

Mrs. Ikeda's New Year's Message for 2011

Congratulations on the start of the Year of Capable People and Dynamic Development!

I offer this message together with sincere prayers from both my husband and myself that all the noble women's division and young women's division members around the world will make great strides in the coming year, while enjoying vibrant health and sparkling with good fortune and wisdom.

My family joined the Soka Gakkai in 1941, when Japan was already at war. I remember a discussion meeting held at our home under the watchful eye of officers of the notorious Special Higher Police or "thought police." Founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi spoke out courageously for his beliefs, unintimidated by their presence. That was already 70 years ago. How quickly time passes!

When I was a young women's division member, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda assured us that the time of widespread propagation of the Mystic Law throughout Asia and the world would definitely come. And now the SGI has spread the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin to 192 counties and territories, with flowers of peace and happiness blossoming everywhere.

My husband always attributes the bright, vigorous growth of our movement especially to the strong prayers and diligent efforts of the women's division and young women's division members.

The Soka Gakkai triumphantly celebrated its 80th anniversary last year (2010) and has now embarked on a fresh phase of dynamic development toward its centennial.

I, too, am determined to continue planting as many seeds as possible for the future growth of kosen-rufu. One of the passages from Nichiren Daishonin's writings that I have often read with my husband and engraved in my heart is:

Because I have expounded this teaching [of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo], I have been exiled and almost killed. [For as] the saying goes, "Good advice grates on the ear." But still I am not discouraged. The Lotus Sutra is like the seed, the Buddha like the sower, and the people like the field. (WND-1, 748)

Kosen-rufu is an ongoing struggle to sow the seeds of Buddhahood in the fields of the hearts of people we meet, undeterred by the daunting challenges we may face along the way.

This year, we celebrate the 60th anniversaries of the founding of the women's division (on June 10, 1951) and the young women's division (on July 19, 1951). The history of the two divisions has been one of human revolution carried out by great women and mothers sowing the seeds of happiness, cultivating them, and bringing them into flower.

Shortly before the establishment of these divisions, the *Seikyo Shimbun* was launched (on April 20, 1951). Its first issue featured an article about the expansion of kosen-rufu by members in Tsurumi Ward in Yokohama, Kanagawa Prefecture.

There was a woman from Tsurumi Ward, incidentally, who once related how my husband had encouraged her and her husband many years ago. I was deeply moved by the story and I'd like to share it with you.

The couple, who were middle-aged, first started practicing because of the husband's illness and resulting dire financial circumstances. He was bedridden with tuberculosis of the spine. My husband, 23 at the time, visited the couple regularly and encouraged them by reading passages of the Goshō to them.

Once he sat by the husband's bedside and clasped his hand, assuring him: "Faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism will absolutely bring positive results. If you practice earnestly, you can definitely transform your karma. As the Daishonin says: 'Winter always turns to spring' (WND-1, 536)."

On another occasion, when the wife asked my husband with a note of desperation in her voice, "Will we really be able to climb out of this poverty?" he replied with complete conviction: "Imagine piling up one thin sheet of paper every day. During the first few days, the pile won't look as if it has grown at all. But if you keep doing that every day for 10 or 20 years, you'll have a high, towering pile that is clearly visible for all to see. Through our Buddhist practice, we can accumulate such 'inconspicuous benefit.'"

Taking this encouragement to heart, the couple devoted themselves earnestly to kosen-rufu. The husband overcame his illness, and together they were able to lift themselves out of poverty and show actual proof by gaining a secure and comfortable lifestyle. The woman made a vow to introduce as many people to the Daishonin's Buddhism during her lifetime as the number of years that she lived, and in the end helped more than 80 people receive the Gohonzon. Enveloped in boundless benefit—the accumulation of inconspicuous benefit gradually becoming manifest, just as my husband had said—the couple, now deceased, lived truly full and satisfying lives and were loved and admired by many fellow members and youthful successors.

As indicated by the Daishonin's words, "It is the heart that is important" (WND-1, 1000), true happiness depends far more on our inner state of life than our external circumstances. Carrying out activities for kosen-rufu together with our fellow

members and the Soka Gakkai, exerting ourselves for the happiness of others, and living each year of our life with a sense of true purpose and fulfillment make for a genuinely happy existence.

Recently, celebrating with my husband the fresh departure of the young women's division in a certain area of Japan, I sent them the following message: "This is the time in your lives for building lasting happiness, so I pray that each and every day will be a memorable one for you."

All of us are engaged in a never-ending struggle with various problems and challenges in our daily lives. And things might not always go the way we'd planned or hoped. But I am reminded of some words that Dr. Lygia Pupatto, former rector of Brazil's Londrina State University, who is also an eminent botanist and a compassionate educator, shared with students of the Kansai Soka Schools (on April 12, 2004):

When you look at plants in winter, most have neither flowers nor leaves. They may seem not to be alive at all, but that's not true. They're waiting for the right time to bloom. They're waiting for the best time for them. . . . In the same way, you need to believe in your own inner strength and wisdom, utilize them, and overcome any difficulty or problem.

I found myself in deep agreement with Dr. Pupatto's message. It also reminded me again of how warm words of encouragement are especially crucial when people are facing the wintertime of adversity.

The presence of even one woman upholding the Mystic Law—be it in the home, in the workplace, or in the community—is like a bright, illuminating sun of hope. Just as the sun in the sky shines in all directions, giving freely of its light, the women of Soka, through their wise and thoughtful conduct, enable others around them who are not practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism to form a connection with it, thereby sowing the seeds for flowers of happiness to bloom in their hearts.

I'm happy to say that my husband remains in fine health and continues to take leadership for the dynamic growth of a youthful Soka Gakkai. He conveyed the following message to a recent nationwide executive conference in Japan: "With even greater energy and vibrant life-force, I will carry forward the struggle for kosen-rufu. Let's strive and win together!"

I know that all of you, the noble and radiant women of Soka dedicated to opening the way for worldwide kosen-rufu in the respective places of your mission, are always in my husband's heart as a bright and shining presence.

He recently composed the following poem for SGI representatives of the women's and young women's divisions who were visiting Japan:

I will never forget your name—
you, a shining protagonist
of kosen-rufu,
a disciple who makes
your mentor proud.

In closing, I'd like to share this famous passage that Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Shijo Kingo and his wife Nichigen-nyo:

There is no true happiness for human beings other than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. . . . Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. (WND-1, 681)

Once again this year, let us, the women of Soka, chant daimoku joyfully and confidently and work together harmoniously to expand our network for peace, culture, and education.

Wishing you all the best of health.

Kaneko Ikeda
SGI Honorary Women's Leader