The Light of the Century of Humanity

By Shin’ichi Yamamoto

March 16

—The Eternal Day of Mentor and Disciple

My young friends,
triumph resolutely through all,
even days of raging storms
and pounding breakers,
as champions of youth.

The Korean independence leader Yeo Un-hyeong (1886–1947) declared: “Only young people always uphold immeasurably high ideals. And only young people truly have the dynamism to boldly realize those ideals without hesitation.” Impress by this quote, I cited it in an interview I gave for the well-known Korean magazine Wolgan Chosun.

Everything hinges on the youth. Indeed, the youth alone hold the key. The courage and the actions of young people who brim with a pioneering spirit can change the times and cause the sun of hope to rise. In any age, it is the youth who open new pages in history.

*

This month (March 2009), noble Bodhisattvas of the Earth from 60 countries and territories gathered in Tokyo to attend the SGI General Meeting commemorating March 16, Kosen-rufu Day. In fulfillment of Nichiren Daishonin’s wish for worldwide kosen-rufu, the banner of Buddhist humanism of the SGI today flies in all corners of the globe.

In his “Song of Comrades,” my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, called out:

Where are the young flag bearers?
Can you not see Fuji’ s summit?
Rally now, quickly, in growing numbers!
How overjoyed he would surely be to see so many dedicated young successors now holding high the banner of worldwide kosen-rufu!

The Daishonin called for the widespread propagation of the Law, and our gathering of Soka is faithfully acting on his decree.

In early March 1958, 51 years ago, Mr. Toda told me that the Japanese prime minister, who was a friend of his, had accepted his invitation to visit the head temple Taiseki-ji in Shizuoka Prefecture on March 16. He asked me to organize a welcome ceremony with members of the youth division. He said: “Let’s have the youth division conduct a ceremony that will serve as a trial run—a dress rehearsal—for kosen-rufu in preparation for the future.” Mr. Toda wanted to show the nation’s top leaders the outstanding young people that he had personally trained, the youth who would usher in a new age. At the same time, he wished to demonstrate to the youth that kosen-rufu is not restricted to the narrow confines of religion, but is a movement that can play an important and significant role in the peace and prosperity of society.

The most essential point, however, was his deep resolve to pass on to his youthful successors the baton of kosen-rufu, an undertaking to which he had devoted his life as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

The future depends on the youth. That is why we must foster young people of true commitment and entrust them with everything.

Mr. Toda’s words resonated solemnly: “I want you to take charge of this event, Daisaku. Give it your best and do whatever you feel is appropriate.”

“Yes,” I responded, “I’ll make sure it’s a beautiful gathering in which we, your successors, will offer our pledge to you.”

We were in perfect harmony. The mentor’s decade of strict training and the disciple’s devoted efforts in response were about to reach their great culmination.

The March 16 gathering was a grand ceremony of the oneness of mentor and disciple that Mr. Toda and I, the second president and future third president of the Soka Gakkai, shared. I regarded it with the same profound significance as the entrustment of the Law from Shakyamuni to his disciples as depicted in the Lotus Sutra. And it forever became a day on which youth stand up together with me to fulfill the vow of kosen-rufu united in the same eternal resolve.
Rise up,
youthful leaders
of the new century,
confident of your profound mission
as the successors of kosen-rufu.

To be a successor means to inherit the mission for kosen-rufu. It is not others, but we ourselves who have to make a vow to devote ourselves to kosen-rufu, and to continue raising the banners of victory of our noble cause for as long as we live.

On March 6, 1958, I had appeared in court in relation to the Osaka Incident. It was a time requiring me to intensify my fierce battle against the devilish nature of authority, waged in staunch defense of my mentor and the Soka Gakkai. I keenly felt the importance of my mission to vanquish the forces of the three powerful enemies of Buddhism by speaking out fearlessly to set the record straight. I was determined to spare nothing of myself to protect the Soka Gakkai, the organization that my mentor declared was more precious than his own life. I felt a deep and powerful sense of mission.

Dr. Jim Garrison, president of the John Dewey Society in the United States, remarked to me in our meeting last year: “Teachings pass down through the generations, and our teachings and what they mean will be decided by the youth of future generations. I know that you place great importance on successors and the spirit to carry on.”

We needed to contact the members about the March 16 ceremony as quickly as possible. There were no cell phones then, and in fact few telephones at all. But we informed the youth about the upcoming event at meetings, through home visits, and even by telegram, getting the word out with lightning speed. Some rushed onto chartered buses or overnight trains with little more information than that there would be a very special meeting and that they should bring a bowl and pair of chopsticks. Thinking the youth would be cold and hungry on their arrival, Mr. Toda had made preparations for them to be served hot pork soup.

With a passionate sense of mission for kosen-rufu, young men’s and young women’s division members, mainly from the Tokyo metropolitan area and Shizuoka Prefecture, assembled in buoyant spirits. Youth from Kansai and other areas of Japan
also came. Just like the line, “Rally now, quickly,” from Mr. Toda’s “Song of Comrades,” 6,000 youth division members rallied to the side of our great leader of kosen-rufu. It was a gathering comparable to the “assembly as numerous as the grains of sand of 60,000 Ganges Rivers” described in the “Emerging from the Earth” (15th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The youth were all present by 7:00 in the morning, their breath forming white puffs in the cold air. Each shared the wish to struggle alongside their mentor, and doing so was their greatest joy.

*

The important thing is what we do at a crucial moment, how earnestly we strive alongside our mentor, and with what kind of resolve and prayer we carry out our efforts. Buddhism is win or lose. It essentially comes down to how we conduct ourselves at such times. This is the vital point that will determine our ultimate victory or defeat in life.

The ingratitude demonstrated by those who betrayed their mentor and fellow members at crucial moments in the past, whether out of cowardice or arrogance, is a black mark that can never be erased. As the Daishonin writes: “Foolish men are likely to forget the promises they have made when the crucial moment comes” (WND-1, 283). This admonition is not limited to the past. It is an axiom of faith that applies to the present and future as well.

When Mr. Toda’s businesses fell into dire straits in 1950, there were smug and self-righteous individuals who cursed and abandoned him. It was a time when the continued existence of our organization was called into question, with the very real danger of the genuine path of mentor and disciple, or the lifeblood of kosen-rufu, being lost. In this crisis, I supported Mr. Toda with all my might. Surely no one in the pages of history can match my dedication to my mentor. I am proud that I have been able to leave a solemn example of the way of a disciple, the golden path of absolute victory based on the oneness of mentor and disciple.

And it is the same today. I hope that truehearted youth will proudly uphold the great vow for kosen-rufu, and even more so when they face great obstacles and challenges.

In a letter dated March 18, 1276, in response to sincere offerings received from his youthful disciple Nanjo Tokimitsu, the Daishonin wrote that such assistance was actually “sustaining the life of the Lotus Sutra” (WND-2, 655). Supporting the teacher who is a genuine votary of the Lotus Sutra is to walk the supreme path of leading all people to enlightenment, which is the essence or ultimate teaching of the sutra. This in turn leads to opening the way to the widespread propagation of the Law throughout the entire world.
On March 16, 1958, about two hours after the youth had gathered, there was a rail accident in Shizuoka Prefecture, in which a freight train derailed and overturned. Actually, on the same day, quite separate from the special youth assembly, groups of members from different parts of Japan were en route to make a commemorative visit to the head temple. The accident caused serious delays for inbound members from Tokyo’s Adachi Chapter as well as those from more distant places in the north such as Otaru, Sendai, Ichinoseki, and Yamagata Prefecture. The train disruption later spread to other lines, causing delays for members seeking to return to Kumamoto and Omuta in Kyushu in the south. Fortunately, however, all our members were safe, and they made light of the inconveniences of the day, joking that it made the trip all the more memorable.

As the person responsible for overseeing both the March 16 youth gathering and the other commemorative group visits, I had prayed for their safe conduct and so was greatly relieved at this news. I also made full preparations to welcome our honored guests, while dealing with this sudden emergency situation. I was determined to lead the way to victory, surmounting every obstacle and putting our members’ minds at ease. This is the mission of youth who embody their mentor’s spirit.

The Soka Gakkai young men’s division transportation group worked in perfect unity with me to ensure that the day would proceed smoothly and without any accidents. The transportation group was the precursor of today’s Soka Group, whose members are trusted and admired as great youthful pillars of kosen-rufu. It has always been the pride and resolve of this dedicated behind-the-scenes group to pray for the member’s safety and protect them under any circumstances and in any weather.

The smooth running and great success of the March 16 gathering, which shines in the annals of Gakkai history, was both a victory of, and brilliant testament to, the tireless and vigilant efforts of the members of the transportation group. As youth division chief of staff, I had thoroughly trained them, and they magnificently rose to the occasion.

In the early days of our movement, I had personally carried out the responsibilities that were undertaken by the transportation group, and had taught my fellow youth the spirit of protecting the Soka Gakkai and our mentor. I did so by imparting to them my own spirit of selflessly protecting Mr. Toda. I conveyed to them the essence of the Gakkai spirit, which can be summed up as follows:

1) Faith directly connected to the mentor
2) Commitment to protecting the members
3) Prompt action
4) Close communication and unity
5) Speaking out to vanquish devilish forces

The members of the transportation group and their worthy successors in the Soka Group have faithfully inherited this spirit. I pioneered and personally fostered the Soka Group. Truly, its members are my direct successors and disciples, perfectly united with me in spirit.

Peerless members of the Soka Group, you are my great pride. To you, I entrust the realm of Soka.

* The prime minister, allowing himself to be dissuaded by the opinions of certain individuals, canceled his visit at the last minute. He himself telephoned to offer an apology.

Arising from his sickbed to take the call, Mr. Toda spoke in a powerful voice that seemed utterly incongruous with his weakened physical condition: “You’ll be betraying the trust of the youth! . . . It’s not me you should be apologizing to! You should apologize to them!” It was a true lion’s roar.

Today, whenever our youth join me in greeting dignitaries and other top leaders from around the world, I always envision Mr. Toda smiling happily at that sight.

I’ll never forget joining Mr. Toda in extending a most cordial welcome to members of the prime minister’s family, who attended the March 16 gathering in the Japanese leader’s stead.

That day, Mr. Toda called out to the 6,000 young people assembled: “The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world!” His great declaration reverberated like thunder in their hearts. The eyes of the young women sparkled with bright resolve. Immense pride shone on everyone’s faces. In the background, a majestic, snowcapped Mount Fuji watched over this heart-to-heart encounter of mentor and disciple.

* The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of noble comrades
in the shared cause of kosen-rufu.
May you all without exception
become magnificent victors.

As the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca once declared, “The soul is our king.”
Those with evil in their hearts are miserable. It is the mission of philosophy and
religion to guide the heart toward truth and victory.

Only when we develop in our hearts a powerful commitment to the highest
good—that is, the happiness of all people—can we truly realize the ideal of genuine
lasting peace and prosperity on our planet. This is the Daishonin’s principle of
“establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.”

The Lotus Sutra is known as the king of sutras, because it can lead all people to
enlightenment. We of the Soka Gakkai are accurately practicing the sutra, just as the
Buddha teaches. We are not swayed by the whims of secular authorities. We are lion
kings practicing the Mystic Law, our lives aligned with the fundamental law of the
universe, dwelling in the “palace of the ninth consciousness [the pure, undefiled
Buddha nature], the unchanging reality that reigns over all of life’s functions” (WND-
1, 832).

The Daishonin declares: “Those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain
Buddhahood” (WND-1, 302). Youth, be confident! Never fear! You are young lions.
You are the successors who will carry on the struggle of the great lion kings of Soka
who have gone before you.

*  

After participating in that dress rehearsal for kosen-rufu, the youth of the Soka Gakkai
began to embark toward the grand stage of worldwide kosen-rufu. Later, when I
became the Soka Gakkai’s third president (in May 1960), they united with me and
dedicated themselves wholeheartedly to pioneering the frontiers of kosen-rufu through
compassionately sharing the Daishonin’s Buddhism with others. They boldly
shouldered responsibility for our movement, achieving the tremendous growth of the
Soka Gakkai in the second half of the 20th century. They attained the life-state of
“Heroes of the World” (cf. WND-1, 835) and played leading roles in various spheres
of society. And today, in the 21st century, their children and grandchildren in turn are
making wonderful contributions to society. I am also overjoyed to witness the
achievements of the graduates of the Soka schools and Soka universities.

*
In another letter to Nanjo Tokimitsu, discussing the nobility of dedicating one’s life to propagating the Law, the Daishonin writes: “Since death is the same in either case, you should be willing to offer your life for the Lotus Sutra. Think of this offering as a drop of dew rejoining the ocean, or a speck of dust returning to the earth” (WND-1, 1003). Fellow members who together dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu are able to merge their lives with the ocean of eternal good fortune and develop a vast and expansive life-state of absolute freedom. They are able to forge a self as solid as the earth that will never be defeated by life’s storms and that will bring forth countless beautiful blossoms of victory.

We of the Soka Gakkai have triumphed because of our earnest and ungrudging spirit. The Gakkai has become the great organization it has because of its members’ selfless dedication to propagating the Law. We must never lose sight of this fact. Those who walk the Soka path of mentor and disciple will come to savor a victorious life of complete fulfillment in the end.

*

The great invincible citadel of kosen-rufu will shine on forever through the shared commitment of mentor and disciple.

Representatives of the student division and the young women’s division Ikeda Kayokai sang at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters leaders meetings this month and last month (on February 11 and March 4, 2009, respectively). Their voices still reverberate in my heart.

The members of the 21st Century Shin’ichi Group, a training group formed 15 years ago on March 16, for members of the young men’s student division, have also developed splendidly. And new members continue to join them. The original Shin’ichi Group, which is the forerunner of the present one, was one that I personally fostered and trained with the hope that its members would become outstanding leaders of kosen-rufu. Today, many youthful “Shin’ichis” are taking their places on the stage of the new century and making commendable efforts to expand our network of Soka successors.

*

One morning shortly after that March 16 ceremony, a bedridden Mr. Toda said to me:
“Daisaku, yesterday I dreamed I went to Mexico.” And he also said: “Daisaku, the world is your challenge; it is your true stage.”

Taking these words to heart, I, his loyal disciple, completely united with him in spirit, soared out into the world to fulfill this great mission. And now, my successors are joyfully active in 192 countries and territories.

The path of mentor and disciple is a grand adventure; it is a drama of indestructible joy. Today, in Mexico, which Mr. Toda dreamed of visiting, SGI youth are making brilliant efforts. Our youth in Argentina have also developed a wonderful solidarity. And SGI-Europe recently announced that it would launch a new youth summit. Countries all around the globe are celebrating March 16 with wonderful victories.

The success of disciples is the success of the mentor. The victory of the youth assures future victory.

*

I’m presently engaged in a dialogue via correspondence with Prince Charles Napoleon, the current head of the Napoleon family. Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821) once declared: “Act boldly, striving to be a model for others. Don’t hesitate. Don’t be fearful, but advance courageously. Be decisive in everything.”

My young friends, triumph in the great struggle for kosen-rufu and proudly raise high the banner of youthful victory and the glorious banner of mentor and disciple!

Steadfastly
surmounting and triumphing over
treacherous currents
and perilous mountains,
uphold the banner of kosen-rufu.

1. Shin’ichi Yamamoto is a pen name of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.
2. Translated from Korean.
3. The interview appears in the November 2008 issue of Wolgan Chosun.
4. For more details on the events of March 16, 1958, please see SGI Newsletter Nos. 4219 and 7516, and volume 12 of The Human Revolution, “Successors” chapter.
5. Osaka Incident: The occasion when President Ikeda, then Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff, was arrested and wrongfully charged with election law violations in a House of Councilor’s by-election held in Osaka in April 1957. At the end of the court case, which lasted for almost five years, he was fully exonerated of all charges.
6. Three powerful enemies: Three types of arrogant people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra in the evil age after Shakyamuni Buddha’s death, described in the 20-line verse section of the “Encouraging Devotion” (13th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The Great Teacher Miao-lo (711–782) of China summarizes them as arrogant lay people, arrogant priests, and arrogant false sages.

7. From a discussion with President Ikeda, held in Nagano, on August 12, 2008. See SGI Newsletter No. 7650.


(Translated from the March 16, 2009, issue of the Seikyo Shimbun, the Soka Gakkai daily newspaper)