

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA MEN ON THE GREAT, EVERLASTING PATH

'We walk the great, everlasting path of life with confidence and integrity,' SGI President Ikeda writes to the SGI men. 'Forging a brilliant realm of indestructible happiness in our hearts and dreams, we advance youthfully, meaningfully and resolutely day after day.'

As long as I possess a lofty philosophy, I can overcome all adversity. For the unparalleled drama of the human spirit lies in transforming adversity into profound happiness.

This is precisely where Buddhism comes in. I wish to pass on the torch of my spirit—its flame never diminishing, growing ever higher—to my comrades and future generations.

Whatever vexing conflicts I may encounter in life, whatever persecution motivated by vanity and jealousy is directed at me, even though I may be bloodied and battered, I am determined to attain proud victory.

My comrades, my fellow members! No matter what dire hardship may befall you, though you may be pierced through and through with arrows, do not be defeated! No matter what dastardly, cowardly attack is made on your morale, always remain proud and lead a noble life in the highest of spirits.



“Never a day without a line”—these are words of the ancient Roman writer Pliny the Elder.

I am grateful that this essay series has continued for five years. I dedicate this essay to the golden pillars of kosen-rufu, the men of the SGI.

Life is filled with problems and difficulties. We never know what will happen next. There are constant challenges at work. There is the prospect of being laid off due to corporate restructuring, having one's company go bankrupt, becoming unemployed and having to find a new job. In our families and communities, too, problems are constantly pressing—sickness, issues with our children and our relationships with others.

And on top of this, the crushing waves of a deep recession continue to batter the economy, with individuals, businesses and every sort of organization caught in a desperate struggle to survive.

I am also a member of the men's division. Though men always talk about these things, I am keenly aware of the hardships facing you, my comrades in arms.

I recall how after the war, when I began to work for second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, we were in the midst of a period of dramatic change brought about by the economic policies during the U.S. occupation. It was a time of fierce, merciless competition, in which only the strong survived.

Even President Toda, brilliant entrepreneur that he was, experienced business failures. Normally stalwart and imperturbable, he suffered so greatly that he awoke each morning in sheets soaked with perspiration from worrying through the night. As a youth, I devoted myself to my job with single-minded dedication, determined to serve and protect my mentor with all my being.

President Toda eventually rode out the worst and, rising like the sun, was inaugurated as second president when he was 51.

The Japanese word for *man* suggests vigor. The true spirit of men in their prime is to look positively to the future.



American entrepreneur Dr. Armand Hammer, whom I met several times, once said that if we allow ourselves to be discouraged, we make ourselves our own worst enemy.

He also used to say: “If I had listened to all the people who have told me, ‘It can’t be done,’ I would never have done anything. I always say, ‘Don’t tell me it can’t be done: tell me *how* I can do it.’” Dr. Hammer burned with an indefatigable spirit of challenge.

In an address he gave at Soka University of Japan more than a decade ago, he reflected on his tumultuous life of 92 years, “If you stick to your original objective, you can as one individual change the situation.”



When Shijo Kingo, the illustrious predecessor of the SGI men, was ordered by his lord to abandon the Lotus Sutra or risk losing his lands, Nichiren Daishonin offered him stern guidance. He said that if Shijo Kingo were to give in, his opponents would induce all the Daishonin’s followers in Kamakura to abandon faith. Do not be defeated, he urged. The pillar must not fall!

The Daishonin writes: “This life is like a dream. One cannot be sure that one will live until tomorrow. However wretched a beggar you might become, never disgrace the Lotus Sutra” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 824).

Shijo Kingo courageously persevered through this trial. Acting with sincerity and integrity, based on the Daishonin’s admonition that our behavior as human beings is the ultimate expression of faith, he summoned all his wisdom to overcome this hurdle.

He conducted himself modestly and was considerate and attentive to all around him. He emerged from this painful period of tribulation as a victor, praised by all as “Shijo Kingo, Shijo Kingo of the Lotus School,” just as the Daishonin had hoped (WND, 319).

Buddhism is about emerging triumphant.

The men of the SGI are the pillars of the family and society; they are the great golden pillars of kosen-rufu. Precisely because the men are strong and resolute, the women and youth can engage in their challenges with confidence and peace of mind.

The ancient Greek poet Sophocles wrote: “And for men, to help [others] / With might and main is of all tasks the highest.”



In your hearts shine medals of supreme, eternal honor. You have triumphed. You have not been beaten. A lofty life is beautiful.

Those who live their lives with such true beauty are victors. The essence of this beauty is our inner determination, in accord with the principle of a single moment of life encompassing three thousand realms; it is our spirit, our mind that matters.

Life is a series of labyrinths. But, my friends, strive for the noble goal you have pledged to realize. Do not get sidetracked and lose your way!

In our world today, many lead lives of despair. Society is full of suffering and rampant with causes leading to tragic destruction. There are those who only close themselves off further as they struggle painfully through life. There are those who go to their grave in bleak misery, weeping tears of regret at their own foolishness, and there are vain pretenders who close their eyes heavy with remorse as they depart this life.

Life is long.

No, life is all too brief.

My friends, drink a toast to victory while enjoying the sunshine! Drink a toast to glory while watching shooting stars streak across the night sky! And sing the song of your vow in resounding voices, solemn and strong, while gazing up at the moon, savoring life's incandescent happiness.

Self-pity, defeat and tears are not for us. We will win in our struggle. Never allow fools, cowards or traitors to encroach!

With a gaze radiating compassion and understanding, with bright smiles and pleasant voices, let us live out our lives encouraging our family members and comrades in faith.

When I meet you, I am filled with joy. Walking with you is to walk a noble path.



We embrace a solid mission in life. Envy-inspired furors are of no concern to us.

There are people who may enjoy enthusiastic applause now. There are others who may be feted by the media. There are also pitiful individuals who are prisoners of their own rapacious, gem-hungry egos. And there are those who, tragically, are heading for a precipitous fall.

The banner of hollow fame and pretension is bound to become ragged and tattered. Fame is not happiness. It is not true victory.

And those who circulate false rumors in an attempt to cause others' downfall are destined to end their foolish lives as objects of scorn and ridicule.

We, on the other hand, walk the great, everlasting path of life with confidence and integrity. Forging a brilliant realm of indestructible happiness in our hearts and dreams, we advance youthfully, meaningfully and resolutely day after day.

Along this path, flowers bloom and perfume the air. We spend each day of our existence savoring the joy of life caressed by a refreshing, laurel-scented breeze.

My friends, boldly extend your broad wings, draw the sword of truth and justice, and fight and triumph!

Life is a struggle. Truth and justice must win in that struggle.

My friends, do not content yourselves with walking a mundane, easy road. Fight for your freedom and glory with pride and determination. Do not become hypocrites or frauds. Do not lead gray, withered lives of remorse.

Rouse yourselves and struggle courageously for what is right. As long as you live, dare to challenge and triumph over every storm, every raging wave.

My friends, who possess a spirit of indomitable determination, who shine with pride, happiness and integrity as emperors of life! Write a new page of history with every challenge, as part of your noble mission to achieve victory!

My friends, do not create a path of defeat and tragedy! Build a great path of happiness and triumph.



My friends, you see it! You see the spread of Nichiren Buddhism across the world, a development as certain as the sun's daily ascent, unailing and eternal.

The law of this great path, assuring certain eternal victory, towers in your lives. On the road ahead, there is no anxiety, no defeat, no retreat and indeed no end. There are truth, justice, freedom and the golden, joyous cries of the people.

There is no regret, no anger—only a song of eternal happiness. We have triumphed.

Indeed, we must continue to do so. We must eternally advance in victory.

We have said farewell forever to that nightmarish time when we were ridiculed and wept aloud. The spring breeze embraces us. The stars, those everlasting medals of honor, gaze down upon us.

Your struggle and the earnest, dedicated spirit with which you have won over all, have forged deeply inspiring lives that will shine and live forever. Your victory is not a distinction stained by bloodshed. It is not a distinction gained through the agonies of a vile conflict between human beings. It is not an ostentatious distinction awarded by arrogant authority. It is the culmination of all your efforts to ensure that truth and justice prevail. The ramparts of your life will never crumble.

There are no greater kings of happiness than those who possess the boundless, immeasurable wealth of “many treasures”—the life-state of Buddhahood—which is more precious than any reward or medal of honor.

My friends, never forget these words of the Russian thinker Nikolai Berdyaev, who echoes our philosophy of human revolution, “The true revolution of the spirit is what interests me most.” In his 70s, he also exclaimed: “My spirit never ages. My spirit is forever young.”

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION THE PILLAR MUST NOT FALL

From This Speech:

When Shijo Kingo, the illustrious predecessor of the SGI men, was ordered by his lord to abandon the Lotus Sutra or risk losing his lands, Nichiren Daishonin offered him stern guidance.... Shijo Kingo courageously persevered through this trial. Acting with sincerity and integrity, based on the Daishonin’s admonition that our behavior as human beings is the ultimate expression of faith, he summoned all his wisdom to overcome this hurdle.

- 1) How, do you think, is our behavior the ultimate expression of our faith? Can you think of specific examples in your daily life?
- 2) Can you share an experience of persevering in the face of a major hardship despite being on the brink of giving up?