

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA MY MENTOR'S WORDS

‘While others may have let his words go in one ear and out the other,’ SGI President Ikeda writes, ‘my mentor’s words struck deep, deep into my youthful heart, as powerful and penetrating as bolts of lightning.’

I have written in the past about my daily morning classes at “Toda University,” during which my mentor, Josei Toda, instructed me on a wide variety of subjects.

Many other people also came to Mr. Toda every day to receive guidance and advice. Even if he was in the middle of work, he would meet them in a private room and spend time with them. They brought with them all kinds of problems and sufferings. There were people who were poor, who were deadlocked in their lives, who were dissatisfied or who had given up their faith.

Mr. Toda kept me at his side at these times. Assisting him behind the scenes on a daily basis, I was sometimes called upon to communicate his advice and guidance to many others. As a result, I listened to his each and every word very carefully, engraving them in my mind.

My mentor always based his guidance on Nichiren Daishonin’s writings.

Sometimes Mr. Toda would give guidance using concrete, easy-to-understand examples, sometimes he gave rousing encouragement, and sometimes he just presented his conclusions in a simple, concise manner. Sometimes he told a lot of different anecdotes, smiling and conversing in a warm, friendly way that soothed the listener’s heart.

Sometimes he could be as fiercely angry as a strict but loving father, pointing out a person’s laziness, weakness and arrogance in an effort to correct those faults. Yet when an impoverished mother came to see him with one infant on her back and another holding her hand, Mr. Toda would open the *Gosho* and cite passages that encouraged and heartened. He would always humbly stress before doing so: “These are not my words. These are the words of the Daishonin, whose Buddhism you practice.” I can still picture the way Mr. Toda reached out to people with infinite warmth and compassion.

“Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 536). “Those who now believe in the Lotus Sutra will gather fortune from ten thousand miles away” (WND, 1137).

He quoted easily comprehensible passages from Nichiren Daishonin’s writings to encourage these women who were struggling amid bitter economic hardship, trying to make their way along life’s steep path. He would reassure them by emphasizing again and again: “These are the teachings of the Daishonin. They are not just my words.”

At other times, when his young disciples of the youth division came to see him, he would quote passages from the Daishonin and instruct them rigorously.

When young women came to ask for advice, he would offer them direction from the Daishonin’s golden words, firmly setting them on the right path by saying, “This is for your future happiness.”

One day when giving guidance to a person who could not get along with his siblings, Mr. Toda read and explained one of the Daishonin’s letters to the Ikegami brothers (*Gosho*

Zenshu, p. 1108). Two brothers united in action, the Daishonin says, are like two wheels of a cart or two wings of a bird. The Daishonin then says that if they look up to him as their teacher, they would resolve their differences and unite in purpose. If they would not, they should be aware that the Buddhas and heavenly deities would no longer protect them.

He reminds them that as upholders of the Lotus Sutra, they already had clearly defined enemies. And if they fought among themselves, they would be like the sea bird and the clam, which, while arguing, were both caught by the fisherman.

The Daishonin made his point eloquently by quoting an old fable.



Mr. Toda also severely rebuked those who slandered their fellow members, quoting several important passages. One was “You must respect him [one who upholds the Lotus Sutra] as you would the Buddha. This is what the sutra means when it says, ‘You should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha’” (WND, 757). Using this passage, Mr. Toda would stress the importance of members showing the same respect for one another as they would for a Buddha. For this, he said, is what both the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin teach.

Quoting the words “Therefore, the best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a good friend” (WND, 598), Mr. Toda would impress upon members how important is the presence of good fellow members in helping one attain Buddhahood.

Citing the passage “In this defiled age, you should always talk together and never cease to pray for your next life” (WND, 449), he would tell his listeners: “The Daishonin strongly urges us, living as we do in this corrupt world, to always talk with one another, work wholeheartedly for kosen-rufu and thereby attain eternal happiness together. We do not have the time to criticize one another or argue among ourselves. We will be scolded by the Daishonin if we allow ourselves to be carried away by petty emotions.”



When leaders came to him with problems in the organization, he would base his guidance on passages from the Daishonin that taught the fundamental principle of unity. In both life and Buddhism, the basics are what count: “If the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals, whereas if one in body but different in mind, they can achieve nothing remarkable” (WND, 618). “In contrast, although Nichiren and his followers are few, because they are different in body, but united in mind, they will definitely accomplish their great mission of widely propagating the Lotus Sutra. Though evils may be numerous, they cannot prevail over a single great truth” (WND, 618).

Mr. Toda also lectured firmly on a crucial passage from “The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life”: “All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren’s propagation. When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled” (WND, 217).

The Soka Gakkai is an organization of harmoniously united believers working together for kosen-rufu, an organization in which this spiritual heritage of the Daishonin flows. Therefore, we must not let anything destroy this organization, which Mr. Toda described as being more precious to him than his own life. The Soka Gakkai will always win through

the unity of many in body, one in mind.

Speaking with great passion and conviction, Mr. Toda declared that only by protecting and strengthening the Soka Gakkai, which has inherited the Buddha's intent and decree, would it be possible to realize kosen-rufu.



The Nirvana Sutra states, "Rely on the Law and not upon persons" (WND, 872). The Soka Gakkai is strong because it is based on the Daishonin's writings. No matter the times, as long as we always return to this foundation, we will never be deadlocked.

In his preface to the Soka Gakkai edition of the *Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin), Mr. Toda writes, "It is my most fervent and enduring wish that this precious scripture be disseminated to people throughout Asia and the entire world." Today, in accord with Mr. Toda's wish, the Daishonin's writings are being translated into many different languages around the globe.

The Goshō has already been translated into Korean, and a Chinese translation will be published to coincide with this year's 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding.

Just last year, a long-awaited revised English translation was published. Since this makes the Daishonin's writings accessible to some 1.8 billion English-speaking readers worldwide, it is an extremely important event.

The SGI, with members in 156 nations, is unified around the core of the Daishonin's writings.



The Daishonin teaches us that nothing surpasses the strategy of the Lotus Sutra. The Goshō is the key to winning in every struggle.

Mr. Toda used to state with firm assurance, "Those who strive to actualize the Daishonin's teaching of widely spreading the Mystic Law are bodhisattvas and Buddhas." Buddhism is about emerging victorious. That is why it is vital that we fight and survive, fight and win through all struggles according to the principles taught by the Daishonin.

For this is the true way of faith of disciples of the Daishonin. The benefits we attain as a result are everlasting, our good fortune immeasurable and our eternal victory assured.

My mentor always urged me to read great books.

Simply producing experts only interested in furthering their knowledge cannot be called true education. This only creates intellectuals in narrow, specialized fields. True learning—learning that equips people with the means to become happy—is found in acquiring the knowledge to develop ourselves as human beings and pursuing knowledge based on humanism.



My mentor in life always strongly urged me to read. I have mentioned this on many occasions.

He was very strict, frequently inquiring: "Daisaku, what book did you read today?" "Daisaku, what are you reading now?" His constant grilling helped make me what I am today, giving me intellectual strength and a solid grounding in literary expression.

Being scolded and prodded by someone who has your best interests at heart can be an immense source of happiness. There is no greater folly than failing to understand that mentors and teachers take you to task because they care about you, and instead responding

to them with resentment, rebellion and criticism.



The first guidance that Mr. Toda gave to me in the form of a reading assignment was asking me to read British author Hall Caine's *The Eternal City*. It was early spring, 1951.

"Daisaku, read this book," he said. "And when you're finished, pass it on to other members you're close to." We were at the old Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo's Nishi-Kanda, and Mr. Toda handed me a book with a red cloth cover. I was surprised. When I look back on that day now, I still feel tremendous gratitude for his kind, fatherly words.

Mr. Toda's business was in a crisis. Why did he want me to read that book? Why did he suggest that one? Why then? The answers to those questions contained profound, precious instructions from Mr. Toda to me.

The Eternal City was set in Rome in 1900—coincidentally, the year of Mr. Toda's birth. The young, idealistic hero of the novel, David Rossi, rises up against the corrupt authority of the state and the Church and begins a revolutionary struggle to bring them down. He calls out to the people of Rome, "Be brave, be strong, be patient, and tomorrow night you will send up such a cry as will ring throughout the world."

But the dictator Bonelli, maddened with envy and enmity toward the young revolutionary fighting for justice and the happiness of the people, throws the full weight of his power against the young man. Bonelli even goes so far as to implicate Rossi in a transparently concocted, utterly baseless plot.

To slander and vilify popular leaders who are loved by the people and respected pillars of solidarity, to try to destroy the beautiful alliance of the people—these are the unchanging tactics of corrupt power holders throughout history who live by the creed of divide and conquer.

But Rossi's companion in the struggle, Bruno Rocco, refuses to speak against his dearest comrade, though Bruno is arrested, imprisoned, tortured and presented with a letter—a clever forgery by the authorities—whose contents suggest that Rossi has betrayed him. Bruno goes to his death crying: "Long live David Rossi! Long live David Rossi!"

Eventually the day arrives when the despotic regime is toppled. Rossi is chosen to head the new republic, and the door is opened at last to the creation of an eternal city, where human harmony prevails. This is the dream that he and Bruno, comrades in life and death, had cherished. The sun of a new day rises brightly in the sky.

In another memorable passage, Rossi declares: "Educate! Educate! Associate! Associate! These are our watchwords and our weapons of warfare."



Through this novel and the picture of oppression by authoritarian powers that it offers, Mr. Toda wanted to deeply impress on the youth the form that the three powerful enemies of Buddhism—which the Daishonin warns will arise in the course of propagating the Mystic Law—will take in society.

Mr. Toda said: "Let those who want to criticize us go ahead. Let those who want to slander us do as they will. But nothing can change the fact that truth is truth, and justice is justice." Mr. Toda's guidance on this subject, citing various episodes and examples in *The Eternal City* to make his point as he did so, left a deep impression on me.

I will never forget Mr. Toda's firm stance and resolute words, like those of a strict father. While others may have let his words go in one ear and out the other, my mentor's words

struck deep, deep into my youthful heart, as powerful and penetrating as bolts of lightning.



No matter what nefarious schemes, jealousy or malicious attacks I encounter, I am not afraid. I know that those who spread spiteful, unjust accusations and all deceitful, morally degenerate individuals who try to subvert the truth will receive strict retribution in accord with the law of cause and effect, manifested by the workings of the heavenly deities, the protective forces of the universe.

I remember a passage from the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau that Mr. Toda made the youth of our day study: “To be just requires severity: to tolerate wickedness, when one has the right and the power to repress it, is to be wicked oneself.” This attitude of severity toward injustice perfectly describes the spirit of Mr. Makiguchi, who did not begrudge even his life in his powerful struggle against evil.

While the elderly Mr. Makiguchi was in prison during the war, he declared that the persecution that had befallen him was infinitesimally small when compared to that which the Daishonin suffered. This is a true example of the faith that is found in the Soka Gakkai—the faith that is the essence of the Daishonin’s Buddhism.



The British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, who fought against the Nazis during World War II, was a contemporary of Mr. Makiguchi. Churchill says, “If you travel the earth, you will find it is largely divided into two classes of people—people who say ‘I wonder why such and such is not done’ and people who say ‘Now who is going to prevent me from doing that thing?’”

Everything begins from the passionate determination of individuals who have a strong, clear recognition of their mission and responsibility.

The great statesman Churchill did not let the Nazi bombings of his beloved country cower him or deter him from his course; he resolutely led his country to triumph over the enemy. His words have enormous weight.

Speaking proudly of how Britain valiantly withstood the Nazi attacks and emerged victorious, he declares: “Alone, but upborne by every generous heartbeat of mankind, we had defied the tyrant in the height of his triumph.... The Island was intangible, inviolate.”

I have but one prayer: That all our precious members attain happiness. I pray that they may be safe each day, be healthy, live long and have lives overflowing with good fortune.

I also pray that, amid the harsh realities of this world, they may be proud victors, savoring the full joy of life. This is my first and foremost prayer, night and day.

As the leader of and person responsible for our worldwide organization, this is my job and duty.