this evaluation.

People outside Japan have a genuine, undistorted appreciation of what is positive and valuable. They understand the SGI. They are not swayed by the vagaries of public opinion. Such is the stance of people of intelligence and integrity around the world.

Too many Japanese, on the other hand, can't see things for what they are. They are concerned about appearances, and they are cowardly. They are always preoccupied with others' opinions of them, forever fretting, "If I say something, what will others think, what will they say about me?" They don't live according to principle.

In regard to the SGI's popular movement, Dr. Hallisey said that, by emphasizing the inner transformation of the individual as it does, the SGI offers a philosophy that resonates strongly with "basic ideas in American culture of the importance of the individual." He also found it extremely noteworthy that the SGI stresses that self-transformation and self-development are accomplished not in isolation, independent of others, but through people supporting and encouraging one another. The way in which the potential of a student or disciple is developed through the inspiration and guidance of a mentor is a good example of this, he said.

The world is now the stage for the SGI's endeavors.

Harvard, as we all know, is one of the world's great centers of learning. Mr. Yokota reports that, in addition to Dr. Hallisey's class, another Harvard class investigating contemporary Buddhism plans to study the SGI and its activities in greater depth. Next month [April 2000], lecturers and students of that department will visit a nearby SGI culture center for that purpose.

People around the world are looking with great interest toward the SGI. The world is the

stage for our endeavors.

I remember once saying to my wife—I think it was in the early '70s when the Soka Gakkai was being attacked from all sides in Japan—“From now on, we must turn to the world. The world will be our stage.” She commented with an understanding smile, “You really are committed to the world, aren't you?”

For this reason, I treasure and encourage with all my heart my dear fellow members around the world, who are fighting so hard amid the most challenging circumstances. I want to talk with them all through the night about the future and life. This is my genuine, heartfelt desire.

Be that as it may, we are saying farewell to the dark 20th century and welcoming the 21st. The time has arrived for our talented youth across the globe to inherit the Soka Gakkai tradition and march forth, spreading the humanistic values of our movement. We have entered that wonderful age.

Nichiren Daishonin is also rejoicing, I am certain, declaring that the SGI is the true representative of this Buddhism, an organization dedicated to truth and justice. I assert here and now that the SGI is the sole legitimate heir to the living essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Those who live in the future are true leaders of humanism.

The British historian Arnold Toynbee shared some words with me that I will never forget at the end of our dialogue. First, he cited a quote from the noted philosopher Bertrand Russell, made at age 84, to the effect that it is important for us think about what will happen after our death. Dr. Toynbee said that we should plan our lives with the farthest possible future in mind. He also told me that the reason he had wanted to meet me was because I had been actively pursuing that course and putting it into practice from a young age.

I remember Dr. Toynbee with great fondness. I spoke of many things with him. During our dialogue, we were joined by Mrs. Toynbee, my wife and our interpreters. We spoke from morning to night.

The Lotus Sutra expounded by Shakyamuni and the writings of Nichiren Daishonin both constitute “prophecies of the Buddha.” Their words are based on what they foresee will happen in the far distant future. They are pervaded with the profound wish of the Buddha to leave behind a message for those of us living in the Latter Day of the Law.

The future—our focus is not on the present but on the future. Those who live in the future, who point to the future, who build the future are true leaders of humanism. They are youth in the best sense of the word. Youth possess incredible potential, a future that is rich in infinite possibilities.

Buddhism, too, has flowed from the Former Day of the Law to the Middle Day of the Law and into the Latter Day of the Law. All things move and advance toward the future. It is my fervent wish now, as we head into the 21st century, that we will open the way for the eternal future of the SGI.

(To be continued in the May 12 issue)

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL

From This Speech:

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- 1) Where do you think Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and American individualism meet? What do they hold in common?
- 2) Do you see drawbacks to American individualism that the Daishonin's Buddhism can help us to change?
- 3) Why can't self-transformation happen in isolation? Why do we need to be around other people to grow?
- 4) Do you think that the idea of mentor and student or mentor and disciple fits with American culture? If so, how?