

## FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR THE FUTURE IS CREATED BY YOUTH

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*! In your hands, you have a very special issue of *Living Buddhism*. It is an issue for the youth, written entirely by young people. I would like to thank the editorial staff and the volunteer writers who worked so hard to see this to fruition.

As you know, March holds a special significance for us. We commemorate March 16, 1958, as the date second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, charged his young disciples with the responsibility of inheriting his vision for the future. Less than one month later, he died, and this date has become symbolic of the passing of the torch from one generation to another; of youth awakening to their responsibility to accomplish and finish what their mentor started.

“A new era will be created by the passion and energy of the youth.”

This is the opening line from Mr. Toda’s famous declaration, “Precepts for Youth.” His successor, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, included this quote in his New Year’s address for this year. This statement is an expression of the confidence he has in the dynamism and creativity of youth, and his conviction that the world of tomorrow will be made by the young people of today.

In one sense, the world of tomorrow will happen on its own; even if all of us do nothing, history will progress and society will continue to move. But if we want to see a more hopeful future, then we must take action to create the world we wish to see.

What is youth? What does President Toda mean when he talks about the “passion and energy of youth?” On one hand, this refers to chronological age. But more than that, youth, as described in Mr. Toda’s statement, refers to an outlook, a spirit and a passion.

In the final installment of the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda says: “To the end of his days, President Makiguchi would say: ‘We are all youth! Youth is not a matter of years according to the calendar. It’s about constant growth and advancement.’ There is no such thing as age in Buddhism. The beneficial power of the Lotus Sutra is ageless and undying.

“It is my hope that the youth who will shoulder the twenty-first century will engrave these words in their hearts. Idleness is the cause of decline. Construction takes tenacious and painstaking effort. Destruction takes but an instant” (*Living Buddhism*, October 2000, pp. 42–43). In other words, youth means to possess a spirit of advancement, a spirit of constant self-development and a spirit to create a new world.

How would you characterize youth today? Most of us know excellent young people who are talented and passionate about living meaningful lives. Yet, when I ask this question, the answer I hear is that young people today lack purpose. Of course, since many people of my generation were young college students during the sixties and early seventies — a time of great idealism among young people — perhaps this opinion is not an objective one. Nevertheless, many people do seem to share this concern.

Last year, President Ikeda held a dialogue with youth representatives from the SGI-USA, and in this discussion, he said: “When I met with Dr. Allen Sessoms, president of Queens College, University of the City of New York, on January 18, he commented that American youth used to have clear causes to fight for, ‘enemies’ to fight against. They had targets to focus on, such as the Vietnam War or bad government or racial discrimination. But today, he noted, the causes which youth should direct their energies toward are getting harder to identify. As a result, the youth lack positive outlets for expressing their passion. In reality, there are many causes — quite large ones in fact — that they should take up, such as environmental

degradation, overpopulation and poverty. But it is not easy for youth to recognize them as causes without good knowledge of them, Dr. Sessoms said” (*World Tribune*, February 25, 2000, p. 7).

Buddhism inspires hope. It inspires us to reform and improve ourselves and to contribute to the happiness of others. Inspiring youth to have great dreams, reminding them that they have the capacity to create any world they choose — this is the spirit of Buddhism.

The Mahayana Buddhism we practice is an engaged philosophy. Though some in American society may see a Buddhist way of life as emphasizing monastic discipline or as demanding separation from the mundane world, we recognize that Buddhist practice lies within struggling amidst the realities of life. We know that in the real world, overcoming problems is the arena where we attain enlightenment.

In his “Precepts for Youth,” Mr. Toda refers to the young students of the past who were revolutionary leaders of society. Indeed, when we examine history — the American revolution in the United States, the Meiji restoration in Japan, or the revolutions in Africa, Latin America and throughout the developing world, which ended European domination — many of these movements were spearheaded by idealistic young students. This is in contradiction to apathy and feeling powerless.

The famous American anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. They are the only thing which ever has.”

This is the conviction of youth. It is the conviction that we are not spectators of world history, but the actors and authors of our own futures.

“All sorts of injustice and evil still exist in the world. It is the mission of youth to fight against them. Strong are those who have resolved to create a better world than the one in which they now live. Such a sense of mission elevates your life” (*World Tribune*, February 25, 2000, p. 7).

During this month in which we celebrate the passion and energy of youth, let’s all refresh our spirit to live youthful lives dedicated to creating a better world. At the same time, let’s cherish and nurture all the young people in our lives because they will be living in and creating the twenty-first century.

Thank you very much!

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