

**SOKA SPIRIT  
CHAMPIONS OF JUSTICE  
BY MONICA ONG  
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*Monica prepared this presentation this presentation for a Soka Spirit meeting on March 3 with the Chicago Area 1 Downtown Chapter. "I can't tell you how profoundly this issue changed my practice and my life. It has truly been my greatest battle and benefit in disguise! I hope this presentation encourages many youth to take on the Soka spirit in their daily lives so they can see the power of the Gohonzon while deepening their individual relationships with Sensei's spirit and that of the Daishonin's."*

"I say to you, this morning, that if you have never found something so dear and so precious to you that you will die for it, then you aren't fit to live. You may be thirty-eight years old, as I happen to be, and one day, some great opportunity stands before you and calls upon you to stand up for some great principle, some great issue, some great cause. And you refuse to do it because you are afraid. You refuse to do it because you want to live longer. You're afraid you will lose your job, or you are afraid that you will be criticized or that you will lose your popularity, or you're afraid that somebody will stab you or shoot at you or bomb your house. So you refuse to take the stand. Well, you may go on and live until you are ninety, but you are just as dead at thirty-eight as you would be at ninety. And the cessation of breathing in your life is but the belated announcement of an earlier death of the spirit. You died when you refused to stand up for right. You died when you refuse to stand up for justice... " (*The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, p. 344)

These are the word of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. during a sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church, on Nov. 5, 1967. He believed that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere" (*ibid.* p. 189).

To me, the situation regarding the temple is really a civil rights issue. It is wrong that an arrogant few believe that they are more deserving than others to reap the fruits of life meant for all people. It is wrong to deny anyone the pursuit of absolute happiness and peace in any form, for it is the denial of that person's humanity. Just like racists who believe they have license to distort the Constitution of the United States of America and implement distorted views in society, it is just as evil, if not worse, to twist the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and oppress people based on their position.

The greatest struggle that Dr. King faced was not really with the few white supremacists who attacked and persecuted him. Rather, his struggle was with the silence of fellow clergymen across the United States, the sense of weakness and self-defeat of those who saw themselves as "victims" of oppression, and the complacency and apathy of moderates who watched this civil rights issue on the sidelines. Though so many people were scared into paralyzing silence by a small group of authoritarian figures, it took only one person to stand up and show others that there is another way. This way is the way of love, nonviolence and a commitment to compassionate dialogue that seeks to awaken in others the immeasurable value of each and every

human being.

This struggle of course begins with ourselves, with daily life. Dr. King looked up to Mahatma Gandhi saying: “If you ask people in India why is it that Mahatma Gandhi was able to do what he did in India, they will say they followed him because of his absolute sincerity and his absolute dedication .... Gandhi had the amazing capacity for self-criticism. This was true in individual life, in his family life, and was true in his people’s life” (*ibid.*, 128). His life was his message.

It is our own individual responsibility to reflect on our Buddhist practice, our behavior as human beings and our efforts to construct harmonious relationships with others in light of this civil rights issue. It is our personal responsibility to decide whether that darkness will defeat us or whether we will defeat it. That’s why it is said that Buddhism is win or lose. We win in this struggle only when we win over ourselves. This is the example of Dr. King, Gandhi and President Ikeda

I believe the key to understanding Soka Spirit in the context of our own lives lies in chanting abundant daimoku, developing and making sincere efforts to study the Goshō and the world around us. When we study, we are able to recognize this issue from an impartial reference point, unclouded by personal feelings or emotionalism. Together with practice and faith, we are able to clearly see right from wrong and courageously act on behalf of solid convictions that are built on experience and reason. The Goshō states:

You must never seek any of Shakyamuni’s teachings or the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the universe outside yourself. Your mastery of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of mortal sufferings in the least unless you perceive the nature of your own life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, any discipline or good deed will be meaningless. For example, a poor man cannot earn a penny just by counting his neighbor’s wealth. That is why Miao-lo states, “Unless one perceives the nature of his life, his practice will become an endless painful austerity. Miao-lo therefore condemns such students of Buddhism as non-Buddhist.” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 3–4)

Making the arduous efforts to do human revolution on the battlefield that is your own life is a chance to develop the courage and wisdom required for an absolutely happy state of life. President Ikeda states: “To lead a life in which we are inspired and can inspire others, our hearts have to be alive; they have to be filled with passion and enthusiasm. To achieve that, as President Toda said, we need the courage to ‘live true to ourselves.’ And to live true to ourselves, we need the strength of mind not to be swayed by our environment or be obsessed with superficial appearances. Rather than borrowing from or imitating others, we need the conviction to be able to think for ourselves and to take action out of our own sense of responsibility” (*Faith Into Action*, p. 102).

I’m thankful to be alive at this crucial time, in the age of Dr. King and Gandhi, alongside President Ikeda and most of all here with you, my fellow Bodhisattvas of the Earth, whom I deeply admire and respect. Let’s make a commitment to win, to stand up in our practice, to study together, chant together and together advance with a courageous spirit that sings, “We Shall Overcome!”