

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S APRIL 25 SPEECH—PART 2 OUR STRUGGLE LIES BEFORE US

‘For the SGI, our full-fledged struggle for the 21st century now lies in front of us,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Our advance will contribute to the happiness of the entire world.’

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 5th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, commemorating May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, held at the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, April 25.

Dr. Joseph Rotblat, Nobel laureate and president emeritus of the Pugwash Conferences, whom I met in Okinawa last year, is a great scientist who has waged an unflinching struggle to realize a world free of nuclear weapons and war. He is a truly admirable man. To my delight, I received a letter from him the other day.

First-rate people really treasure, and make diligent efforts to sustain, the friendships they have forged. I want to share his letter with you:

Dear President Ikeda,

I am writing to congratulate you on the occasion of the opening of Soka University of America, the fulfillment of one of your dreams.

You are admired throughout the world for your ceaseless efforts towards universal peace, and the establishing of a Culture of Peace. It is most important that the concept of a Culture of Peace be imbued in the young generation; this can be brought about by education, the kind of education—to quote your own words—that fosters love for humanity, develops character, and provides the basis for the realization of peace. Soka University of America is designed to provide this type of education and thus is an integral part of your lifelong endeavors.

I send my best wishes for the success of this valuable center of education.

With warm regards for yourself and your wife.

Yours sincerely,

Joseph Rotblat

On May 3, the dedication of Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo is taking place at last. The first class will comprise more than 100 outstanding students from around the world. [The entrance ceremony for the first freshman class will take place on Aug. 24.]

In advance of the university's long-awaited dedication, congratulatory messages have been pouring in from international leaders and dear friends around the world. I want to share some of them with you today.

First, a message of congratulations from Prime Minister Helen Clark of New Zealand:

The campus at Aliso Viejo will offer good facilities in a beautiful natural setting and should attract students from around the world.

The long-standing work of Dr. Ikeda and Soka Gakkai International for peace and international cooperation transcends barriers of class, culture and nationality. I trust that this same spirit infuses life at the new university and wish everyone involved all the best

for the future.

Congratulations!

We also received a message from Fidel Ramos, former president of the Philippines:

It is commendable that Soka University continues its mission to develop the potential for hope, courage, and altruistic action among its students. This prepares the youth, as well as their elders and mentors, to face the challenges of the new millennium with more responsibility towards oneself and to fellow citizens in the global human family.

Also, may I extend my congratulations to the founder of Soka University, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, for his vision of peace through education.

Mabuhay (continued success) to Soka University of Aliso Viejo, California, USA!!!

Our purpose is to win true liberation – to safeguard justice and human rights.

What is the significance of this day, April 25, in world history? It is Italy's triumphant Liberation Day—the day it won its victory over fascism. On this date in 1945, at the end of a long struggle in which the people rallied bravely together, all of Italy was finally liberated.

For the SGI, our full-fledged struggle for the 21st century now lies in front of us. It is crucial that we achieve victory all across Japan. Kosen-rufu is a movement to win true liberation—to safeguard justice and human rights. Our advance will contribute to the happiness of Japan and the entire world. This was Nichiren Daishonin's desire. And it was the dearest wish of my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda.

We have no course but to realize their dream without fail. Today constitutes an important departure toward that goal.

In Campomorone, Italy, right now, to commemorate Liberation Day, an exhibition titled “Three Great Leaders of Peace” is being shown. The exhibition features the lives and achievements of Mahatma Gandhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as well as myself. I am deeply humbled to be included alongside such great individuals.

Nichiren Shoshu has desecrated Nichiren Daishonin's lofty spirit.

If we turn to Japan, April 25, 1872, was the day on which the Meiji government issued an edict pertaining to priests. This was in the year following first Soka Gakkai president Tsu-nesaburo Makiguchi's birth. The edict stated, “From this time on, Buddhist priests are free to eat meat, marry and grow their hair.” This was a directive issued solely to suit the government's own agenda, without paying any regard to the Buddhist teachings.

On the surface, this decree may seem to be generous, offering the priests substantial freedom. But the underlying motive on the part of the authorities was to undermine Japanese Buddhism by encouraging the moral decline and corruption of the priests, so that Shinto could be established as the state religion. This is an example of the frightening, diabolical nature of authority.

There have been those among our own ranks who foolishly succumbed to the insidious nature of authority, grew arrogant and corrupt, and strayed from the path of human honesty and decency. President Toda sharply saw through this fundamental corrupting nature of power. That is why he constantly called on us to fight against abuses of authority.

Unable to discern the government's true intent, Japan's Buddhist clergy in the early

Meiji Era took the edict at face value and happily adopted its directives. Moral decline and corruption soon followed.

Deplorably, as records of the day show, many priests were ecstatic when they read the edict. Some even wept with gratitude, declaring that “the government’s compassion surpasses even the Buddha’s.”

Of course, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood was no exception. In a journal published by the head temple during the Taisho Era, we can find such defiant declarations as “Priests are human beings, too. They have the right...to keep mistresses.” [An article in the October 1914 issue of the Nichiren Shoshu journal *Natural Sound* reads: “Priests are human beings, too. They have the right to take wives, to eat meat, to have children, and to keep mistresses.”]

The subsequent moral decline of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood and its lamentable development into an increasingly closed, narrow order, where priestly family ties came to be valued above all and nepotism ruled, are well known. And today the priesthood has degenerated into a school that has deviated completely from Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings.

The Daishonin writes: “I have neither wife nor children, nor do I eat fish or fowl. I have been blamed merely for trying to propagate the Lotus Sutra. Though I have neither wife nor child, I am known throughout the country as a monk who transgresses the code of conduct, and though I have never killed even a single ant or mole cricket, my bad reputation has spread throughout the realm” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 42). The Daishonin, who strove nobly throughout his life to lead people to happiness, was maligned and called the vilest names by people throughout the land — all at the instigation of those jealous of him. But aware that the persecutions befalling him accorded with the Lotus Sutra’s prophesy, the Daishonin said of his state of mind, “I cannot possibly express my joy” (WND, 43).

High Priest Nikken Abe and the Nichiren Shoshu priests have desecrated this lofty spirit and become utterly debauched and degenerate. I want to leave a clear record of this fact for future generations.

President Toda often used to say: “Though they are called priests, they get married, eat the same food, wear the same clothes and chant the same Nam-myoho-rence-kyo that we do. They are exactly the same as we are, aren’t they? In that case, self-respecting priests should not act as if they are superior but work together with us on an equal footing for the sake of kosen-rufu.”

I am happy that we are joined today by our friends the reformist priests — priests of kosen-rufu — who are working together with the SGI in the manner that President Toda described.

History shows that great people are always criticized and attacked.

The Daishonin’s ideal of the harmonious unity of believers (Jpn *wagoso*) is today found only in the SGI. Although *believers* here is represented by the Chinese character for *priest* (Jpn *so*), the term does not refer only to clerics. This Chinese character is also used to represent the community of believers, including both priests and laity — the *samgha* as it was known in Shakyamuni’s day — who correctly uphold and propagate the teachings of Buddhism. [Originally, this character, *so*, was used to represent the Sanskrit word *samgha*, but it later came to be used as the character for *priest*.]

Based on this understanding, the community of believers is comprised of those whose faith is dedicated to kosen-rufu. It is not a matter of outward appearance or formality. Though we are laity, we who are correctly advancing toward kosen-rufu embody a

harmoniously united community of believers in the truest sense.

In closing, I want to quote some words by the famous Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore: “To derive self-satisfaction from traducing [malining] others is the entertainment of the weak.” History shows us that there will always be petty individuals who criticize and attack great people.

The Daishonin writes, “To be praised by fools—that is the greatest shame” (WND, 287). And Josei Toda says, “To be praised by the great sage [the Daishonin] is the highest honor in life.” Let us continue to fight with this proud conviction.

On your return to your respective areas, please convey my best regards to all your fellow members.

Congratulations again on today! Thank you!

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS FROM THIS SPEECH:

Nichiren Daishonin’s ideal of the harmonious unity of believers (Jpn *wagoso*) is today found only in the SGI. Although *believers* here is represented by the Chinese character for *priest* (Jpn *so*), the term does not refer only to clerics. This Chinese character is also used to represent the community of believers, including both priests and laity—the *samgha* as it was known in Shakyamuni’s day—who correctly uphold and propagate the teachings of Buddhism. [Originally, this character, *so*, was used to represent the Sanskrit word *samgha*, but it later came to be used as the character for *priest*.]

- 1) SGI President Ikeda says, “This Chinese character [for *priest* (Jpn *so*)] is also used to represent the community of believers, including both priests and laity...who correctly uphold and propagate the teachings of Buddhism.” How do you think the essential meaning of the harmonious unity of believers relates to the difference between formality and substance in Buddhist practice?
- 2) Can you think of instances where becoming attached to outward appearances over real substance can destroy people’s happiness? Do you have any experiences of challenging mere outward appearances to reveal the truth?
- 3) In an age of democracy, do you think it is still necessary for a priestly class to instruct lay believers on the correct practice of religion?
- 4) Do you think there is still a place for priests, by virtue of their clerical position, to claim any special authority? If not, why not? Do you think this type of behavior violates Nichiren Daishonin’s spirit?

For further discussion on the role and development of the priesthood in Buddhist history, see “Do We Need Priests?” by Shin Yatomi, October 1999 Living Buddhism, pp. 5–15.