

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA ABSOLUTELY OPPOSED TO WAR

‘I am absolutely opposed to war,’ writes SGI President Ikeda. ‘That is one reason why I so highly respect Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, who, imprisoned by the military government, became foremost champions of truth and justice.’

A Headquarters Leaders Meeting celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai’s founding was held with great festivity on a beautiful May day, May 24, at the Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Tokyo.

The sight of our members, who are working so hard to achieve kosen-rufu, was so refreshing and inspiring that it is difficult to describe.

How noble are their incredible efforts to promote our movement, their courageous fighting spirit to sail intrepidly through the fiercest storms, their intense prayers and committed actions to thoroughly vanquish the enemies of the Buddha, based on eternal principles and the invincible power of the Mystic Law!

In addition, a large number of overseas members, hailing from 13 countries and territories, joined us, brimming with energy and shining with the praiseworthy spirit of selfless dedication.

Our goals are peace, progress, and increasing happiness throughout the world.

The hearts of all that day were filled with the irrepressible joy of Buddhas.



After the meeting, my wife and I gazed out at a knoll in front the Makiguchi Hall that we call Moonlight Hill and talked of many things. Our conversation led to a letter I had received from one of my elementary school teachers and from there moved on to memories of my youth.

In 1937, I was 9 years old. My father was finally beginning to recover from a long, severe bout of rheumatism. It was at that time that my eldest brother was drafted into the army. His name was Kiichi, and he was 12 years older than me, making him 21 when he was called up for military service.

He was very earnest and sincere, and I respected him a lot. While our father was ill, Kiichi worked hard to support us, becoming the pillar and mainstay of our family.

First he and then my three other elder brothers—all in the prime of life—were snatched away from us by the military. As a result, the responsibility to care for our aged parents fell to me, weak and sick with tuberculosis. My father’s illness also persisted. What cruel demands nationalism makes on the lives of ordinary people!

In the early spring of 1939, two years after he was drafted, Kiichi was sent abroad to fight. We received notification from the army that we could go and see him before he was shipped overseas, so my mother and I hurried to Tokyo Station to do so. I was a fifth grader by then. My mother prepared some food, mainly rice balls—a veritable feast in wartime Japan—which she generously wrapped in large sheets of seaweed; as she said, “We won’t be seeing him for a long time.”

When we got to the station, there were about 300 soldiers on the way to the front. Their families had gathered with them in the open area in front of the station, and they were enjoying themselves eating and talking together. Since the young men were headed for the

battlefront, this might well be their final farewell. The eyes of many of the mothers and young wives were filled with tears.

The soldiers' departure had been decided so suddenly that the families of those from regions far away from Tokyo, such as Yamagata and Akita, did not have time to get to Tokyo to say good-bye. I still have a clear memory of those soldiers sitting quietly in their uniforms on the concrete outside the station with no one to talk to, their shoulders drooping. My mother called out to several of them to join us, and she sent me to hand rice balls to those who seemed too shy to accept her invitation. Their forlorn expressions brightened, and they smiled and talked in friendly camaraderie as they shared in the humble yet heartfelt repast my mother had made.



Finally, though it broke our hearts, the time for departure arrived. My brother retied his gaiters, checked the sword in his belt and returned to his squad.

My mother and I headed back by public railway to Shinagawa Station, which was on our way home. We were waiting on the platform in the hope that my brother's train would pass through the station, when a train full of soldiers pulled in.

My mother dashed from window to window, looking for my brother, but she was unable to find him. Just then, an elderly station attendant, sympathizing with our plight, grabbed a megaphone and began calling in a loud voice: "Is Kiichi Ikeda there? Is Kiichi Ikeda there? Your mother is here to see you." He walked up and down the platform for us, searching for my brother.

The train was preparing to pull out when one of my brother's comrades heard the attendant's call. I think it was a boy from Yamagata who had eaten with us earlier. He rushed to my brother, who was sitting on the other side of the train, and said, "Kiichi, it's your mother!"

The train had quietly started to move. My brother flew to the window and leaned out to see her.

"Kiichi, Kiichi, take care of yourself!" said my mother as she chased after the accelerating train for several steps. My brother nodded silently and waved his arm vigorously.

My mother and I continued to wave good-bye until the train had completely disappeared from sight.



In 1941, Kiichi was temporarily discharged and came back to us from China. It was at this time that he said to me, his voice shaking with anger, "The Japanese army is too cruel for words."

My father said privately to my mother: "We don't know when they'll send Kiichi back to the front. He should think about getting married while he has the chance." He told Kiichi: "As the eldest son, you should choose a wife. What do you say?"

It became a subject of concern among the entire extended family. But in Japan at the time, completely dominated by militarism, a happy marriage was unthinkable. Everyone was taught that the greatest possible honor was to fight and die heroically for the nation.

The next year, Kiichi was called up again. In a letter from the front, he wrote, "As the son of a seaweed farmer [and being used to working in freezing temperatures as a result], I was hoping to be sent to a cold place, but as luck would have it I've been sent to tropical Burma!" When I read these words, I feel a pang of pity all over again.

Some time later, Kiichi became a victim of the Imphal Campaign [an abortive Japanese attempt to seize Imphal, in northeastern India, through Burma, during the final stages of World War II]. This is famed as one of Japan's most ill-conceived military operations. He died in Burma (now Myanmar) in January 1945. He was 29.



I am against war! I am absolutely opposed to it!

Many of the young men of my generation were incited by the military government to go proudly to the battlefield and give their lives there. The families left behind were praised for their sacrifice as “military mothers” and “families of soldiers at the front”—terms deemed to carry high honor.

But in reality, what a doleful tumult of pain, grief and misery swirled in the depths of their hearts! What deep wounds did the contrived praises and sympathy of others, oblivious to this inner turmoil, inflict on the aching hearts of the mothers and children left behind!

A mother's love, a mother's wisdom, is too great to be fooled by such false phrases as “for the sake of the nation.”

During the war, every season of the year was like winter. Then, finally, when the war ended, a new sun of peace began to rise on the horizon—quiet, yet shining bright and strong.

I heard the emperor's Aug. 15, 1945, radio announcement of the end of the war at the home of relatives in Magome in Tokyo's Ota Ward, where we had taken refuge. I was 17. The complex feelings I experienced at that time remain indelibly engraved in the core of my being.

I am absolutely opposed to war. That is one reason why I so highly respect Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, who, imprisoned by the military government, became foremost champions of truth and justice. That is why I readily became a disciple of these great mentors of the Soka Gakkai.

Above all, I am proud to follow in the footsteps of the first and second presidents, who gave their lives selflessly for their faith in Nichiren Daishonin, the Buddha of eternal peace.

I am determined to fight against anyone who supports or advocates war. I will fight against the dark, demonic forces of destruction!

And I am joined by an impressive force of Buddhas close to 10 million strong, a force that is armed with tremendous strength of spirit and powerfully committed to the cause of achieving genuine lasting peace.