

**A RECORD OF MY LIFE
BY DAISAKU IKEDA
THOSE WHO HAVE SUFFERED DESERVE HAPPINESS**

‘Those who have suffered the most deserve to become the happiest,’ SGI President Ikeda writes of the Okinawan people. ‘I firmly believe it is the duty of a Buddhist leader to spare no effort in making this a reality.’

Since turning 60 in 1988, I have exerted myself with ever-increasing resolve to forge a great path of Buddhism throughout the world, taking not a moment’s rest.

In January 1988, I embarked on a 20-day trip to Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. When I returned to Japan in February, I made a stop in Okinawa. That was my first visit there in five years.

Okinawa, known traditionally as Ryukyu, was the only part of Japan to experience ground combat during the Pacific War. Its mountains and rivers were reshaped by the incessant shelling and artillery fire dubbed by the locals the “storm of steel.” One can never forget the cruel history of domination endured by the people of Okinawa.

Those who have suffered the most deserve to become the happiest—I firmly believe it is the duty of a Buddhist leader to spare no effort in making this a reality. Though I carry this thought at the forefront of my mind whenever I visit Okinawa, I inevitably find that the islands emanate a sun-like brilliance that dispels misery and sorrow. Brilliance is everywhere—in the people and the natural surroundings—and it purifies the heart.

Okinawa is a land of cultural generosity and tolerance. It possesses a motherly warmth that embraces all.

During the 15th century, a system was established whereby the ruler of the Ryukyu Kingdom would secure the kingdom’s independence by sending tribute missions to the court of the Chinese emperor, receiving in return Chinese investiture missions that would legitimize each royal successor. An expression often used at the time for these delegations was “Welcoming our benefactor.” This phrase, which says, “We welcome you with deep respect and appreciation,” seems to really capture the spirit of Okinawa.

The people of the Ryukyus entertained the Chinese delegates not with a display of their military might but with the power of culture—of music, song and dance. These guests from China were received in the Northern Pavilion of Shuri Castle, which is located to the left as you face the castle’s main building. The entire structure has been beautifully restored. [Shuri Castle is on the outskirts of Naha, the capital of Okinawa Prefecture.]

The alcoves in the homes of kingdom officials were adorned, not with swords as was usual in Japan at that time, but with *sanshin*, a stringed musical instrument unique to Okinawa. The Ryukyu Kingdom was indeed a land of culture.

The phrase “Welcoming our benefactor” later came to be used widely among the Okinawans to convey the spirit with which one greets visitors. It is this kind of rich tradition that has nourished Okinawan culture and has lived on as an integral part of the Okinawan way.

It is truly a society of people who treat others with utmost respect. This must be the origin of the indescribable warmth felt by visitors to the islands and the reason why Okinawans are undisputedly recognized as being good-natured and kind.

A common saying in Okinawa is “*Chimugurusan*,” which literally means the heart is

pained. Far from being a statement of condescension or pity, it reflects a spirit of sympathy to share the suffering of another person. Okinawan society abounds with such compassion.

There is also the expression “*Moashibi*.” Broken down into elements, *mo* indicates grassy plain. (Incidentally, the *mo* of Manzamo — a place near the SGI Training Center in Okinawa — is made up of the same Chinese character used in *moashibi*. *Manzamo* means literally grassy plain where 10,000 people sit.) *Ashibi*, on the other hand, indicates recreation or play. A grassy plain has no boundaries or fences. Everyone is welcome. And they are free to sing and dance to their heart’s content.

Play, here, does not imply the momentary pursuit of self-indulgence, which tends to occur at the expense of all else. Rather, it points to the inherent desire of the Okinawans to bring joy to others. They are aware that one enjoys oneself to the extent that one does so — a spirit that resonates with the Lotus Sutra’s assertion that “living beings enjoy themselves at ease” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 230). And Nichiren Daishonin says: “Joy means delight shared by oneself and others.... When both oneself and others have wisdom and compassion, this is called joy” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 761).

The heart of Okinawa is open wide to the outside world.

Traditionally, the Okinawans referred to their land as *Uchina* (inner or home) and themselves as *Uchinanchu*, whereas they called the rest of Japan *Yamato* and its people *Yamatonchu*. They distinguished themselves in this way not to discriminate against others but to inspire themselves to work for the happiness of as many others as possible.

Okinawa does not uphold the narrow-minded ethnocentrism that first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was indicating when he denounced Japan for its intolerance of the unfamiliar. It does not possess the mentality of an island country; it is a land whose spirit is as vast as the ocean that surrounds it and whose heart is open wide to the outside world.

The ability of the Okinawans to adapt to the foreign circumstances they encountered in the places to which they emigrated, their tenacity when faced with hardship and their willingness to help one another — all of these qualities seem to derive from the fiber of Okinawan society itself.

While enjoying the various cultures they met in their new homes across the globe, these Okinawans — these *Uchinanchu* of the world — also succeeded in maintaining the virtues of their own culture. Knowing that great value derives from cultural diversity, they highly treasured their heritage.

Wherever they went, the Okinawans carried on the traditional songs and dances of their ancestors, including the *kachashi*. Like the samba of Brazil, the *kachashi* is music and dance that instantly brings people together. It is performed on any occasion, creating circles of joy that transcend nationality and ethnicity.

In South America and the other regions around the world to which they emigrated, the Okinawans took care not only of each other in difficult times but also reached out to the locals. Singing the songs of their homeland while plucking away at the *sanshin*, they would give themselves wholeheartedly to encouraging anyone who was suffering.

Hand in hand, foreigner and local stood up and sang together. Even if they couldn’t communicate with words, the sincerity of these *Uchinanchu* spoke volumes. Rather than attempting to force their culture on others, they strove to use their culture to contribute to humankind.

Okinawans do not discard their cultural traditions but use them to help others. The

desire to achieve happiness for themselves and others is a unique characteristic of the *Uchinanchu*. And it is what, I believe, has enabled them to adapt to life in their new environs without forgetting their roots.

One-fourth of the citizens of Okinawa Prefecture lost their lives during the World War II. People housed in shelters after the war collected shards of Okinawan pottery salvaged from the rubble and charred scraps of *bingata*-dyed fabric and displayed them in dilapidated sheds inside the barracks. Day after day, throngs of people came to view the items, searching desperately for some sense of cultural identity that would enable them to go on living. At the same time, they sought to rekindle their spirit to contribute to the world.

When I think of Okinawan cuisine, what comes to mind is the famous dish *chanpuru*, a stir-fry that mixes various local ingredients with a noodle, tofu or goya (bitter melon) base. By combining many distinct local flavors into one fine dish, it has the taste of good home cooking.

Okinawan culture, just like the island's traditional cuisine, contains the influence of many other cultures, including those of mainland Japan, China, Korea, North and Latin America, and Europe. Each of these harmonizes perfectly with the local ethos. The spirit conveyed here, the spirit of *chanpuru*, derives from the Okinawans' desire to welcome others with open arms and to share their joys and sorrows. Their zest for life shines like a brilliant early summer sun.

Faith is the realm of the heart.

I have a treasured photo that has grown yellow with age. It is a scene captured during my second visit to Peru, in March 1974. Amid our busy itinerary encouraging members, my wife and I attended a joint marriage ceremony for two couples at the community center in Peru.

One of the couples was a former young men's group leader from Okinawa, who had come to Peru a year earlier and was working for a foods company, and the Peru young women's leader. The other couple was the head of the community center office and a young women's vice headquarters leader. They were all first-, second- or third-generation immigrants from Okinawa. During my stay in Lima, the Peruvian capital, the four of them worked tirelessly to make sure all the events went smoothly.

I have many unforgettable memories from that visit a quarter-century ago.

One day, under a scorching sun with temperatures in the upper 80s, we took a commemorative photo with 2,000 members. I gave each of them something to drink and encouraged them with all my heart. The heat caused me to perspire, and probably the cold beverage was too much for me. That, combined with the exhaustion of keeping up the strenuous pace of activities, took its toll, and during the latter part of our stay, I became feverish and fell ill. With a look of concern, Victor Kensei Kishimoto, the general director of Peru, who also hailed proudly from Okinawa, strongly urged me to change my schedule so that I could recover.

Declining his entreaties, I went on to visit the University of San Marcos, the oldest university in South America, where I had a discussion on education with university president Juan de Dios Guevara Romero and others. Afterward, when he and his wife learned of my condition, they went to the trouble of calling on me at my lodgings. I understand that Dr. Guevara is still hale and hearty at more than 90 years of age. The memory of his sincerity has stayed with me to this day.

There was also a young girl, who had just become a member, who came to visit me with her mother. She told me that although she didn't have much, she wanted to present me with an Inca doll, which she clutched in her lovely little hands. It was a small, simple doll made of lead.

I immediately presented her with a book of mine that I dedicated with the words "I pray you will become a queen of happiness."

Faith is the realm of the heart. Sincerity must be replied to with sincerity.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda often said: "Leaders must dedicate themselves to serving the members. Despite their poverty and the fact that they are ridiculed and laughed at, these sincere members use what little money they have on transportation and go out to spread Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. Leaders must treasure such people, "showing [them] the same respect [they] would a Buddha" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 324). If the Soka Gakkai has caring leaders who are thoroughly devoted to the members, it will grow boundlessly, and kosen-rufu will advance."

Returning to the photograph I mentioned earlier, while I was in Peru I received a message from the two couples explaining that they had planned to hold their weddings after my visit, but that it would make them ever so happy if I could attend the ceremony while I was there. It was an earnest plea. My wife and I gladly participated in the event, which was held in conjunction with the opening of the community center. We wanted to celebrate the union of these young people who would shoulder the future of Peru.

After a commemorative recitation of gongyo to mark the opening of the center, I offered prayers for the good fortune of both couples as they began their new lives. General Director Kishimoto and his wife served as the go-betweens for both couples. I was responsible for the ceremonial exchange of cups of sake that is a wedding tradition in Japan. The wedding cake was shaped like swan, which is supposed to bring happiness. My wife and I wholeheartedly prayed for the growth of these youth.

Impressive strides had been made in the movement to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism in Peru. In fact, during my trip, a culture festival was held as an official event of the city of Lima, with the mayor in attendance. I was also presented with a key to the city of Lima as a special honorary citizen in a ceremony held at City Hall. I had done my utmost to stick to my original schedule—for the future of Peru, in hopes of paving the way for the members there carry out their activities freely.

The culture festival was held amid all this. As long as I live, I will never forget the wonderful show the members put on that day, particularly the moving performance of the famous Andean song "Flight of the Condor."

While we were there, my wife noticed that General Director Kishimoto was always wearing the same suit. The noble spirit of Mr. Kishimoto and his wife to get by on the bare minimum, so that they could give everything to the advancement of kosen-rufu, was painfully clear. I therefore took the opportunity of a casual stroll with Mr. Kishimoto and some others through the upscale shopping district Miraflores to make him the present of a suit.

The spirit to spread Buddhism is our greatest pride.

Twenty-five years after that visit, in April 1999, a delegation from Peru's prestigious Federico Villarreal National University came to Japan to confer an honorary doctorate upon me. Accompanying the group was SGI of Peru General Director Carlos Shima and Senior Vice General Director Alberto Sueyoshi.

Mr. Sueyoshi was one of the new grooms at the wedding I had attended all those years ago. He was the youth from Okinawa who had only come to Peru the year prior to my visit. His bride, Angelica Sueyoshi, who at the time was Peru's YWD leader, is now the SGI of Peru women's leader. As for the other couple, Van Kanashiro, who had been the head of the community center office, is today a vice general director. His wife, Kikuko Kanashiro, is a women's vice chapter leader.

All I did was participate in their weddings, but the four youth then took the opportunity to make fresh determinations to exert themselves even harder toward achieving their personal development and that of the organization. As a result, they are all now central figures in Peru working closely with General Director Shima.

Also, the young girl whom I encouraged to become a queen of happiness became a schoolteacher and is now happily married. Her husband is also a teacher; they are both active in the world of education. And I understand that they are both chapter leaders. Nothing makes me happier than to hear of such wonderful developments among the membership.

Mr. Sueyoshi has been working at the Japanese Embassy in Peru for 21 years, since 1978. When a group of armed terrorists occupied the Japanese ambassador's residence in 1996, he was held hostage for six days. I prayed for his safety, as did fellow members throughout Peru. After it was all over, Mr. Sueyoshi vowed to make even greater efforts for the prosperity of Peruvian society.

General Director Kishimoto died in 1981. I will never forget that on his deathbed, he said with a look of great satisfaction, "Besides my blood and bones, I have been sustained solely by my desire for the happiness of the people of Peru."

Mr. Kishimoto's determination vividly conveys the profound spirit and inner strength of the Okinawan people to resolutely advance along the path one has chosen to the very end. The noble spirit to dedicate our lives to working for others and advancing the spread of Buddhism is our greatest pride.

Ten in a series