

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S AUG. 11 SPEECH RISE UP WITH ABSOLUTE DETERMINATION

'The members in the Soka Gakkai's pioneering days rose up with a spirit of absolute determination to triumph and to carry out kosen-rufu in their communities,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'If you have that determination, capable people will appear and join you in realizing that goal.'

SGI President Ikeda's speech at a conference attended by visiting representatives of SGI-Italy, held at the Nagano Training Center in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, Japan, Aug. 11.

My dear friends from Italy! Welcome! Thank you all for coming such a long way and in such hot weather! To commemorate your visit, I dedicate this poem to you:

*How dazzling
The smiles
Of our Italian comrades!*

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of the kosen-rufu movement in Italy. SGI-Italy, a model for all of Europe, has shown tremendous growth and development. This is truly the dawn of Europe.

Congratulations on your plans to build a magnificent new culture center in Milan. The center, I understand, will be equipped with a library, audiovisual facilities and a multipurpose hall that will be open for use by the general public. I hope to visit the new center someday.

SGI-Italy is making powerful progress. One of its goals, as we approach the 21st century, is to increase the attendance of its discussion meetings nationwide to 30,000 people. This is a wonderful undertaking.

Also, later this year, some 18,000 men's and women's division members will participate in joint divisional commemorative general meetings around Italy. In addition, there are plans next year for 16,000 Italian youth division members to gather together on March 16 to celebrate Kosen-rufu Day.

A number of publications to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Italian kosen-rufu are also slated. [Scheduled for publication, for example, are Italian translations of *The New Human Revolution*, *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, *A New Humanism*, and *A Glorious 70-Year History of the Soka Gakkai*.]

In addition, SGI-Italy has been organizing and sponsoring lectures and exhibitions on the themes of peace, education and human rights, in conjunction with national and local government bodies, UNESCO and other nongovernmental organizations.

I have also had the honor of receiving awards from many different regions of Italy. My wife and I often mention to each other that these honors are proud testimony to your dedicated efforts, and that they have actually been bestowed upon you.

As Nichiren Daishonin says, "All the various teachings of the Buddha are spread by persons" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 61). You are earnestly pioneering the

way for the spread of the Daishonin's teachings.

I have not the slightest doubt that your noble names will live on forever in the annals of the kosen-rufu movement in Europe and the entire world. Your achievements will shine with undying brilliance throughout the 10,000 years and more of the Latter Day of the Law. The benefit and honors you are accumulating are immeasurable.

We have each chosen to be born on Earth to fulfill our mission.

According to astronomers, the solar system is hurtling toward the constellation Hercules at a speed of 12 miles a second. The universe, as vast and infinite as it is, has a strict order. The law that governs the universe and all life is the Mystic Law.

There are billions of planets like Earth in the universe. Among all those planets, we have chosen to be born here. And it is here that we are now spreading the Mystic Law. "Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku" (WND, 385), says the Daishonin. As these words underscore, we each have a profound mission.

I hope you will all work together in unity and friendship. We must widely propagate the Mystic Law. If we do, we will create a world that "remains safe and tranquil" and "where living beings enjoy themselves at ease" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 230).

And when we have accomplished that, we will move on to some other land or planet in the universe and carry out kosen-rufu there. Such is the grand mission we possess.

Buddhism is dedicated to building an eternal realm of friendship.

The famous Roman philosopher Seneca says, "Nothing delights the mind so much as fond and loyal friendship." There is no greater joy than friendship, and there is nothing more beautiful. Buddhism is dedicated to building an eternal realm of friendship.

I hope that SGI-Italy, with its characteristic good cheer and warm camaraderie, will strive even harder to spread its exemplary network of friendship and trust in society.

The modern Japanese thinker Kanzo Uchimura had a high opinion of the cheerful spirit of the Italian people. He said that the Japanese, like the Italians, essentially have an optimistic outlook toward life. And he suggested that they should give full play to that optimism and contribute to making the world a better place.

I am reminded of an Italian thinker in the 19th century who was instrumental in paving the way to Italy's independence and unification. His name was Guiseppe Mazzini.

At the time, Italy was ruled by foreign powers. Tyranny reigned, and freedom of assembly and association was suppressed. The people also suffered at the hands of a corrupt, decadent and autocratic clergy.

It was against this backdrop that the young Mazzini rose up to champion the cause of independence for his homeland. Even when he was thrown into prison by the authorities, he fought on fearlessly.

Efforts to achieve independence by the existing leaders had failed. Their movement had stalled. What went wrong? Analyzing the situation with his sharp mind, the young Mazzini sought the reasons for that failure so that he could rectify them and ensure future success.

He reached several conclusions. One failing, he discerned, was that the leadership of the revolutionary movement had grown old and lost their passion for change. Another flaw was pinning all their hopes on support from foreign military powers and their weak determination to change history through their own efforts. But the most important failing of all, he concluded, was that the movement had become divorced from the ranks of ordinary Italian people.

In other words, the movement's leaders had become arrogant and lost touch with the people. Only when the people awoke and rose up would they gain independence for their nation. Mazzini decided to rouse the people with youth's passion and burning sense of justice.

In 1831, when he was 26, he established a patriotic movement named Young Italy for young men and women. He called out, "Place the young at the head of the insurgent masses; you do not know what strength is latent in those young bands, what magic influence the voice of the young has on the crowd." This is the formula for historic change, East and West, past and present.

The growth of our Italian youth division is also astonishing. And the achievements of graduates of the division are remarkable as well.

Leaders should set an example throughout their lives of tireless devotion.

Mazzini called on the youth to go out among the people and engage in dialogue. "Awaken a sense of mission in the hearts of your fellow youth!" was his cry.

He urged: "Climb to the top of the hill, and sit at the farmer's table, visit the craftsman's workplace. These are the ones you have ignored up to now. Talk to them of their proper liberty, of their ancient traditions and glory, and of their great commercial power of ages gone by, theirs no longer. Speak to them of the many forms of oppression brought to bear upon them that they have not recognized, that no one has yet enlightened them to."

Many young people responded to Mazzini's plea. They came forward courageously to work for the future of their country. The youth visited house after house, person after person, moving among the people and earnestly discussing their situation with them. They sent copies of their organization's journal, which carried their call for independence, from village to village, town to town, to every corner of the land. For us, this would correspond to promoting the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper, the *Seikyo Shimbun*, or the publications of each SGI organization.

Through the efforts of these youth, an alliance of pro-independence supporters was born in every class and profession, reaching tens of thousands in number. One Italian youth leader at the time declared: "When you feel like staying at home, you must go out! When you feel like remaining quiet, you must talk!"

In other words, if they were to succeed in their struggle, each of them had to take action, each had go out and talk to others about their cause. Buddhism also teaches that our actions demonstrate our faith, and that our voice does the Buddha's work.

If the authorities discovered the young people working for independence, they would of course be apprehended and imprisoned, exiled or sentenced to death. In fact, there were those who were harshly persecuted and even executed, laying down their lives for their cause.

But they regarded the hardships they encountered in striving to realize their lofty ideals as their greatest pride and joy. And their fighting spirit only burned brighter in the face of oppression.

For his activities, Mazzini was accused of crimes by the authorities on many occasions. He was treated as a criminal, tried in absentia and condemned to death. But he remained unperturbed, because he knew the way to inspire the people. And that was for leaders themselves to set an example throughout their lives of tireless devotion, sparing no effort for the sake of their fellow citizens and their ideals, never being defeated by adversity nor discouraged by others' indifference.

The actions of the youth who joined Mazzini in his struggle became a great source of education and inspiration for the common people, and they have been praised as having the most powerful influence on the eventual unification of Italy. Many of Italy's future leaders came from the ranks of these brave young people.

All our sufferings and earthly desires are fuel for our enlightenment.

In August 53 years ago, I became a disciple of Josei Toda. Soon after joining the Soka Gakkai, I read the Daishonin's writing "On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings." There is one passage, which says: "Once you become a disciple or lay supporter of the votary who practices the true Lotus Sutra in accord with the Buddha's teachings, you are bound to face the three types of enemies. Therefore, from the very day you listen to [and take faith in] this sutra, you should be fully prepared to face the great persecutions of the three types of enemies that are certain to be more horrible now after the Buddha's passing" (WND, 391).

The three powerful enemies are the three types of people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's passing, as described in the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. They are: 1) lay people ignorant of Buddhism who denounce the votaries of the Lotus Sutra and attack them with swords or staves; 2) arrogant and cunning priests who slander the votaries; and 3) priests respected by the general public who, fearing the loss of fame or profit, induce the secular authorities to persecute the sutra's votaries.

As a true disciple who made Mr. Toda's heart my own, I prayed fervently: "Please let me alone bear the brunt of any persecutions. Please allow me to protect my mentor, Mr. Toda, and all the Soka Gakkai members." My prayer was fused with a deep pledge to do that at all costs.

Over the last 53 years, I have prayed and striven always to fulfill that pledge. My greatest personal pride is that, while fighting fiercely against the three types of enemies predicted by the sutra and the Daishonin's writings, I have opened the way for kosen-rufu in 163 countries, without a single person losing his or her life at the hand of persecution by the authorities.

When the Daishonin was about to be executed at Tatsunokuchi, he exclaimed, "What greater joy could there be!" (WND, 767). And when he was exiled to Sado, he declared, "Because I view things this way, I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile" (WND, 386). In life and in the struggle to achieve kosen-rufu, all our sufferings and earthly desires are fuel for our enlightenment. The tougher the challenges we face, the greater will be the joy and benefit—the higher the life-condition—we will ultimately savor.

I hope that as leaders, therefore, you will resolve: "I will work hardest and challenge myself the most!" I hope that you will vow to yourselves, "I am going to have the best time!" and live your lives cheerfully and confidently.

People with this resolve are invincible, unbeatable. One person of passionate commitment is stronger than a force of untold numbers.

The outcome of a struggle is decided by the leaders' determination, by their sense of responsibility. The members in the Soka Gakkai's pioneering days rose up with a spirit of absolute determination to triumph and to carry out kosen-rufu in their communities. If you have that determination, capable people will appear and join you in realizing that goal.

Your resolve will also be communicated to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas throughout the universe, and they will respond to your dedication.

In other words, resolute prayer is the key. Just as the fields burst into flower when spring comes, all of your efforts, too, when the time comes, will blossom without fail.

Because our efforts entail difficulties, they come back to us as rock-solid benefit.

Mazzini says, “In laboring according to true principles for our Country we are laboring for Humanity.” Buddhism comprises the highest truth. All of you, as SGI members basing yourselves on that truth, are contributing in your respective countries and regions to the welfare of humanity as good citizens of your communities and conscientious citizens of the world.

Mazzini also urges, “To improve yourselves and others — this must be the first aim and the supreme hope of every reform, of every social change.” The great thinkers of our world all share a similar awareness of the need for inner transformation — of what we refer to as human revolution — and a movement to realize that goal. The Italian thinker Dr. Aurelio Peccei, cofounder of the think tank Club of Rome, also shared this view.

Mazzini further declares, “The watchword of the future faith is *association*, fraternal cooperation toward a common aim.” In the 20th century, unfortunately, a fascist alliance between Japan and Italy plunged the world deeper into the tragedy of war and brought terrible suffering to the people of many nations. But in the 21st century, it is my hope that Japan and Italy will form an alliance of humanism that brings happiness, peace and prosperity to all peoples.

The renowned 14th-century Italian poet Petrarch writes:

*My lords, take note of how time flies
on earth as well as how our life
is fleeing, and how Death is at our backs.
.....
[May that] all the time you spend
in giving others pain, to some more worthy act
of hand or intellect,
to some beautiful praise,
to worthy dedication be converted:
thus here on earth is joy,
and open is the pathway to the heavens.*

How should we use our time on earth? The most important question we face is that of life and death.

In our SGI activities, we study and put into practice the philosophy that teaches us the answer to this fundamental question, we dedicate our lives to a path that seeks peace for all humanity and we advance in harmony and friendship with our neighbors and friends all around the world.

All activities that are related to kosen-rufu, through the principle of a single life-moment containing 3,000 realms, can positively impact our lives, our societies and our countries, moving them in the direction of happiness.

Giving personal guidance to fellow members, introducing others to the Daishonin’s

Buddhism, promoting our publications—these kinds of activities may seem the most time-consuming and difficult. But precisely for that reason, the effort we put into them comes back to us in direct proportion in the form of great, rock-solid benefit.

At a crucial moment, the heavenly deities, the protective forces of the universe, will protect us. We will savor immeasurable joy in both life and death. We will lead unsurpassed lives—lives of infinite meaning and significance.

Let me close with some more words by Seneca: “He [the wise man] himself is always in action, and is greatest in performance at the very time when fortune has blocked his way.” I hope you will all become sages of life, making your way wisely, in good health, full of vitality and enthusiasm, achieving fresh growth and development that will astonish all.

Grazie! (Thank you!)

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS FACING PROBLEMS WITH JOY

From This Speech:

When Nichiren Daishonin was about to be executed at Tatsunokuchi, he exclaimed, “What greater joy could there be!” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 767). And when he was exiled to Sado, he declared, “Because I view things this way, I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile” (WND, 386). In life and in the struggle to achieve kosen-rufu, all our sufferings and earthly desires are fuel for our enlightenment. The tougher the challenges we face, the greater will be the joy and benefit—the higher the life-condition—we will ultimately savor.

- 1) Why did Nichiren Daishonin think that being executed would be a joy? How can we apply his spirit to our own struggles?
- 2) Was the Daishonin executed? What actually happened?
- 3) How do you think that your pains and desires contribute to your Buddhist practice? When you look back at serious problems that you have overcome, do you feel appreciation for them?
- 4) What struggles are you facing right now? Do you think that they help you practice Buddhism more strongly?
- 5) SGI President Ikeda talks about the high life-condition we can reach through tackling tough challenges. What is a high life-condition?