

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JULY 18 SPEECH—PART 2 BUDDHISM IS DIALOGUE

'The eternal, unchanging spirit of Buddhism is dialogue,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'Handing directives down from above is not dialogue. Rather, dialogue arises when we open our hearts to one another, walk together on life's path and work together.'

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 48th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, July 18.

Saion was a great Okinawan philosopher-statesman who, in the 18th century, built the foundation for the golden age of the Ryukyu Kingdom, present-day Okinawa. He is one of the most respected figures in Okinawan history, and I have talked about him before in one of my speeches.

A person of remarkable insight into human thought and behavior, Saion told a story about an encounter between a boy and an old man, a story of advice and encouragement.

The young Okinawan lad in Saion's story proudly told the old man: "I have a sword that has been handed down in my family for generations. I polish it every day, never missing a single one!" The old man then asked, "Do you have any treasure other than the sword?" The young man replied, "No, I don't."

The old man continued quietly: "That sword is just a small treasure. You have the most wonderful treasure of all: you yourself."

The old man's inference was "Why don't you polish the treasure that is your life?" The boy was deeply moved by the old man's words and grateful for this important lesson.

This story resonates with the Buddhist teachings. We must always come back to our original point of departure, to us and to life itself. To live with dignity and reveal the full shining potential of our humanity—nothing surpasses this. Only by so doing can we find true happiness, peace and coexistence with the natural world. This should also be the true purpose of all scientific and technological advances.

As we stand on the threshold of the 21st century, the human race must reconfirm this fundamental truth. It is time we return to the starting point of the human being.

In this regard, Okinawa shines with the philosophy that life itself is a treasure. Respect for life is also the foundation of humanistic education.

Because life is precious, taking human life and committing war are absolutely wrong. This is a simple but fundamental principle, one that we must pass on rigorously to the next generation, the generation that will shape the 21st century.

Aside from that sacred principle, I think our best course is to educate and encourage our young people with warmth and broad-mindedness, so that they have sufficient freedom and room to grow and develop their potential.

The information revolution has led to a dire shortage of real dialogue.

One of the major topics of discussion for the Okinawa Summit is the information technology revolution. I have discussed this subject in the past with the world-renowned economist Dr. Lester C. Thurow and more recently with a group of Japanese business leaders here in Tokyo. The dynamic information revolution, perhaps best symbolized by the Internet, has opened the way for large numbers of people to have access to information that had previously been available only to a select few. What will be increasingly needed

henceforth is the wisdom to use that information and knowledge to promote peace and the happiness of all humankind.

I also took up the subject of the information revolution in one of my discussions with the noted Iranian-born peace scholar Dr. Majid Tehranian. Dr. Tehranian, who is also an authority on international communications, points out that the new world we are living in has, in spite of its greatly increased channels of communication, a dire shortage of real dialogue. The world is connected, but no real dialogue is taking place, he says. I could not agree more.

Although technical advances have rapidly narrowed physical distances, our hearts remain far apart. Alienation continues to be a persistent, acute problem. That is why our increasingly information-oriented society will need leaders who are committed to humanism and will pursue life-to-life dialogue, demonstrating character and integrity. Dr. Tehranian and I were in complete agreement on this score.

Dr. Tehranian goes on to cite the SGI's promotion of discussion meetings and dialogue as an ideal model for such inspirational life-to-life communication. Says the peace scholar: "I highly value the role of such voluntary associations as the SGI, who promote small group meetings and discussions among the membership and their associates. At the level of modern states and corporations, abstraction, impersonality, greed and aggression tend to predominate."

As the information technology revolution continues to advance, it is only natural that one-on-one dialogue, where genuine life-to-life communication takes place, will be increasingly crucial for healthy individual and social development.

Intellectual leaders around the globe are beginning to take note that the SGI is leading the way in creating that kind of world and in contributing to the development of a new global civilization.

Shakyamuni Buddha spent his life walking all over the land that today is India, engaging in one-on-one dialogue with all kinds of people. Nichiren Daishonin's treatise "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" is also written in the form of a dialogue.

The eternal, unchanging spirit of Buddhism is dialogue. Handing directives down from above is not dialogue. Rather, dialogue arises when we open our hearts to one another, walk together on life's path and work together.

During the war, as the militarist authorities closed their dark net around him, first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi continued his propagation activities and his dialogues to convey the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism to the very end. He was arrested in Shimoda on the Izu Peninsula having made the long journey there from Tokyo in order to meet and talk on an individual basis with people there.

"One's voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708). How important it is that we talk with others, that we engage in dialogue! Armed with patience and wearing the "robe of gentleness and forbearance" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 971), let us make a point of always speaking to others with bright, vibrant voices. Let us hold warm dialogues, happy dialogues. Let us hold dialogues that inspire and encourage. Let us hold dialogues brimming with philosophy. Such dialogues are what pave the way to a truly humane world. And let us work hard to link those dialogues to the ongoing victory of our movement.

Truth is found in the practice, not in the theory.

Last autumn, the SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century published

a collection of papers under the title *Buddhist Peacework: Creating Cultures of Peace*, which has attracted considerable attention across the United States. I contributed a paper, “The SGI’s Peace Movement,” to the collection. The book is now being used in classrooms at the University of Hawaii and three other American universities, and it has been well received by university students.

In the United States, people are pretty straightforward in their judgments: They are not afraid to come out and say what they think is right and wrong or good and bad. In Japan, on the other hand, people tend to be envious of any real achievement, a common manifestation of their narrow-minded island mentality.

BRC President Masao Yokota interviewed Dr. Donna Giancola, associate professor of philosophy and director of the Religious Studies Program at Suffolk University in Boston, who is using *Buddhist Peacework* in one of her courses. Dr. Giancola says that many world religions today have no real practice. She feels that practice is a crucial component of religious faith, adding that the truth is found in the practice, not in the theory. This is why she views the SGI’s activities with great interest.

She also has something to say about the SGI’s discussion meetings. By participating in such meetings, she says, individuals learn they are not the only ones who are suffering, and that other people have overcome their suffering. Discussion meetings not only provide an opportunity for people to come together but offer a source of inspiration and mutual trust, because everyone chants and practices the Daishonin’s Buddhism and is working toward being a better human being, she says.

She describes the SGI members she has met as “honest, authentic people,” saying that such people are a rarity in today’s world. She adds that while many other religions try to build a sense of community among their members like that which the SGI enjoys, so many of them do not succeed. She says she found it amazing the way the SGI’s practice of the Daishonin’s Buddhism has taken off, especially in this past century, noting that it has flourished and spread all over the world.

Revitalization and genuine hope are found in the practice of the SGI. The thoughts I have just introduced are an example of the praise that people around the globe are showering on our movement. I am certain, too, that later generations will say that the SGI movement is a great religious revolution that inspires all humanity and revitalizes people all over the world.

Prayer can fundamentally transform your life.

Let me share words of wisdom from some of the great thinkers of the world that might serve to spur our advance. Thomas Paine, whose work greatly influenced the American Revolution, writes in his famous treatise *Common Sense*, “It is not in numbers but in unity, that our great strength lies.”

Unity is strength. In the realm of faith, people who cannot join hands and cooperate with others undermine the harmonious unity of the community of believers. This is the most serious of offenses. Consequently, those who cause such disharmony will experience no benefit.

The German poet and dramatist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe writes in *Faust*, “With little men go little acts, / Among the great a small one grows.” We must take on big challenges. That is why I hope you will not seek to accumulate petty, minor benefit but great benefit. I hope you will not restrict your focus to this little island-country of Japan, but allow your gaze to encompass the great wide world.

Mahatma Gandhi says, “Those who will not do it, although they appreciate the truth, will deserve to be called cowards.” We must act on what we know to be right and true. We know the importance of discussion meetings, gongyo and the struggle for kosen-rufu. If we fail to carry them out, we are cowards. Gandhi also says that there is no greater crime than cowardice.

Let me introduce another remark by Thomas Paine. “My country is the world, and my religion is to do good.” Today, the world is our arena—the world is the stage upon which kosen-rufu is unfolding.

Abraham Lincoln says: “Let none falter, who thinks he is right, and we may succeed.” “I am a slow walker, but I never walk back.” We must stick to our ideals to the end. Let us say, for example, that you have a friend who just does not seem willing to accept Buddhism. He attended a discussion meeting with you, but he does not want to practice. That is fine. What matters is that you keep moving forward in your practice, letting nothing set you back.

Then, I always keep a copy of Ralph Waldo Emerson’s collected works close to my desk. Mr. Makiguchi and second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda were both fond of the American writer. Emerson writes in “Spiritual Laws,” “Never was a sincere word utterly lost.” Sincere words, words filled with conviction—they are the key to victory. We do not need to exaggerate, plot or scheme.

Finally, let me share more words by Lincoln: “We proposed to give *all* a chance; and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together.” “For all to become happy together!”—let us advance with this spirit.

And let us meet again next month, in victory. I pray for your health and long life and for your success in all endeavors. I am sending you daimoku.

I hope you will all pray, too. Pray that instead of devils or negative, destructive forces infiltrating your being, Brahma (Jpn Bonten), Shakra (Jpn Taishaku) and the gods of the Sun and the Moon—the positive, protective forces of the universe—will enter your life! Pray that they will enter the lives of all members in your region and the entire membership of the SGI, as well. If you do this, your strength will multiply a hundredfold, a thousandfold. With such prayer, with such faith, you will realize a fundamental transformation in the very depths of your life. This is the secret to achieving your human revolution.

In one of his commentaries, 26th high priest Nichikan writes that the Daishonin’s life manifests itself in our lives. [In his “Commentary on ‘The Entity of the Mystic Law,’” Nichikan states, “Through the power of the Mystic Law, we manifest the life of the Daishonin within ourselves.”]

This is the ultimate truth of faith in the Mystic Law. Nichikan says that the life of the Daishonin manifests itself in the life of each of us. That is why we will never be defeated. Let us move forward with this invincible conviction.

Thank you for being here today.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS THE SECRET TO HUMAN REVOLUTION

From This Speech:

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- 1) What do you think SGI President Ikeda means by saying we should pray for protective forces to enter our lives? Where do these protective forces come from?
- 2) Why do you think he asks us to pray that they will enter our friends' lives?
- 3) If we do this, our strength can multiply a thousand times, he says. In what ways do you want to become a stronger person?
- 4) Have you ever experienced your prayer fundamentally transforming your life? How did that happen?