

EDITORIAL
THE RIGHT TIME
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Looking toward the second seven bells—the SGI’s new history in the 21st century—Jeff Farr asks, ‘Aren’t we fortunate to be practicing Buddhism in the SGI right now, to be alive when the time is so right?’

*That bell
is not an evening bell,
but the bell of dawn.*

— SGI President Ikeda, “Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!”

It is a big relief in chapter 11 of *The Untold History of the Fuji School* when the Soka Gakkai finally appears. After centuries of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism being cooped up with a small group of priests at the head temple, the common people, represented by Tsu-nesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, ride in to save the day. They rescue this philosophy and deliver it to the world.

Showing up seven centuries after the Daishonin’s time, the Soka Gakkai has always had a mystic rhythm to its history. In this vein, second Soka Gakkai president Toda used to say, “The Gakkai should advance a major step every seven years.” He used the analogy of ringing a bell: “Let’s sound a bell every seven years to mark our progress toward kosen-rufu. Let’s aim to strike seven bells!” (February 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 42).

Looking toward the future, SGI President Ikeda expanded on this idea in a speech a month after Toda’s death. At the May 3, 1958, general meeting, he shared how our organization’s history could be divided into “seven bells”—seven seven-year periods from 1930–79. From today’s vantage point, it is clear how the Soka Gakkai did “sound a bell every seven years,” as Toda envisioned:

- **1930–37:** Makiguchi and Toda began the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creation Education Society) on Nov. 18, 1930, by publishing the first volume of *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*. The initial period of our movement, the early years of Makiguchi and Toda’s Buddhist practice, closed in 1937 with the official inauguration of the organization and the launch of steady propagation efforts.

- **1937–44:** The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai grew to a membership of 3,000, mostly educators. In 1943, first president Makiguchi stood up to the priesthood to protect this Buddhism’s integrity, while the Nichiren Shoshu priests complied with the military government in accepting State Shinto. Makiguchi was thus arrested and met his death in prison on Nov. 18, 1944—exactly 14 years after the organization was founded.

- **1944–51:** During these postwar years, Toda followed in Makiguchi’s steps to rebuild the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, which had fallen apart, as the Soka Gakkai (Value-Creation Society). On May 3, 1951, seven years after Makiguchi’s death, with the organization back to its prewar size, Toda accepted the presidency.

- **1951–58:** At his inauguration, Toda determined to increase the membership to

750,000. This is the point where kosen-rufu started to spread at a rapid pace. Toda accomplished his goal at the end of 1957, shortly before his death. The Soka Gakkai's future course was set with his 1957 call to youth to abolish nuclear weapons and the March 16, 1958, ceremony at which he turned his responsibilities over to young Daisaku Ikeda and the youth division.

- **1958–65:** President Ikeda took leadership as third president in 1960, the same year he started his travels for kosen-rufu outside Japan, with the United States as his first destination. The Soka Gakkai surpassed a membership of 3 million, President Ikeda's target for the seventh memorial (sixth anniversary) of Toda's death.

- **1965–72:** The Soka Gakkai focused on the completion of the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo) at the Nichiren Shoshu head temple to support the burgeoning worldwide movement. While he led the Soka Gakkai to a membership of 7.5 million, 10 times Toda's 1951 determination, President Ikeda saw to the completion of the Soka University campus in Japan to actualize the ideals set forth in *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*.

- **1972–79:** The international movement started to come together, leading to the formation of the SGI on Guam in 1975, with representatives from 51 nations in attendance. Various anti-Soka Gakkai parties incited a conflict between the priesthood and the organization in the late 1970s, ending in President Ikeda, resolved to do whatever it took to protect the membership, stepping down as Soka Gakkai president.

This 49-year history takes the Soka Gakkai from its birth, through its transformation into an international movement, to a crucial moment that tested its spiritual identity. The appearance of strong anti-Soka Gakkai forces signified that the SGI was in accord with the Lotus Sutra's teaching that enemies of the Buddha *must* appear if the Bodhisattvas of the Earth are correctly spreading the teachings. This was the opportunity, then, for the SGI to prove it was a gathering of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Thanks to President Ikeda's resilient leadership at the time—reminding us that the organization's core mission was to save and serve the common people—the SGI stayed the course, survived the dispute and started moving straight toward the 21st century with a solidified sense of purpose.

On May 3, 1966, President Ikeda had first shared his vision of a second set of seven bells—a new history for the Soka Gakkai beginning in 2001. On Nov. 18, 1978, when the “first temple issue” was coming to a head, President Ikeda announced a series of four five-year plans to cover 1980–2000, the years between the first and second seven bells. Here is how the five-year periods have played out:

- **1980–85:** Coming out of the conflict, President Ikeda decided to strengthen the SGI by developing more capable leaders, particularly youth leaders. A new generation, many who grew up in the organization, began propelling the spread of this Buddhism. Inspired by the 1975 formation of the SGI, organizations in many countries became much stronger and larger.

- **1985–90:** Toward the 700th anniversary of the head temple in 1990, the SGI donated more than 100 temples to the priesthood, hoping that, despite the difficulties in the late '70s, Nichiren Shoshu would continue supporting the kosen-rufu movement. At the same time, the SGI became increasingly involved in peace activities, including efforts for nuclear disarmament and refugee relief, often in concert with the United Nations. President Ikeda opened the first Soka University of America campus in Calabasas, Calif., in 1987, which became an international graduate school for Teaching of English to

Speakers of Other Languages.

- **1990–95:** The intent for these five years was to get everything squared away for the SGI’s activities in the new century. Fortunately, Nichiren Shoshu’s attacks on the SGI, which peaked with the excommunication of all SGI members in 1991, freed us from the priests’ authoritarian attempts to control our activities.

- **1995–2000:** While the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood destroyed the Grand Main Temple, the SGI spread its movement to 163 countries. Throughout the world, the new generation raised by the pioneers became the central figures of the movement, in turn working to raise the next generation, which will take the lead in the second seven bells. Interfaith activities became a crucial part of the SGI’s ongoing peace activities. The construction of the Soka University of America campus in Orange County, Calif., to be an international liberal arts college, was undertaken.

Which brings us to today. Here we are, standing on a mountain of SGI history — and a mountain of prayer. Behind the scenes, every step of the way, has been the rhythm of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; the members’ sincere prayers to progress kosen-rufu are what have made the Soka Gakkai’s history so impressive.

President Ikeda has explained that the five-year periods and the first seven bells represent Nam-myoho-renge-kyo — the five or seven Chinese characters that make it up (the five being *myo*, *ho*, *ren*, *ge* and *kyo*, and the seven being these plus *nam*, made up of two characters). (Likewise, High Priest Nichijun, regarding Toda’s goal of 750,000, once said, “I believe President Toda called forth these people in the number of 750,000, representing the five or seven characters of Myoho-renge-kyo.”)

The first seven bells and the five-year periods also express the oneness of mentor and disciple, which is based on Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. As President Ikeda told Kansai Senior High School students during a February Q-and-A session: “My mentor and I are linked together by the rhythm of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. And that is why I must realize his dreams and ideals, why I must keep exerting myself” (April 7 *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Our prayers for kosen-rufu, too, can link us with the SGI’s history and the spirit of the three presidents. And our prayers can create the SGI’s future. The second seven bells are, after all, up to us. Aren’t we fortunate to be practicing Buddhism in the SGI right now, to be alive when the time is so right? “From a mundane view, I am the poorest person in Japan,” the Daishonin writes, “but in light of Buddhism, I am the wealthiest person in all Jambudvipa [the entire world]. When I consider that this is all because the time is right, I am overwhelmed with joy and cannot restrain my tears” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 977).

Who are the luckiest people in the world today? We are. The second seven bells are about to ring — history is about to be made — and we are here not only as witnesses to the dawn of a new era but as the creators of it.