

Advance With the Awareness That You Are the “SGI-USA of the World”



ELEVENTH SGI GENERAL MEETING, WORLD PEACE
IKEDA AUDITORIUM, SANTA MONICA, CALIFORNIA,
FEBRUARY 17, 1990

I AM INDEED HAPPY to see all of you in such high spirits at this significant Eleventh SGI General Meeting. The fact that all of you are in such good health means everything to me.

It is the desire of the original Buddha that each of your families is harmonious and happy. I also sincerely hope that, treasuring your lives and doing your best at your jobs, each of you without exception will lead a victorious life. It is for this reason that we carry out our practice of faith.

This is my first visit to Los Angeles in three years. The mountains surrounding the city look majestic in their fresh coat of snow. We have also had rain that seemed to purify and refresh everything. These seem almost like congratulatory messages from heaven; it is the first time I have seen the city in such a festive mood. The trees that we have planted in honor of various countries at the Soka University Los Angeles campus in Calabasas must be jubilantly sinking their roots into the soil. The person in charge of watering the plants must be exulting at all this rain! And the Buddhist gods must be dancing with joy at the events taking place here!

The First SGI General Meeting was also held in this city at the

Shrine Auditorium in 1980. I feel it is profoundly significant that now, ten years later, we are holding this general meeting here with the participation of members from fifty-four countries. Soka Gakkai President Akiya, General Director Morita and the vice presidents and other senior leaders in Japan asked me to convey their best regards to you. Similar messages have arrived from Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania.

I also express my sincere appreciation to all those who have sent congratulatory messages, including U.N. Secretary-General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar; Dr. Henry Kissinger; Lauro F. Cavazos, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Education; Professor Bruce Merrifield of Rockefeller University; Professor Harold M. Proshansky, president of the Graduate School and University Center at City University of New York; Professor Robert H. Donaldson, president of Fairleigh Dickinson University; Professor John D. Montgomery of Harvard University and California Governor George Deukmejian.

Because this is a special occasion, and out of my deepest respect and desire to praise you, I would like to introduce some of the treasures of Soka University. I hope you will take a look at them later.

Among the letters on display are those by President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor; Marquis de Lafayette; President John F. Kennedy; President Abraham Lincoln; Richard Wagner; Bartolomeo Vanzetti; Victor Hugo; Thomas Edison; Ralph Waldo Emerson and Helen Keller.

THE DAWN OF LIBERTY

At this significant general meeting, I would like to speak about the Declaration of Independence of the United States.

Today, the deep shadows of autocracy and tyranny are rapidly receding. Historically, America's Declaration of Independence represents the first ray of democracy and the dawn of liberty. It was on July 4, 1776, that the Continental Congress of the thirteen federated states unanimously adopted the Declaration of Independence.

The Declaration sets forth the principle that all human beings are equal and asserts this to be “self-evident.” It also proclaims outright that “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” are natural, inalienable rights of all people that no one may infringe upon. This historic declaration has much in common with the Buddhist ideal of the inherent dignity of human life.

This document preceded the French Revolution by thirteen years. In this sense, the American War of Independence was a landmark divide in world history. Fifty-six delegates representing thirteen states signed the document. Along with the Declaration of Independence, their names will live forever.

Like history itself, the lives of those who create history are everlasting. All of you have dedicated yourselves over these past thirty years to opening the hitherto untrodden path of kosen-rufu in your respective countries. Each of your names, without exception, will be remembered forever, throughout the Latter Day of the Law, and the blessings you accumulate are everlasting, indestructible and inexhaustible. This is due to the workings of the Buddhist Law; it is the promise of the Buddha.

Our first discussion meeting in the United States was held thirty years ago in Hawaii, on October 2, 1960, on the first leg of the trip with which I inaugurated my travels for worldwide kosen-rufu. There were fewer than thirty people present, including the children. I spoke earnestly about Buddhism and faith to every participant and answered each of their questions with all sincerity.

I proposed at that meeting that the first overseas district be formed. No one in my entourage had thought of this move. Today the SGI-USA has more than seventeen hundred districts. Thirty years ago, I personally saw to it that a solid core was established to open the way for future development. The only way to succeed is by first bringing to completion that which is most immediate. This principle applies in all affairs of our daily lives, our work and our families, as well as in the progress of kosen-rufu.

The statue recently erected in Hawaii of an SGI-USA woman honors the great contributions that the members of Hawaii have made as pioneers of the kosen-rufu movement in the United States.

It honors especially the members of the women's division, who bore the full brunt of the early struggles. I sincerely hope that all SGI leaders in all countries will treasure the members of the women's division and show them the utmost respect.

The United States has the honor of being the launching pad for the worldwide kosen-rufu movement, which has now spread to 115 countries [now 192]. I call on you to proudly advance with the awareness of and a sense of responsibility for the great mission you have as the SGI-USA of the world and as a model for all other countries. My wish is that the SGI-USA will eventually develop the strength to provide a lead for Japan.

The Declaration of Independence was drafted by Thomas Jefferson, who subsequently was elected the third president of the United States. The important task of drafting the document fell on Jefferson who, at age thirty-three, was the youngest of the five committee members. Replying to the great trust they had placed in him, the young Jefferson is said to have prepared the document in just a few days.

To actively promote young people of outstanding ability to positions of responsibility and allow them to give free rein to their potential accords with the spirit of Buddhism. It is also the spirit of the SGI, and it ought to be the spirit of each member-organization. The reason for this is that the dynamic activities of young people are the fundamental driving force for fresh development.

Now, what was it that Jefferson labored over? To what did he pay the closest attention? It was neither novelty nor affected formality. His sole wish was to make the Declaration of Independence the crystallization of the American spirit. Jefferson was a person who, throughout his entire life, maintained the vibrantly pulsing spirit of America.

It is the cry of the spirit from the very depths of a person's life that shakes and moves other people's hearts. Similarly, Buddhism is above all concerned with the world of the heart. It expounds the principle that enables us to manifest the infinite power of the spirit. People of faith should strive to become outstanding citizens of their respective countries. There is no need for you to try

to imitate others or force yourself into following any specific pattern of behavior.

In 1800, when Jefferson was fifty-seven years old, he wrote in a letter, “I have sworn . . . eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.” I feel the same way. Freedom is something that you must fight for and gain by and for yourself. It is not handed over on a silver platter.

One who has the courage to speak the truth lives a truly splendid and fulfilling life. In any sphere of society, if one loses this courage and become obsequious, one cannot resist exploitation by corrupt authorities.

The life of a person who shrinks before oppression and tries to get by with cunning strategies and falsehood is extremely pitiful. Such a life is self-defeating. Rather, by fighting against and pushing through all the evil that oppresses one, both internally and externally, one establishes a magnanimous self and a profound and happy state of life. This is the purpose of faith.

THE FOUR SUFFERINGS AND THE EIGHT SUFFERINGS

Buddhism describes the fundamental anguish that restricts the freedom of life as the four sufferings or the eight sufferings. The four universal sufferings comprise birth, aging, sickness and death. In more detail, we can describe them as follows: the suffering of living bound by the shackles of karma; the loneliness of aging; the anguish of sickness; and the fear of that most fundamental fact, death. The eight sufferings include four additional sufferings: the suffering of having to part with loved ones; the suffering of having to meet those whom one hates; the suffering of being unable to obtain what one desires, as in the case of one who wishes to become wealthy or successful; and the suffering arising from the five components, in other words, the suffering of being unable to realize harmony in the physical and spiritual aspects of one’s life and of feeling heavy and depressed.

It is the sharp sword of the Mystic Law and the great power of faith that enable us to completely sever the chains of these suf-

ferings. Therefore, I wish to make it clear that to secure eternal freedom and happiness, you must absolutely not be cowardly, especially in faith.

By coincidence, Thomas Jefferson died at the age of eighty-three on July 4, 1826, the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. In another example of historic coincidence, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founding president of the Soka Gakkai, died on the anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding (November 18).

Ten days before his death, in a letter of thanks for an invitation to a ceremony commemorating fifty years of independence, Jefferson said that the Declaration of Independence would become a signal to awaken people around the world, encouraging them to win liberty by severing the chains of ignorance and superstition that had hitherto bound them. I feel that now, some one hundred sixty years later, as we contemplate the current toward a century of peace that has emerged in all parts of the world, we can see Jefferson smiling brightly in victory.

A NEW PHILOSOPHY TO LEAD PEOPLE TO FREEDOM, EQUALITY AND HAPPINESS

The ideas espoused in the Declaration of Independence have spread worldwide. Today there is a need for a profound, reliable philosophy to support these ideals and to ensure their universal promulgation. The lack of such a philosophy is becoming an increasingly urgent issue. A new philosophy is called for to bring about the realization of freedom, happiness and equality in their most profound sense.

In our turbulent, rapidly changing society, people have begun to look with yearning toward the merciful light of the sun of the correct teaching. It is you who are playing the major role on the stage of this new era.

Every day, I offer earnest prayers for your happiness, good health and success. You each have your respective place of mission; you are all extremely precious children of the Buddha dedicated

to the cause of kosen-rufu. I hope that while fostering cordial and warm relations among yourselves, you will advance as good citizens of your countries. Finally, I ask that you convey my best wishes and cordial regards to all of the members in your areas who were unable to be present today.