



SGI AUSTRALIA AUTUMN STUDY COURSE

THE ONENESS OF

MENTOR AND DISCIPLE

The mentor and disciple relationship is core to the hopeful and empowering philosophy of Buddhism spreading throughout society and to future generations. Nichiren, awakened to the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, is the original Buddha. In essence this is because he manifested the Law of Life through his courageous and compassionate behaviour. Thus the Law was his mentor because he demonstrated proof beyond doubt of living with the Law at the centre of one's existence. Sharing everything with his disciples so as to instil the same confidence in the Law, not all of them inherited his spirit. Only one of his close disciples in fact remained true. Then over successive centuries, a priesthood more concerned with hierarchy and tradition did not spread Buddhism and instead oversaw a decline in Buddhism. In different periods, there were however a few (unfortunately isolated) reformists who reignited the heart of Daishonin's desire for *kosen-rufu*.

It was not until first president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and his disciple second president Josei Toda formed a community (Soka Kyoiku Gakkai) to study and discuss Daishonin's Buddhism that the movement for *kosen-rufu* became a reality. Although mainly educators, Buddhism became accessible and people could practice, study and apply it in their struggles. Makiguchi's and Toda's example of oneness of mentor and disciple, demonstrated in their united courage to face persecution during World War II, became the bedrock of Soka Gakkai's continued growth after Toda's release from prison. Makiguchi died while in prison and Toda's actions were based on avenging the injustice of his mentor's death. (See Special Feature article pp8-12) This spurred him, not to seek revenge, rather to create a great citadel of people striving for peace. All his efforts centred on discussion meetings that mushroomed throughout Japan.

On meeting Josei Toda at one such gathering, a young Daisaku Ikeda discerned immediately Toda's towering conviction. From this point he determined Toda as his mentor in life and strove to realise Toda's vision for the Daishonin's Buddhism to spread throughout the world. In testament to the undeniable actual proof of the SGI, President Ikeda is the living mentor of this age, having realised the widespread establishment of *kosen-rufu* globally. As with his predecessors, all his efforts centred on engaging others in open, heart-to-heart dialogue in small group discussions. For this lineage to continue requires disciples who consolidate and expand *kosen-rufu* by mastering the art of dialogue centred on compassion, courage and respect for each person's dignity. Efforts to unify through a resounding commitment to dialogue ensures the mentor's legacy continues and people have access to the hope-filled philosophy of Buddhism – which the Soka Gakkai Buddha represents – a beacon of hope for humanity.

This course, held in group discussion meetings around Australia, will examine the oneness of mentor and disciple in four sessions. These will be around the themes of:

- **The essential spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple and why it is central to SGI.**
- **The relationship of mentor and disciple between first president of Soka Gakkai Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and second president of Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda.**
- **The relationship of mentor and disciple between second president of Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda and third president Daisaku Ikeda and;**
- **Soka Gakkai Buddha – Inheriting the spirit of oneness of mentor and disciple.**

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Session 1

The Spirit of Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

The Nourishing Earth of the Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

The essence of Buddhism is found in the spirit of striving with the same commitment as the mentor. (Daisaku Ikeda, SGINL 7581)

This brief, yet profound statement from President Ikeda seems to capture the heart of the principle of oneness of mentor and disciple in Buddhism – disciples, based on their shared bond of mission with their mentor, striving to live their lives with the same commitment; a commitment to the happiness of all humanity.

The practice of this principle has provided the foundation for the global development of the SGI *kosen-rufu* movement over the past eighty years; a humanistic ‘earth’ nourishing the transformation of millions of people’s lives based on the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. As President Ikeda has stated:

The mentor is the spiritual foundation or earth, a source of spiritual sustenance. From that earth, the disciple brings flowers of victory to bloom eternally. (SGINL 7720)

Striving to understand the heart and vision of the mentor and live a creative life based on this, we are able to expand our own life state immensely; developing a sense of confidence that we would not have previously thought possible. The three presidents of the Soka

Gakkai have demonstrated vivid proof of just how much a human being can develop when basing their lives on this nourishing ‘earth’ of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Human Revolution and the Spirit of Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

In practice, developing this living understanding of the oneness of mentor and disciple can be quite challenging. The relationship draws from deep aspects of our shared humanity and is therefore closely bound to our own human revolution. It challenges us to overcome the impulses that erode our connection with others while building on the common desire for happiness.

For example, developing a bond of trust for another person is an aspect of the oneness of mentor and disciple relationship that can be very challenging for us – particularly for those of us who have felt their trust betrayed by others. Overcoming our fears to trust a mentor, though, is key to unlocking our ability to trust ourselves and trust those around us; not a passive trust based on expectations of others, but a trust born of our own determination to believe in others.

Living the oneness of mentor and disciple relationship also challenges our human tendency to fluctuate between the extremes of self-centred independence and passive dependence on others. President Ikeda has stated that these tendencies both represent a “type of immaturity”.

The mentor and disciple relationship in Buddhism is not based on followers passively worshipping or

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following the mentor; or a mentor choosing ‘worthy’ followers to be disciples. The relationship is based on an honest acknowledgement of the mentor’s living inspiration and the mentor’s desire for disciples to “achieve the same life-state as they – no, they wish to foster disciples who will be even better people than they are.” (Daisaku Ikeda, SGINL7819) Importantly, in this regard, it is the disciple who chooses the mentor; determined to stand up together with the mentor based on a shared sense of responsibility for the happiness of humankind. This dynamic relationship manifests itself in a finely tuned balance between independence and dependence, inspiring us to fully develop our own unique life expression while honestly seeking inspiration and vision from the mentor.

Another aspect of our ‘shared humanity’ we are able to open up in our lives through the mentor and disciple relationship is our capacity to express appreciation and gratitude. Again, this can be very challenging for those of us who, for example, have endured emotionally damaging relationships. However, challenging this, to sincerely express appreciation and gratitude for the potential of life and to the mentor whose actions and encouragement allow us to realise this, unlocks enormous potential from the depths of our heart and allows us to further appreciate those around us – even those we may have previously resented. As President Ikeda boldly states:

The greater appreciation we feel for our mentor, the greater ability and strength we are able to manifest. The moment we vow to repay our debt of gratitude to our mentor, we set forth on a path toward the victory of mentor and disciple on the deepest level of life. We will then be able, together with our mentor, to eternally enjoy a wonderful life-state equal to that of the Buddha. (SGINL 7819)

Challenging our own human revolution is therefore key to ‘living’ the relationship of oneness of mentor and disciple. President Ikeda clarifies this when he states:

Striving in our Buddhist practice with the same spirit as our mentor means challenging ourselves in our own human revolution “day by day and month after month” (WND1p997), taking our mentor’s boundless life-state as a model and a source of inspiration. (SGINL 7921)

The Shared Vow of Mentor and Disciple

The driving force underlying the dynamic relationship of mentor and disciple is the vow or commitment to *kosen-rufu*, to the happiness of humanity. This resolve is based on a belief in the unlimited potential of all human beings, no matter what their current circumstances. It is the sense of purpose linking our life with our mentor and the rest of humanity; the response when we ask ourselves, “for what purpose am I living my life?” or “on what basis do I create value in my life?”

It is a vow shared by mentor and disciple that can sustain the *kosen-rufu* movement and our individual struggles to pursue our human revolution – the battle to win over our fundamental darkness. As President Ikeda encourages us:

The moment that the sun of the shared commitment of mentor and disciple rises in our hearts, a great transformation begins. There is no karma that we cannot surmount, no struggle that we cannot win. (SGINL7720)

On a day-to-day level, based on our practice, this shared commitment is manifested as we challenge ourselves to express our trust in another; honestly express our gratitude to others; support others to be victorious, etc. As President Ikeda stated in his 2010 New Years message, “Ultimately, worldwide *kosen-rufu* begins with encouraging the person right in front of us.”

The Soka Gakkai’s Revival of the Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

The practice of the oneness of mentor and disciple, courageously enacted by Nichiren Daishonin and his successors, Nikko Shonin and Nichimoku Shonin,

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PHOTO: WAYNE WONG

remained largely dormant for seven centuries until the emergence of the Soka Gakkai. The three presidents of the Soka Gakkai revived the relationship of oneness of mentor and disciple as the heart of Buddhist practice, based on their unwavering vow for the realisation of *kosen-rufu*, the vow shared with Nichiren Daishonin.

Their deep relationships have brilliantly portrayed the power of the oneness of mentor and disciple; evident in the profound trust they held for each other, the strong desire of the mentor to foster the disciple and the disciple's determination to fulfil the mentor's vision out of a deep sense of gratitude.

And, as in the example of Nichiren Daishonin's life, the three presidents have demonstrated the significance of standing firm to one's convictions, in a nonviolent manner, no matter how serious the threat from those in authority or from those with selfish, destructive motives. And their resolve stemmed not from personal pride but from their deep desire to protect the lifeblood of *kosen-rufu*; the means for all people to forge true

happiness in their lives; the SGI organisation that second president Toda declared to be more precious than his own life.

In the following two sessions (Session 3 will appear in May *Indigo*) we will briefly explore the relationships between the successive presidents of the Soka Gakkai and how these relationships embody the essence of the principle of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

End Session 1

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PHOTO: BILL CROSSLAND

Session 2

Makiguchi and Toda – Embracing the Heart of Nichiren Daishonin

Soka Gakkai founding president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi first started practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism at the age of 57. He thus declared, 'With an indescribable joy, I completely changed the way I had lived for almost 60 years.' (SGINL 7894)

Such was the expansive and revitalising effect that embracing the life philosophy and practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism had on the life of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first President of the Soka Gakkai. It was a teaching that resonated powerfully with his own convictions and opened up a new, clear path for him to devote his life to the happiness of others, based on the inspiring model of Nichiren Daishonin.

Makiguchi encountered the Daishonin's Buddhism in 1928. He had dedicated his life up to that time to education – as a teacher and author of educational works, and as an advocate of education for those less privileged in the community. Makiguchi developed theories on education based on his firm belief that fostering well-rounded, happy children and awakening in them the will to learn was the true purpose of education. This however conflicted with the prevailing nationalistic view at the time of schools as institutions for producing obedient subjects of the state. His approach therefore frequently led him into conflict with politicians and those with vested interests.

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In a similar way, as a teacher and principal, he refused to conform to the customary practice of accepting gifts from parents – particularly from influential parents, whose gifts were in fact offered as an incentive to win favour for their children. Again, Makiguchi's principled stance led to his persecution, this time at the hands of offended parents and educational authorities, who joined together to have him removed from his position.

Given his staunch commitment to humanistic principles and to fostering the potential of others, it is not surprising that Makiguchi experienced “indescribable joy” on embracing the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. It was as if all the struggles he had endured during his life took on a new meaning; becoming the fertile soil from which his true potential could blossom. In Nichiren Daishonin he had discovered an inspiring model of how to live with an unshakeable belief in the happiness of humankind; in other words, a mentor.

Makiguchi related the very ‘real’ internal transformation that occurred in his life when he stated:

The sense of unease, of groping my way in the dark, was entirely dissipated; my lifelong tendency to withdraw into thought disappeared; my sense of purpose in life steadily expanded in scope and ambition, and I was freed from all fears; I became possessed with the irresistible and bold desire to effect the reform of national education with as much haste as was humanly possible. (<http://www.tmakiguchi.org/religiousreformer/asreligiousreformer/nichirensvision.html>)

Makiguchi and Toda – Developing the Bonds of Mentor and Disciple

Shortly after Makiguchi took up faith, Josei Toda, a young teacher working under Makiguchi also began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Over the following years Makiguchi and Toda developed deep bonds of trust, mutual respect and gratitude for each other; Toda looking to Makiguchi as his mentor in life and sharing with him the Daishonin's vow for the realisation of *kosen-rufu* – to “rid the world of suffering”. Toda later stated:

Our relationship was one of mentor and disciple, or like parent and child; it is impossible to fathom the depth of the bond I shared with Mr Makiguchi. I knew his real state of life. No one else did. I used to tell others that they would one day boast of knowing Mr Makiguchi. And as I predicted, meeting him is today the pride of all of his disciples. (SGINL 7819)

Their relationship became a model of enacting the oneness of mentor and disciple in modern times. On the important aspect of trust, Makiguchi once stated:

If you are unable to trust others and cannot gain their trust, your life is like that of a large tree alone in a field. Isolated and unaided, you are vulnerable to being knocked down by the next great storm. This is the most insecure way of life imaginable. (<http://www.tmakiguchi.org/quotes.html>)

Out of gratitude to his mentor and the wholehearted belief in his humanistic approach to education, Toda worked to compile Makiguchi's numerous notes on educational theory into a publication, *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*. This work outlined Makiguchi's ideas on how education should serve to allow people to create ‘value’ (happiness) from whatever difficulties they faced in their lives. This publication, funded by Mr Toda, marked the formalisation of the title Soka (value creation) and the date of its publishing, 18 November 1930, is commemorated as the founding date of the Soka Gakkai.

Establishing the Foundation of the Global SGI Movement

The formation at this time of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society), later to become the Soka Gakkai, marked the beginnings of the global lay movement of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism that we all benefit from today. Significantly, the activities of this organisation were centred on small group discussion meetings, open to all people at members' homes. At these meetings, participants could openly discuss their

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struggles and determinations related to education and life through the lens of Buddhist philosophy.

Mr Makiguchi was convinced of the importance of basing the humanistic movement of the Soka Gakkai on these small group dialogue meetings, as President Ikeda relates:

A young man once told first Soka Gakkai President Tsunesaburo Makiguchi that he thought it would be better to hold large scale lectures than discussion meetings. “No, it wouldn’t,” Mr Makiguchi replied without hesitation. “Dialogue is the only way to communicate with one another about life’s problems. At a lecture, listeners inevitably feel uninvolved. Even the Daishonin’s treatise *On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land* was written in the form of a dialogue, you know.” (SGI NL 6713)

The core spirit of SGI’s discussion meeting movement was therefore established at this time. Toda later encapsulated this spirit while providing the following encouragement:

When we first began holding discussion meetings, we would often travel long distances for a meeting of just one, two or three people. I want you to return to that original spirit and foster members with the same degree of sincerity and dedication. (SGI NL 7485)

Inheriting the Mentor’s Conviction and Vision

Makiguchi’s commitment to the creation of value, no matter what the circumstances, underlined his understanding of Nichiren Buddhism as an ‘active’ practice; one that must actually transform our life and environment from within – in other words, reveal actual proof. Furthermore, he often declared the principle that failing to do ‘good’ (make good causes) is no different to directly doing ‘evil’ (make bad causes). He explained this through the following analogy:

If you see a child who has tossed off their blankets in sleep, failing to cover them again is failure to do good. If the child gets a chill and catches cold,

the outcome is the same as if you had pulled the covers off them yourself. The outcome of failure to do good is evil. (<http://www.tmakiguchi.org/quotes.html>)

Makiguchi and the movement’s commitment to these humanistic principles was seriously tested in the early 1940s as the military government in Japan imposed demands on all religions to adopt the talisman of the state-sanctioned Shinto religion; based on a cult-like worship of the emperor. Makiguchi and Toda in particular, however, did not yield (although the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood did), and continued to travel to attend discussion meetings around the country, which were increasingly attended by members of the Special Higher Police – responsible for the suppression of ‘thought crimes’.

On 6 July 1943, Makiguchi and Toda, along with 19 other leaders of the organisation, were arrested and jailed under a law that held them guilty of showing disrespect to the emperor. Under interrogation and privation most of the leaders abandoned their faith in order to be released. Only Toda and Makiguchi remained steadfast, continuing to practice their beliefs and encouraging others from the prison cell – Makiguchi even openly discussing Buddhist principles with his interrogators.

Under such demanding conditions, the relationship of oneness of mentor and disciple, exemplified by Makiguchi and Toda, showed brilliant proof of victory. Toda alone understood the true spirit of Makiguchi and without hesitation stood up beside his mentor, resisting the enormous pressure to divide and break their commitment to *kosen-rufu*. In fact, Toda later expressed his deep appreciation to Makiguchi for allowing him to enter prison with him, where Toda was able to forge his indomitable conviction, “In your vast and boundless compassion, you let me accompany you even to prison.” (SGINL 7889)

On 18 November 1944, after enduring months of harsh conditions, Makiguchi died in prison. Toda survived his sentence, emerging in July 1945, wracked with illness but with an unshakeable determination to rebuild the Soka Gakkai, prove the greatness of his mentor Makiguchi and transform the destiny of humanity.