

**YOUNG DISCIPLES
CHERISHING ONE INDIVIDUAL
BY PAUL LIM, TORRANCE, CALIF.**

For 16 days, I witnessed first hand how tirelessly President Ikeda worked for the sake of the members – exhaustively sharing and implementing his grand vision for America, yet never losing sight of a single individual.

Having grown up in the SGI, I was always aware of who SGI President Ikeda was, but only in the most superficial sense. My father often told me what a great leader he was and how he had inspired so many people. Our living room always had a picture of President Ikeda, and with much awkwardness, I would explain to my friends who came over why he was not a family member. The only connection I had with President Ikeda was through my father. In February 1990, that all changed.

President Ikeda arrived in Los Angeles for what would become a historic 16-day visit. I had the opportunity to participate behind-the-scenes during his visit. As a wide-eyed 22-year-old, I was excited and at the same time anxious about the opportunity to see President Ikeda in person. I chanted many hours before and during this time. I'd like to share one particular experience that left an indelible impression on me.

One afternoon, I was assigned to open and close the front gate of the Malibu Training Center. At that time, President Ikeda was leaving the center en route to a meeting with the late Dr. Linus Pauling. From inside the car, President and Mrs. Ikeda waved to me as they went through the gate. Soon after, I watched as two youth leaders came running toward me with a sense of urgency. They told me that President Ikeda wanted to present me with a gift and to thank me for all my efforts. I was surprised, to say the least. They continued by saying that this gift was not for me, but was in fact for my mother. My surprise turned into puzzlement.

I was asked to contact my mother as soon as possible. I called her and found out that she had actually been trying to get in contact with me. Her voice was hoarse and she sounded tired; I knew something was wrong. I told her not to worry and that I would come home immediately. When I arrived home, I learned that my uncle had suddenly passed away of respiratory failure at the age of 51. Although my uncle lived in Thailand, the news of his death devastated my mother.

My mother's father died when she was an infant and it was my uncle that helped raise my mother and supported her family. He had been a father to her, and in a way, his death was like losing her father all over again. I could tell my mother was suffering deeply. Her eyes were bloodshot from crying.

It was at that moment that I remembered that I had a gift to give her on behalf of President Ikeda. When she opened the gift and saw that it was a pair of beautiful sandalwood prayer beads, her face immediately lit up. In that instant, I watched her face change from anguish to appreciation and joy. President Ikeda's consideration had touched her beyond words. It is a moment that I will never forget.

As I was driving back to Malibu, I felt so appreciative toward President Ikeda. I was so moved by his thoughtfulness, his consideration to treasure one person, my mother, in the midst of such a hectic schedule. Right then, I decided that I would challenge myself to learn from him and contribute in some way to kosen-rufu.

For 16 days, I witnessed first hand how tirelessly President Ikeda worked for the sake of the members — exhaustively sharing and implementing his grand vision for America, yet never losing sight of a single individual.

I realize I still have a long way to go in becoming a capable disciple. But I am confident that the path to becoming humanistic lies in the mentor–disciple relationship. Since 1990, whenever I read President Ikeda’s encouragement, I have absolute confidence that there is no separation between what he says and what he does. In his New Year’s poem for 2001, I was reminded of President Ikeda’s spirit to cherish each person:

*From one individual to another,
Starting in our immediate environment,
From small, modest efforts,
Let us steadily carry on our movement.
A commitment to treasure each person—
In that daily, unceasing practice
Lies the dynamism
To transform the entire planet.*

(Jan. 1 *World Tribune*, p. 3)