

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S NOV. 12 SPEECH—PART 2 OUR WORDS REVEAL WHO WE ARE

‘Words are decisive,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Our words reveal our character, wisdom and attitude toward life.’

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the 11th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, Nov. 12.

The march “Old Comrades,” which the Soka Gloria Wind Orchestra just performed, was composed by a young member of a regiment band, Carl Teike [Germany’s greatest march composer]. He joined the regiment band when he was 19. Teike had been studying percussion and the French horn from the time he was 14, and after joining the regiment band he received training in composition from the bandleader.

Training is the key to growth. Teike was in his mid-20s when he composed this march with all his youthful passion.

Why did this march come to be named “Old Comrades?” Allow me to share this well-known story with you.

When Teike completed his composition, he showed it to the new regiment bandmaster—the previous bandmaster who had mentored him having left the regiment sometime earlier. Teike presented it with great pride and confidence, but the bandmaster, instead of praising it, denigrated Teike’s work and told him it was fit only to be thrown into the fire. This incident, unfortunately, led Teike to resign from the regiment band.

The bandmaster refused to recognize the young musician’s talent. He completely lacked the spirit to nurture the fresh, burgeoning potential of youth—a spirit that a person who is senior in years or experience ought to possess.

The young Teike had made a valiant effort in composing this piece. Surely, as his senior, the bandmaster should have had the generosity of spirit to acknowledge that effort and respond with sincerity.

I hope none of you will become this kind of mean-spirited person. And younger people should not allow themselves to be defeated by such ill-natured seniors, either.

Words are very important. Leaders in particular must be very careful about what they say. Words are decisive. As Nichiren Daishonin says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 400). Our words reveal our character, wisdom and attitude toward life. Are you a leader who praises members who have worked hard for kosen-rufu, regardless of the result? Or are you an insensitive leader who says: “What? Is that the best you can do?”

Please remember that the growth of talented people and the development of our organization depend on the words of our leaders. If there is a leader who addresses members in a rude, insensitive manner, it is important that you point this out to him or her. And should you recognize this fault in yourself, I hope you will make an effort to correct it.

The spirit of fellowship is the fundamental spirit of the SGI.

Now, back to the story of the young Teike, whose work the bandmaster callously negated. When his fellow band members, with whom he had shared joys and sorrows, learned of his imminent departure, they held a farewell party for him. They wanted to lift his spirits by reminding him that they were his friends and comrades.

And they all got out their instruments and played his new march for him. It was a dramatic premiere for Teike's composition. What a wonderful spirit of fellowship!

This same spirit of fellowship—of care and concern for our fellow members—is the fundamental spirit of the SGI. Our organization has developed as it has today because of this spirit.

Teike must have been touched by their gesture. "Though others may not understand me, I have true friends!" he must have thought. "Wherever my life may lead me, I will always be with old friends who share my thoughts and feelings!" Deeply moved, Teike named his march "Old Comrades."

This is the spirit behind the tune that the orchestra just played for us. Thank you once again!

No matter what anyone says, we should never leave the SGI family.

Teike did not stray from the path of music. While taking up employment as a policeman, he continued to compose music in his spare time, following his chosen path with perseverance. The determination that no doubt drove him was "Whether people listen to my music or not, I do not care. This is the path that I have chosen to follow."

Our attitude in faith should demonstrate the same kind of commitment. No matter what anyone says, or even if we encounter from time to time unpleasant individuals along the way, we must not leave the SGI, because the correct practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism for the realization of kosen-rufu is found only in the SGI.

Teike sold his march "Old Comrades" to a music publisher for the ridiculously low sum of 25 German marks—the equivalent of one-tenth of the average working person's monthly earnings at the time. But once it was published, it began to attract attention and eventually came to be played around the world.

The true value of great works or achievements is often only appreciated much later. I hope the members of the arts division will not forget this truth.

Teike, who came to be known as the "composer policeman," left behind some 100 marches, engraving his name in the annals of music.

In life and in art, such things as short-term popularity and fame are all petty considerations. While of course it is important to make one's best effort, there is no reason to be disappointed if there are no immediate results. The important thing is to become a stronger person and to grow as a human being.

Times change quickly, as do people's hearts. This is especially the case in Japan, a society fraught with envy. We can never rely on others' opinions of ourselves. That is why true victory depends on us becoming people of genuine, solid ability.

All of us in the SGI are old friends of life, old friends across eternity, precious beyond measure and linked by bonds from the beginningless past. We have treasured this world of trust, friendship and fellowship.

How sad and pitiful it is to betray and leave this beautiful realm! Those who abandon their faith travel on a course to tragic defeat in life.

Let us ever advance together with our old friends, happily and vigorously, along the great path of ultimate peace and justice that is kosen-rufu!

Youth will build the future of our organization.

Today, Nov. 12, is Young Women's Day. Congratulations to all the young women!
It is the age of women.

I am presently engaged in a dialogue with the world-renowned futurist Dr. Hazel Henderson, which will be serialized in the monthly magazine *Ushio* under the title “Toward a Century of the Sun—Dialogue on the Philosophy of Global Citizenship,” starting in January 2002.

Women, and especially the members of our young women’s division, are the suns of hope for the 21st century. Let’s all pray for the victory, success, and happiness of our sunny young women!

A week ago, Nov. 5, was Young Men’s Day. Historically speaking, it was the day that the renowned Japanese educator and reformer Yoshida Shoin started his innovative private school, the Shoka Sonjuku, in a small, eight-tatami-mat classroom. The academy, where he personally gave instruction, was officially opened when construction work on the building that housed it was completed. This event took place in 1857, in the midst of a period of turmoil, as Japan began its transition from a closed feudal society to a nation open to the world.

At the time, Shoin was 27. That puts him in the age bracket of an SGI young men’s division member. This 27-year-old leader educated individuals who would become the driving force of the revolution in Japan known as the Meiji Restoration [that took place in 1868].

Youth build the future. Youth are crucial.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda often talked to us youth about Yoshida Shoin. The young educator’s academy was hardly a luxurious facility. It was very simple—actually just a remodeled shed. The one-room structure had a floor-space of only 142 square feet.

Shoin, who boarded together with his students in this small room, trained them vigorously. He never put on airs. He was always there with them—his disciples and comrades. The students found Shoin’s training intense and demanding. The lessons were impressed deep into their beings.

When Shoin spoke of courageous individuals who laid down their lives for their beliefs, his voice shook with emotion, as if to say: “May you all be like this! May you all live lives like this!” This recalls the passionate spirit of Soka Gakkai leaders in the organization’s early days. Only with such personal passion and commitment can leaders rouse their fellow members to action.

And when Shoin spoke of cowardly traitors, his expression grew ferocious, his voice rose, and his whole being veritably bristled with outrage. He stressed the importance of resolutely fighting against such treacherous individuals. In this way, he taught his disciples the fundamental path of humanity. This was what Shoin’s school was like.

Wherever we dwell is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.

What were the basic principles underlying his school? Many answers to this question could be discussed, but for today, because our time is limited, I want to focus on just one. And that was Shoin’s belief that you must never feel inferior just because you are far from the bustling center of things, tucked away in a small country village. If you are striving earnestly where you are right now, that is the best, most exciting place in the world. [Though his school was located in the village of Matsumoto, far away from the capital of Edo (now Tokyo), Shoin was confident that future leaders of society would come from his school.]

Buddhism teaches that the supreme state of life is eternally inherent within us, and that wherever we dwell is in fact the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. The thinking of many

great people comes close to the teachings of Buddhism. These people often articulate at least a part of Buddhism's message.

I hope that all of you will courageously advance with the firm resolve to make the place where you are right now shine brightly and to produce outstanding leaders from within your respective organizations. When you do so, you will also develop your potential immensely. The SGI is what it is today because members have advanced with this spirit.

It is not our environment or circumstances but our inner resolve that is important. Do not allow yourself to be preoccupied or held back by considerations of educational background, wealth, fame or social position. Always advance in life based on faith, no matter what happens. That is the spirit of a Buddhist.

Shoin called out to his students to stand up against the anti-reform forces of the day with a spirit dedicated to truth and justice, and to carry out a revolution in Japan. He also had a message that I especially want to pass on to the young men: "One or two people of firm will are certain to emerge from this academy. If that number grows to five or eight people, and if each person teaches another 10, and those 10 in turn teach another hundred, their ranks will naturally swell to thousands and 10 thousands and eventually to millions."

The same is true of our actions to introduce the Daishonin's Buddhism to others.

The presence of genuine disciples is crucial in the advance of kosen-rufu.

Shoin was executed a little less than two years after he began teaching in his humble academy. But he had true disciples—disciples with a sense of purpose and commitment. Determined to vindicate their mentor, disciples of such towering caliber as Takasugi Shinsaku and Kusaka Genzui sprang to action, becoming a major force in the realization of the Meiji Restoration and the building of a new Japan.

The presence of genuine disciples is also crucial in the advance of kosen-rufu.

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi is on record as having said while in prison, "I have a great disciple by the name of Toda, so even if I die in prison, the Soka Gakkai is bound to develop throughout the world." In the mentor-disciple relationship of presidents Makiguchi and Toda, I discern the ultimate essence of humanity, of Buddhism and of history.

I will also never forget what President Toda said at one gathering of the young men's training group, the Suiko-kai: "The Meiji Restoration was accomplished by Shoin's disciples, who were fostered at the Shoka Sonjuku, a school that started out with just one small room. Similarly, in the Soka Gakkai, as long as there is a core of youth—no, even one single true disciple—we will be able to achieve kosen-rufu."

Who was that single disciple? Who has spread Buddhism throughout the world, with all his being, exactly as President Toda instructed? I am proud and honored to be that single disciple.

As a result, those who follow this genuine disciple are also genuine. I wish to declare this for the sake of future generations.

I urge the youth to carry on the rigorous spirit of mentor and disciple of the first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai. Those who do so will be ultimate victors in life. This is also the fundamental path for the SGI's ongoing success in the 21st century.

The portraits of our noble founding mentor and disciple, presidents Makiguchi and Toda, are smiling down and watching over this gathering that has assembled to celebrate the Day of the Soka Gakkai's Founding, Nov. 18. [Large portraits of both men adorn the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium.] My thanks to the members of the Makiguchi and Toda

families who have taken time from their busy schedules to join us today.

I had hoped to speak a little more with you today, but because of time restrictions and the fact that many of you have a long way to travel home, I will close now and continue at our next meeting. Thank you for your understanding.

We are at a change in the seasons, when many people find themselves more susceptible to illness. Please take care of your health. It will be getting colder now here in Japan, so please take special precautions in the morning and at night.

Also take care to get enough rest, and remember not to eat too much late at night!

Bring your meetings to an early close, get plenty of sleep so you can awaken refreshed, and use your time and energy wisely, so that you can lead healthy, balanced lives.

Thank you for your attention! Thank you!

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS THE POWER OF WORDS FROM THIS SPEECH:

Words are very important. Leaders in particular must be very careful about what they say. Words are decisive. As Nichiren Daishonin says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 400). Our words reveal our character, wisdom and attitude toward life. Are you a leader who praises members who have worked hard for kosen-rufu, regardless of the result? Or are you an insensitive leader who says: “What? Is that the best you can do?” Please remember that the growth of talented people and the development of our organization depend on the words of our leaders. If there is a leader who addresses members in a rude, insensitive manner, it is important that you point this out to him or her. And should you recognize this fault in yourself, I hope you will make an effort to correct it.

1) SGI President Ikeda points out that words are decisive and quotes the Daishonin, who says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 400). Why do you think our choice of words is so important? Can you think of examples in your life of both value and anti-value that you created with the words you used? Can you find examples from the Daishonin’s writings where victory or defeat resulted from what a person said?

2) President Ikeda asks: “Are you a leader who praises members who have worked hard for kosen-rufu, regardless of the result? Or are you an insensitive leader who says: ‘What? Is that the best you can do?’” Do you try to think about your choice of words when speaking with others? If so, in what ways? What do you think causes words to become destructive? What do you think gives words the power to encourage the lives of others?