

Friday, January 30, 2009

**SGI President Ikeda's Essay**

**THE LIGHT OF THE CENTURY OF HUMANITY**

**By Shin'ichi Yamamoto<sup>1</sup>**

**The Wise Members of the Men's Division, Champions of Kosen-rufu—Part 2 [of 2]**

As a wise champion  
of kosen-rufu  
upholding Buddhism,  
take pride  
and lead the way to victory.

I once sent this poem to a member who was struggling against adversity. He immediately responded with a letter expressing his determination, and he cited a quote from the Swiss philosopher Carl Hilty (1833–1909) to the effect that people who have suffered in life only trust those who've experienced hardship themselves.<sup>2</sup> His letter closed with the pledge: "With that resolve, I will strive to become truly wise, sparing no effort."

Hilty himself lived a life filled with difficulties, but to a friend who visited him in his final year he said: "If I were to erase all of the sufferings from my life, I would have no good memories left. Everything grew out of such times [of suffering]."<sup>3</sup> By encountering many obstacles, a genuine leader is able to develop the ability to guide and encourage others. This is a principle that we should never forget.

In the words of Nichiren Daishonin, "The greater the hardships befalling [a votary of the Lotus Sutra], the greater the delight he feels, because of his strong faith" (WND-1, 33). In this light, the hardships and powerful opponents that we of the men's

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<sup>1</sup> Shin'ichi Yamamoto is a pen name of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.

<sup>2</sup> Translated from German. Carl Hilty, *Für Schlaflose Nächte* (For Sleepless Nights) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1908), p. 299.

<sup>3</sup> Translated from German. Alfred Stucki, *Carl Hilty* (Basel: Verlag Friedrich Reinhardt AG, 1946), p. 146.

division encounter serve to strengthen and revitalize us until our lives burn with a bright and vigorous flame.

When Hilty was asked the secret to remaining young at heart, he declared that it is to always learn something new.<sup>4</sup> A life of continual learning is forever young.

The older students enrolled in Soka University's correspondence education program, studying alongside the younger students at the school, exude a splendid youthfulness and inner beauty.

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The ancient Greek poet Theognis, whom I've always admired, declared: "A man who's friend in word but not in deed is not my friend . . . . He must prove, if he can, by action, that he's good."<sup>5</sup> My mentor Josei Toda was also very stern about people who were all talk and no action. On the other hand, he treasured down-to-earth, unpretentious people who made a sincere and heartfelt effort, people who worked hard and produced tangible results. He was always paying careful attention to the prayers and struggles of his disciples. It is most fortunate to have such a mentor in life.

At the September 1953 Headquarters leaders meeting, Mr. Toda said: "Though you may hold a leadership position, if you don't have a challenging spirit, you won't gain benefit." He also declared: "Don't be cowardly! Cowards have neither the ability nor the qualifications to lead."

In the home, breadwinners have the mission and responsibility to protect and support the family. In an organization, in the strictest sense, everything depends upon the resolve and challenging spirit of its leaders.

In September 1953, Kamata Chapter became the first in Japan to gain over 1,000 new member households in a single month. It had been just over a year and a half since the February Campaign, when the members in Kamata and I broke through the impasse in the Gakkai's propagation efforts by introducing 201 new member households in one month. Suddenly, even that record had been broken in a new, golden achievement.

Kamata's greatest momentum in reaching that second landmark came from Yaguchi District, which introduced more than 300 new member households. The campaign there was led by Shigeji Shiraki, the district leader and a real pillar of support for those around him. He was later appointed as the chapter leader of Kamata, the second to hold that position. Mr. Shiraki was an executive in a company and a man of character and sound common sense. He showed great compassion in his concern for district members, expressing a love for them that would rival that of a parent.

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<sup>4</sup> Translated from German. Carl Hilty, *Glück* (Happiness) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs'sche Buchhandlung, 1904), vol. 2, p. 322.

<sup>5</sup> Theognis, "Elegies," in *Hesiod and Theognis*, translated by Dorothea Wender (Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin Books, Ltd., 1984), p. 131.

In those days, the Soka Gakkai was structured as a “vertical-line” organization—that is, new members, regardless of where they lived, were assigned to the group or district to which the person who introduced them belonged. Wherever his members might be struggling in Japan—be they in Akita, Hokkaido, Aichi, Gifu, or Yamanashi—Mr. Shiraki would gladly visit and personally encourage them, often traveling long distances in his earnest desire to offer support.

Members felt that they could talk to him about anything, and so they fondly referred to him as “Uncle Shiraki.” The tremendous respect and trust they had for him was clearly evident in the way they would call out that nickname. And when it was time to gear up for the next campaign, Mr. Shiraki would burn with the fighting spirit of an ardent youth. Those who take on challenges with a positive, upbeat attitude shine with a special brightness, irrespective of their age. And because Mr. Shiraki had this quality, he was able to foster many capable individuals.

Behind the scenes, Mr. Toda was always saying in praise: “That Shiraki, he is gaining all kinds of benefit.”

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Cherishing  
health  
and long life,  
may you enjoy boundless honors  
in the prime of your years.

A challenging spirit provides the energy to boldly stand at the forefront of any struggle.

Chinese Premier Zhou Enlai (1898–1976) embodied this quality throughout his life. He once visited a dam construction site outside Beijing and spent a week there, sleeping, eating, and working side-by-side with the laborers. More than 500 central party leaders joined him in this effort. The premier and the other party leaders carried stones in handcarts and formed relay lines to pass stones from one person to another as they built retaining banks. Premier Zhou was already 60 years old at the time, and the average age of the party leaders with him was over 45. But in spite of that, they worked “like dragons and tigers.”<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, after the other laborers were all sleeping, exhausted from the day’s work, Premier Zhou remained awake, cutting back on his rest so he could also take care of affairs of state. The lights in his room seemingly never went out.

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<sup>6</sup> Translated from Japanese. Takeo Arai, *Kakumeiji Shu Onrai no Jissen* (Revolutionary Zhou Enlai in Action) (Tokyo: Ushio Shuppansha, 1979), p. 22.

The brigade that Premier Zhou led was dubbed the Huang Zhong Brigade, as a sign of respect. Huang Zhong was a renowned leader under Zhuge Liang (Chuko K'ung-ming; 181–234) in the age of the Three Kingdoms in ancient China. Huang Zhong continued to serve as a general even though he was almost 70 years old. It is written that when he once faced an opposing general, he shouted as he rushed bravely to the attack: “Do you despise me for my age? You will find my good sword, however, young enough.”<sup>7</sup>

When Huang Zhong took the lead, the entire army was roused to fight. *Records of the Three Kingdoms* describes his stirring attitude in battle: “He held his halberd aloft, was always first in the attack, encouraged the foot soldiers, made the gongs and drums resound to the heavens, and shook the valleys with his joyful battle cries.”<sup>8</sup>

The Taiyo-kai (Sun Group) and Kanto-kai (Fighting Spirit Group)—groups comprised of men’s division members who have retired from their jobs and now participate in kosen-rufu activities during the day—represent the glorious Huang Zhong Brigade of the Soka Gakkai. I hope the members of these groups will take care of their health as they continue to advance in high spirits.

There is, of course, a retirement age in one’s career. But there is no retirement age in a life dedicated to chanting and spreading Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which enables us to attain eternal and indestructible victory and enjoy a life-force as strong and radiant as the rising sun.

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Your descendants  
for generations to come  
will enjoy benefits  
based on the causes  
made by you, their forefathers.

The citadels of our lives, built through our fierce struggles against daunting odds, are unassailable and indestructible.

The Daishonin describes the vicissitudes experienced by Shakyamuni’s trusted disciple Sudatta: “Seven times he became poor, and seven times he became a wealthy man” (WND-1, 1086). Rising and falling fortunes are an inescapable part of the real world. Sudatta’s seventh period of poverty was especially severe, but even then, in the

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<sup>7</sup> Lo Kuan-Chung, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, translated by C. H. Brewitt-Taylor (Rutland, Vermont: Charles E. Tuttle Company, 1959), vol. 2, p. 109.

<sup>8</sup> Translated from Japanese. Chen Shou, *Seishi Sangokushi* (Records of the Three Kingdoms), translated by Ritsuko Inami (Tokyo: Chikuma Shobo, 2003), p. 184.

worst of times, he and his wife continued to follow the Buddhist teaching of striving to create good causes by assisting others. The benefits the couple reaped from such acts insured that they rose again from the depths, becoming the richest people in the land and attaining an expansive life-state that enabled them to donate Jetavana Monastery to Shakyamuni and his followers. In praising Sudatta and his wife for the victory they achieved by striving in faith with the same spirit as Shakyamuni, the Daishonin states: "From this, you should understand all things" (WND-1, 1086).

Buddhism teaches the law of cause and effect that allows us to accumulate inexhaustible benefits. The Buddhist scriptures also describe the Buddha as one who is "supreme in the spiritual realm," having the power to "vanquish demons" (cf. GZ, 818)<sup>9</sup>. Summon forth this power of the Buddha! Vanquish all devilish, negative influences, and win in all areas of your life. And, while supporting the women's and young women's divisions, do your best, inspire others through your dauntless courage, and win the trust of those in your workplace and community.

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Dr. N. Radhakrishnan, a leading Gandhian scholar, is a good friend of mine. His father, Neelakantha Pillai, worked alongside Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) in the nonviolent struggle for Indian independence, and was known for his fearlessness and utter lack of concern for social status, power, or wealth. Dr. Radhakrishnan was told by his mentor Dr. G. Ramachandran (1904–95) that, as the courageous son of his great father, he should also strive his utmost to become a man of character and a victor in life. The most precious legacy one can leave one's children and juniors is a triumphant record of achievements, attained by remaining true to one's convictions.

Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) summed up the essence of successful leadership, declaring that the key to victory is the individual, not the number of individuals involved. The victory of kosen-rufu also depends entirely on each individual. For a member of the men's division, his greatest source of pride is the number of victories he has achieved through faith.

It's not about others; it's about you. It's about you winning, and winning over yourself. By doing so, you will provide inspiration and encouragement to all.

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Like phoenixes,  
inseparable as life and its environment,  
you and I.

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<sup>9</sup> From "Oko Kikigaki" (The Recorded Lectures); not included in WND, vols. 1 and 2.

I composed this poem on August 24, 1977, the 30th anniversary of the day I joined the Soka Gakkai. It was also Men's Division Day. I was calling upon all the trusted members of the men's division to advance, together with me, like phoenixes arising from the ashes. The phrase "inseparable as life and its environment" refers to the profound Buddhist teaching that living beings, the initiators of action, are one with their environment, the place where that action unfolds.

We employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra to triumph over inconceivably arduous circumstances and build strong selves that cannot be shaken by anything. As we win and win again, we are at the same time creating an environment of the most resplendent success and glory. In all things, life and environment are one. Therefore, by achieving self-mastery, we also achieve victory in our environment.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote to the Ikegami brothers, who can be considered as precursors of the men's division: "You must grit your teeth and never slacken in your faith" (WND-1, 498). He also encouraged them to be as fearless as he had been when he confronted the powerful government official Hei no Saemon and boldly spoke out to refute the erroneous and reveal the true.

Men's division members who share the same commitment in faith as their mentor strive in the spirit of champions. Disciples, advance bravely along the great path to victory that your mentor has opened for you!

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When the French government's *Mona Lisa Exhibition* was held in Japan in 1974 [at the Tokyo National Museum], it was accompanied by a special representative, the French writer and art critic André Malraux (1901–76). At that time, we met at the Seikyo Shimbun building in Shinanomachi, Tokyo, and conversed for nearly three hours. In May 1975, he invited me to his home on the outskirts of Paris. There we talked about many subjects, including the future of culture and civilization in general.

Mr. Malraux said one thing that seemed to me to summarize his personal philosophy: "Do what you believe you must, and leave the interpreting of it to others." How true this is. Don't be distracted by the carping of bystanders, their irresponsible attitudes, their self-serving, cowardly words and actions. We are champions of kosen-rufu, undying as phoenixes. We share an everlasting vow as mentor and disciple, and a supreme mission from time without beginning. Our challenge lies ahead, and it is imperative that we succeed. There is no trail we cannot blaze, no wall we cannot topple, no struggle we cannot win. So let's get to it!

And let's win, completely and utterly, so that we may leave a profound and magnificent record of achievement for our descendants and all future generations.

Let's live out our lives as great actors playing the role of courageous human beings on the eternal stage of life. My precious fellow men's division members, my inseparable comrades in faith walking life's most noble path—never forget for an instant that the heavenly deities are cheering you on; they are protecting you now, and will protect you always.

As men rich in happiness  
sharing the same spirit as your mentor,  
strive courageously  
like lions  
and win victory after victory.

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