

Session 12 - August

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

2. The Time of Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda

On July 3, 1945, Josei Toda emerged from prison, having endured two years of life in confinement, and stood up alone to carry on the will of his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, for the accomplishment of kosen-rufu. As general director of the Soka Gakkai, he began immediately to undertake the reconstruction of the organization, which was in a state of ruin.

The people of Japan at the time were in the pit of despair, reeling from the destruction brought on by the war and the turmoil of its aftermath. State Shinto, which had been forced upon the populace, was now being repudiated, along with other beliefs and values espoused by the militarist government. Yet no new source of hope was to be found.

Toda Sensei was convinced that Nichiren Buddhism alone constituted a spiritual principle powerful enough to lead the people away from suffering and confusion, and he stood up with a great wish and vow to spread its teachings widely. The organization's goal would be not only to carry out educational reform, but to accomplish kosen-rufu, that is, peace throughout the world and happiness for all people. In line with that purpose, he amended its name from Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value-Creating Education Society) to Soka Gakkai (Value-Creating Society), and began again to hold discussion meetings and travel to outlying regions to offer guidance in faith.

Encounter between Mentor and Disciple—Toda Sensei and Ikeda Sensei Meet

In 1947, Toda Sensei met young Daisaku Ikeda, who would later become the third President of the Soka Gakkai (today President of the Soka Gakkai International).

Ikeda was born in the district of Omori, in Tokyo's Ota ward, on January 2, 1928.

He grew up at a time when Japan was plunging into war: He was nine years old at the start of the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937),¹ and thirteen at the outbreak of the war with the United States in the Pacific theater of World War II (1941). As the war intensified, his four older brothers, all in the prime of their lives, were drafted into the military and sent into battle. To help support his family, Ikeda worked at a munitions factory. Suffering from tuberculosis, however, he spent his early youth in physical distress, thinking deeply about the questions of life and death.

¹ The war that began in 1937 as a Japanese invasion of China and ended with the World War II defeat of Japan in 1945.

When his eldest brother, Kiichi, had returned home temporarily from the battlefield, he described how much misery the war was causing the people of Asia. In addition, his family had been forced from their home, which burned in the air raids. Through these accounts and experiences, he had become bitterly aware of war's injustice and tragic cruelty.

After the war, the family learned that the eldest brother, who had been sent back to the battlefield, had been killed in combat in Burma (today Myanmar). Witnessing his mother's deep sadness on learning of her son's death, young Ikeda's sense that war was evil, a crime against humanity, strengthened and deepened. Searching for clear answers to the question of how to live, he delved into works of literature and philosophy.

It was in the midst of this quest that, on August 14, 1947, he attended his first Soka Gakkai discussion meeting. There he encountered the man who would become his lifelong mentor, Josei Toda.

At the meeting that evening, Toda Sensei was delivering a lecture on Nichiren Daishonin's writing "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land." When Toda had finished lecturing, Ikeda asked him a series of questions, including "What is the correct way to live?"; "What is a true patriot?"; "What is the meaning of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?"; and "What do you think about the Emperor?"

Toda's answers were clear and well-reasoned, and infused with the deep conviction he had gained through his struggles against Japan's militarist government and during two years of unjust imprisonment. As he listened, the youth was struck with the sense that he could trust everything this man had said.

Ten days later, on August 24, Ikeda began his practice of Nichiren Buddhism. At the time, he was 19 years old, and Toda Sensei, 47.

In April the following year, the youth enrolled in night classes at Taisei Gakuin (later, Tokyo Fuji University). In September, he began to attend Toda's lecture series on the Lotus Sutra. Taking Toda Sensei as his mentor, he deepened his study and understanding of Buddhism and vowed to live his life for the sake of kosen-rufu.

And in January 1949, he started to work at Toda's publishing company as the editor of a magazine for boys.

The Shared Struggle of Mentor and Disciple to Rebuild the Soka Gakkai

In July 1949, the Soka Gakkai launched publication of its monthly magazine, the *Daibyakurenge*. The inaugural issue carried an essay Toda Sensei had written, titled "The Philosophy of Life." Later, Toda's businesses, which had been struggling amid the effects of Japan's chaotic post-war economy, faced dire financial setbacks, and on August 24, 1950, he announced his intention to step down from his position as Soka Gakkai general director.

On that occasion, young Ikeda asked him, “Who will be my mentor from here on?” to which Toda Sensei replied, “Though I’ve caused you nothing but trouble, I am your mentor,” affirming the unbreakable bond of mentor and disciple.

The disciple exerted himself fully to settle Toda’s business affairs, solving the financial crisis. He resolved deeply in his heart to make it possible for Toda Sensei to take full leadership as president of the Soka Gakkai.

Ikeda had decided to stop attending night school so that he could fully support his mentor. But in response, Toda Sensei told him that he would personally instruct him and provide him with a broad education surpassing any he could obtain from a university. This private instruction, known as “Toda University,” continued for nearly a decade, until the year before Toda’s death.

Amid this intensive struggle, Toda Sensei discussed with his most trusted disciple his vision for the future. This included the establishment of the organization’s newspaper, *Seikyo Shimbun*, to wage a battle of the written word for the sake of kosen-rufu, and the founding of Soka University. Both of these institutions came into being as a result of such dialogues between mentor and disciple.

Inauguration of the Second President

Having overcome his business troubles, Toda Sensei agreed, in response to requests from many members, to take on the position of Soka Gakkai president. His inauguration as the organization’s second president took place on May 3, 1951, and on that occasion he declared his vow to achieve a membership of 750,000 households.² There were only about 3,000 members at the time, and no one could believe it was possible to achieve the goal Toda had stated.

Before his inauguration as president, Toda Sensei implemented a restructuring of the Soka Gakkai organization. He instituted a chapter-based system as a foundation for future development and refreshed the organization’s preparedness to take on the challenge of kosen-rufu.

Prior to his becoming president, the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper commenced publication on April 20. Its inaugural issue carried the first installment of Toda Sensei’s serialized novel *The Human Revolution*, which he authored under the pen name Myo Goku.³

“Human revolution” refers to the process by which, through the practice of Nichiren Buddhism, each individual achieves a transformation of their state of life, eventually leading to a transformation in the destiny of all humankind. Upholding the principle of human revolution based on his philosophy of life, President Toda

² In those days the Soka Gakkai’s membership was indicated by the number of households.

³ The name Myo Goku derives from Toda’s prison experience, during which he had awakened (*go*) to the essence of Buddhism, the mystic truth (*myo*) of nonsubstantiality (*ku*).

endeavored to spread Nichiren Buddhism as a teaching accessible and applicable to all people today.

Also, immediately after his inauguration, President Toda established in succession the women's division, the young men's division, and the young women's division.

At the same time, in the beginning of 1952, on Toda Sensei's instruction, Ikeda became chapter advisor to the Soka Gakkai's Kamata Chapter in Tokyo, and led an effort that resulted in 201 new households joining during the month of February. This represented a breakthrough, far surpassing the monthly membership increases achieved by any chapter until then, and became known as the historic February Campaign. It marked a turning point, after which the Soka Gakkai's progress toward achieving its membership goal of 750,000 households accelerated rapidly.

Toda Sensei had been planning to publish a collection of Nichiren Daishonin's writings. He knew this would be indispensable to the correct study and understanding of the Daishonin's teachings and, therefore, progress toward kosen-rufu, the widespread propagation of Nichiren Buddhism.

Toda Sensei asked the accomplished Nichiren scholar Nichiko Hori (1867–1957) to take charge of the compilation and editing. In April 1952, marking the 700th observation of the Daishonin's establishment of his teaching, the *Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin) was published. From that time on, every Soka Gakkai member used this book to earnestly study Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, and the spirit to base everything on the Daishonin's writings was established throughout the entire Soka Gakkai.

Battle against the Devilish Tendencies of Power

In April 1955, the Soka Gakkai ran its first candidates in local assembly elections. It took this step based on the spirit of “establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land,” which the Daishonin espoused in the course of his struggle for the people's happiness and a peaceful society.

In 1956 in Kansai, Ikeda inspired a remarkable increase in propagation, and in May the Osaka Chapter achieved an unprecedented membership increase of 11,111 households in just one month. In the House of Councillors election held in July that year, a candidate running in the Osaka district, whose campaign Ikeda had led, was elected, defying all predictions to the contrary.

It was an outcome so astonishing that a major daily newspaper in Japan reported it under the headline, “What was thought impossible has been achieved!”

Three candidates endorsed by the Soka Gakkai had been elected to the House of Councillors, and from then on the organization became a focus of attention as a group

with growing social influence. At the same time, vested powers and interests began to attempt unjustly to impede the organization.

In response to these attacks, Ikeda fought resolutely to protect the Soka Gakkai members. In June 1957, when the Yubari Coal Miners Union in the city of Yubari, Hokkaido, acted unjustly to suppress Soka Gakkai members' religious freedom, he went there immediately to address the issue. Declaring that the Soka Gakkai would adamantly oppose these abuses, he strove diligently to achieve a solution. (This became known as the Yubari Coal Miners Union Incident.)

On July 3, immediately after leaving Yubari, Ikeda was unjustly arrested by the Osaka Prefectural Police (in what became known as the Osaka Incident). In April that year (1957), the Soka Gakkai had run a candidate in a by-election to fill a vacant House of Councillors seat in the Osaka electoral district, and some members involved in the campaign had been charged with violating election laws. Ikeda, as the person responsible for the election campaign, was baselessly accused of orchestrating the illegal activities.

July 3 is the same date on which, in 1945, Toda Sensei was released from prison. Years later, Ikeda Sensei referred to this in a haiku poem, writing, "On this day of release and of imprisonment [July 3] are found the bonds of mentor and disciple."

For 15 days, Ikeda was subjected to harsh interrogation, during which the prosecutor threatened: "If you don't confess your guilt, we will arrest President Toda." Toda's health had by that time become very frail, and going to jail would have surely led to his death.

To protect his mentor's life, Ikeda confessed to the charges for the time being, resolved to prove his own innocence later in court. On July 17, he was released from the Osaka Detention Center.

For the next four-and-a-half years, Ikeda Sensei waged an ongoing court battle, and finally, on January 25, 1962, he was pronounced not guilty on all charges. The prosecutor affirmed the court's decision, declining the option to appeal.

Entrusting Kosen-rufu to Successors

On September 8, 1957, Toda Sensei delivered his "Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons,"⁴ which would become the start and keynote of the Soka Gakkai's peace movement.

In it, based on the Buddhist principle of the sanctity and dignity of life, he identified nuclear weapons as a devilish creation that threatens to usurp humanity's inviolable right to live, calling use of such weapons an act of absolute evil.

⁴ "Nuclear Weapons" in the title can more literally be translated as "Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs," for this was the common term for nuclear weapons in Japan at that time.

In December 1957, the Soka Gakkai reached its membership goal of 750,000 households, which Toda Sensei had vowed to achieve. And in March the following year, it completed and donated the edifice called the Grand Lecture Hall at the Nichiren Shoshu head temple, Taiseki-ji. There, on March 16, six thousand youth from around Japan, led by Ikeda, gathered for a ceremony in which Toda Sensei entrusted them with every aspect of kosen-rufu. On that occasion, President Toda declared, “The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world!”

This day, March 16, on which these young successors were entrusted with the great wish and vow for kosen-rufu, came to be called “Kosen-rufu Day” in the Soka Gakkai and the SGI.

On April 2, 1958, Toda Sensei passed away, having completed all he had set out to accomplish. He was 58. Basing himself on the awakening he achieved while in prison, he had rebuilt the Soka Gakkai and constructed an immovable foundation for the future of kosen-rufu.

[To be continued]