

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S ESSAY ON THE STUDENT DIVISION SHINING STARS OF HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

For my mentor, Josei Toda, who had a gift for mathematics, one of the proudest events of his youth was attending a lecture by the great physicist Albert Einstein, together with his mentor, Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. This took place in Tokyo in November 1922. At the time, Mr. Toda was a young teacher of 22. Einstein, he reminisced, gave a brilliant lecture on the theory of relativity lasting some five hours with intermission. Mr. Toda often spoke of this memory when he was personally tutoring me at what I fondly call “Toda University.”

Both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda retained a passionate spirit of learning and intellectual self-improvement throughout their lives. These first two presidents of the Soka Gakkai are themselves wonderful examples for all of our student division members.



In one of his popular works, Einstein wrote: “What is the meaning of human life, or of organic life altogether? To answer this question at all implies a religion. Is there any sense then, you ask, in putting it? I answer, the man who regards his own life and that of his fellow creatures as meaningless is not merely unfortunate but almost disqualified for life.”

A society lacking in humanistic, religious and spiritual values is an unfortunate society that lacks reverence for life. In my dialogue with Dr. Felix Unger, the renowned Austrian heart surgeon and president of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts, we explored this important theme in depth.



On July 7, 1957, scientists around the world, carrying on Einstein’s spirit of peace activism, convened the first of the Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs. This, coincidentally, was just a week after the establishment of the Soka Gakkai student division (on June 30).

The Nobel Peace Prize winner Dr. Joseph Rotblat, with whom I published a dialogue, was a leading force in the Pugwash Conferences and dedicated his life to working for peace. I was deeply gratified that Dr. Rotblat, up to his final days, spoke of his visit to Soka University of America as one of his most treasured memories. Placing great confidence in the bright young people studying there, he declared that they would be the ones to carry on our work for peace.

The student division is a gathering that inspires immense hope, with many of the world’s foremost thinkers and scholars looking to its members to continue the spiritual struggle for truth and justice.

Congratulations on the landmark 50th anniversary of the establishment of the student division! I’m overjoyed above all to see the dynamic, vibrant, pioneering advance of the young men and young women of the student division and their resolve to adorn this special year with a clear and resounding victory. Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda, as well as such figures as Einstein and Dr. Rotblat, are surely celebrating this day with you and smiling on your achievements.



The Chinese poet and philosopher Yang Xiong said: “If one cultivates the way of righteousness, one cannot fail to triumph over evil. Oh, students: be careful in distinguishing right from wrong.” This great sage, who lived more than 2,000 years ago, called expectantly on students to correctly discern right from wrong and to possess the power of virtue in order to defeat evil.

Yang Xiong also said that the essence of government lies in clearly distinguishing truth from falsehood. When no such distinction is made and the two are confused, he said, the essence of government is lost. This keen observation applies with equal relevance to the present. If anything, it is more important than ever today for bright young minds to cultivate the ability to see clearly through devious falsehoods. Youth also need to speak out fearlessly for truth and justice with even more vigor.

Mr. Toda was very fond of quoting from *The Analects of Confucius* that “one should regard the young with awe.” He used to gaze at us with intense hope and say: “It is the job of disciples to achieve success. When a mentor is praised as great, it’s because his successors, his disciples, have achieved great things. The greatness of a mentor depends upon his disciples.” One should regard the youth with awe. One should regard the student division with awe. It is you bright young people to whom we must entrust the future.

The English historian Thomas Carlyle stated, “Of wisdom cometh strength.”



In 1956, the Soka Gakkai set out to create a great wave of change in Japanese society in order to realize Nichiren Daishonin’s vision of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.” With a look of deep resolve, Mr. Toda said to me, “Daisaku, it’s about time we formed a student division, wouldn’t you agree?” The time was indeed ripe for such a group, and I replied immediately in the affirmative. The origins of the student division lie in this moment of the shared commitment of mentor and disciple. And plans for the division’s establishment were announced in April 1956.



In January 1957, in the middle of winter, I traveled for the first time to Yubari on Japan’s northern island of Hokkaido. I earnestly encouraged the members toiling hard in what was then one of Japan’s major coal-mining towns, as well as their children. On that occasion, I spoke with a young man who was just about to graduate from high school. He wanted to go on to attend college, but his family situation meant that he would have to find a job and become the family’s breadwinner. He was deeply conflicted about this situation.

I urged him: “As the old proverb goes, ‘You can make your fortune anywhere in the world.’ Through the power of faith, you can study without limit. It all depends upon your inner determination! Working with Mr. Toda, I studied, received training and transformed everything I learned into something I could use in life. That is faith. That is the Soka Gakkai spirit.” I shook his hand firmly.

The youth took a job with the local coal-mining operation and went on to lead a life of magnificent victory, contributing to the welfare of his community and fellow citizens.

Many among our members wanted to go to college but couldn’t. By proudly polishing

and developing themselves within the great “university of humanity,” the Soka Gakkai, they have won the trust of their communities and society, and they have built the movement for *kosen-rufu* that exists today. I have never forgotten this for a moment.

The eminent American psychologist Abraham Maslow held the belief that the whole world is a university and that learning is a lifelong pursuit.



June 30, 1957—the day the student division was established 50 years ago—was a Sunday. Fresh-faced young men and young women started arriving at the Azabu Civic Hall in Tokyo from early morning. Some 500 members—mirroring the significance of the disciples in the “Prophecy of Enlightenment for Five Hundred Disciples” chapter of the Lotus Sutra—assembled for this inaugural meeting with Mr. Toda. I was in Hokkaido that day and couldn’t attend.

That year, I fought single-mindedly against the fierce onslaughts of the authorities buffeting the Soka Gakkai and strove to defend the truth and rightness of our cause. One struggle I was involved in was the Yubari Coal Miners Union Incident in Hokkaido, when that particular union tried unjustly to expel Soka Gakkai members from its ranks. The other was the Osaka Incident. [During an election campaign in Osaka, President Ikeda had been falsely accused of illegally soliciting votes.]

In both cases, the established powers persecuted ordinary citizens in Japan who, awakened to their mission through practicing Nichiren Buddhism, were taking political action to try to reform society. We were harassed by people who maligned the Soka Gakkai out of simple ignorance; by ill-informed scholars and social commentators who launched misdirected attacks at us; and by the political and religious establishment along with opposition political parties and labor unions. All feared and resented the emergence of an activist, popular movement that might lay claim to the power they had hitherto wielded unchallenged. An onslaught of unprecedented hatred and abuse by the three powerful enemies as predicted in the Lotus Sutra erupted in full force.

In the “Letter from Sado,” Nichiren writes: “It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong. Our contemporary scholars of the various schools are just like them.... When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood. Like Nichiren, for example” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 302).

I engraved these words in my heart as I faced these daunting obstacles.

As the inaugural meeting of the student division was being held in Tokyo with Mr. Toda, I was in Hokkaido rallying and supporting our members with every ounce of my being, and seeking a chance to talk with the leaders of the coal-miners union, which was doing everything in its power to avoid such a direct engagement. While claiming to want to have it out with the Soka Gakkai in public, the union was actually afraid of the vigorous energy of our organization. As long as the difference between right and wrong remains vague, the people are bound to suffer. Judging that now was the time to set the record straight, I resolved to fight with everything I had. In the midst of this storm of persecution, the student division embarked on its voyage to open a new age.

What is true intellect? It is not being blind to the truth or ignorant of the difference between right and wrong; it is not being afraid to stand up and defeat the enemies of the

people.

I had high hopes for the student division. Indeed, I believed that only the student division, as a force of socially engaged and activist intellectuals, could really help the oppressed. And true to that conviction, when the Soka Gakkai faced attacks by the devilish nature of authority, the student division rose up steadfastly to fight alongside me. The noble responsibility and mission of the student division is to vanquish those who would deceive the people and to protect the Soka Gakkai, an organization dedicated to the highest good.

In a university speech, the English philosopher John Stuart Mill declared, “Whoever does not help the right side is helping the wrong.” He also said, “Bad men need nothing more to compass their ends, than that good men should look on and do nothing.” The silence of good people abets evildoers. Mill further asserted that the “ultimate end” of the pursuit of learning in youth is to make people “more effective combatants in the great fight which never ceases to rage between Good and Evil.”



At the student division inaugural meeting, Mr. Toda called upon the members to become neither professional religious leaders nor social revolutionaries. What he did say was that he hoped that half of those present would become top business executives and the other half outstanding scholars.

I hope you will become truly dedicated leaders of society, builders of peace and victorious champions of justice. I hope you will become capable individuals firmly imbued with the Soka Gakkai spirit who are active and successful in every field of endeavor. For unless that happens, *kosen-rufu* will remain an empty dream.



At that time, there were far fewer young women in the student division than young men, but Mr. Toda trained these young women with deep affection and caring. As Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern nursing, declared, “There is a time for all things — a time to be trained, and a time to use our training.” She also said, “Training is enabling you to use the means you have in yourselves.” It is certainly true that the student division is an ideal place for young women to gain training so that they can develop the means to lead happy lives and help others they encounter do the same, as well as the means to build a peaceful world, starting with their immediate environment.

Today, young women who are graduates of the student division are vibrantly taking the lead in the Soka century of women, and I am constantly receiving words of praise for them from people in every sphere of society.

I offer these words of the English novelist Charlotte Brontë to the young women in the student division, who are spending their youth in such an admirable, worthwhile manner, striving for the sake of Buddhism, their friends and the future: “This is not the time to regret, dread or weep. What I have and ought to do is very distinctly laid out for me; what I want and pray for, is strength to perform it.”

The Mystic Law, which allows us to reveal our true and highest potential, enables us to summon this strength freely from the depths of our lives.



The eminent Japanese educator Inazo Nitobe, who was an acquaintance of Mr. Makiguchi, wrote in an essay that students can pursue their studies thanks to their mothers. He was referring to the numerous hardworking mothers who through their tireless efforts make it possible for their children to attend school. The times may have changed since then, but the sincere feelings of mothers praying for the growth and success of their children are unchanging. What good is learning if you forget to be grateful for this selfless spirit of mothers and the importance of serving the people?

I hope our student division members will never do anything that would cause sorrow to their mothers. Please take care not to get involved in traffic accidents. I also hope that our young women's division members will remind each other to get home at a reasonable hour after activities so that they don't worry their parents.



One conclusion I have reached in my numerous dialogues with great thinkers around the world, beginning with Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee, is that the starting point for changing the world must be the human revolution of those in leadership positions. Just look at the arrogant authorities, political leaders and clerics who treat the people with contempt. As the 17th-century French author François duc de La Rochefoucauld observed, "No fools are more troublesome than those who have some modicum of intelligence."



We have had far too many ingrates who, after rising to high positions in society, became intoxicated with power and then betrayed and exploited the people. Having gratitude and showing appreciation are the very foundations of Buddhism. That's why I hope no graduates of the student division will become the kind of people who, because of their ingratitude, were condemned by Nichiren as being worse than animals. It is the lofty mission of the student division to stand up against and sternly rebuke those who, forgetting their debt of gratitude, turn with enmity on their fellow members and their mentor.

Nichiren declared, "From the beginning, I pursued my studies because I wanted to master Buddhism and attain Buddhahood, and also to save the people to whom I am indebted" (WND-1, 202).

As the English writer Samuel Johnson wisely observed, a person consumed by conceit and envy "circulates the whisper of malevolence, aggravates the tale of calumny, and assists the clamour of defamation." Such base and unscrupulous intrigues must be actively denounced.

What the 21st century needs is leadership dedicated to serving the people. I would like my disciples from the student division to be the guiding stars who are at the forefront of just such a leadership revolution, rallying the rest of the world onward.



On Sept. 8, 1968, in my address at the 11th Student Division General Meeting, during which I made my proposal calling for the normalization of diplomatic relations between

Japan and China, I cited a passage from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*: “It is due to the authority and supernatural power of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy that this Lotus Sutra is propagated throughout Jambudvīpa [the entire world]. Therefore the widespread propagation of this sutra must be under the care and protection of Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” (p. 190).

Universally worthy and wise leaders will advance the cause of world peace.

Having studied and been trained at the world’s foremost “Toda University,” I am proud to regard myself as the first actual member of the student division. That first student division member has now received 216 honors from universities and other institutions around the globe. I dedicate them all to my mentor, Mr. Toda, as an expression of my appreciation and gratitude to this great man.



The universities around the world that have presented me with these honors have by no means done so lightly or casually. Each is profoundly significant. As President Rubén Urbieto Berecochea of the Universidad Columbia del Paraguay said in his remarks upon presenting me with an honorary doctorate (on April 19, 2003): “One of the purposes of conferring such an honor is to send a powerful message to society that the recipient is a person whose virtuous actions deserve emulation.... I would like the young people of Paraguay...to learn from Mr. Ikeda’s life.... I wish to say to them: ‘In a world in crisis, this person has opened a great path to peace. This person has triumphed over every adversity, viewing even the most difficult circumstances as opportunities to elevate the spirit.’”

I would like you, the members of the student division, to take these words as praise also for your indomitable efforts as my successors.

The great path of worldwide *kosen-rufu* opens brightly before us, and we must ensure that it continues to do so infinitely into the future.

In the 50 years since its establishment, the student division has become a major force for peace among university students worldwide, expanding to include members in the United States, Canada, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland, Belgium, Ghana, Côte d’Ivoire, South Korea, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, India, Australia and New Zealand — just to name a few. Now there are also students who uphold the Mystic Law in Cuba.

Like the young eagle taking flight depicted on the Soka Gakkai student division flag, student division members are spreading their wings of intellect and passionate conviction and struggling valiantly to create a hope-filled future for the world. You, the bright young men and young women of the student division, are indeed the new shining stars of hope for the next 50 years. I call on all of you to follow in my footsteps! Advance boldly and cheerfully along this great and glorious path of mentor and disciple!

I present these words of Victor Hugo to you, my dear young friends, “The honesty of a great spirit, fined down to justice and truth, is devastating.”

—Written June 30, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the student division, at the Mentor-Disciple Hall, Soka Gakkai Headquarters.

FOR DISCUSSION

From this essay:

“What is true intellect? It is not being blind to the truth or ignorant of the difference between right and wrong; it is not being afraid to stand up and defeat the enemies of the people.”

1) How does the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood apply in your relationships at home, work or school?

2) How has your practice of Nichiren Buddhism helped you to distinguish right from wrong?