

# Session 11 – July

## **Worldwide Kosen-rufu and the Soka Gakkai: The History of the Soka Gakkai**

In this chapter, we will examine the history of the Soka Gakkai by learning about the accomplishments of its three founding presidents, who dedicated their lives to kosen-rufu, and the spirit of mentor and disciple they shared.

The Lotus Sutra is the scripture that makes clear Shakyamuni Buddha's intent, the real purpose of his teachings. The intent of the Buddha is that all people bring forth the wisdom of Buddhahood that has always been inherent within them and establish unshakable happiness for themselves and for others, creating the basis for peace throughout the world.

The Lotus Sutra describes those who strive to actualize this intent of the Buddha as bodhisattvas of the true Mahayana teaching. They do so by struggling against all kinds of obstacles to achieve a profound transformation in their own lives and the lives of others. Such bodhisattvas, the sutra teaches, appear in the age called the Latter Day of the Law, after the passing of Shakyamuni Buddha. They work to spread the Lotus Sutra throughout the entire world and thereby realize the Buddha's purpose, a process we call kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of the sutra's teaching. The bodhisattvas who shoulder this mission are called the Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

The leader of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth who appear in the Lotus Sutra is named Bodhisattva Superior Practices. Nichiren Daishonin awakened to his mission to fulfill the role of Superior Practices in the Latter Day, taking as his own the great desire and vow for kosen-rufu described in the sutra—the Buddha's will and mandate. He stood up to actualize that will and established the fundamental teaching and practice for freeing all people and all of society from suffering throughout the Latter Day. For this reason, the Daishonin is known as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law.

And today, it is the Soka Gakkai that has inherited and is carrying on the Daishonin's spirit, deeply resolved to accomplish its mission of worldwide kosen-rufu and earnestly preserving in its efforts to actualize that goal. The leaders who have firmly established the practice, awareness, and resolve for achieving kosen-rufu in modern times are the Soka Gakkai's first three presidents: its first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, its second president, Josei Toda, and its third president, Daisaku Ikeda (currently its honorary president and the president of the SGI). Together they are respected as the Soka Gakkai's three founding presidents.

Hereafter we will refer to these three founding presidents with the honorific title Sensei, which follows the family name.

## **The Time of the First President, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi**

We can find the origins of the Soka Gakkai in the relationship of mentor and disciple that existed between the first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and the second president, Josei Toda. Both were educators.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was born on June 6, 1871, in the village of Arahama in today's Kashiwazaki City, Niigata Prefecture (on the Japan Sea coast). While in his early teens, he moved to Hokkaido, the northernmost of Japan's four main islands, where he lived under the care of a relative. There he exerted himself in his studies while working, and eventually entered the Hokkaido Normal School (today, Hokkaido University of Education). Upon graduating, he became a schoolteacher, and in 1901 he moved to Tokyo with the manuscripts for his first work, *Jinsei Chirigaku* (The Geography of Human Life), which was published in 1903. He later held the post of principal at several elementary schools in Tokyo.

Josei Toda was born on February 11, 1900, in a village called Shioya in present-day Kaga City, Ishikawa Prefecture (also on the Japan Sea coast). In around 1902, his family moved to the village of Atsuta in today's Atsuta Ward in Ishikari City, Hokkaido. After graduating from an ordinary and higher elementary school (roughly equivalent to finishing today's junior high school) in 1914, he studied on his own while working. Eventually, he received his teaching certificate and began his career as a teacher in the Hokkaido town of Yubari.

### **Mentor and Disciple Meet**

Toda Sensei from that time on had been seeking a mentor in life, and upon visiting Tokyo, he met Makiguchi Sensei, who was by then the principal of an elementary school. The two readily took to each other. The former was 48 years old at the time, and the latter, 19. Before long, Toda Sensei began to teach at the school, regarding Makiguchi Sensei as his mentor in life and supporting him in every possible way.

*[Note: After moving to Tokyo, Toda, while working, studied at the night school of Kaisei Middle School and night classes at Chuo University.]*

### **The Establishment of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai**

As an educator engaged first-hand in primary school education, Makiguchi Sensei's hope and vow was to enable every child to succeed in creating personal happiness as a self-sufficient member of society. He applied himself to developing an approach to education that would make this possible.

Makiguchi Sensei delved deeply into research and formulated a theory of value that could serve as a foundation for the unique pedagogy he would later systematize.

In the process, he encountered the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, which he realized clarified the principles and fundamental practice for enabling the kind of life transformation that would give rise to value creation in human society. And in 1928, he took faith in Nichiren Buddhism as a member of Nichiren Shoshu—a Buddhist school that derived its teachings from the lineage of Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin’s direct disciple and successor. He was 57 years old at the time.

Makiguchi Sensei recounts his state of mind immediately after taking faith in Nichiren Buddhism, writing, “With an indescribable joy, I completely changed the way I had lived for almost 60 years.”<sup>1</sup> As this statement suggests, he took the Daishonin’s teaching as a principle for living and devoted himself to it. He regarded it as a source of power and energy for creating value and achieving actual positive results in the midst of society and in daily life.

Regarding his motivation for taking faith, Makiguchi Sensei recalls, “Encountering the Lotus Sutra, I realized the teachings of the sutra in no way contradict the principles of philosophy and science that form the basis of our daily lives.”<sup>2</sup>

That same year, Toda Sensei followed his mentor in taking faith in Nichiren Buddhism.

On November 18, 1930, Makiguchi Sensei published the first volume of his *Soka Kyoikugaku Taikei* (The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy). This work systemized his views and ideas on education, and was intended as the first of twelve volumes (of which four were eventually published).

His disciple, Toda Sensei, personally helped fund the publishing project, and collaborated in every aspect of its production, including organizing and editing Makiguchi Sensei’s notes into a manuscript and dividing the content into chapters.

The publisher’s imprint listed Tsunesaburo Makiguchi as the author, Josei Toda as the publisher and printer, and the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society, the predecessor of the Soka Gakkai) as the publishing house. This was the first time the name Soka Kyoiku Gakkai had appeared in public, and for this reason the day of the work’s publication, November 18, is celebrated as the day of the Soka Gakkai’s founding.

*[Editor’s Note: After the society was virtually destroyed by the militarist government, as will be explained below, Toda restored and renamed it the Soka Gakkai.]*

*Soka* means “creation of value.” The purpose of education and the purpose of life are the pursuit of happiness, and the name Soka expresses Makiguchi Sensei’s

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<sup>1</sup> Translated from Japanese. Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, *Soka Kyoikugaku Ronshu* (Writings on Value-Creating Education), in *Makiguchi Tsunesaburo Zenshu* (The Collected Works of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi) (Tokyo: Daisanbunmei-sha, 1984), vol. 8, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 405.

thinking that the creation of value is integral to building happiness.

The conception of the word Soka itself came about in the course of a discussion between the two innovative educators. We could say that the birth of the Soka Gakkai, then, was itself a crystallization of the united spirit of mentor and disciple.

### **Buddhist Practice Directly Connected to Nichiren Daishonin**

In this way, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai itself was born out of the bond of mentor and disciple. Gradually, its organizational structure became more defined and it began to grow.

While originally an association of educators interested in the principles of value-creating education, non-educators eventually began to join as well, and the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai became a group for the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, the power source for value creation.

Though a society of lay practitioners of the Nichiren Shoshu school of Buddhism, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai conducted its affairs in a completely different manner than previously established Nichiren Shoshu lay societies. These groups of lay believers each were affiliated with a specific local temple, and operated under the guidance of the chief priest of that temple.

The Soka Kyoiku Gakkai, however, operated independently, under the leadership of President Makiguchi and General Director Toda. It did not rely on priests for its management or operation or for providing guidance pertaining to faith.

Nor was the form of Buddhist practice it encouraged constrained to visiting temples or participating in ceremonies such as funeral and memorial services, as was the case with most Buddhist schools in Japan, including Nichiren Shoshu. Rather, it taught a practice that was open to everyone, which aimed to enable each person to actualize happiness in the midst of life's real challenges and to contribute to the peace and prosperity of society.

Through holding discussion meetings, and its leaders traveling to various regions to offer guidance and encouragement in faith, the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai grew steadily, reaching a membership of around three thousand.

### **Challenging Japan's Militarism**

The militarist government, in its reckless rush to expand its war footing with State Shinto<sup>3</sup> as its spiritual pillar, endeavored to coerce uniformity of thought among Japan's populace. It placed Soka Kyoiku Gakkai discussion meetings and other

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<sup>3</sup> State Shinto: A national religion established and promoted by the government after the Meiji Restoration in 1868 under the emperor system of Japan. The militarist government used it as a means to put the people under its thought control. Worship of the Sun Goddess was its tenet.

activities under surveillance by the Special Higher Police, which was responsible for investigating so-called thought crimes.

At the time, the government was pressuring citizens to visit and offer prayers at Shinto shrines and to enshrine and worship talismans to the Sun Goddess, the mythical progenitor of the imperial lineage. In June 1943, the priests of Nichiren Shoshu, in fear of government repression, delivered to the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai the following request: “Why don’t you accept the Shinto talisman?” This was made to Makiguchi Sensei in the presence of the high priest.

The posture of Nichiren Shoshu in accepting the government’s demand to enshrine the talisman to the Sun Goddess constituted complicity in slander of the Law (slander of the correct Buddhist teaching). It was a violation of the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin and his successor Nikko Shonin, from whom Nichiren Shoshu claimed lineage. Makiguchi Sensei adamantly refused to accept the Shinto talisman, and the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai thus persisted in upholding the Daishonin’s teaching and example of strictly admonishing slander of the Law.

On July 6, Makiguchi Sensei, while visiting Shimoda in Izu, Shizuoka Prefecture, and on the same day Toda Sensei, in Tokyo, were taken into custody by detectives of the Special Higher Police. Ultimately, 21 leaders of the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai were arrested on suspicion of committing lese majesty (the crime of violating the dignity of the Emperor) and violating the Peace Preservation Law.<sup>4</sup>

All those arrested were subjected to coercive interrogation, and most of them abandoned their faith. In the end, only Makiguchi Sensei and his trusted disciple Toda Sensei resisted, persisting in their faith. Makiguchi Sensei even explained to the prosecutors and judges who questioned him the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism. Both refused to buckle under the pressure of authority and persevered in upholding the right and just principles of Buddhism.

On November 18, 1944, at the age of 73, Makiguchi Sensei passed away at the Tokyo Detention Center due to malnutrition and the weakness of age. Coincidentally, the day of his death was the anniversary of the Soka Gakkai’s founding.

Throughout his life, he had lived and practiced as the Daishonin taught in his writings, never hesitant to risk his life to do so. He lived as a noble pioneer who revived in modern times the Daishonin’s spirit of propagating the Mystic Law to lead the people from suffering to happiness.

### **Toda Sensei’s Awakening in Prison**

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<sup>4</sup> Peace Preservation Law: Enacted in 1925 and completely revised in 1941, this law was used to suppress thought in the name of protecting the Japanese “national polity” and preserving peace. The law provided for harsh punishment of persons found to be in violation, including the death penalty.

While in prison, Toda Sensei, in addition to exerting himself in chanting daimoku, from early 1944 began to read the Lotus Sutra and ponder it deeply. In the process, he achieved an awakening—a realization that “the Buddha is life itself.”

As he continued to chant and engage in profound contemplation, Toda Sensei also became aware that he himself was a Bodhisattva of the Earth who had been present at the Ceremony in the Air described in the Lotus Sutra and who was entrusted with the widespread propagation of the sutra’s teaching in the age after Shakyamuni Buddha. Thus, in November 1944, he awakened to the deep conviction that “I, Toda, am a Bodhisattva of the Earth,” whose mission it was to accomplish kosen-rufu.

Through the profound awakening he experienced in prison, Toda Sensei developed an immovable conviction in the teachings of Nichiren Buddhism, and resolved that it was his personal mission to ensure their propagation worldwide. The awakening that Toda Sensei had experienced while in prison became the primary inspiration behind the revival of Buddhism in the modern age and the powerful progress of the Soka Gakkai as a religious group dedicated to the accomplishment of kosen-rufu.

At a memorial service for Makiguchi Sensei after the war, Toda Sensei addressed his departed mentor:

In your vast and boundless compassion, you let me accompany you even to prison. As a result, I could read with my entire being the passage from the Lotus Sutra: “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers” (LSOC7, 178). The benefit of this was coming to know my former existence as a Bodhisattva of the Earth and to absorb with my very life even a small degree of the sutra’s meaning. Could there be any greater happiness than this?<sup>5</sup>

This passage from “The Parable of the Phantom City” (7th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra teaches that the bond between mentor and disciple is such that they will always be born together in a Buddha land, in a place where they will strive together to save people from suffering.

While most of those persecuted by the authorities discarded their faith, Toda Sensei’s words express his sincere appreciation and resolve to repay his debt of gratitude to his mentor under any circumstances. In them, we catch a glimpse of the strength of this bond of mentor and disciple.

*[To be continued]*

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<sup>5</sup> Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, “Makiguchi Sensei Sankaiki ni” (On President Makiguchi’s Third Memorial) in *Toda Josei Zenshu* (The Collected Works of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbun-sha, 1983), vol. 3, p. 386.