



With Hope and Courage, Transform Adversity into Victory!

**September 2020 SSA Times
Complementary Booklet No. 4**

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SSA General Director Tay Eng Kiat's Message to SSA Members

Achieving Absolute Victory through Expanding Our Lives

We have entered the last quarter of this year. After months of much anxiety and uncertainty, I am sure everyone joins me in rejoicing to see a steady decline in Covid-19 cases in the community in recent months.

I am happy to report that with this improvement in the local situation, construction works for our new centre in Punggol will soon begin with the approval of the authorities. Thank you very much for all your sincere daimoku and contributions that have made this possible. Let us continue to pray that the construction process will be smooth and accident-free as we look forward to the completion of our new castle of kosen-rufu.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the beginning of Ikeda Sensei's journey for worldwide kosen-rufu. It was on October 2, 1960 (also known thereafter in the Soka Gakkai as "World Peace Day"), when Ikeda Sensei first stepped out of Japan, to visit America and plant the seeds of our global peace movement. On September 27 this year, a significant online World Youth General Meeting will be held in commemoration of this occasion.

Towards the significant online gathering,

all of us have been participating in the "Together We Dialogue" movement, reaching out to one more person and empowering them through the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, with the youth division taking the lead. To the adult division, let us continue to give our wholehearted support to the youth division and contribute to the great success of this meeting in every way possible. Besides the youth, invitations are also extended to the adult division members to join in this unprecedented online gathering where youth from 192 SGI countries and territories will be in attendance. Let's not miss this rare opportunity to be a part of the meeting!

I am truly pleased that the SSA Publication Division has released this Complementary Booklet No. 4 titled "With Hope and Courage, Transform Adversity into Victory". In the annals of Nichiren Buddhism, on September 12, 1271, at the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, Nichiren Daishonin cast off his transient status and revealed his true identity as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. In a recent article, Ikeda Sensei shared his mentor Toda Sensei's belief that through this "casting off the transient and revealing of

the true”, the Daishonin is showing all of us, the people of the Latter Day of the Law, that we can all bring forth the great life state of time without beginning as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and overcome any difficulty. Ikeda Sensei also shared, “In both life and society, it is in times of crisis that we can draw forth tremendous inner strength and open the way to a new age.”

How can we expand our lives and draw forth tremendous inner strength?

I believe there are three actions we can take. 1) By chanting sincere daimoku with firm conviction in the Gohonzon; 2) By practising for others—Through the “Together We Dialogue” movement, an initiative that places emphasis on the transformative power of dialogue, we can awaken and empower in another their inherent Buddhahood. It will open the gateway of victories in the lives of others as well as our own; 3) By making sincere offerings for the

advancement of kosen-rufu. This October will be our annual financial contribution activity month. Despite the present trying situation, let us strive with profound belief that “all misfortune will change into fortune” (WND-1, p. 412), and pray to be able to participate in it.

This complementary booklet contains wonderful stories of members who based on joyous faith, transformed adversities into victories as well as Ikeda Sensei’s encouragement that is truly applicable for us during this period. As the title of this booklet suggests, it is my sincere wish that we will all rise up to the challenge of the present situation with hope and courage. Let us triumph over all adversities and create a personal history of unsurpassed happiness and victory in our lives through this wonderful practice of Nichiren Buddhism!

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Pria Pamnani
Bukit Merah Chapter
Women Division Member

I first started chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in 2015. It started with a simple need to pray for my son to get into the tennis team which was his dream. I took to the practice like a fish to water. I used to chant more than three hours daily, study and home visit two to three members a week. While I did get my prayers answered, my initial attitude towards chanting was more of fear, anxiety and doubt. I felt very guilty whenever I could not chant a certain number of hours. As a result, I took the joy out of chanting. Later, I was diagnosed with a serious autoimmune skin condition that landed me in hospital for six weeks. That was the turning point in faith for me and an opportunity to work on my human revolution. Many wonderful comrades in

faith chanted for me during that period.

Through dialogue with seniors in faith, I also learnt that my daimoku should not have been based on fears and doubts. I realised the need to substitute fear with faith and doubt with daimoku. Through prayers, I managed to find a wonderful doctor that served as a protective function of the universe, enabling me to receive the right treatment. Today, I am chanting with joy, wisdom and courage. I have shared my journey in faith with so many people in Singapore and India, and encouraged them to take up this life transforming Buddhist practice. I feel that I have truly come a long way since I first started chanting five years ago!

The Circuit Breaker implemented this year by the Government of Singapore has also taught me a lot, enabling me to grow even more as a human being. Due to the Circuit Breaker, many people were forced to stay at home, this was probably the period that we spent the longest time with our family members. As a result, more conflicts were bound to surface in the family.

During this time, my two kids, who are young adults, struggled with being confined at home. However, through my prayers I was reminded of the kind of mother Ikeda

Sensei always encourages us to be – a mother that has limitless patience and compassion, in order to raise wise and capable children who would become future leaders of kosen-rufu.

In fact, we transformed our home into a Buddha land by creating a happy and harmonious environment. I attribute this to the high life state that I was able to bring forth through my Buddhist practice.

The Gosho states, “When we revere Myoho-enge-kyo inherent in our own life as the object of devotion, the Buddha nature within us is summoned forth and manifested by our chanting of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. This is what is meant by ‘Buddha’. To illustrate, when a caged bird sings, birds who are flying in the sky are thereby summoned and gather around, and when the birds flying in the sky gather around, the bird in the cage strives to get out. When with our mouths we chant the Mystic Law, our Buddha nature, being summoned, will invariably emerge. The Buddha nature of Brahma and Shakra, being called, will protect us, and the Buddha nature of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, being summoned, will rejoice.” (WND-1, p. 887) By bringing forth the state of Buddhahood in me, I was able to draw forth the state of Buddhahood from my family members as well. During this period, I also wisely took advantage of my excess free time to study Ikeda Sensei’s guidance and conduct dialogues with members over Zoom calls.

Despite the new norm that we have to live with, I am filled with immense gratitude and joy. I am glad that when I chant, I can draw forth the wisdom and clarity to make the right causes through my thoughts, words and deeds for my

absolute happiness and the happiness of others.

I also feel a deep connection with our mentor Ikeda Sensei. Without him, we wouldn’t be able to practise Nichiren Buddhism today. With deep emotions, I wrote the following poem in dedication to my mentor:

*This lockdown has made me sit back
and pause,
Made me realise, the importance to
smile as a cause.
A smile that could make someone else’s
day,
For this effect, I thank my practice and
Sensei.
A practice that I would be completely
lost without,
A practice that teaches me faith minus
doubt.
I chant with wisdom and choose hope
as my decision,
To study and encourage others, has
become my mission.
As I chant, my life condition soars high,
Even more so when I see 86
bodhisattvas at our zadankai (discussion
meeting).
Together we can make a change with
itai doshin (the spirit of many in body,
one in mind),
After all, we have Nam-myoho-enge-kyo
as our mystic potion.
Thank you lockdown for teaching us to
lend a helping hand,
To those in need, collectively we pray
for peace of the land.
I bow to you Sensei, the time is now,
Today, again, I redetermine my kosen-
rufu vow.*

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Chong Kwong Ki
Queenstown Zone
Vice Young Men Division Zone Leader

I was retrenched at the end of March 2020 when the company I was working for decided to shut down its office in Singapore. The whole world was marching towards a gloomy economic slump due to the Covid-19 pandemic and it was taking its toll on jobs everywhere.

Being thrust into unemployment during the worst of times, I felt lost. However, it dawned on me that I could only turn to the Gohonzon and chant before I decide what to do next.

Coincidentally, that was when we embarked on the nationwide Young Men Division (YMD) Daimoku Campaign to pray for the safety of all and the early resolution of the pandemic. I decided to start this campaign with the intention to challenge and break through my own limitations. I

kept pushing myself to chant more every day, from two hours a day to eventually five hours, sometimes six hours a day. I also vividly remember that we carried out a 11-hour chanting marathon on May 1 at our individual homes, and I managed to achieve 10.5 hours of daimoku - the most I had ever chanted in a single day! It was very challenging with so many distractions - the phone, messages, my wandering mind, etcetera. But the process of struggling with the devilish functions in me made me realise that what seemed impossible initially is actually possible when we make a strong resolve and keep renewing that determination to push forward.

As we continued into the campaign, I decided that I wanted to create the most value out of my "retrenchment experience"

and tapped on my experience to encourage fellow young men who were going through the same struggle. To my surprise, the initial feelings of worry turned into hope and a sense of mission. In fact, I never felt so hopeful before.

Of course, there were times when things seemed to move slowly, and it felt like nothing would materialise. However, thanks to the encouragement and concern of my comrades in faith, I persevered. After about two months, I found myself a job and started work just when the Circuit Breaker ended.

The true benefits that I received during this period go far beyond securing a job. Firstly, I had reaffirmed the power of chanting to turn the impossible into possible and the unprecedented amount of daimoku that I had been consistently chanting during this time had enabled me to elevate my life condition and to experience the joy of having a vast life state.

Secondly, because of my retrenchment, my daughter had started to chant regularly with me in an attempt to support me.

Thirdly, I wasn't chanting just to find a job to get by, I chanted to get a job that would bring me the same pay if not more and a job which will enable me to learn something new. Though many people thought I was

being unrealistic, I managed to show actual proof. My current job is in fact a promotion from my previous one and I am given the opportunity to learn a new technology.

The other thing that I found really amazing was when I was retrenched, I was only given a minimal retrenchment benefit of 1.5 months' pay. In the end, as it turned out, the duration from my last official working day till the day I started my new job was exactly 1.5 months. This meant that I suffered no income loss at all during this period.

Ikeda Sensei says, "If we challenge ourselves to transform our lives from within - what we call human revolution - with the confidence that we will gain final victory in life, we will be able to greatly expand our state of being. We will be able to attain a life-state of boundless freedom that will allow us to embrace all hardships and sorrows like a great ocean. The time will definitely come when the significance of all our experiences will become clear."

Looking back, I realised that it must have been my mission and good fortune to go through this, so that I can fully experience the power of chanting and strengthen my faith in our Buddhist practice, creating yet another prime point in my life.

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Tian Kim Koh Alan (First row, first from right)
Owen Chapter
Vice Men Division District Leader

In the early 2000s, I worked in the retail industry, selling clothing. I endured major crises such as Sars in 2003, and the Global Financial Crisis from 2007 to 2008. I am very grateful for the constant encouragement of my seniors in faith when I suffered from loss of income during those crises. They told me, “Any normal person can go through the same problem, but as a Buddhist practitioner, it is important for you to show actual proof of our practice.” Encouraged by this advice, I always picked myself up. I remained undefeated by chanting to the Gohonzon with earnest faith and striving in the frontlines of kosen-rufu. In fact, my experiences with these crises

helped me emerge stronger and better prepared me for this Covid-19 pandemic.

During the 2010s, through the recommendation of an acquaintance, I developed interest in the real estate. Although I was already in my 40s, I thought hard if I should make a mid-career switch and leave the retail industry, in which I was already quite comfortable in and making a sizable profit.

I chanted hard about it and at the urging of my acquaintance, decided to give it a try. I sat for the Real Estate Salesperson examination. I studied hard while managing my business and contributing my best

efforts to SSA activities. As I haven't been studying since Primary 6, I was surprised when I passed the examination and received my real estate licence!

However, I knew the road ahead in real estate was going to be tough as I had to learn everything from scratch. I buried myself under piles of notes and materials needed to master my skills. I knew I had to use the strategy of the Lotus Sutra and applied Buddhist principles at work as I would be meeting people from all walks of life. I chanted fervently each day and treasured each encounter with my clients. Through my sincere interactions with my clients, I was able to develop close connection with them and gain their trust.

During the Circuit Breaker, my work was affected as we were not allowed to go on site. Instead of grumbling, I spent more time chanting at home, sometimes up to four hours a day. I also read our SSA publications to encourage myself and my members during this difficult time. Towards the end of April, I was surprised to receive requests for my service, but I had to conduct the viewing via virtual platform. I managed to overcome each hurdle with poise, meet my clients and even secure good deals for them. Amazingly, I had such large influx of business opportunities during the Circuit

Breaker that I earned even more than the pre-Circuit Breaker period!

Ikeda Sensei wrote, "Only when you experience the crushing, painful depths of sufferings can you begin to understand the true meaning of life. Precisely because you have experienced great sufferings, it is imperative that you go on living. The important thing is to keep moving forward. If you use your sadness as a source of growth, you will become a person of greater depth and breadth – an even more wonderful you. This is the harvest of your pain and sufferings."

The greatest benefit that I have received these years is not success in my career. It is the change I see in myself. Previously, when I encountered adversities, I would doubt my Buddhist practice, my heart was filled with anguish, fears and worries. However, today, I can confidently say that I face each problem with a heart of challenge and gratitude, and because of this I am able to live each day with uplifting spirits.

More importantly, I am filled with appreciation towards Ikeda Sensei and SSA for nurturing me over the last 20 odd years. Through practising and learning in the Soka family, I am able to truly grow and develop as a human being.

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Fiona Lee Jia Ying

Lakeside Chapter

Young Women Division District Leader

the numerous applications that I had sent, I only managed to secure a couple of interviews and none came back with a positive outcome. About a month after my examinations, I was at the brink of despair and was considering to take up a temporary job to get by.

It was then that I received a call from a senior in faith. Upon hearing my situation, she shared with me about her own challenging job search experience and encouraged me not to give up. The conversation gave me a lot of hope. Through persevering efforts, I managed to secure more interviews and offers started coming my way.

In the end, I was considering between two job offers. One of them was a full-time job, and the other was a traineeship opportunity under the government's initiative to help graduates find jobs. Even though the full-time job was a stable one with lots of potential for advancement, I thought the traineeship was a rare opportunity. It was difficult to make a decision between the two.

I chanted for the wisdom to make the right decision and finally decided on the traineeship opportunity.

I started looking for a job since April before I had my examinations in May this year. Eventually I successfully graduated and became a “Covid-19 graduating batch” student.

I have been praying for a career that would allow me to demonstrate my capabilities and overcome my weaknesses; contribute to the society and to kosen-rufu; and contribute to my family financially.

However, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the job market badly. Despite

After I had made my decision, challenges began to arise. The start date of the traineeship was delayed for multiple times and the promised conditions and offers of the programme kept changing. I started to harbour doubts and thought to myself that if I had taken the full-time job, I would probably have already been working for a month, with a month of salary and job experience.

It was at this time that another senior in faith spoke to me. Through our dialogue, I realised that my attitude wasn't right in the first place. There were bound to be challenges, no matter what decision I made. What was more important was to have the determination to transform every challenge and move things towards the best direction through my Buddhist practice. I renewed my determination to overcome all the challenges that I faced and to take every experience as a stepping stone for further growth and development. In August,

I became the first graduate to be onboard the programme!

Through this experience, I have learnt the importance of dialogue. We can bring hope to our friends at the crucial moment, just like how my two seniors in faith had encouraged me, enabling me to strengthen my faith and bring forth the courage needed in my endeavours.

I would like to share these words from Ikeda Sensei that I had held close to heart and tried to actualise during this period, "The ability to solve problems is not something reserved for special people: it is a path that opens before any of us when we face reality head-on, taking up some aspect of its weighty burden and acting with persistence. Our capacity to overcome difficulties is unleashed as we turn anguish and concern into determination and action." (SGI President Ikeda's Peace Proposal 2017)

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Goh Chai Yan

Teck Whye Chapter
Vice Young Women Division
District Leader

that I wasn't feeling well and would be taking medical leave, he told me that my work performance was unsatisfactory and I did not plan my time wisely. I was then told that I did not pass the probation period and was fired, even though I had worked nine months in the company. That was the day before Malaysia's lockdown took effect. Colleagues around me felt indignant that I was receiving such treatment. On hindsight, I was happy that I could finally leave such an unhealthy working environment.

The next day morning, I received an acceptance letter from the National University of Singapore. Though I was elated to receive the letter, I felt lost and uncertain about my path ahead. Should I return to my hometown in Malaysia? Should I search for another job or go on to further my studies? But the most immediate concern was how to pay my rent without a new job in a month's time?

Through daimoku, I realised that I should not waste my time in despair. Instead, I should take this window period to do things that I had not been able to do because of my busy schedule in the past. I also took the opportunity to read Ikeda Sensei's

I was an architectural designer. My job nature required me to work overtime frequently, and to make things worse I had a demanding and unreasonable boss. This resulted in me feeling pressurised very often. However, I encouraged myself to pull through for another year before I pursue my dreams to further my studies.

In March this year, continuously working overtime had worn me down and I fell sick. Due to Covid-19, patients with any flu or fever-like symptoms were automatically given five days of medical leave. I remembered I was still working in the office before I would go on medical leave the next day. When I told my boss

peace proposal, contact my Young Women Division members and chant abundant daimoku.

Later, many countries started locking down due to the pandemic outbreak. Foreign dormitory clusters appeared to be increasing in Singapore. With many companies and businesses in the construction sector greatly affected, it made me feel even more worried and uncertain. I turned back to faith and started my 10-hour daimoku marathon. On the same day, I found a part-time job at NTUC Fairprice, doing contact tracing and temperature screening.

It was a challenging job, having to face people from all walks of life and to say "Thank you" every day for almost 500 times! I felt as though I was performing Byakuren Group (YWD training and behind-the-scene group) duty. I was, however, reminded of Ikeda Sensei's guidance to youth that it is through work that we are able to polish our character. Hence, I continued to do my best every day.

However, I knew that the part-time job would not be a long term solution. I continued to challenge my situation with abundant daimoku while remaining active in online Soka activities and sharing Buddhism with others. I was overjoyed when on one occasion, I managed to invite my landlord to join our zoom discussion meeting! One day, I received a call from my mother, informing me of the dire financial situation that our family was facing. I saw it as a clear signal that I needed to hold back my plans to further my studies and look for

a full time job instead.

On June 10, I spoke to a senior in faith. She told me that although it was important to find a job, I shouldn't be working just for the sake of money. I should work for a greater purpose in mind. Hence, she advised me to base my prayers on a vow for kosen-rufu and to set my sights on July 3, Mentor and Disciple Day, to realise my prayers to find a job. Through our conversation, I also learnt that how we see the world and feel about our lives is determined solely by our inner life condition. Nichiren Daishonin writes: "Hungry spirits perceive the Ganges River as fire, human beings perceive it as water, and heavenly beings perceive it as amrita. Though the water is the same, it appears differently according to one's karmic reward from the past." (WND-1, p. 486)

Another senior in faith who works in the related industry also helped me check through my resume and keep a lookout for job openings. I am very grateful to be in this warm Soka family.

My senior committed to chanting with me at 6.30am every morning and through our shared struggle, I received a call from a company on June 29, asking me to start work on July 1. Although it was a long struggle, I was able to build a strong foundation in Buddhism that is based on faith, practice and study. I realised that the battle is always with the devilish functions within me and that we can only win over our situations when an inner transformation takes place within us. With that, winter will always turn into spring!

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Cheryl Fong Siew Mei
Sengkang Zone
Vice Women Division Zone Leader

I was looking forward to a fresh start in 2020, getting ready to advance even further for kosen-rufu together with my mentor, Ikeda Sensei. Never did I expect the world to be so badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic this year.

All SSA activities had come to a halt. Businesses, schools and people's livelihoods were badly affected. Then came the unexpected announcement of the Circuit Breaker which would start on April 7. It caught many Singaporeans off guard, including myself.

As my husband's business was deemed as non-essential service, our staff and both of us had to work from home. Instead of

letting the negativity of uncertainty affect me, I decided to continue to strive for kosen-rufu in whatever ways I could, reaching out and encouraging one more person through the social media, messages, emails or phone calls. I managed to share Nichiren Buddhism with a new friend and one of my staff just before the Circuit Breaker began.

I have been chanting three hours of daimoku every day constantly since 2018 when I was facing huge challenges in my family and business. When the Circuit Breaker was implemented, I thought to myself that this would be a good opportunity to chant more daimoku and to read more. Hence, I decided to exert myself to chant one more hour of daimoku, and read more guidance from Ikeda Sensei and the Goshō.

It is a great challenge to chant one more hour of daimoku despite working from home. In fact, I had to work longer hours, having numerous online business trainings. I also had to adapt to working in a home environment and manage the household such as purchasing groceries. At the same

time, my father develops mild dementia at this moment. He would disrupt my work and call out to me at times when he wanted attention. Not to mention, my mother is also suffering from anxiety disorder and my son is experiencing a major depressive disorder. I had to bring forth the wisdom and life force to handle their emotional needs.

One of my greatest worry was our business. We had zero income in April and were uncertain how the company could survive for the next few months. Despite these hounding thoughts, I reminded myself once again that I would not be drowned by my problems, instead I must challenge them using the strategy of the Lotus Sutra. My strong resolve was to be undefeated in the face of the three obstacles and four devils and my fundamental darkness!

I kept increasing the hours of daimoku chanted, sometimes to seven hours a day. As days passed, I felt hope emerging from my life. As all SSA meetings were held online, I exerted myself to join as many meetings as possible. I wanted to create maximum value during this period. I encouraged everyone as if it was my last opportunity to speak to them as demonstrated by the actions of Ikeda Sensei.

As I continued in my earnest Buddhist practice and efforts at work and home, I

received good news before May 3 that our company successfully bid a government tender project! This was a great relief to us. It meant that our staff would not lose their jobs and we could clear some of the company's debts! It also meant that I could achieve the goal that I set in January this year to make a substantial financial contribution for the new Soka centre in Punggol to repay my debts of gratitude to the Gohonzon. Once again, I felt the greatness of our Buddhist practice.

On the family front, with the help of psychiatrists, my mother and son are beginning to see improvements. I continue to chant for their happiness. Even with all past and present challenges at work and family, I am filled with joy because I know that every challenge gives me an opportunity to strengthen my faith and actualise my human revolution. They serve as fuel to propel me forward so that I can better empathise with fellow members and their challenges in the journey of shared struggles.

I will never forget the vow that I had made in the Hall of the Great Vow for Kosen-rufu during the SGI training course in Japan last October. I am determined to be the lionhearted disciple of Ikeda Sensei and to advance in one mind with my mentor to bring hope to as many people as possible.



Meet online or contact through phone call (or whatsapp call)



Always keep at least one metre apart



Wear a mask when going out from home



**New
Normal**



Wash or sanitise our hands after touching common surfaces



If you are sick, see a doctor and stay at home



Check in and out with SafeEntry; download TraceTogether app to keep you safe

Earthly Desires are Enlightenment

Ikeda Sensei says, “Buddhism teaches the principle that ‘earthly desires lead to enlightenment’. To explain this very simply, ‘earthly desires’ refers to suffering and to the desires and cravings that cause suffering, while ‘enlightenment’ refers to happiness and an enlightened state of life.

Normally, one would assume that earthly desires and enlightenment are separate and independent conditions — especially since suffering would seem to be the exact opposite of happiness. But this is not the case in Nichiren Buddhism, which teaches that only by burning the ‘firewood’ of problems and suffering can we obtain the ‘flames’ of happiness. In other words, by using suffering as fuel, we gain the ‘light’ and ‘energy’ for happiness. And it is by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that we ‘burn the firewood of earthly desires’.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our problems and sufferings all turn into energy for our happiness, into fuel that enables us to keep moving forward in our lives.

The wonderful thing about faith in Nichiren Buddhism is that it enables those who suffer the most to attain the greatest happiness and those who experience the most daunting problems to lead the most wonderful, meaningful lives.”

Members of the Soka Gakkai have through their own life stories proven that despite being ordinary people who face challenging situations and limitations, they are able to create meaning and value that is unique to their lives, gaining enlightenment by leading truly fulfilling lives. In the following excerpts from *The New Human Revolution* (NHR) are such stories chronicled by Ikeda Sensei. Ikeda Sensei appears as the character Shin’ichi Yamamoto in the NHR.

Challenges are Harbingers of a New, Genuine Happiness

The young man who played Yahe'e, after speaking his closing lines, looked towards Shin'ichi in the balcony with tears in his eyes. He could not, however, see very much; he was almost blind. His name was Masayoshi Nagamatsu, and he was 33 years old. He was from Gujo, where the Gujo Rebellion had taken place.

After graduating from high school, Nagamatsu, filled with ambition and zeal, got a job at a fabric wholesaler in Tokyo. But one day about two years later he noticed that the numbers on the calendar were fuzzy. He could see clearly with his right eye, but something was strange when he tried to use only his left. About two months later, he also lost most of the vision in his right eye. He was shocked and scared. An eye doctor examined him, but the cause of his vision loss was unclear...

"In a few more weeks, you would have lost your sight completely," the doctor now told him. "We must operate immediately. The surgery, however, will only preserve your sight at its present level, not restore it. You'll never see again as you once did." Even so, surgery was the only option. Fortunately, the operation was a success.

Nagamatsu wanted to return to Gifu. He longed for the clean air and water and the fresh green of his birthplace. He felt that his sight might even recover if he went home. But the doctor insisted that he receive regular outpatient treatment in Tokyo. They had cut into his skull, and there was a chance he might suffer a seizure at some

later point.

There are times when the tempests of karma seem to blow mercilessly. That is why it is crucial that we transform our karma in order to triumph in life – and that is the purpose of faith and Soka Gakkai activities.

Nagamatsu's vision was so compromised that he couldn't see his own hand unless he placed it right in front of his face. It was in that condition that he returned to his hometown of Gujo, Gifu Prefecture, in the late autumn of 1961, accompanied by his father. The beautiful tapestry of fall foliage was just a blur to his dim eyes. But far more worrying to him was that he couldn't see his own future.

His dream of making a success of himself in Tokyo was crushed, and he was left with a profound sense of disappointment and defeat. He returned home with a feeling that he had been cursed. Then, two months later, another tragedy befell him as his beloved mother, who had saved his life so many years ago, died of cancer. Weeping before her lifeless form, Nagamatsu said: "If only I could have died in your place. Life is useless to me now."

After his mother's death, Nagamatsu took over the housework. One day a woman selling sewing machines stopped by. She was a Soka Gakkai Women Division member. Observing how despondent Nagamatsu was, she started to talk to him about Buddhism. Several local Gakkai leaders also visited him and encouraged him to give the practice a try. Nagamatsu vehemently resisted their efforts, refuting everything they told him, but that didn't make him feel any better.

“Gakkai members guarantee that I can achieve happiness by practising Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism,” he thought. “I have rebutted all their claims, but do I really believe that I am happy?” Asking himself this question, he felt miserable. He decided he wanted to know the source of the passion and certainty exhibited by the Gakkai members he had met. Finally, more out of curiosity than anything else, he joined the Soka Gakkai in May 1962. He was 22 years old.

Nagamatsu began participating in Gakkai meetings. Having been unable to find any hope in life, he felt envious of the pure-hearted enthusiasm of the members. He decided to try chanting daimoku. Soon after doing so, he had a seizure. His whole body shook and he lost consciousness. It happened while he was crossing the railroad tracks at the same spot where he had almost been hit by a train at the age of 18 months. Nagamatsu keenly sensed the invisible chains of karma that bound his life.

When Nagamatsu had a seizure and collapsed on the train tracks, fortunately someone was nearby who was able to pull him to safety. Hearing about the incident, a senior in faith was very concerned and immediately visited Nagamatsu to encourage him.

“You experienced your first seizure after beginning to practise,” he said. “That means you have taken the first step to transforming your karma. When a hose is turned on that has been out of use for a long time, initially, all the dirt and scum that was inside is flushed out. But if you keep the hose on, eventually clean fresh water

will flow forth.

“Changing karma is a similar concept. Because you started practising, the karma that had been clogging up your life has come out. This is the law of life. You can definitely transform your karma and attain happiness, so please continue to carry out faith until the very end, no matter what.”

Inspired by this encouragement, Nagamatsu resolved to practise in earnest. He began to study voraciously, devouring such Soka Gakkai publications as the *Daibyakurenge* study journal. He did this in spite of the fact that he couldn’t see anything in the middle of his field of vision and could only dimly make out writing from certain angles. It took him 30 or 40 minutes to read a single page, but he engraved each word and sentence deep in his life. The more he studied Buddhism, the deeper his convictions grew and the more joy he felt.

He had seven seizures after that, but the symptoms became less intense each time, until finally they stopped completely. His desire to find work was also fulfilled and, after working for a period with a life insurance company, he gained employment at a metal parts manufacturer. At the latter, he started with the simplest manual tasks, but he eventually went on to reach a high degree of technical skill, developing the ability to process sheet iron and other steel parts within a millimetre’s accuracy. He used a magnifying glass to do this highly detailed work and persevered with great determination.

Before joining the Soka Gakkai, he spent his days lamenting his near blindness and cursing his fate, but now he realised that

it was his mission to excel at his work and find happiness in spite of his disability.

The Swiss educator and philosopher Carl Hilty once wrote: “[Challenges] are harbingers of a new, genuine happiness that will bloom in our lives.”

(NHR Volume 17, “Green Fields” chapter)

It is in Times of Adversity that We Rouse Courageous Faith

Takao Tajima, a fourth-year student in the night school course of the economics department of Kokugakuin University in Tokyo, had only a half-year to go before graduation, but he didn’t have a job lined up. At the general meeting of the night school students, he decided to find a job at a city hall in the Tama area of western Tokyo, where he lived. He thought that his mission was to contribute to local society with the abilities he’d cultivated as a night school student.

Tajima had joined the Soka Gakkai as a child with his family, but he really began to practise in earnest just when he became a night school student. While he went to a preparatory school to get ready for retaking the college entrance examinations after graduating from high school, the company his father worked for went bankrupt and his mother started leaving the house early every morning to go to her job. Tajima quit the school he was attending and began a part-time job. Determined to support himself through school, he entered the night school university course. In night school, a senior leader on campus thoroughly instructed him

in his Buddhist faith. He guided Tajima with fierce vigour: “What’s your great purpose in life? You must resolve to dedicate your life to kosen-rufu, the movement to make all people happy, the highest purpose in life. That’s the source of true happiness, and that’s human revolution.

“As a matter of course, night school students have to work and go to school. You need to demonstrate proof both at your workplace and in your studies. You need to do your best in daily activities in your local Gakkai organisation and on campus. That’s the way to polish yourself, train yourself, and build a firm foundation for your life.

“Just thinking that something is impossible or that you can’t do it is the greatest cause of failure, because when you do that you impose limitations on yourself.

“We’re aiming to follow President Yamamoto’s example. Live your life always reflecting on what struggles he’s faced and asking yourself what he’d do!”

The encouragement of his senior leader came at him like a hard fastball, which was in earnest. Though stern, it was also infused with sincerity and consideration. Tajima accepted the guidance wholeheartedly and straightforwardly.

When he engaged in Gakkai activities, he deeply learned how difficult it was for the majority of night school students. Some of them were even sending money from their jobs to help their families back at home. After paying their rent and tuition from their earnings, some of them could no longer afford to buy enough food for themselves, so for days on end they subsisted on instant

noodles and bread crusts. Some of them were so exhausted by their daily struggles that they dropped out of school.

On returning home from Gakkai activities, Tajima thought while looking up at the moon: "While many others are struggling so hard, I'm fortunate to be able to live at home and have enough to eat. How lucky I am!"

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "If they complain of hunger, tell them about the sufferings of the world of hungry spirits. If they grumble that they are cold, tell them of the eight cold hells. If they say they are frightened, explain to them that a pheasant sighted by a hawk, or a mouse stalked by a cat, is as desperate as they are." (WND-1, p. 998)

When people feel isolated and think they're the only ones suffering, they may succumb to self-pity and weakness. But there are always those who have it worse off than us and yet are still making an effort. When we realise this, we feel courage. And by looking down on our own sufferings from a higher plane, we can grow into people who can even encourage our friends who are also struggling. It is in times of adversity that we really rouse courageous faith, cut the cycle of suffering in our lives, and open a broader, more elevated life-state.

When Tajima had reached the point where he could take responsibility for several other members at his university, his senior leader said to him: "The majority of night school students are given to being in a state where they are almost crushed by financial and emotional pressures. As a leader in our organisation, the important

thing is to insure that not a single member drops out of school or despairs. Towards this end, the first step is to be aware of who isn't attending school."...

Takao Tajima made it his duty to pay an after-school visit to any member who was continuously absent from class. Also, realising that study was his first priority, he chose to take a part-time job. But his senior exhorted him to do his best and win the trust of others in the workplace, even at a part-time job.

Tajima took on the challenge. When he was in charge of organising the warehouse, he came up with ideas such as a chart so that everyone would know how to keep the warehouse organised. As a result, he was kindly offered a position as a full-time employee, for which he was grateful, but he had to refuse.

From his third year of studies at university, he worked part-time at the local city hall. He also earned a reputation there as a diligent and energetic worker. Many city employees in the workplace suggested to him that when he graduated he should get a full-time job at the city hall. They even prepared an application for the employment examination for him.

It was at that time that Japan entered a period of slow growth and a hiring slump due to the economic downturn triggered by the oil shock of the autumn of 1973. The public did not hold night school students in high regard, but Tajima, through his own efforts and actions, tried to change that situation.

The surest way to change society is by striving to become a person who shines

with a golden light that no one can fail to recognise. As Josei Toda once said: “There’s no holding youth back. No matter how many times they’re knocked down, they keep on growing.”

Tajima decided to become a full-time city hall employee at the night school students general meeting. With the spirit of service he had learned in the Soka Gakkai, he wanted to demonstrate the Buddhist way of life by protecting the people and contributing to society. He took and passed the hiring exam. The following year, he became a city employee. Tajima gained experience in many different departments. Every day was a fresh challenge.

When he thought “I’m a member of the Soaring Group (a training group for night school students)! This is my chance to demonstrate my powers! This is my chance to show my abilities!” he felt his fighting spirit rise up. And thinking back on his time as a night school student, who had experienced so many challenges already, he felt like he could certainly handle whatever lay ahead. Just as President Shin’ichi Yamamoto had said in his message to the night school students, the struggles of his youth had built a strong foundation for his life.

Tajima accomplished important things in each department in which he worked – for example, devising a policy for reducing household waste and establishing a community FM radio station – until eventually he became a key player at the local city hall.

(NHR Volume 23, “Courage” chapter)

Transforming Past Karma into a Wonderful New Mission

Tateno was born in August 1928 in Kamisunagawa, Hokkaido. His father died in an accident when he was only three years old, after which Kozo was adopted by the Tateno family. Kozo was so young at the time that he always believed that his adopted mother was his birth mother. About six months after he was adopted, his adoptive father suddenly died of illness. His adoptive mother remarried, and took Kozo with her to her new family. At her wish, Kozo kept the family name Tateno.

Kozo Tateno’s new father worked in a coal mine. He had children of his own from a previous marriage, all of them older than Kozo. His new father and siblings warmly welcomed Kozo and his mother, and soon a new little sister was born. The neighborhood children, however, used to tease and pick on Kozo because his last name was different than that of his adoptive family.

World War II started in December of the year Kozo began the last two-year course at the national people’s school. After graduating, he got a job at a steel foundry in Muroran, Hokkaido. The factory produced war material. At that time, Kozo happened to see the family registry that his mother had obtained for submission to the factory as part of his employment application. He gasped. For the first time, he learned that he was adopted, and the woman he thought was his birth mother turned out to be his adoptive mother. For him, it was a terrible

shock. He dropped the family registry from his grasp.

From that day on, he had no appetite. Seeing him wasting away, his mother, who guessed the reason for her son's distress, explained the situation to him. But hearing the truth from her didn't make him feel any better.

He soon started his job and his new life at the factory in Muroran, but he remained depressed. He realised he had no blood connection to his parents or any of his siblings. He thought to himself that no one would care if he died, and he gave himself over to despair. He even considered sacrificing his life by enlisting as a kamikaze pilot in the military's Junior Pilots Training Corps.

He wrote of his overwhelming feelings in a letter to his parents. They were so surprised that they immediately set out on the five-to-six-hour train journey from Kamisunagawa to Muroran in order to beg their son not to end his life, finally succeeding in convincing him. Their deep love for him warmed the young man's heart, and hot tears rolled down his cheeks. He realised that even though they might not be connected by ties of blood, he had real parents, and he resolved to make something of himself in order to repay this debt of gratitude to them.

From this experience Tateno learned about the power of parental love, and it helped shape his attitude to the children he later taught when he became a teacher.

Giving wholehearted affection to one's children is the sure way to open up communication and interaction.

Trials and tribulations are an inescapable part of life. What matters is how we deal with the challenges we encounter. It is our struggles to overcome them that become our greatest treasures in life and make us shine as people.

In December 1944, his second year at the steel foundry, Tateno came down with tuberculosis of the ischium. He had to return to his family home in Kamisunagawa to recuperate, and the war ended while he was recovering. When he got better, he took a job in the coal mines. It was very hard work.

He got married at the age of 24. He realised that he needed a better education in order to get a job with the mining company that didn't involve such hard physical labour, and he began attending a high school night course. His wife supported his efforts. One of his teachers at the school turned out to be a fellow student from his national people's school days.

And a daughter was born to the Tatenos.

Tateno's teachers, seeing how hard he studied and how helpful he was to the other students, frequently told him that he had potential as a teacher, and they encouraged him to enter the teaching profession instead of spending his life working in a coal mine. He finally decided to accept their suggestion and take on the challenge of trying to make a new career for himself. He studied diligently and earned good grades. When he graduated, the local newspaper ran a story about him under the headline "A Father Graduates with Top Marks".

After graduating, he advanced to a two-

year course at the Iwamizawa branch of Hokkaido Gakugei University (present-day Hokkaido University of Education). He got assigned to the night shift at the mine, from 10pm to 6am, so he could attend school during the day, leaving him with only about four hours for sleep. He used his commute to school by train to catch up on his sleep.

As the Brazilian poet Francisco Otaviano once noted: “A man who spends his life without exertion. This is not a true man. It’s the hollow image of a man. He has passed through life, but he hasn’t lived it.” Tateno strived tirelessly towards his goal of becoming a teacher.

Having a dream provides a sense of hope. It illuminates one’s youth and becomes a sustaining force throughout life.

For Kozo Tateno, his two years of university study were a time of terrific struggle, fighting against lack of sleep and testing the limits of his physical and mental endurance. He always sat in the front row of the classroom in order to stay alert and stave off his perennial drowsiness.

After graduating in 1959, he realised his wish by becoming a teacher at an elementary school in Kamisunagawa. He was already 30 years old at the time.

He joined the Soka Gakkai in July 1961. Before that, his mother-in-law, who lived nearby, had taken up faith. Though she’d always been weak and ill, after she started practising she became stronger and more energetic with each passing day. She told Tateno’s wife that Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the only way to change their karma, which led her daughter to begin practising Buddhism. Through earnestly

chanting and participating in Gakkai activities, Tateno’s wife became more positive and cheerful.

Destiny was an idea that always preoccupied Tateno. As he contemplated his own complex origins and family relations, he couldn’t help but think deeply about the nature of human life and karma. This is why he was greatly intrigued by the concept of changing one’s karma.

Tateno then began to read Gakkai publications. In particular, he found himself deeply moved by Josei Toda’s theory of life. He was thrilled by what he read in the speeches by Shin’ichi Yamamoto that were published in the *Seikyo Shimbun*. He was also touched by Shin’ichi’s passionate and powerful determination to achieve world peace and happiness for all, as well as by his spirit of immense compassion and conviction. Tateno was especially impressed to learn that he and Shin’ichi were of the same age. Knowing that such a person existed in his own generation inspired Tateno to lead his life by advancing straight ahead towards his own ideals as a teacher.

Two months after his wife started practising, Tateno joined the Soka Gakkai. In the words of the Russian author Leo Tolstoy: “The strongest influence is the example of a good life.”...

When the Sapporo Soka Kindergarten preparations committee held deliberations on whom to hire as the new school principal, Kozo Tateno’s name was among the first to come up. The committee members were well aware of his devoted commitment to education.

In September 1969, Shin'ichi Yamamoto visited the Iwamizawa Community Centre in Hokkaido and sat for a commemorative photograph with local members. He personally spoke with Tateno, who was a Soka Gakkai Men Division greater block chief (equivalent today to a Men Division chapter leader). Shin'ichi felt that Tateno was a man of honesty and integrity – very important qualities for a teacher. On that occasion, Shin'ichi also learned from Hokkaido leaders of Tateno's background and contributions as a teacher.

In early winter of 1974, Shin'ichi received a report from Susumu Aota, the chair of the Soka Schools board of directors, that Tateno was being considered for the position of principal of the new kindergarten. Shin'ichi wholeheartedly agreed with the choice. In January 1975, Tateno was selected for the post.

Tateno realised that he should make use of his own unique personal history, as well as his experience teaching at both the

elementary and junior high levels, in his new role as principal. He also felt that his past karma had been fully transformed into a wonderful new mission. He decided to devote his life to the educational vision of President Yamamoto.

Tateno first joined the staff of the Soka Schools and began to work very hard for the establishment of the kindergarten. It was all new to him. He visited and observed numerous kindergartens in the Hokkaido area to gather information about establishing a kindergarten. Because he was determined to make the kindergarten the best one possible, he was highly motivated. He visited more than 30 kindergartens in all.

As the South American independence hero Simón Bolívar once wrote: "The difficulties could not frighten me, the greatness of the work excited my passion." The fires of true passion will incinerate all difficulties and trials.

(NHR Volume 23, "The Future" chapter)

Transforming Earthly Desires into Enlightenment through the Power of the Mystic Law

Excerpts of Ikeda Sensei's Encouragement

We Are the Protagonists of Our Own Triumphant Dramas

Buddhism teaches us that we each write and perform the script of our own life. No one else writes that script for us. We write it, and we are the star who performs it. This extremely active life philosophy is inherent in the teaching of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life.”

We are each the author and the main character of our own story. In order for it to be a wonderful production, it's essential that we become so familiar with the scenario that we can picture it vividly. We may need to rehearse it mentally. Sometimes it helps to write down our goals (for example, to pass an examination or to improve at work), and read them over and over again until they are deeply impressed in our minds.

There once was a young boy who had an accident that left one of his legs shorter than the other. His parents, however, never told him that anything was too hard or impossible for him to do. They treated him like any other child and encouraged him to play sports. They taught him that he could do whatever he believed he could, and that if he was unable to do something, it

was because he had decided he couldn't before even trying. Their conviction wasn't based on mere idealism or optimism. It was a belief in the latent potential of the human being.

The boy later became a star football player at school, and after graduation he succeeded in society as well. His life perfectly illustrates the following assertion, made by the Russian writer Maksim Gorky in one of his novels: “Talent is nothing but faith in yourself, in your own powers.”...

When we read the Daishonin's letters, we find that he constantly cites sutras and Buddhist scriptures to offer examples and documentary proof relevant to the situations or questions of the recipients, seeking to change their hearts, strengthen their determination, and give them conviction and self-confidence. His words always radiate hope and encouragement, like the sun. This is because he fully understood that when a person's heart changes, everything changes.

Many people ascribe others' success to favourable circumstances. They are likely to think, “If only I had such good luck” or “If only I didn't have this problem to deal with.” But that ultimately is just complaining. There

is no one who doesn't have problems.

A businessman once said to a friend: "You're always complaining about having so many problems. I know a place where there are at least ten thousand people, and not one of them has even a single problem or worry. Would you like me to take you there?"

His friend said: "Yes, please do!"

And guess where the businessman took him? To a cemetery. He was teaching his friend that as long as we are alive, we will have to deal with problems and sufferings. Challenging ourselves to find ways to overcome these problems gives richness and meaning to our lives.

Buddhism teaches that "earthly desires lead to enlightenment." This means the greater our worries and sufferings, the greater the happiness we can transform them into through the power of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo...

The most important thing is to expand our state of life. When we think only of ourselves, we become increasingly caught up in our small egos, or lesser selves. In contrast, when we work towards a great and all-encompassing objective – for the sake of the Law, the happiness of others, and the welfare of society – we can develop big hearts and bring forth our greater selves through the "wonderful workings of one mind" (OTT, p. 30). With big hearts, we can savour truly immense happiness. Sufferings that may have once been a heavy burden in a lesser state of life will appear minor, and we are able to calmly rise above them. I hope all of you will lead lives in which you can demonstrate such brilliant, positive

proof of the "wonderful workings of one mind".

Creating the Future with the Buddhism of True Cause

It often seems that people only begin to seriously consider the nature of cause and effect or what it means to lead a happy life when they experience acute suffering themselves. When all is going smoothly, they tend not to give much thought to the truly important things in life. In that sense, difficulties play a crucial role in helping us lead deeper and more meaningful lives. In fact, that's how we should look at them.

No life is utterly without problems or difficulties. All too often, seemingly happy life circumstances can become a cause of suffering and unhappiness. This is something we come to recognise more and more as we mature in years and experience.

A married couple's happiness, for instance, may be shattered when their child is born with a serious illness. All sorts of unanticipated events can assail us – a sudden economic downturn, a fire or accident, family discord, divorce, difficult personal relationships. They can even sometimes lead to lifelong suffering. It is truly the case that we never know what tomorrow brings. None can declare with certainty that they will never encounter misfortune.

Even those who enjoy security and tranquility can come to feel that their lives have no meaning as they age. There are still others who always seem to be busily engaged in purposeful endeavours, but are

in reality simply trying to escape loneliness and emptiness by doing so, unwilling to reflect on themselves or their lives.

Behind a smile might lie sadness. After pleasure might come emptiness. Problems and suffering are inescapable realities of life. And yet, we must go on living. How, then, should we live? How can we change suffering into true joy? The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin has the answer to these important and fundamental questions.

The Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of true cause. It is a great, revolutionary teaching. It reveals that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the fundamental cause for attaining enlightenment and that, by simply embracing the Gohonzon, we can acquire in this lifetime all the practices and virtues of the Buddha.

The Daishonin's Buddhism focuses on the present and the future. Its essence is for us to always keep advancing while looking towards and brightly illuminating the future...

The important thing is to remain undaunted when difficulties arise, to firmly believe that they are expressions of the Buddha's compassion and forge ahead with even stronger faith...

As ordinary people, we may not be able to fathom why a particular event happens at a particular time, but over the long term we will come to understand its meaning. We will also be able to positively transform the situation, changing poison into medicine. I can say this with complete confidence based on my personal experience of more than four decades of Buddhist practice. We

may not understand the significance of a certain event until five or ten years later, or it may even take a lifetime. However, from the perspective of the eternity of life spanning the three existences, everything has meaning as an expression of the Buddha wisdom.

The Power of Our Determination to Change Suffering into “Peace and Comfort”

Nichiren Daishonin's life was a series of hardships and persecutions, including being exiled twice. Some of his disciples questioned where any “peace and comfort” was to be found in all this. But the Daishonin insisted that difficulties are in fact “peace and comfort” (cf. OTT, p. 115) and in his writings repeatedly made such statements as: “What fortune is mine!” (WND-1, p. 402); “How delighted I am!” (WND-1, p. 402); “In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy” (WND-1, p. 287); and “How can such joy possibly be described!” (WND-1, p. 396). He savoured a state of life that he could only describe as “How fortunate, how joyful!” (WND-1, p. 642).

In the light of the Buddhist scriptures, difficulties are inevitable. The important thing is how we transform them, changing poison into medicine, and use them as the driving force for fresh growth and progress.

There is no point in feeling anxious or lamenting each time the harsh winds of adversity blow. If we have a powerful determination to change everything that

happens into a strong “tailwind”, we can surely open the way forward.

We of the SGI have been able to create a history of tremendous development based on faith that is focused on the present and the future – namely, always looking from the present moment onwards and moving forward, ever forward.

Without hardships, there is no true Buddhist practice. Without struggle, there is no genuine happiness. And that would not be real life. There would be no attainment of Buddhahood, either. When we practise the Daishonin’s Buddhism with this understanding, we will never reach an impasse.

The power of one’s state of life is indeed wondrous. The power of one’s inner determination is limitless. In identical situations or circumstances, people can achieve completely different results and lead completely different lives depending upon their life state and their determination.

Those who have a strong resolve to promote our movement for kosen-rufu will see clear blue skies of good fortune appearing rapidly in their lives, stretching ever further and further, as if the wind were sweeping away every dark cloud.

Polishing Ourselves through Adversity

Why do we have to endure hardships? The purpose of our Buddhist practice is to attain Buddhahood. Buddhahood is the state of absolute happiness. Though we are practising Nichiren Buddhism to become

happy, why then do we have to overcome obstacles? The reason is that we need to undergo the trials of difficulty to forge and strengthen within us the diamond-like and indestructible “self” of Buddhahood.

The diamond is regarded as the king of gemstones. It is the hardest of all minerals, possessing unmatched brilliance. A symbol of purity, its name derives from the Greek word *adamas* meaning “unconquerable” or “invincible”.

How are diamonds formed? I’m not a scientist, but it is widely known that diamonds, like graphite, are made of carbon. Deep in the earth, this material is subjected to intense heat and pressure until it is transformed into the crystalline structure of a diamond.

This is similar to how we develop ourselves. Only when subjected to the concentrated pressure of hardships and the fierce heat of great adversity will the core of our lives, our deepest self, be transformed into the diamond-like and indestructible life state of Buddhahood. In other words, it is through experiencing hardships that we acquire the “diamond-like body”, or the Buddha body – a brightly shining state of absolute happiness as indestructible as a diamond that cannot be crushed by any amount of suffering or delusion.

A smooth and uneventful kind of Buddhist practice without any difficulties cannot truly help us polish and forge our lives. It is only when we withstand the intense heat and pressure of great hardships that we can shine as “champions of life”, sparkling like the most perfect of diamonds.

Such a diamond-like state of life shines with a pure, beautiful, and imperishable light. It is solid and indestructible when buffeted by the turbulent tides of society and the obstacles of corrupt and ill-intentioned forces. We can achieve this state of life through earnestly chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and dedicating ourselves to kosen-rufu. Then our lives will forever be one with the Mystic Law, and we can strive for kosen-rufu with complete freedom throughout eternity. By correctly embracing and upholding the Gohonzon, we can become our greatest possible selves, continuing in this supreme state of Buddhahood in lifetime after lifetime.

Please lead brilliant lives that are diamond-like and indestructible. Indeed, may you all become “diamonds” of happiness that sparkle with the radiance of your beautiful hearts. To do so, please never

fear hardships. Don't allow yourselves to be defeated by unfounded criticism. Rather, be grateful for all obstacles, because they help you polish and develop yourselves.

Those who show even stronger conviction in faith and engage even more joyfully in Buddhist practice the greater the hardships they encounter will truly live as diamond-like champions.

Please magnificently adorn this precious life with beautiful faith and beautiful friendship. Live out your days spreading the sublime diamond-like light of life far and wide and demonstrating the truth of the teachings and principles of Nichiren Buddhism.

(Adapted from The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace, Part 1: Happiness, Chapter 4: Transforming Suffering into Joy)