

**A RECORD OF MY LIFE
BY DAISAKU IKEDA
TO LISTEN WITH AN OPEN MIND**

‘Listening with an open mind to the opinions and ideas of others is not an easy task,’ SGI President Ikeda writes. ‘Whether the ability to do so depends on one’s state of life or one’s depth of experience, what matters most is that we pay close attention to what others have to say.’

On the topic of turning 60 (see last week’s “A Record of My Life”), I am reminded of Confucius’ words about listening. In the *Analects* he says, “At 60, my ears were obedient.” Looking back over his life, Confucius observes that at 60 he had become able to listen to everyone’s opinions.

It is well known that Confucius says that 40 was the age when he “had no doubts.” He is talking here about gaining confidence in his direction in life. And when he says that at 50 he came to understand the “commands of Heaven,” he means that he awakened to his life’s mission.

My mentor, Josei Toda, was persecuted and imprisoned by Japan’s militarist authorities. While in prison, he thoroughly read the Lotus Sutra. Having then become enlightened to the essence of life at age 45, he declared, “Five years later than Confucius I became free of doubt, and five years earlier than him I came to understand my mission.”

Returning to the phrase “My ears were obedient,” the fact is that listening with an open mind to the opinions and ideas of others is not an easy task. Whether the ability to do so depends on one’s state of life or one’s depth of experience, what matters most is that we pay close attention to what others have to say. I always make an effort to be a good listener.

It is generally thought that as we get older, we become increasingly attached to our experiences, growing more stubborn and unyielding as the years pass. But it is precisely in our advanced years that we should give full play to the wisdom we have gained through our experiences and listen with an open mind to what others have to say. I feel that I have become an even better listener the older I get.

Buddhist texts frequently warn that the great obstacles of hatred and jealousy will arise the wider the correct teaching is spread. The Great Teacher Miao-lo of China says with regard to jealousy, “‘Jealousy’ [refers] to those who take no delight in listening to the doctrine” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 240). This brings to light how fearful it is to close one’s ears to the truth.

The sutras also teach that our life itself is an irreplaceable treasure tower adorned with seven kinds of treasures. These are the seven essentials of Buddhist practice: hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments and reflecting on oneself (see WND, 299).

First among these is hearing the correct teaching; this essentially means listening to Buddhism. On a broader scale, it underlines the importance of listening to others. And it is those people who can take constructive criticism from others who grow as human beings.

Those who pursue the lasting obtain eternal youth and immortality.

Since ancient times, people have sought eternal youth and immortality. But what are they really looking for? When Shakyamuni decided to expound this teaching, he declared,

“Open...the doors...to Ambrosia [immortality]!” (*The Book of Kindred Sayings*, vol. 1, p. 174).

So what does *immortality* mean? Of course, it doesn't mean that we go on living for ever and ever.

Let's take a look at a number of passages from the sutras that relate to eternal youth and immortality. One passage reads: “Even splendid royal coaches are subject to decline. / Similarly, the body grows old. / But those who lead noble lives enjoy the virtue of unaging.” Another says: “Even though they had everything in life, / Many hundred thousand men and women from all walks of life / Must go beneath the power of death. / Collections in the end disperse, / Whatever rises must also fall.... The final end of life is death” (*The Tibetan Dhammapada Sayings of the Buddha*, pp. 39–40).

Those who are attached to such ephemeral things as a flashy lifestyle, wealth, status or position will see their lives diminish along with the disappearance of such attachments. The life of those who pursue the lasting, on the other hand, pulses with the vitality of eternal youth and immortality. It comes down to what we aspire toward and what we seek. In order to leave behind a history that endures, we need to live in pursuit of something meaningful and everlasting.

My friends, let's live eternally! Let's live out our lives dedicated to the spread of Buddhism, the eternal hope of humankind. Those who live in accord with the great Law of Buddhism can create a brilliant history of genuine fulfillment in lifetime after lifetime.

Another passage from the sutras reads: “Completely crush all demon ranks. / O monks! Do this and transcend life and death” (*Tibetan Dhammapada*, p. 42). The Buddha is called the Victorious One (Skt Jina). Buddhism is about winning. The life force of eternal youth and immortality burns within the strong spirit to defeat the devilish functions that seek to destroy one. It is struggle itself that frees us from the fear of death.

Another text says: “Caution (*apramada, bag yod*) is the ground of immortality / Carelessness the ground of death. / With caution death does not occur, / With carelessness there is always death” (*Tibetan Dhammapada*, p. 49). Age creeps up on those who give in to their weaknesses, to the desire to idle away time. Shakyamuni declares that such an existence is equivalent to death. Elsewhere he says, “A person who has learned little ages like an ox; his flesh increases, but not his insight” (*The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, p. 52).

I am putting all my energy into my writings and other activities each day. The reading I did during my youth is indispensable. Above all, the guidance and training that I received from President Toda has been a great source of sustenance.

At the same time, I continue to read as much poetry and other works as I can. Like anyone, I wish to absorb even a little of the wisdom the world has to offer. I want to live out my life filled with boundless hope, together with all the SGI members. It is with this feeling in my heart that I have been carrying out dialogues with the world's leading intellectuals.

Each day is a fresh departure into a hope-filled future.

Let the sun rise!

Today, again, I will give my life to the worldwide spread of Buddhism!

Nine in a series