



Starting Afresh, Forward We Advance!

**December 2020 *SSA Times*
Complementary Booklet No. 5**

Contents Page

1. **SSA General Director's Message to SSA Members - p3** (中文版29页)

2. **Voices of Lionhearted Disciples**
 - i) **Vanessa Phang Wan Qing - p5** (中文版30页)
 - ii) **Choy Kwok Fu - p7** (中文版32页)
 - iii) **Lee Guang Rong, Alan - p9** (中文版33页)
 - iv) **Ang Chee Hwee - p11** (中文版34页)
 - v) **Seow Chee Seng - p13** (中文版36页)
 - vi) **Yap Li Yu - p15** (中文版38页)

3. **Moving Forward with the Spirit of "True Cause"– Excerpts from President Ikeda's Guidance and *The New Human Revolution* - p17** (中文版40页)

备注： 中文版的内容从29页开始

Towards 2021 – Year of Hope and Victory!

The month of December is a time when we round up the year 2020 and prepare ourselves for the fresh year ahead. I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to all for making great efforts in supporting all our activities, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Every one of you has remained undefeated and shown great actual proof of faith. Congratulations to all!

The Soka Gakkai theme for 2021 was recently announced at the 47th Headquarters Leaders Meeting. Our theme next year is **“Year of Hope and Victory”**. It is such a hope-filled theme at this difficult time as the whole world tries to navigate the pandemic. In his message for the meeting, Ikeda Sensei introduced a new calligraphy with the inscription of the words, “Vast Heart”. In relation to this, he shared:

“We of the Soka Gakkai, linked by the bonds of mentor and disciple, are committed to encouraging and shining a light on each precious, uniquely talented individual. United in the spirit of “many in body, one in mind”, let us pledge together to

impart great hope to our troubled world and exert ourselves bravely and vigorously to achieve the great spiritual victory of transforming the destiny of all humankind – a victory anchored in each of us developing a “vast heart”.

The year 2021 will be decisive in creating the momentum for victory in the next decade. Nichiren Daishonin writes, “Buddhism primarily concerns itself with victory or defeat”. Toda Sensei has also said, “Our Buddhist practice enables us to achieve absolute victory. With this awareness and understanding, we should strive to win in our jobs and in all areas of our lives.”

Let us advance with a “vast heart” and an invincible spirit to overcome even the most bitter adversities so that we can change “all poison into medicine” and secure victories in our lives, thereby transforming the destiny of humankind.

Next year, we will again celebrate multiple anniversaries: the 150th anniversary of Makiguchi Sensei's birth; the 70th anniversary of Toda Sensei's

inauguration as second Soka Gakkai president; the 70th anniversaries of the Women, Young Men and Young Women Divisions; and the 50th anniversary of the establishment of the Soka University in Japan.

With the awareness of the significance of 2021, let us strive even more in our endeavours as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, to spread “the light of happiness and reassurance” through dialogue and hope-

filled encouragement to our friends. We must also be even more determined and diligent in our Buddhist practice in order to show actual proof in our own human revolution and win victories in our lives.

Let’s advance joyously into 2021 and make it another fulfilling and memorable year. I would like to end my message by wishing everyone and your family good health, happiness and victory in 2021.

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Vanessa Phang Wan Qing
Paya Lebar East Chapter
Young Women District Leader

Like everyone else, at the start of the year I was hopeful and determined to make 2020 the best year of my life. However, I recall the uneasiness that came over me when I was watching the news of the Covid-19 virus over a Chinese New Year reunion steamboat dinner with my family. Little did I know then that the Covid-19 pandemic would affect us all so badly.

I have been a freelance performer, singing and hosting since 2017. Cancellation of events started from early February. Everyone in the events industry

was in a state of mild panic and uncertainty. Then came the implementation of the Circuit Breaker (CB).

I knew there was no way I could take “flight”, so I could only activate my “fight” mode. I needed to find out how I could pivot my business such that my musician friends and I could still have some income. Through prayers, I manifested the wisdom and courage to start my own events entertainment agency. I prayed that precisely because of the challenges during this period, I must bring forth creativity to bring a sparkle to events, making them still an enjoyable experience for both the audience and performers alike. There were many administrative details that I had to look into in order to start the business, such as branding and accounting, all of which were new to me.

When Prime Minister Lee announced in May that the CB would be extended for another month or possibly longer, I remember dropping a tear. I was suddenly fearful of phone calls or text messages coming in as they would most likely be calls for postponement and even possibly cancellation of work assignments (mostly from couples who had to postpone or cancel their wedding plans). While I understood that it was a tough decision on their end, it became a choice between my morals and livelihood. Eventually, with encouragement from my fiancé and asking myself what Ikeda Sensei would do in this situation, I decided to refund my clients their deposits, digging into my savings despite having

close to zero income myself.

I internalised these words of Ikeda Sensei: “What our society today needs more than anything is the spirit of empathy – the ability to put ourselves in the shoes of those who are facing hardship and suffering, to understand and share what they are going through. When the spirit of compassion becomes the bedrock of society, and is embodied by society’s leaders, the future will be bright with hope”. I believe that what goes around comes around.

I am very thankful that through referrals and good fortune, business has been picking up. Many of us who have pivoted to being the voice of our clients online find that the remuneration is much less as most budgets have been cut, but we are grateful to have work at the very least. I have also embarked on a new endeavour to conduct sharing classes on livestreaming to Small and Mid-sized Enterprises (SMEs) because many of these SMEs are in a dire state and have no idea how to get started on this new avenue of online marketing that could help their businesses. It is tough work that requires a lot of patience and time, but I sincerely hope my company can create value in this way.

Despite all the challenges, I feel fortunate that I can still continue to contribute to various Soka activities, including Future Division (FD) activities such as FLINT programme (Future Leaders in Niche Training), which kept SGI and Ikeda Sensei close to my heart. My counterparts, who have been so encouraging and embracing, kept me going.

However, I found, often times, that when it rains, it pours. At a fateful competition I challenged myself to go for despite the

challenges this year, I was fat-shamed. I learned just how unforgiving and superficial the entertainment industry is, but in contrast, the sincerity and warmth of the Soka family kept me hopeful. One of my current FD students even sent me words of encouragement upon hearing the nasty comments on social media regarding my looks. I realised that I should not be mired in the transient and superficial. Just as Nichiren Daishonin teaches, “More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all.” (WND-1, p. 851) The treasures of the heart, the inner richness, that we have accumulated within our lives are indestructible compared to material wealth or social standing. Hence, I want to lead an expansive life, creating value and a Buddha land of human harmony where I am.

Though I have been repeatedly challenged during this crisis, I believe there is no deadlock as long as we have faith in the Mystic Law. Striving for a greater purpose has also made every hardship more invaluable. I hope to exemplify Ikeda Sensei’s philosophy and teachings through my work, foster other talents and collaborate with them to bring better entertainment to the public. I believe we can create greater value through collaboration rather than competition.

I still hope to open a care centre that is based on Ikeda Sensei’s life philosophy of valuing every individual and that can fuse community services with the performing arts, something that is always close to my heart. This is my dream towards 2030 and I will keep working towards it!

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Choy Kwok Fu
Toa Payoh South Chapter
Men Division District Leader

I am a registered psychiatrist nurse currently working in the Institute of Mental Health (IMH). I was formerly a paramedic with the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) for about 14 years before I switched to nursing in 2013.

I had decided on the job switch because I knew that I could only work up to the age of 50 if I were to stay on in SCDF. To make a career switch was not an easy decision. I had to consider my financial capability and take up the challenging of studying again.

However, Ikeda Sensei says, “We earnestly chant daimoku each day so that we can overcome all our problems and have everything go well in our lives without making mistakes we might regret. When we follow this solid path in life, then

no matter what adverse circumstances or difficult problems we may encounter, all our worries, anxieties, and mistakes will be burned up in the fire of wisdom in the same way that flames from a small spark can consume whole stretches of dry grass, one after another.” I believe that what I needed to do was to manifest the wisdom to make the best decision. And once the decision was made, I must strive with the conviction that there would be no obstacles I could not overcome.

By always returning to the basic practice of chanting, I overcame every difficulty I encountered in my studies even though I had not touched any textbook since 1988 when I completed my pre-university education. To my surprise, in 2017, I was nominated and

selected to pursue an Advance Diploma in Mental Health. After completing the course, I signed up for a nursing degree course in 2018. I recently graduated with Bachelor of Science (Nursing) and received my official transcript with an award letter. I was informed in the letter that I had passed the degree course with Distinctions!

I have managed to complete this course amidst this difficult Covid-19 pandemic. Each day continues to be a battle to win on various fronts. Besides having rotating shift work, I have to meet assignment deadlines, attend online nursing classes and conduct monthly discussion meetings. Adjusting to the new norm of having classes and meetings online was not easy initially and was time consuming for me as I am not a tech savvy person. However, bearing in mind that our Buddhist practice lies in continuously challenging our limitations, I pressed on

and adapted to the changes.

My daily daily Buddhist practice of chanting daimoku and performing gongyo is the fuel that enables me to bring forth life force and wisdom. Reading Ikeda Sensei's guidance and Gosho passages from Creative Life also helps me strengthen my faith and keeps me going. It is exhilarating to keep challenging oneself to scale one mountain after another. Hence, in October this year I took up the challenge to pursue the Master of Science (Nursing) for Public Health Management.

Looking towards the future, I resolve to put my knowledge to good use and provide quality nursing care to the patients under my care. I am determined to lend a helping hand and a listening ear to members and friends who need my support, and fulfil my unique mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth, for this is the reason I have come so far!

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Lee Guang Rong, Alan
Hong Kah Zone
Young Men Division Zone Leader

I manage a small business selling leather shoes and shoe care accessories. When the Covid-19 situation escalated in Singapore, I was increasingly worried about my business survival as sales were dropping week after week and the situation was bleak. My prayer was to find the best possible solution that would tide me over this period.

Soon enough, we received a new wave of customers from overseas as the brand I was selling was mentioned in a Youtube

review by an industry heavyweight. Amazingly, this happened just before the onset of the Circuit Breaker, so I was able to start selling to customers from the United States and Europe. As a result, I managed to sustain the business by diversifying overseas. Various influencers and reviewers served as protective functions of the universe at a critical time, for which I am grateful.

Though I managed to keep my business afloat, new challenges arose when my mother was found unconscious one evening and had to be rushed to the hospital. She suffered two bouts of seizures on the way and was in the Accident and Emergency unit for three hours before slowly regaining consciousness. After a series of tests, she was diagnosed with a kidney infection which has led to an infection in her bloodstream. I set a prayer for my mother to have the strong life force to battle the infection. After spending four days in the Intensive Care Unit and almost two weeks in the hospital, she was finally discharged on November 15. Though she is still required to undergo treatment for five weeks to treat the infection, I am thankful that she managed to bring forth great life force during this period despite her advanced age.

2020 has been a tough year, I feel that every challenge I faced has brought me closer to my Young Men Division leaders and members who also have their fair share of struggles. Through dialogue, we have deepened our understanding of Nichiren Buddhism and learnt what it truly means to apply Buddhism in daily life and to truly triumph over life challenges through faith.

The Daishonin employs the following simile: “It will only be like a boar rubbing against the golden mountain” (WND-1, p. 770). By referring to the boar which has a stiff coat, yet rubbed very hard against the golden mountain, the Daishonin teaches us that the more the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra encounter obstacles, the brighter their lives would shine. Through overcoming the various hurdles in my life, I am able to recognise my fundamental darkness and polish my life by striving

to overcome it. Hence, it is a constant reminder for me to never shun hardships or problems, but to appreciate their presence and boldly confront them.

Having the opportunity to foster youthful members in the Future Division, during such a turbulent period in humanity’s history, makes it more meaningful and fulfilling for me. I will do my best to rally and support my fellow Future Division leaders to help our members build bonds of friendship, deepen their understanding of Nichiren Buddhism and inherit the mentor and disciple spirit, so that they will be able to build a solid foundation in their youth.

Towards 2030, the centennial of the Soka Gakkai’s founding, I am determined to make full use of the next 10 years to foster the next generation of Soka successors.

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Ang Chee Hwee
Siglap Chapter
Women Division Chapter Leader

I am an art instructor who works in an art institute conducting art enrichment classes. I also hold art therapy sessions at a nursing home for dementia patients. At the beginning of the pandemic, when the Circuit Breaker (CB) was implemented in Singapore, my enrichment classes had to be suspended till further notice. We were uncertain when we could return to school for our classes, or what changes to expect. As my monthly income is determined by the number of classes I hold, not conducting any class would mean no income for me. However, I was not the least worried. I was confident that

with absolute faith, I would be able to find a way out of every situation.

Instead, I was more concerned about how to engage my leaders and members during this period when physical activities were forbidden. The CB gave me a long break by leaving me cooped up at home, without work and any form of activity. I thought hard about how I could still create value during this period, as well as encourage my leaders and members to strengthen their faith, practice and study.

That was when the idea of tapping on my creativity and strength in art creation to

produce videos based on Ikeda Sensei's novel *The New Human Revolution* (NHR) came to me. I hope to inspire our Women Division members to read this novel that our mentor has painstakingly written for us. Since this year also marks Ikeda Sensei's 60th anniversary of travelling for worldwide kosen-rufu, I thought it would be a good idea to illustrate some of the inspiring moments during Ikeda Sensei's visits to some of the countries mentioned in NHR. Excited by this idea, I quickly set myself to work – reading and picking up the episodes from various chapters of NHR, drawing the illustrations, creating the layouts and choosing the appropriate music.

My videos were well received by my leaders and members. Later, I also did a Chinese version and even made audio reading available to those who are illiterate, all in the hope of inspiring those in my zone and chapter to read NHR and understand the greatness of our mentor.

No efforts for kosen-rufu will go to waste. Besides seeing my leaders and members being encouraged by my videos, I saw actual proof at work and at home too. After the CB kicked in, the number of classes I conduct has to be reduced in order to follow the safety measures stipulated by the government, but my salary was not in the least affected.

At home, fostering my children has always been a top priority for me. Even though I have been busy with the production of the videos and participation in online Soka meetings, I always ensure

that my family engage in our daily Buddhist practice of chanting daimoku and performing gongyo together. Before gongyo, my children will take the initiative to read a piece of Sensei's guidance for us. With these consistent efforts, I have been able to witness the growth of my children. My daughter was awarded the Star Pupil on Children's Day this year in recognition of her good performance in school. It was the fulfilment of a dream and a prayer she has cherished since Primary One.

In the recent Chapter General Meeting, it was heartening to see both my children contribute to the meeting by hosting the meeting and sharing a testimony.

Nothing beats being able to contribute to kosen-rufu and grow in faith together as a family. I know that as long as my family continues to strive with this greater purpose in life, we will definitely be able to move everything towards the direction of great good and happiness.

Ikeda Sensei writes, "When you have given your all to a struggle, you are filled with a deep sense of satisfaction and joy. That is because you have met the challenge, conquered your limitations, and experienced the great drama of life and human revolution." (NHR Vol 7, "The Flower of Culture" chapter) I am filled with a deep sense of satisfaction, gratitude and joy now. I hope to inspire my children, my fellow SSA leaders and members, and friends to rise up to every challenge and struggle so that they can savour such satisfaction in life too.

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Seow Chee Seng
Pasir Ris Zone
Men Division Zone Leader

I have been working in the aviation industry for the last 30 years as a pilot. I have never seen anything like this Covid-19 pandemic that has made such an unprecedented impact on the industry as well as on the lives of people. I began to witness flights being reduced drastically, salaries being slashed, and even jobs that were once most sought after become uncertain. The pandemic has forced the world to make a very hard landing and created much anxiety, uncertainty and even suffering for many of my colleagues and friends.

When Singapore entered Circuit Breaker in April, I had many questions in

my mind. How long is this going to last? Are my colleagues, friends and members going to be all right? Will the number of infected cases stop increasing? How are we going to visit our members? How are we going to hold our discussion meetings?

However, I recalled the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. We can manifest Buddhahood even in the world of Hell. I realised that no matter how bad our current circumstances may be, we can still achieve happiness. I determined to create maximum value out of a terrible situation.

The Courageous 1-2-3 actions (1 hour of Daimoku, Encouraging 2 friends a day,

Reading Ikeda Sensei's Guidance or the Goshō for 30 minutes) launched in SSA was truly timely. What better time than now to chant more daimoku, encourage others, and study harder to reinforce our understanding of Buddhism.

I resolved to chant abundant daimoku and thought long and hard about how I could encourage my other three division leaders to embark on this campaign too. I began a 100-minute daimoku challenge each day. With the wonderful support of my three division leaders, it became a 120-minute daimoku challenge and soon I was chanting three hours a day.

When the Together We Dialogue movement was introduced, I realised that dialogue is most needed now to encourage others and instil hope. But who should I conduct dialogue with? I set a prayer to meet someone with whom I can share Buddhism and to be able to encourage people who need my encouragement. Since then, I have managed to conduct dialogue and share Buddhism with six colleagues and friends.

Through dialogue, I have come to learn that many people out there are seeking

answers and meaning to the pandemic. One of my ex-colleagues started chanting and later told me that he felt hopeful again after chanting. Facing a potential job loss, he was able to pray and bring forth the courage to embark on a job search instead of waiting for the inevitable. He did not lose his job, but what was most rewarding was the growth that he had witnessed in himself through this experience.

Throughout these few months, these words from the Goshō "The Opening of the Eyes" have constantly inspired me to grow in faith and to keep moving forward:

"Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbour doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood." (WND-1, p. 283)

This has become my driving force to be even more determined to show victorious proof of my human revolution and to encourage even more people to do the same, transforming great evil into great good. It is not a question of when or how. Now is the time for me to take action as that lionhearted disciple!

Voices of Lionhearted Disciples



Yap Li Yu

East Coast Zone

Young Women Division Zone Leader

2020 has been an extremely challenging year for me. In January, while juggling overtime at work and preparing for renovation works at home, on the Gakkai front, I was in the January 11 Youth Leaders Training Course Committee and was also helping to create a video for the organisation. Despite all the challenges, I tried to expand my life, squeezing in time to drop by my leaders' houses to encourage them. In the end, the training course was a huge success and we all renewed our determination to be "that Lionhearted Disciple", the slogan of SSA this year.

Not long after, I began to experience anxiety and panic attacks. There were times when I was seated but developed breathing difficulties. I was struggling inside. Recognising that this was a manifestation of my own fundamental

darkness from within, I returned to daimoku and over the next few months, was mentally rejuvenated.

As we entered the Circuit Breaker (CB), my body started to respond adversely to the many changes in my lifestyle. My eczema flared up across my entire body and the itch was unbearable. Later on, I also had a very bad acne problem. However, each time, I returned to daimoku and found the best solution to recover fully. Initially, I felt helpless during the CB, but I was gradually inspired by fellow comrades at our online meetings to chant for my members and conduct "phone-visits" during the Together We Dialogue movement. In so doing, I rediscovered my greater self.

My workload increased as we entered CB Phase 1, but I continued to give of my best. In July, I started to lose huge clumps of hair and was diagnosed with Alopecia Areata, an autoimmune disease. However, I was unafraid and took it positively with faith in the Gohonzon. During this period, I even took up the challenge to help with the editing of the South Asia Sunrise Stage video for the World Youth General Meeting. With a grateful heart, I took it as writing a video

letter to Ikeda Sensei, sharing with him his youthful disciples' determination to triumph over this pandemic with him. I wanted to make the video one befitting of the unprecedented meeting.

It was also at this time that I received sudden news of my retrenchment. I was surprised to feel a sense of calmness and strength within me. My only thought was "I have the lion's roar of daimoku, so there is nothing to be afraid of!" But, just like everyone else, I eventually succumbed to a wave of emotions – shock, confusion, anger and sadness – in the following weeks. However, each time I was hit, I was able to ride each wave with daimoku and bounce back with hope.

Ikeda Sensei says, "How can we expand our life state? By expanding our human relationships... Human relationships and interactions are important. We need to connect and associate with others, both within and outside the organisation. Doing so expands and enriches our lives." (*The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace*, [22.4] "Expanding Our Life State") I truly feel the importance of connecting with others during these turbulent times. Having dialogue with and support from seniors and my family have helped me tremendously. At the same time, through encouraging colleagues who were facing the same predicament and members who were also experiencing job difficulties,

I began to feel hope and strength well forth within me. I realised that this is my mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

I can now see the inconspicuous benefits accumulated while giving my all for kosen-rufu in the last decade. Nothing in this world could have prepared me for a pandemic, retrenchment and health problems that came all at the same time – nothing, that is, except for my Buddhist practice. Despite losing my job, income and hair, I feel so grateful to be alive! With the heart of the mentor and disciple, as well as daimoku, we can summon forth the same life state of Buddhahood as Nichiren Daishonin and the three founding presidents of the Soka Gakkai.

Setting my sight on November 18 this year, exactly three months from the day I was retrenched, I actively attended various online classes to upgrade myself while chanting for a new job. I have since embarked on a new part-time job, while seeking treatment for my hair condition. Though I continue to face new challenges in various aspects of my life, I am determined to remain undefeated!

Looking towards 2030 and beyond, I want to unleash my limitless potential from within, win in all aspects of my life, and use my life and work to inspire hope in others. I will also work even harder to foster the next generation of youth who will shoulder the future of the Soka Gakkai!

Moving Forward with the Spirit of “True Cause”

Excerpts from SGI President Ikeda’s Guidance and *The New Human Revolution*

This moment is time without beginning. Everything starts from now.

The past no longer exists. The future isn’t here yet. All that exists is this present moment. And in a flash, the present becomes the past... In this state, life continues, moment to moment. It exists nowhere aside from the moment. We experience happiness and unhappiness only in the moment.

To regard our life in this present moment as the result of past causes is to view things from the standpoint of the “true effect” — that happened, followed by that, creating the present result. But to have that perspective alone does not engender hope. Instead, we should regard this present moment of life as the cause for manifesting a future effect. That cause is the “true cause” penetrating the innermost depths of one’s life. It is not a superficial or outward cause.

The true cause sinks its roots deeply into one’s life of time without beginning and, at the same time, pervades the entire Dharma realm. It is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the great law that sets everything in the universe into motion, the boundless eternal life force that causes all things

to emerge and develop. Therefore, each moment that we believe in the Gohonzon, chant the Mystic Law, and engage in Buddhist practice is itself time without beginning...

Faith in the Mystic Law is a source of infinite hope. No matter how adverse your present circumstances may be, even if it seems you have been defeated, it’s important that you stand up with strong resolve to turn your situation around and demonstrate the limitless transformative potential of the Mystic Law. This is the essence of faith.

(The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace, Part 2: Human Revolution, Chapter 16: Making the Most of Each Day, 16.4 Every Day is “Time without Beginning”)



The Daishonin quotes a passage from a sutra: “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (WND-1, p. 279).

The focus of this passage is the present.

If the present is the inevitable result of past causes, then we can say that the present is defined by the past. Indeed, the present is a mirror reflecting the past. At the same time, however, the present is the starting point of the future, the active cause for creating a new future.

The mystic principle of the true cause, in terms of the text of the Lotus Sutra, refers to the fundamental cause for Shakyamuni's attainment of Buddhahood in the remote past. In Nichiren Buddhism, however, we are practising that same fundamental cause, the Mystic Law, now in the real world. Thus, in this Buddhism of true cause, the remote past becomes the present time of the Latter Day of the Law. In each moment, we begin anew our practice of the eternal bodhisattva way.

As such, we are always standing at the fundamental starting point of everything. Drawing forth the boundless life force of our inherent Buddhahood, we can dynamically transform ourselves and our lives where we are right now. This is the essence of faith based on the true cause — of always starting afresh from this moment on.



I believe the doctrine of the true cause to be the conceptual source for the possibility of transforming karma and the foundation for gaining true freedom.

The traditional theory of karma sees the past as determining and governing the present. This inevitably leads to a passive, backward-looking way of life, in

which we are held captive by the past. It can also result in apathy and a feeling of powerlessness, in fatalistic resignation, in blaming everything on our karma, and in giving up any effort.

We of the Soka Gakkai, however, embrace the great philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, which enables us to change karma into mission, teaching the principle that transforming karma means doing human revolution. In other words, instead of being imprisoned by the past, by transforming our mind-set, or deep-seated resolve, we can change the meaning of our past; through our actions, we can create value and open the way to a new life starting from this present moment.

The philosophy of true cause means striving to build a brighter future.

The Daishonin declared that his life was not passively subject to “the general law of cause and effect” (WND-1, p. 305), the traditional theory of karma. What can we do to change our karma on a fundamental level? We can dedicate our lives to the great vow for kosen-rufu as practitioners of the Lotus Sutra. The Daishonin personally demonstrated this in the way he faced great persecutions in his own life. And we, the mentors and disciples of the Soka Gakkai, are his direct disciples.



We are all writing the story of our own life. It is our story, and ours alone. We decide for ourselves where our narrative will begin, devise our own plot of the ups and downs we will face, what odds we will surmount, and all the rest.

Praising the Ikegami brothers¹ for overcoming adversity through unity, the Daishonin writes: “Could there ever be a more wonderful story than your own?” (WND-1, p. 499).

Theirs was not a bitter story of being mercilessly attacked by the three obstacles and four devils². Rather, it was a story of creating a new future. It was a story of the Ikegami brothers uniting to triumph over hardship, a story of achieving family harmony, and a story of the victory of truth and justice.

The starting point for writing such a new story are the principles of true cause and transforming karma taught in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism of the sun.



Today, Soka Gakkai members, with their mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, are emerging everywhere around the world and initiating an inspiring new drama of the victory of the people.

Start from where you are now! Keep moving forward! Continue striving forever! – this is what it means to lead a life based on the true cause, ever advancing from this moment onwards.

The Daishonin declares: “Strengthen your faith day by day and month after month” (WND-1, p. 997). Brimming with the boundless life force of the sun of time without beginning, let us cheerfully and boldly create a new story of mentor and disciple depicting our effort to realise the vow for kosen-rufu and the victory of Soka!

The time for creating the future is now!

(*The Buddhism of the Sun, Illuminating the World* [45], “*Embodying the Spirit of ‘True Cause’ – Moving towards Victory through Daily Renewal*”)

Through faith in the Mystic Law, and based on the principle of true cause, Soka Gakkai members, in spite of their past circumstances or challenges, have been able to advance with hope, transform their karma and lead victorious lives. Through The New Human Revolution (NHR), Ikeda Sensei had illustrated the stories of some of these members. Below are some excerpts from NHR (where Ikeda Sensei appears as the character Shin’ichi Yamamoto in the novel):

The Causes We Make in the Present Determine Our Future

Katsuya was born with congenital glaucoma, leaving him almost completely blind in his left eye and with little sight in his right. From the second grade of elementary school, he attended a special school for the blind, and from the fifth, he began to live in a dormitory. When he was in his second year of junior high, the vision in his right eye began to decline further and he underwent surgery to try to restore his sight. He had been able to preserve his minimal vision up to that time, but as he lay in the hospital he worried that he might completely lose the vision in his right eye to glaucoma as well.

One day a woman who was attending to the patient in the bed next to his gave him

a newspaper, saying that it had a wonderful article in it he should read. It was a copy of the *Seikyo Shimbun*. When Katsuya was in the fifth grade, he joined the Soka Gakkai together with his father, but Katsuya had never really practised diligently. He set the newspaper aside. Actually, he was deeply angered by the fact that the woman would ask him to read the newspaper in spite of his poor eyesight. But then he decided that he shouldn't just throw it away without looking at it, so two or three days later he picked it up. He had to hold the paper so close to his face that it brushed against his skin, and even then it took a very long time to read.

The newspaper had an article about a person who had overcome a serious illness through faith. Though Katsuya remained skeptical, he was also intrigued. Each issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun* is a letter about kosen-rufu, opening the door to people's minds and bringing their hearts together.

After leaving the hospital, Katsuya spent some time recovering at home, and he began to read the *Seikyo Shimbun* and whatever other Gakkai publications he could lay his hands on there. Through his reading, he discovered that life is eternal. He also learned about the law of cause and effect, according to which the sufferings of our present existence are the result of past causes and the causes we make in the present determine our future. Katsuya had always bemoaned his fate, but now the clouds that had darkened his heart lifted and he felt a ray of hope begin to shine within.

Hiroyuki Katsuya decided to start practising Buddhism in earnest. He returned to the school for the blind and his dormitory life. Each day after school, he began going to the home of a Gakkai member who lived nearby to do gongyo. He also started participating regularly in Gakkai activities. When he attended discussion meetings, everyone encouraged him warmly, as if he were their son or younger brother. Katsuya was deeply touched by the Gakkai's warmhearted atmosphere and the ties of members united in faith.

As he studied the teachings of Buddhism, Katsuya learned that the Daishonin encouraged his followers to work for kosen-rufu not just for their own happiness but for the happiness of others as well. He also realised that we who practise the Daishonin's Buddhism are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth who appeared in this world to lead the people of the Latter Day of the Law to enlightenment. Even with his visual disability, Katsuya thought, he, too, was a Bodhisattva of the Earth with a mission to help others become happy. For Katsuya, this was a profoundly significant discovery that gave meaning to his birth in this world.

When we awaken to our mission, we experience a kind of rebirth and can gain true autonomy and control over our lives.

As Katsuya took part in Gakkai activities, he felt energised and invigorated. In addition, his former tendency to become negative and easily discouraged disappeared and he began to view things and events in a positive, constructive light.

Eventually he became a licensed practitioner of massage, acupuncture, and moxibustion. He found a job at a clinic and assisted patients in their rehabilitation. He also started to meet with other Gakkai members with visual impairments, offering them support and encouragement. He played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Freedom Group as well.

Shin'ichi Yamamoto picked up a fresh cloth, dampened it, and wiped Katsuya's face, which was swollen from crying. Katsuya felt unbelievably refreshed. "I'm deeply grateful," he said.

"You've struggled and overcome so much," Shin'ichi remarked. "I can tell just by looking at you."

With resolve, Katsuya then said: "Sensei, my wife and I are going to have a baby soon. We'll raise our child to make a positive contribution to kosen-rufu." Katsuya had married in October of the previous year. His wife, who had accompanied him to the meeting, was already visibly pregnant.

"Congratulations! Please raise your child into a fine successor for kosen-rufu!" Shin'ichi replied.

(NHR Vol 19, "Treasure Tower" chapter)

To Shoulder the Future, it is Vital to Look Ahead and Strive Tirelessly

Isamu Nakayama, who worked at a computer chip maker in Tokyo, held a position of solid responsibility in the company's accounting division. He had graduated from the regular course at high school and had no special previous training

in accounting. He entered the company in 1964, and was assigned to the factory production line. This was a period when higher levels of education were coming to be demanded of workers, and Nakayama worried about whether he'd be able to successfully take on more responsibilities.

Striving on the front lines of Young Men Division activities, he heard from a Soka Gakkai senior that Shin'ichi continued to read and study diligently, even when he worked for Toda's imperiled businesses and later, too, when he was extremely busy as the Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff.

"I'm still young," he thought. "My future lies ahead of me. I'm going to study diligently, too, just like President Yamamoto." He decided that, for the sake of his company's future success, he should gain a good grasp of economic trends and also master accounting, so he began studying accounting at a business night school.

To shoulder the future, it is vital to look ahead and strive tirelessly.

Though Nakayama enrolled in an accounting class, he had no previous knowledge of the subject, so it was very puzzling to him. Most of his fellow students were in their thirties or forties and were studying to become tax accountants and certified public accountants. At the beginning, Nakayama couldn't keep up with them.

He reproached himself: "I can't give up before I even start! I'm a Soka Gakkai Young Men Division member, after all! I'm a disciple of President Yamamoto!" As the

German writer Thomas Mann (1875–1955) stated: “Character is all important. Become better yourself! And everything will be better.”

Nakayama was determined not to reduce his Gakkai activities in the least. After leaving work at 5.00pm on workdays, he rushed to night school. For three hours, from 6.00pm, he studied business and tax accounting, and after that he went to encourage Young Men Division members.

Striving Diligently is the Key to Personal Growth

One of Nakayama’s superiors at work heard that he was studying accounting, and eventually Nakayama was transferred from the production line to the accounting department. The company was eagerly looking for skilled accountants.

Nakayama grew even more determined to develop his skills. He studied not only accounting but also how to improve his company’s stability, profitability, and growth relative to other companies in the same field.

Because the Soka Gakkai always emphasises youth standing up and taking full responsibility for everything, Nakayama had been well trained in the youth division and given responsibility for conducting various meetings. And through that experience he also gained an overall view of an entire movement. This training and education served Nakayama well in the workplace.

In 1971, at the young age of 26, Nakayama was promoted to assistant

manager of the office of management control. He was very much aware of the value of the training he’d received through Soka Gakkai activities.

Then, at the February 2, 1977, Business Professionals Division Gongyo Meeting, Nakayama resolved to become the top employee at his company.

Soon after that meeting, Nakayama was promoted to the head of the accounting department.

When one opens the eye of wisdom and views things from that fresh perspective, a new world opens up. Buddhism provides the power to open that eye of wisdom.

Isamu Nakayama didn’t look at accounting as just the business of working with figures, but as managing the business operation. When he looked at the numbers from that perspective, he could see the challenges facing the company and anticipate the future.

He worked in the spirit of being personally responsible for the company. He stopped thinking of himself as a mere cog in a machine of the company he worked for, because if we have such an attitude it only narrows our ability to think and grasp an organisation as a whole, ultimately preventing us from taking full responsibility for our work.

Nakayama began to study computers on his own. In this way he strove to improve himself, based on his certainty that the age of computers was on the horizon.

Later, Nakayama’s company decided to start using computers. His steady efforts at self-education proved to be very useful. In subsequent years, he received promotions

and was eventually appointed to the company's board of directors...

It's crucial to cultivate the ability to read the future and grasp the changes that are in the offing. To do that, one needs to be constantly studying, striving tirelessly to acquire the latest information and newest skills.

If one fails to keep learning and allows oneself to stagnate, he or she won't be able to succeed in the workplace. Once people graduate and enter the working world, they are expected to study much harder than they did in school. It is vital to strive, polish oneself, and be innovative every single day. For that, one needs a foundation of firm business principles and a sound philosophy of life. Lacking those, one will be buffeted and swept away by the tide of the times.

Those Who Dedicate Themselves to Kosen-rufu are Alight with Joy

Yoshiko Urushibara was born in Hakodate, Hokkaido. From childhood, she wanted to be a painter and study at a Tokyo art school. But her father was retired, and the family couldn't afford to send her to Tokyo. Instead, she received a scholarship at a local school, the Hakodate campus of Hokkaido Gakugei University. Enrolling in a two-year course, she majored in art with the aim of becoming a teacher.

In March 1953, Yoshiko graduated and became an elementary school teacher. At the end of the year, she fell ill and, after having an x-ray, was diagnosed with tuberculosis. She had no choice but to go

on an extended leave of absence.

Having just settled into the teaching routine and filled with hope for the future, this development left her deeply frustrated. This was the start of an unhappy period in her life.

No one knows what may happen tomorrow. Although smooth sailing may seem to lie ahead, life's course always remains uncertain. That's why we all need a solid life philosophy that can be our guide and compass, a strong system of values and beliefs.

Resting and recovering at home, Yoshiko's condition improved somewhat.

In the autumn of 1954, while she was still recuperating, a group of friends from her university days, who shared her love of art, invited her on a trip to visit galleries in Tokyo. She promised to go, seeing it as a chance to get herself out and active once again. However, dissuaded by her mother's warning that she mustn't overexert herself, Yoshiko cancelled at the last minute.

On September 26, the day that the rest of the group left for Tokyo, Typhoon Marie was travelling northeast, bringing violent weather from just before noon. In the evening, contradicting all predictions, the typhoon intensified in strength and the winds blew harder. The city of Hakodate lost power, and the Urushibara house was creaking and groaning in the wind.

Suddenly, there was a crashing sound from the second floor. The powerful winds had smashed a window. Clutching a flashlight, Yoshiko ran upstairs in the darkness. She felt an abrupt, sharp pain. She had stepped on some broken glass. In

the light of the flashlight, she could see her bloodied foot. She was filled with a sense of foreboding.

Around the time that Yoshiko Urushibara cut her foot on the broken window glass, her friends headed for Tokyo were on board the ferry Toya Maru, and out at sea near the breakwater and lighthouse of Hakodate Port.

The captain of the Toya Maru, having decided that the weather was improving, had left Hakodate harbour about four hours behind schedule, at 6.39pm. Soon after, however, the wind that had seemed to be dying down quickly picked up again. In order to avoid danger, he cast anchor near the breakwater, but the powerful wind and waves began to carry the ferry away. At its strongest, the wind surpassed 50 metres (164 feet) per second, and the ferry began to take on water. The engine gave out, and it became impossible to navigate.

To stop the ferry from sinking, the captain ran it up onto the nearby shoaling beach of Nanaehama, but it was struck by huge waves. At around 10.45pm, it capsized and sank.

Of the 1,314 passengers and crew on board, only 159 were rescued. It was the worst maritime accident in Japanese history with 1,155 people dead or lost at sea.

The news of the disaster stunned Yoshiko. Only two of her dozen-or-so friends on their way to Tokyo survived.

Yoshiko felt the arbitrariness of fate, which no one can control. She attended the funerals of her friends, still limping

because of the wound on her foot.

As her foot was healing, her father sustained injuries in a traffic accident that the doctors said would leave him permanently disabled. The shock of this sent her mother's blood pressure soaring, and she was in bed for several days. Yoshiko's younger sister, who also lived at home, started to suffer from inexplicable losses of consciousness.

Yoshiko felt as if her life were plunged into darkness and despair.

It was at this time that a woman she knew invited her and her mother to a Soka Gakkai discussion meeting. Everyone there was smiling and seemed full of hope...

At the discussion meeting, a women's division leader spoke passionately about the connection of one's beliefs and values to one's happiness or unhappiness in life. Yoshiko Urushibara and her mother both wholeheartedly agreed with her explanation. Then, in December 1954, not only they, but also Yoshiko's father and her younger brother and sister, who were living with them, all joined the Soka Gakkai.

Yoshiko's father was the first to see the benefits of embracing faith in Nichiren Buddhism. Though told he would be permanently disabled from the traffic accident, he began to walk again. Yoshiko's mother, who had been in bed with high blood pressure, was also able to get up and manage the household once more.

Seeing this proof of practice right before her eyes, Yoshiko felt as if a ray of light had pierced the darkness of her life. She strove tirelessly in her faith, determined that she would overcome her tuberculosis and her

sister would overcome her fainting spells...

At that time, discussion meetings were held almost every day. Yoshiko faithfully put that guidance into practice.

Ten days after she joined the Soka Gakkai, she was appointed a Young Women Division unit leader on the front lines of the organisation. The following month, she invited 19 friends to discussion meetings, three of whom started practising...

Yoshiko Urushibara exerted herself earnestly in her Buddhist practice, determined to overcome her illness. Through her efforts, a little over three months after starting to practise the Daishonin's Buddhism, she recovered and was able to return to work...

Actually, in addition to striving to surmount the obstacle of illness together with her family, she was spurred on in her Buddhist practice by a desire to know why it was that her life had been spared by not boarding the Toya Maru ferry that fateful day.

She was sure that if she had been on board, she would have died, too. Her mother's plea urging her not to make the trip to Tokyo had made the difference between life and death. But, she knew if she had insisted on going anyway, her mother would have let her.

She felt at times it may just have been a coincidence. But, then, if everything in life were mere coincidence, even making effort becomes meaningless. Yoshiko sought to find an answer from Buddhism that would make sense to her and resonate deeply with her life.

However, after returning to teaching, she found herself so busy with work and Gakkai activities that she was utterly exhausted and had no energy left to devote to Buddhist study. She also failed the study department entrance exam.

In August 1965, four chapters were established in Hokkaido – Asahikawa, Sapporo, Otaru, and Hakodate. At that time, Yoshiko Urushibara was appointed Hakodate Chapter Young Women Division leader.

She wondered whether she was really qualified to carry out her new duties, but she had made a decision never to avoid engaging in activities for kosen-rufu, because she wanted to change her shy and introverted character.

Human revolution starts from recognising one's own weaknesses and taking the first step to overcome them...

As a chapter Young Women Division leader, she was extremely busy with activities. At the time, her parents were still struggling with health problems, and her sister was now bedridden. Yoshiko was almost entirely responsible for financially supporting her family, and money was so tight that she couldn't afford to buy any new clothing.

On one occasion, a Young Women Division member said to her: "Ms Urushibara, you always wear the same black suit, don't you?"

But she was too busy to worry about such minor things.

"Now is the time to transform my karma. I must keep doing my best!" she thought.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring. Never, from ancient times on, has anyone heard or seen of winter turning back to autumn” (WND-1, p. 536). Yoshiko wanted to experience the meaning of this passage in her life. This, she was sure, was the way to truly deepen her understanding of Buddhism.

When she thought about her family situation, she felt like she was blindly feeling her way forward through a fierce blizzard. But, oddly enough, she didn’t pity herself. In her heart was a joy and warmth, which illuminated a future of hope.

The hearts of those who dedicate themselves to kosen-rufu are alight with a joy that even the harshest winds of adversity cannot extinguish. In fact, the stronger the winds blow, the more luminous that joy becomes, bringing hope to shine even more brightly. As long as we have faith, we have hope.

“Yes,” she thought. “I am alive because I have a mission to carry out kosen-rufu in Hokkaido! From now on, I will look at that accident as the day my old life ended, and devote my whole life to kosen-rufu!”

She still had to endure many difficulties, but her parents recovered their health and gradually her family’s financial situation also improved.

When Shin’ichi became the third Soka Gakkai president on May 3, 1960, the organisation was making dynamic strides.

In November of that year, Yoshiko was appointed Hokkaido Vice Young Women Division leader. The Hokkaido Young Women Division leader at the time was Haruko Arashiyama. Yoshiko worked steadily behind the scenes and ably supported Haruko. They would open up a map of Hokkaido and passionately discuss the future of kosen-rufu in the region.

(NHR Vol 26, “Atsuta” chapter)

Footnotes:

1. The Ikegami brothers: Leading disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. The elder brother, Munenaka, was twice disowned by their father, who was a follower of Ryokan, the chief priest of Gokuraku-ji temple of the True Word Precepts school, a person hostile to the Daishonin. At the same time, their father tempted Munenaga, the younger brother, to abandon his faith in the Daishonin’s teaching and take his brother’s place as the next head of the family. Despite these adversities, the brothers persevered in their Buddhist practice. The father later rescinded Munenaka’s disinheritance, and in the end took faith in the Daishonin’s teaching.
2. The three obstacles and four devils are various obstacles and hindrances to the practice of Buddhism. The three obstacles are (1) the obstacle of earthly desires, (2) the obstacle of karma, and (3) the obstacle of retribution. The four devils are (1) the hindrance of the five components, (2) the hindrance of earthly desires, (3) the hindrance of death, and (4) the hindrance of the devil king.