

MARCH 16, 2001
THE SPIRIT OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE
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Would you stand up against the country of your birth if you had the foresight to see your country and all its peoples heading for ruin? Would you be able to find the requisite courage to speak out for the sanctity of human life when doing so in your present circumstances meant imprisonment or execution? What if the national policies you sought to challenge were being celebrated day in and day out in mass public rallies? What if speaking out meant endangering your friends, your family and your children? Would you be willing to take these personal risks, in order to avert a national disaster? First and second Soka Gakkai presidents Makiguchi and Toda faced these questions. And their decision is the legacy of the Soka Gakkai.

It is a simple matter of fact that none of us would ever have come into contact with this legacy if it weren't for SGI President Ikeda's worldwide propagation efforts. Not a tear of joy would have been shed, nor a single heart flush with the surge of hope.

March 16, 1958: On that day, as his life was drawing to an end, addressing an assembly of 6,000 Soka Gakkai youth, President Toda declared: "Never forget that you are heirs to this legacy. I want you to fight and advance bravely, as valiant young warriors, in the proud battle to spread the Law. Today, I want to bequeath this mission to you young people. I entrust the future to all of you. I'm counting on you — counting on you to accomplish kosen-rufu!" (August 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 42).

For 13 years, since his release from prison in 1945, President Toda had lovingly devoted himself to the poor and sick of Japan. In those chaotic post-war years, when values had been turned upside down, Toda had resurrected hope in the hearts of nearly a million citizens through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. But prison's bitter cruelty had robbed Toda of robust health. By March of 1958, Toda's emaciated body and labored steps revealed that his time was running out.

Early that month, President Toda proposed holding a youth gathering as a "dress rehearsal for kosen-rufu." "Shin'ichi, I'm thinking of March 16 as the occasion on which I will formally transfer the mission for achieving kosen-rufu to all of you" (March 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 49).

Word of the gathering reached every corner of the youth division with lightning speed. "They [the youth] would do whatever it took to make the time to go to Toda's side" (June 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 54).

In the pre-dawn hours of March 16, thousands of youth members arrived for the gathering. Unbeknownst to them, President Toda had made preparations so that hot pork soup would be provided for each participant. "The hot soup satisfied their hunger and warmed their bodies to the core. When they realized that the food had been provided out of President Toda's concern for them, many were moved to tears at their mentor's sincerity" (June 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 54).

Directed by young Daisaku Ikeda and deeply concerned about Toda's ailing health, youth members had prepared a litter for the president to ride in. President Ikeda describes the scene in *The Human Revolution*:

"Looking at Shin'ichi, Toda smiled and nodded. He then allowed his disciples to help him onto the seat they had affixed to the center of the litter. Carried by several young men's division members, who had been selected for the task, the litter quietly

moved down the path toward the Grand Lecture Hall. Shin'ichi walked closely alongside.

“A sense of love and pride filled his heart as he gazed at the youth who lined the walkway. Deeply moved by their robust growth, Toda addressed them in his heart, ‘Thank you for coming! I’m so happy to see you. How splendidly you have grown! You’ve really developed. This will probably be the last time I’ll be able to meet you like this. After I’m gone, it will all be up to you! I’m counting on you to realize kosen-rufu!’” (July 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 53).

“When the litter carrying Josei Toda arrived in the square in front of the Grand Lecture Hall, joyous cheers arose, like the sound of crashing waves, from among the youth waiting there. ‘It’s President Toda, it’s President Toda!’ Though Toda was gaunt and emaciated, the youth were beside themselves with joy to see his dauntless form after so long. Some of the young women strained to hold back a rising surge of emotion and keep from sobbing” (August 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 40).

That day, President Toda declared, “The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world. We are afraid of nothing. Never forget that you are heirs to this legacy” (August 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 42).

Forty-three years have passed since then. The year is 2001. President Ikeda is 73 years old. Soka Gakkai organizations exist in 163 countries. And a new generation of youth, personified by the newly appointed young men’s and young women’s leaders of SGI-USA, have taken the lead in the American kosen-rufu movement.

History will record how we respond to the call of our mentor, President Ikeda. The meaning of March 16 lies in the bond between mentor and disciple.

“I ask that each of you, the young leaders of the new century, please realize that now is the time to develop yourself. So please journey boldly along your chosen course of magnificent humanism, surmounting all billows and swells so that you may establish the immortal castle of happiness in your heart” (March 20, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 1).

“Your mission is to ensure that this precious organization endures for all time, to create a Soka Gakkai that nothing can ever destroy” (April 18, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 10).