

SGI Newsletter

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SGI President Ikeda's Essay

OUR BRILLIANT PATH TO VICTORY

By Shin'ichi Yamamoto¹

Our Districts Are Warm, Hope-filled Citadels of Kosen-rufu—Part 1 [of 2]

This place
is the citadel of kosen-rufu
where we carry out our mission.

June 6 is the birthday of Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944). This year, 2010, also marks the 80th anniversary of the publication of Mr. Makiguchi's *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Education).

Mr. Makiguchi once said: "Having lofty ideals and a clearly defined purpose, and then putting them into practice in daily life—this is what it means to live with true clarity of vision."

The philosophy of value creation, of Soka, is indeed to embrace lofty ideals and a clear purpose, and to live them on a daily basis. This is the philosophy articulated by the great founder of our movement, who gave his life for his beliefs.

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June 6 is also celebrated as SGI-Europe Day. Throughout Europe, SGI members, carrying on the legacy of Mr. Makiguchi, are vibrantly expanding their networks dedicated to contributing to the betterment of society.

The Villa Sachsen Culture Center is located in the city of Bingen, Germany, along the middle reaches of the Rhine River, one of the largest waterways in Europe. It is a citadel of culture and friendship treasured by the local residents, situated at a site that the German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832) described as having "the most beautiful view of the Rhine." Goethe, who exerted himself tirelessly for the welfare of his community, went by the motto: "What we are searching for is here or

¹ Shin'ichi Yamamoto is a pen name of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.

nowhere.”² He regarded wherever he was as the place of his mission, and he strove his hardest to win in everything he did. Goethe also encouraged a friend, stressing the importance of grounding one’s feet firmly on the earth.³

The great endeavor of kosen-rufu to bring “human flowers” (LSOC5, 142) dedicated to peace and happiness to bloom across the globe begins with putting down roots in the local community where we live. Our hardworking and sincere members who are striving courageously and steadily at the district level are planting deep roots of trust in their communities. That is what makes the SGI so strong.

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On May 3, 1951, when my mentor Josei Toda was inaugurated as second Soka Gakkai president, he announced his goal of expanding our organization to 750,000 member households. It was such an ambitious target that some leaders just brushed it aside, unable to take it seriously. Others were completely baffled as to how such a number could possibly be reached. I, however, vowed to take concrete steps from that very moment toward realizing my mentor’s vision, and I focused on the district as the place to carry out this struggle. I burned with youthful, fighting spirit, determined to open the way forward by starting with my district and working with energy, joy, and enthusiasm.

During that period, I wrote in my diary: “I must exert myself so that my district will grow and develop.”⁴ I was serving dually as what is the equivalent of today’s district leader and young men’s district leader of Omori District, Kamata Chapter, located in Tokyo’s Ota Ward.

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I was 23 years old, so most of the other members in my district were older than me. Naturally, I always tried to be courteous and sincere in my interactions with them. Though I was younger than everyone else, none could match my earnest commitment to Mr. Toda and the Soka Gakkai.

The Russian author Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910) cherished these words from the

² Translated from German. Albert Bielschowsky, *Goethe: Sein Leben und Seine Werke* (Munich: C. H. Beck’sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1904), p. 362.

³ Cf. Translated from German. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Briefe und Aufsätze von Goethe, 1766–1786* (Letters and Articles, 1766-1786), edited by A. Schöll (Weimar: Landes-Industrie-Comptoir, 1846), p. 168.

⁴ Cf. Daisaku Ikeda, *A Youthful Diary: One Man’s Journey from the Beginning of Faith to Worldwide Leadership for Peace* (Santa Monica, California: World Tribune Press, 2000), p. 115.

classic Chinese work *Tao Te Ching* by Lao Tzu: “A tower nine stories high is built from a small heap of earth. A journey of a thousand miles starts in front of your feet.”⁵ The starting point for any great achievement is always close at hand, right in front of us.

At the district level, we are able to see firsthand what is going on with the members. Indeed, just as a mirror reflects our appearance, the members’ attitudes reflect the commitment of the district leader.

I fervently chanted for the growth of our district and wholeheartedly encouraged each precious member. With the passion and energy of a youth, I took the lead and gave my all to increasing our membership.

The Daishonin writes: “Teach others to the best of your ability, even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (WND-1, 386). This is a perfect description of what our SGI activities are all about.

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In the autumn of 1951, as one of the few members of the Soka Gakkai study department, I was put in charge of giving lectures on the Daishonin’s writings in Kawagoe District in Saitama Prefecture, a place that had tremendous untapped potential. My mission as Mr. Toda’s representative was to instill the Daishonin’s spirit of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land” in the hearts of members there. I regularly traveled back and forth between Tokyo and Saitama with the strong and deep prayer to make Kawagoe into the top district in Japan and to attain victory together with the Saitama members with whom I shared such profound ties.

I did this for nearly three years. It was a long and arduous undertaking. But because of this, a golden citadel of kosen-rufu that I personally helped build now shines in Saitama.

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“Treasure the districts!”—this was Mr. Toda’s creed. He always encouraged and praised leaders working on the front lines of our movement, especially the district leaders. He often said: “Japan will be protected by your presence. You are precious pioneers, truly important people.” Those taking responsibility on the front lines are leading lives of the most lofty and noble mission.

My wife also took responsibility during Mr. Toda’s time serving as what would

⁵ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching: The Book of Meaning and Life*, translated by H. G. Ostwald (London: Arkana, 1989), p. 56.

today be a young women's division district leader. Later, when she became a member of the women's division, she continued to be active in the local organization as a group leader and a vice district leader, always taking our children with her to activities. From time to time, members who worked alongside her in those days write to her reporting on the wonderful fortune they have accumulated through their Buddhist practice.

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The true, hope-filled picture of kosen-rufu is when our frontline organizations are forging ahead with energy and optimism, solidly united in purpose. It is important, therefore, that all of our leaders enthusiastically exert themselves on the front lines, inspiring others to action and imparting courage and joy to members on the district level. Let's stir up a powerful groundswell of encouragement and widely expand our network of individuals dedicated to the cause of good.

Mr. Toda believed that the key to winning in all our struggles as an organization was winning at the district and chapter levels. As his loyal disciple, I gave my all to supporting the districts and chapters I was assigned to, seeking to ensure their absolute victory. Mr. Toda always knew about and was pleased with my efforts.

To the young men's division district leaders, youthful heroes of kosen-rufu, and the young women's division district leaders, hope-filled members of the Kayo-kai: Resolutely take the lead!

To the men's division district leaders, our valiant golden pillars, and the women's division district leaders, the shining suns of kosen-rufu: Work together and raise high the banner of the complete victory of Soka!

Taking to heart my call, I hope you will all do your utmost to support our precious districts.

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The kickoff for the 1956 Osaka Campaign⁶—the results of which were to astonish all of Japan—also began from the district level. On January 5, at the old Kansai Headquarters, I held a district leaders meeting to coordinate our efforts based on a shared commitment to win without fail.

Earnest daimoku, excellent planning, and dynamic action are the keys to certain

⁶ Osaka Campaign: In May 1956, the Kansai members, uniting around a young Daisaku Ikeda, who had been dispatched by second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda to support them, introduced 11,111 households to the practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism. In elections held two months later, the Soka Gakkai-backed candidate in Kansai won a seat in the Upper House, an accomplishment that was thought all but impossible at the time.

victory. It is faith in the Mystic Law that enables us to effectively harmonize these three aspects.

Based on such courageous faith, our district leaders throughout the Kansai region solidly united in spirit.

Nothing surpasses the strategy of the Lotus Sutra. When we resolve to win through faith, we set ourselves on the path of making even the impossible possible.

I visited members all over Osaka together with the district leaders there. Some members were ill, some were experiencing economic hardship, and some were having problems with their jobs. Some youth had family members who were strongly opposed to their Buddhist practice. No one was free from problems or sufferings of some sort. I reached out to each individual I encountered, and encouraged them with all my heart.

The philosopher Francis Hutcheson (1694–1746), who taught at the University of Glasgow, wrote: “The soul who bears [adversity] well, will obtain a new and enlarged strength.”⁷

While continuing their arduous and often unseen efforts, the Kansai members eagerly took their place on the crucial battlefield of their mission, transforming their problems and sufferings into a great vow for kosen-rufu and into courageous action toward accomplishing their human revolution.

One district leader proudly exclaimed of himself: “The sleeping lion has awakened!” A single earnest individual can surpass a force of one million. With this resolute leader spearheading the way forward, his district broke through its limits and achieved tremendous growth.

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In the intense struggle of the Osaka Campaign, one particular leader lamented that there were no capable individuals in his local area. I said to him: “There are always capable people. Please decide that there are, and chant with that conviction.” The leader did as I suggested, and as he met with members from his district and interacted with them based on this fresh outlook, he came to discover that every member was indeed extremely capable. Before, he had allowed himself to believe that there weren’t any capable people, so he simply couldn’t see any.

When we look through the eyes of faith, we will be filled with gratitude and joy to see all the precious and capable individuals with whom we are able to work for our noble cause.

The sphere of our struggle for kosen-rufu is vast and the purpose of our Soka organization is truly profound. Each person has a unique mission to fulfill.

⁷ Francis Hutcheson, *A Short Introduction to Moral Philosophy* (Glasgow: The University of Glasgow, 1753), p. 83.

As Nichiren Daishonin states in reference to the principle of “emerging from the earth” (WND-1, 385), when one person stands up, they are certain to be followed by two, three, and then a multitude of Bodhisattvas of the Earth in steady succession.

When all our districts in Kansai rose up together, history was made. In the single month of May 1956, Osaka Chapter introduced an unprecedented 11,111 new member households to the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Then in July of that same year, we achieved the impossible by winning a great victory that astounded the general public.

Brave champions
of kosen-rufu,
now is the time
to create brilliant,
everlasting achievements.

[*To be continued*]

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Thursday, August 5, 2010

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OUR BRILLIANT PATH TO VICTORY

By Shin'ichi Yamamoto¹

Our Districts Are Warm, Hope-filled Citadels of Kosen-rufu—Part 2 [of 2]

Youthful lives
shine radiantly
with the rhythm
of infinite
hope and victory.

“Focus on District Activities”—that was the headline appearing on the front page of the June 3, 1960, edition of the *Seikyo Shimbun* (the Soka Gakkai newspaper in Japan). That was 50 years ago and only one month after I was inaugurated as the third Soka Gakkai president.

The district is the very foundation of our kosen-rufu movement.

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I also concentrated on the district as the starting point for new development when I embarked on my great journey for worldwide kosen-rufu in October 1960. To the surprise of the leaders traveling with me, when I arrived in Hawaii, my first overseas destination, I announced the establishment of the Soka Gakkai's very first district outside Japan.

The district leader I appointed was Harry Hirama, a second-generation Japanese American. He was a leader who genuinely treasured and cared for the members and was liked by all. I said to him: “I am the one who appointed you as district leader. If you fail, then I, too, will have failed. I will take full responsibility. Please strive to the best of your ability, giving your utmost.” Mr. Hirama responded to my ardent resolve by demonstrating a passionate fighting spirit for kosen-rufu. I still clearly remember the sincerity and dedication of this pioneer member.

¹ Shin'ichi Yamamoto is a pen name of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda.

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The district leaders working on the front lines of our movement are the ones bearing responsibility for the happiness of the members and the victory of kosen-rufu. Nothing can possibly defeat these valiant Bodhisattvas of the Earth who are united with me in spirit and commitment.

I wish to call out to them: Everything starts from this moment! Take action with a stand-alone spirit! Keep pressing onward, even when things become difficult! Courageously challenge every obstacle blocking your way! When you do so, other courageous like-minded people with a mission for kosen-rufu will join you one after another.

As district leaders, some of you may be newly appointed, and some of you may be veterans at the job. Whatever the case may be, I hope you will lead the way toward achieving great victory, always maintaining an enthusiastic spirit and youthful energy and engaging in our struggle with wisdom and perseverance.

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The Kenyan environmentalist Dr. Wangari Maathai, with whom we of the SGI have developed a close friendship, initiated a tree-planting campaign called Save the Land Harambee (*harambee* is Swahili for “let us all pull together”), which would later develop into the Green Belt Movement. She describes the challenges of this campaign in detail in the pages of her memoir *Unbowed*, of which she sent me a copy.

On June 5, 1977, in honor of World Environment Day, seven trees were planted in a park outside the Kenyan capital of Nairobi. The trees were named after seven eminent figures who had contributed to the local community from the late 19th century through the early 20th century. This was the starting point of the Green Belt Movement. When Dr. Maathai tried to expand this movement throughout Kenya, however, she encountered obstacles.

In one region, Dr. Maathai donated two donkeys to carry water for the trees that were planted there, but when she left the area, the project came to a halt. For the people in this region, donkeys were traditionally only used to carry household goods and the idea of using a donkey to carry water went against the grain. Dr. Maathai learned a valuable lesson from this experience, which enabled her to keep the movement going: to respect the autonomy and sense of responsibility of each area and to place importance on coordinating with the local community.²

In other words, the movement could only advance if the people in each area were

² Wangari Muta Maathai, *Unbowed: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), pp. 132–33.

deeply and personally motivated to make their community a better place and able to employ their own ideas and local wisdom in doing so. Later, in towns and villages across the land, the people—most of whom were women—planted seedlings of hope one by one, until finally more than 30 million trees had been planted. Overcoming various difficulties and setbacks, the Green Belt Movement soon spread to other African nations, giving birth to a global environmental conservation movement.

Since starting this movement, Dr. Maathai's life has been filled with many ups and downs. She has been the target of unfounded criticism and attacks, and was even arrested and jailed on false charges. Nevertheless, her hopes and beliefs have remained undimmed.

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There are people who speak out for justice for the sake of their communities and society and do what needs to be done at their own initiative, no matter what others might say. Each is like a single drop of water, but together they will form a mighty river and eventually produce a great current that will change society.

In our SGI movement for peace, culture, and education, surely none love their communities more or are working harder for the welfare of others than the mothers of Soka, our district women's division leaders and all our women's division members. They are truly precious drops of water in our great river of kosen-rufu. I wish to convey my highest praise and deepest gratitude to them.

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The time has come
for you to summon forth courage
on the stage of your mission.

Warmly encouraging a lay follower serving as a pillar of his community, the Daishonin writes: "I entrust you with the propagation of Buddhism in your province" (WND-1, 1117). Engraving this passage in their hearts, SGI members, fellow Bodhisattvas of the Earth, are actively working to create peace and happiness in their respective countries.

The world-renowned jazz musicians and SGI-USA members Herbie Hancock and Wayne Shorter, both with whom I'm presently engaged in a dialogue by correspondence, have held district leadership positions for many years.

In our discussions, we have talked about how important it is to focus on each individual and help them reveal their fullest potential. The principle of human revolution is that everything starts from a deep awareness of our personal mission in

life. Mr. Shorter has shared with me an anecdote about the great jazz musician Art Blakey (1919–90) that illustrates the importance of cherishing each moment and each person we encounter. He related: “Art would say, ‘If there is just one person in the night club, don’t walk out on the stage and get super relaxed because there is only one person. Perform like it is your last moment for that person, with that one person in mind.’”

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As members of the SGI, let’s courageously work for kosen-rufu in our communities, taking personal responsibility “for the propagation of Buddhism in [our] province” (cf. WND-1, 1117). Let’s serve our communities and strive for the welfare of our neighbors.

We are living in an age when human relations are growing more and more tenuous. In such an environment, the SGI district, where members forge strong bonds of mutual support and understanding, is the cornerstone for the success of our movement.

The ancient Greek dramatist Menander (also Menandros; 342–291 B.C.E.) wrote: “The good [person], as it seems, makes also others good,”³ and “When good people flourish, it benefits the welfare of society.”⁴ Showing actual proof of victory by fostering, developing, and bringing together good people in our communities leads to the dynamic development of kosen-rufu.

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In January 1965, 45 years ago, during a trip to Kyushu and Osaka, I made an impromptu visit to Tottori Prefecture after receiving a report on members who were engaged in a fierce struggle there. I attended a district leaders meeting at Tottori’s Yonago Community Center, at which I strove to wholeheartedly encourage the members. Afterwards, I posed for a photograph with the participants, who had traveled from Tottori and neighboring Shimane Prefectures. I shook hands with each person, saying: “Let’s do our best together!” “Please give my regards to everyone in your district!” “Let’s strive all-out with a youthful spirit!” Each member shook my hand firmly, looking at me with strong determination. Though my hand was red and swollen

³ Menander, *The Principal Fragments*, translated by Francis G. Allinson and edited by T. E. Page (London: William Heinemann, 1921), p. 357.

⁴ Translated from Japanese. Menander, *Danpen* (Fragments), in *Girisha Kigeki Zenshu* (Collected Works of Greek Comedies), translated by Tetsuo Nakatsukasa, et al. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 2010), vol. 9, p. 404.

after shaking hands with the 170 people present, my heart was aglow with the warmth of all these noble members who were working so hard for kosen-rufu.

If it were possible, I would have liked to shake hands with and personally encourage all those serving as the mainstays of their districts—the local leaders of the men’s division, women’s division, young men’s division, young women’s division, and student division. But that was physically impossible. That is why I came up with the idea of taking commemorative group photos as a way of personally encouraging members. Thus, for several years starting in 1965, wherever I went throughout Japan, I sat for commemorative group photographs with our admirable district leaders.

To this day, my wife and I continue to chant on a daily basis for the success and victory of all our district leaders who are opening the path of kosen-rufu in their communities, imagining ourselves shaking hands with each one.

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Soka Gakkai districts are diverse gatherings with members of all ages and generations. Indeed, the district is a microcosm of our Soka family as a whole. Each district is filled with capable individuals, starting with the members who each morning deliver the *Seikyo Shimbun*, a publication that seeks to impart a message of humanism and hope to its readers. The efforts of those who hold various leadership and vice-leadership responsibilities in the district, as well as of the supporting leaders of the chapter level and up, are all truly commendable. So many individuals are working in so many different capacities to promote the growth and development of our districts.

When members support the district and their hearts are united in the spirit of “many in body, one in mind,” it will give rise to a tremendous source of energy toward the realization of victory. In the district, the front line of the Soka Gakkai, everyone is a protagonist.

Mr. Toda had high aspirations for district leaders. “You are the great leaders of the Gakkai,” he would say, “and the attainment of the Gakkai’s goals depends upon you above all.” He also said: “Care for the members of your district as if they were your own children and compassionately guide and encourage them so that they can gain their own personal experience of the benefit of faith.” We are the proud Soka family, ever moving ahead toward victory with bright optimism and joy. Please demonstrate exemplary leadership, warmly embracing and supporting everyone in the district so that they can freely and joyfully practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

The Soka Gakkai and the district are one and the same. When districts brim with hope and confidence and pulse with the spirit of mentor and disciple, our movement is certain to grow.

Nichiren Daishonin writes to a disciple facing a critical challenge: “You should

pray intently that Shakyamuni, Many Treasures, and the Buddhas of the ten directions will all gather and enter into your body to assist you” (WND-1, 829).

Let’s spur all the positive forces of the universe into action and win in our noble cause of kosen-rufu.

May the members of our districts everywhere advance with courage and hope based on a strong sense of mission, vibrantly demonstrating the power of faith for absolute victory and for living long, healthy, fulfilling lives. May they join together in beautiful unity toward that end with the district men’s and women’s division leaders.

May our proud districts be as dauntless as towering mountains! May they blossom like magnificent cherry trees of boundless benefit!

Courageously
take the lead
and win victory after victory.

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