

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S DEC. 1 SPEECH MORE HAPPINESS IN THE 'YEAR OF TOTAL VICTORY'

SGI President Ikeda explains what 'Year of Total Victory,' this year's theme, is all about: 'We practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to win in life and to become happy.'

SGI President Ikeda's speech at a Soka Gakkai Malaysia Representatives Conference, held at the SGM Culture Center, Kuala Lumpur, Dec. 1, 2000.

Malaysia, which is soaring valiantly toward the 21st century, shines with the light of unlimited hope. I am overjoyed to finally visit this young, dynamic country again after a gap of 12 years. It is the realization of a long-cherished dream. I am filled with deep emotion to be here, and I congratulate you with all my heart on the phenomenal development that Malaysia has undergone in this past decade.

You, the Soka Gakkai Malaysia members, for whom I have the greatest esteem and affection, have worked together with General Director Koe Teng Hong and Women's Leader Tan Lian Kim to become exemplary citizens of your respective communities and your country. As a result of your efforts, you have earned the trust of people in all areas of society, including the top echelons of government. The growth and activities of the youth, the protagonists of the new century, are also deserving of the highest praise.

In addition, centers of kosen-rufu have appeared one after another around the country. Such community centers are a crystallization of your noble sincerity and a symbol of your immense good fortune.

Before coming here today, I stopped by the construction site of the new SGM Grand Culture Center, which is scheduled for completion in February 2001. While I was there, I chanted daimoku for the construction work to proceed smoothly and for the center to become a wonderful base for activities dedicated to social contribution.

On one of the walls here in this room is a banner with next year's theme, "Year of Total Victory for the New Century." We practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to win in life and to become happy. You, my friends in Malaysia, have won on all fronts. I applaud you wholeheartedly. Three cheers for SGM's resounding victory! Three cheers for your brilliant triumph!

On Nov. 29, I had the privilege of receiving an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the Universiti Putra Malaysia. I want before anything else to share this proud honor with all of you, my beloved SGM members.

The conferment ceremony was most dignified and solemn. And words cannot express my profound appreciation for the warm, heartfelt welcome of the university officials, faculty and students, whose sincerity and good wishes pervaded every moment of the ceremony.

It is also my humble pleasure to report that many people at the Universiti Putra Malaysia voiced genuine praise for the contributions that all the SGM members are making to society.

On Nov. 30, I met with Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad at the new Prime Minister's Office Complex in Putrajaya. It was our second meeting. We had a very meaningful discussion, centering on Malaysia and the world in the coming century.

I also brought up the subject of the spectacular card stunt performed by 5,000 SGM members at the opening ceremony of the 16th Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur in September 1998. Dr. Mahathir said he had been most impressed by that performance.

Each day of my stay in Malaysia has been one of creating golden pages of history with you. I owe everything to you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Only the good fortune we accumulate is indestructible.

I want to share a Malaysian anecdote that dates back some two centuries.

A father was teaching his son languages. Day in, day out, they would study together. The boy was of an age when he wanted to be out playing with his friends and having fun. One day he had enough and shouted, "I'm sick of studying!" Maybe some of you have felt the same way.

His mother, however, did not fly off the handle and start scolding him. This is an important point. She proceeded to tell him gently and persuasively why it was important to study. "Even if we leave you an inheritance, if you are unlucky, it can vanish in an instance," she pointed out. "But sound knowledge and learning are not like that. They stay with you until you die."

This episode appears in *Abdullah's Story*, a Malay literary classic.

Abdullah is the boy's name. He lived up to his mother's expectations and went on to become a famous language teacher.

This mother's words are profound. They are words of wisdom and philosophy reflecting a deep understanding and insight, like our SGM women's division members have.

Money and material wealth can be fleeting when the fickle winds of fortune blow against us. In contrast, learning or skills that we have acquired and made a part of ourselves are lifelong treasures. For that reason, education is very important.

The Daishonin writes, "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851). But even these "superior" treasures of the body are not everlasting. The treasures of the body alone cannot solve the fundamental sufferings of the human condition, which are characterized by the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death.

Where, then, can we find an indestructible treasure in life? What is it that has golden value across the three existences—past, present and future—and is never destroyed by even the cruelest fate? The Daishonin tells us clearly, "The treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all" (WND, 851).

Simply put, the treasures of the heart refer to the wealth and richness we build within us and, ultimately, the good fortune and benefit we obtain through faith.

When we live in accord with the eternal Law, our lives shine eternally throughout the three existences. When we devote ourselves wholeheartedly to accomplishing our mission for kosen-rufu, we develop a state of life as vast as the universe itself.

Only the good fortune we accumulate in our lives is indestructible. No one can take it away. No one can destroy it. That is why, as the Daishonin teaches, our heart is the most important thing.

Because you are making the highest possible good causes each day, you are all people of fabulous riches—millionaires of life—adorned with infinite, immeasurable treasures of the heart.

The 'saha' world is where we have to endure and persevere.

The story of the mother and son was about the importance of making efforts in your youth. Only to the extent that you make efforts can you develop ability and strength. Only to the extent that you work hard can you polish yourself and grow. This is the law of cause and effect.

And we see this even more in our efforts for kosen-rufu: None of our hard work is ever wasted. The Daishonin writes: "Where there is unseen virtue, there will be visible reward" (WND, 907). "All your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life. With this conviction you should strive in faith" (WND, 4).

True victors in life work hard and forge within themselves an indestructible state of life. I hope my beloved Malaysian youth will be confident that all their exertions for the sake of the Law, for others' happiness, for the welfare of society, will make their lives sparkle with the golden light of character and of boundless good fortune and benefit.

In the course of a long life there are often times when things do not go the way we plan. And out in the real world, we are confronted with contradictions at every turn. In Buddhism, we speak of this existence as living in the strife-filled *saha* world. *Saha* means endurance.

Hence, the *saha* world is where we have to endure and persevere. That is why another name for the Buddha is "One Who Can Endure" (WND, 23).

If everything always goes smoothly, it leads to arrogance and paves the way to ultimate defeat in life. On the other hand, by enduring all kinds of sorrow and suffering, and triumphing over them, we can become truly strong. Such a life ultimately glows with happiness and victory.

The important thing is to maintain faith like flowing water.

I now want to touch a little on gongyo. There may be times when you cannot do a full morning or evening gongyo, because you are genuinely exhausted, ill or facing some other set of unavoidable circumstances. I think it is perfectly all right at such times if you just do, for instance, A and C gongyo and daimoku. Or even chant three daimoku. Even just one daimoku contains unfathomable benefit.

What matters is continuing and moving forward. The important thing is that you maintain continuous faith that flows unceasingly like water.

By the same token, I hope that you will warmly encourage and support others facing various hardships and problems, that you will watch over them with genuine concern and advance together with them.

No matter what happens, please never let go of the Mystic Law, please never leave the SGI. I say this because they form the railway track that leads to absolute happiness. If you get off the train midway, you cannot reach your destination. It is important not to veer from the fundamental path in life.

Doing gongyo, our lives commune with the universe.

Buddhism expounds that each human being is a microcosm — a miniature version of the universe itself. Modern science corroborates this view.

The Buddhist scriptures set forth in great detail how our body is like the universe in miniature. They liken our two eyes to the sun and the moon. The roundness of our head, to the vault of the heavens. And the hair on our head, to the stars. In which case, I guess you could say, hair that falls out is like falling stars!

The scriptures further liken our eyebrows to the Big Dipper and our breath to the wind. The some 360 joints of our body are said to correspond to the days in a year. The warmth of our stomachs represents spring and summer, while the cold hardness of our backs represents winter and autumn. [The Daishonin cites Miao-lo's *Annotation on the Great Concentration and Insight*: "The inhaling and exhaling of breath through the nose is like wind that wafts through the mountain and valleys; the inhaling and exhaling of breath through our mouth is like the winds that course through the open skies. Our eyes are like the sun and the moon; their opening and closing is like day and night. The hair on our heads is like the stars, our eyebrows are like the northern dipper. Our blood flow is like rivers and streams, and our bones are like gems and stones. Our skin and our flesh are like the earth and soil, and the fine hairs on our body are the grasses and forests that cover the earth" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 567).]

Gongyo is a ceremony in which the microcosm of our lives communes with the macrocosm of the universe. In gongyo each day, we recite the *jigage* verse section of the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The *jigage* section begins with the word *ji*, meaning self, in the passage *ji ga toku burrai* and ends with the word *shin*, meaning body, in the passage *soku joju busshin*. When we combine these first and last Chinese characters, they form the word *jishin*, meaning oneself. In a general sense, therefore, the *jigage* section extols our own incredible life force, which is eternal and precious beyond measure.

A certain scholar says: "We have entered the Internet age. But while information is important, it will not necessarily guarantee human happiness. Science and economics alone cannot bring people happiness. We have to look within ourselves, to delve into the essence of our existence as human beings. That is why today we need philosophy and spirituality, especially the humanism of Buddhism."

If we believe in the Mystic Law and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, putting our lives in rhythm with the universal law, we can develop a self that is strong, rich and healthy, that radiates intellect and wisdom, that brims with happiness throughout eternity.

Just as the Buddha is endowed with ten honorable titles expressing his or her power, wisdom, virtue and compassion, we, too, will come to be crowned with immense good fortune and benefit. We practice the Daishonin's Buddhism to construct a brilliant palace of happiness in the depths of our lives.

The path of Buddhist practice is found in the unity of practitioners.

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, makes the following observation: "Ashoka became an ardent Buddhist and tried his utmost to spread the *Dharma*. But there was no force or compulsion. It was only by winning men's hearts that he sought to make converts." [Ashoka was the first king to unify India. During the early years of his reign he was a tyrant, but later he converted to Buddhism and governed compassionately in accordance with Buddhist ideals.] Nehru's words highlight the humanism of Buddhism, which is characterized by deep sincerity and integrity.

Our kosen-rufu movement is about spreading friendship, spreading trust, spreading happiness. Here in Malaysia you have a saying "Friendship is a bond as indivisible as a fingernail and the flesh beneath it." The friendship and unity evident among the SGM members are wonderful. Your sincere actions and your beautiful harmony and solidarity have drawn wide applause from Malaysian society. Furthermore, the members in each state of Malaysia are advancing confidently, joyfully and high-spiritedly, under respective themes such as "Unity and Continual Victory," "Harmony and Unity" and "Eternal Victory."

Shakyamuni called the assemblage of his followers “an invincible gathering” and taught that advancing together with good friends constitutes the entirety of Buddhist practice. The path of Buddhist practice and victory in life are found in the splendid unity of practitioners striving together in faith.

In contrast, when people impede the flow of kosen-rufu by being selfish, holding grudges against fellow members, disrupting the organization’s unity and denigrating SGI activities, they bring suffering upon themselves and destroy their lives from within. This is a strict, inescapable law of Buddhism.

I ask that all of you advance cheerfully and harmoniously under the leadership of General Director Koe, in whom I place the greatest trust. And just as Malaysia boasts the famous Petronas Twin Towers—the tallest building in the world today—I ask that you create a magnificent human castle boasting the world’s foremost unity.

You will surely attain a lofty state of life.

If you chant daimoku to the Gohonzon, you will attain a lofty state of life that is like standing at the highest point in the universe and gazing serenely down upon all phenomena. Therefore, there is nothing to fear.

The Daishonin writes: “If the votary of the Lotus Sutra neither regresses in faith nor acts falsely, but places himself fully in the hands of the Lotus Sutra, practicing exactly as its golden words prescribe, then he will surely obtain supreme blessings in this lifetime, being safe from misfortune and prolonging his natural life span, to say nothing of his good fortune in his next existence. Our great wish for kosen-rufu will also then be fulfilled” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1357).

Twelve years ago, on my last visit, I embarked with all of you to finish laying the foundation for kosen-rufu by the end of the 20th century. So here in Malaysia once again today, let us together open the golden door to kosen-rufu in the 21st century.

I pray for Malaysia’s unending prosperity. And I pray with all my heart—and will continue to do so for as long as I live—for the good health and longevity of all the members of Malaysia, for each one of you to lead lives of unsurpassed happiness.

Please give my best regards to the members I could not meet today.

Long live Soka Gakkai Malaysia!