

Research Article



***Cultivating Charisma: Ikeda Daisaku's  
Self Presentations and Transformational  
Leadership***

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Although social scientific studies of leadership have progressed significantly since the 1960s, discussions of popular religious leaders remain grounded in Weberian ideas on “charisma.” Because “charisma” in Weber’s writings lacks conceptual clarity and analytical precision, it fails to illuminate how specific understandings of popular leaders develop or how leaders create affective ties with followers. Weber’s discussions of charisma, however, can still lead to important questions. Using a Weberian statement on charisma as a departure point, this article argues on the basis of the published diary of Ikeda Daisaku, leader of the Nichiren Buddhist organization Sōka Gakkai, that self-representations by a leader can influence how followers understand him or her in a way that cultivates charisma. More specifically it argues that by depicting the mentor-disciple relationship as empowering, Ikeda’s diary can serve as a method for transformational leadership that fosters a sense of intimacy and nurtures affective ties with him.

[**Keywords:** leadership, autobiography, Ikeda Daisaku, Sōka Gakkai, charisma, New Religious Movements]

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Since the time of Max Weber the study of leadership has evolved from trying to identify the traits of successful leaders, to trying to identify their distinguishing behaviors, to trying to understand how they interact with those they lead. For the past 40 years, social scientists have focused largely on how leaders and the led relate with each other. In particular they have sought to understand how followers empower their leaders and how leaders empower those they lead. The study of leadership today is less about individuals and more about relationships.

Although our knowledge on leadership in politics and business has made steady progress, our understandings of leadership in religious contexts have remained largely stagnant. Discussions on what makes popular religious leaders influential are still grounded in the Weberian concept of “charisma.” While characterizing certain religious leaders as “charismatic” is useful for indicating that their authority is not based simply on an institutional office and the affective ties followers have with a particular leader, it provides little insight when it, as is often the case, connotes circular reasoning: a leader is popular because he is charismatic; and his popularity is evidence of his charisma. The ambiguity of

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the term is also problematic. Geertz points out that Weber's "concept of charisma suffers from an uncertainty of referent" and that the "multiple themes in Weber's concept of charisma... are more stated than developed" (1993: 121, 122). Weber's statements on charisma, however, can still prompt productive questions about leadership that can move us beyond using charisma as an amorphous term for explaining the source of a leader's influence to discovering specific methods that leaders use to cultivate affective ties.

For example, amongst his various discussion of charisma, Weber states:

... 'charisma' shall be understood to refer to an *extraordinary* quality of a person, regardless of whether this quality is actual, alleged, or presumed. 'Charismatic authority,' hence, shall refer to a rule over men [sic], whether predominately external or predominately internal, to which the governed submit because of their belief in the extraordinary quality of the specific *person* (1958: 295, emphasis in original).

This statement raises a key question that Weber's work never adequately answers, namely, how do religious leaders shape followers' understandings so that they come to a "belief in the extraordinary quality" of them? By addressing this question, we can enhance our understanding of religious leaders and what makes them attractive to their followers.

Because space does not permit a full answer to the question of how leaders shape followers' understandings, this article focuses on just one specific leader and one specific method. The leader is Ikeda Daisaku, who despite not holding the top administrative office of the Sōka Gakkai since 1979, has been that Nichiren Buddhist organization's undisputed leader since 1960. The method is autobiographical representation, which I argue fosters an interpretation of Ikeda as being an exemplary disciple to his own mentor, Toda Josei, the second president of Sōka Gakkai. Ikeda's self representations as a completely dedicated disciple, despite the obstacles he faced, makes him seem extraordinary and worthy of great admiration in today's Gakkai, in which the mentor-disciple relationship is a central concern.

Although the analysis below is mostly textual, the ideas that inform it have been shaped by ethnographic fieldwork done among members of Sōka Gakkai, particularly its leaders in Japan and the United States. That fieldwork has entailed, since 2008, in-depth interviews with over 50 high level leaders and participation in various Sōka Gakkai gatherings, such as discussion meetings (*zadankai*) in Japan, a three-day retreat at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, and ceremonies at Gakkai-affiliated schools during which Ikeda spoke. What I discovered is that Ikeda is not only a charismatic leader but, more specifically, a transformational one. On the basis of Ikeda's self presentations, Gakkai members come to learn a model of the mentor-disciple relationship that is empowering and thus one that encourages them to enter a mentor-disciple relationship with Ikeda. When they come to understand themselves as being in a mentor-disciple relationship, they no longer identify themselves as just Nichiren Buddhists, but conceive of themselves as disciples in a way that nurtures an affective connection with Ikeda.

## Who is Ikeda Daisaku?

Ikeda Daisaku (1928– ), has been among the most powerful Japanese leaders for more than 50 years. The Sōka Gakkai, which he became president of at age 32, today claims to have a membership of about 8.2 million families in Japan and 1.7 million individuals beyond Japan in over 190 countries and territories. Although the claimed number of members is almost certainly inflated, Sōka Gakkai is unquestionably Japan's largest lay Buddhist movement and perhaps its largest current religious movement (McLaughlin, 2012b, 269). As Sōka Gakkai's long-time leader, Ikeda is revered by Gakkai members, who attribute to him the founding of research institutes, numerous serial publications, the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, the Min-On Concert Association, schools and two universities, including Soka University of America in California, which, according to National Center for Educational Statistics, had an endowment of over a billion dollars in 2011.<sup>1</sup> He is also understood to be a prolific writer. His collective works, which include novels, essays, poems, and commentaries on Buddhist texts, extend to more than 130 volumes.<sup>2</sup> He has engaged in dozens of lengthy dialogues with leading intellectuals, including historian Arnold Toynbee, chemist Linus Pauling, and the sociologist of religion Bryan Wilson. Many of these dialogues have been published as books. In recognition of his work, he has received over 300 honorary academic degrees or awards from hundreds of institutions around the world.

Ikeda has also had significant political power. One prominent Japanese political commentator Morita Minoru claimed in 1995 that no one at the time had more power in Japan than Ikeda.<sup>3</sup> Ikeda's connection with politics has led to vociferous criticism. Over the past four decades the Japanese tabloid press has commonly characterized him as a self-aggrandizing egotist who has used Sōka Gakkai members for his own personal gain.<sup>4</sup> To support their position, critics point to his connection with the Komeitō, the third largest political party in Japan, which Ikeda founded in 1964. Although the Kōmeitō and the Sōka Gakkai have been separate since 1970 and Ikeda has no position in it, the vast majority of

<sup>1</sup> The endowment of Soka University of America (SUA) in 2011 was larger than that of Carnegie Mellon University (nces.ed.gov). SUA is a liberal arts university with about 450 undergraduates. Its stated mission written by Ikeda is "to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life." In its effort to develop along the lines similar to secular liberal arts schools and to avoid being perceived as a religious school, the administration attempts to distance the university from the religious activities of Sōka Gakkai. Although proselytization probably occurs on SUA's campus in the dorms and elsewhere, the university does not officially endorse any proselytizing activities on campus so that non-Gakkai students at the school will feel welcome. During interviews conducted on SUA's campus in March 2011, I was also told by senior administrators that students, administrators, and faculty who are members of Sōka Gakkai are encouraged to refer to Ikeda on campus as only the founder of the university and not as a mentor.

<sup>2</sup> Although there is skepticism among scholars that Ikeda has written much of what is attributed to him, it is a rare Gakkai member who doubts that Ikeda authored everything in his collected works.

<sup>3</sup> This claim was made in the BBC documentary *The Chanting Millions*, which aired on national television in the UK on 14 October 1995. While this documentary was justifiably criticized for trying to make Sōka Gakkai seem dangerous by insinuating that it was similar to Aum Shirikyō, Morita's claim in it about Ikeda's power was representative of a view common among many political commentators. For how Ikeda influences political engagement among young Japanese Gakkai members, see Fisker-Nielsen, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> For more on how this is done, see McLaughlin, 2012a, and Gamble and Watanabe, 2004. Chapter six of Gamble and Watanabe's book, titled "Smearing a Buddhist Leader," focuses on negative treatment Ikeda has received in the popular Japanese press.

Kōmeitō's politicians and those actively involved in their campaigns are members of the Sōka Gakkai who are ardently loyal to Ikeda. Thus there is understood to be a connection between Ikeda and the Kōmeitō, even if he has refrained from becoming directly involved in Kōmeitō politics and policy making. Ikeda's political influence is evidenced by the major world leaders he has been able to meet. Among these have been Margaret Thatcher, Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev, Zhou Enlai, and Hu Jintao. While US presidents have not met with Ikeda, he has not been completely absent from the US political scene. In 2008 Congressman Hank Johnson of Georgia introduced a resolution for "recognizing the service and dedication of Dr Ikeda Daisaku and celebrating his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday" (Urbain, 2010: 12).

How has Ikeda been able to wield such influence? To answer this question, we must understand the centrality of the mentor-disciple relationship in the Gakkai in recent years.

### **The Mentor-Disciple Relationship in the Sōka Gakkai and the Life of Ikeda**

Stories have power. In the Sōka Gakkai today few if any stories have more power than the life story of Ikeda Daisaku and his relationship with Toda Jōsei. Although Toda died in 1958 and Ikeda has done much since his mentor's death, there is no part of his life that he talks about more, or with more enthusiasm, than the years he spent with Toda.

Ikeda tells of his time with Toda as a dramatic narrative. A short version of this narrative as he tells it and as many Gakkai members know it, goes something like this: In 1947, Ikeda is a young man living in Tokyo and has no clear direction in life. One night in August of that year a friend takes him to a Gakkai meeting and introduces him to Toda Jōsei. Impressed with Toda's character and intellect, Ikeda decides to join the Gakkai. About sixteen months later he begins working for a business Toda owns. The economy is bad and the business struggles. Toda is a righteous and honest man. Ikeda is impressed with how he remains dignified in the face of adversity. Although Ikeda receives little money and often suffers from exhaustion and illness so severe that he thinks he might soon die, he devotes his life to Toda. When Toda has troubles with his business and the law, many abandon him, but Ikeda stands firmly by him. Toda tacitly recognizes Ikeda's devotion and loyalty but he often scolds Ikeda and is harsh with him because he wants to make him a better person. Concerned with Ikeda's education, Toda teaches him in the mornings and on Sundays. Ikeda soaks up this knowledge. He grows very close to Toda and is willing to do anything to protect him and to promote his vision for the Gakkai and Japan. When Toda dies there is no disciple who has been as close, devout or as loyal to Toda as Ikeda. Members of the Gakkai ask him to be the next president, but he repeatedly refuses. Eventually, however, with hopes of promoting his mentor's vision, he consents to becoming the third president of the Gakkai in May 1960. After 1960 he expands the Gakkai and has great success, which he attributes to Toda. He also faces adversities, but he confronts them with the image of Toda never far from his thoughts.

This dramatic narrative Ikeda tells in the multivolume roman à clef, *The Human Revolution* (*Ningen kakumei*), which has sold millions of copies (McLaughlin, 2009: 150). He also tells it in speeches, in reflective essays, and in a diary that he kept at the time. Although Ikeda spent less than 11 years with Toda, has led the Gakkai for much longer

than Toda, and has arguably done more for it than Toda did, Ikeda repeatedly in a public manner attributes his success to Toda. In doing so, Ikeda provides a model of the mentor-disciple relationship for Gakkai members.

In the Gakkai today, few issues, if any, receive more attention than the mentor-disciple relationship. Ikeda and Gakkai members say the relationship is so close as to be indivisible (*shitei funi*). The mentor is concerned with improving the lives of his disciples. Or, as the January 2010 *Sōka Gakkai International Quarterly* puts it, the mentor gives disciples “confidence in their own unrealized possibilities” and “is focused on the empowerment of others” (p. 28). Disciples support their mentor and his vision using their unique abilities. They are not passive followers of the mentor; in fact simple followers are not good disciples because they do not adequately seek ways to use their own individual talents to help realize their mentor’s vision. Good disciples protect and promote the mentor’s vision, with which they identify. Today Gakkai members both in and outside Japan commonly refer to Ikeda as their mentor. They often speak of the oneness of the mentor-disciple relationship (*shitei funi*), and some members say the relationship exceeds all others. They describe the relationship not as hierarchical but one in which there is mutual giving. Both the mentor and disciple are ideally selfless in their devotion to each other.

The idea of mentor-disciple can be found in the history of Nichiren Buddhism in general, and Sōka Gakkai in particular, before 1960. Since the split with Nichiren Shōshū in 1991, however, and particularly after the Aum sarin attacks that resulted in more intensive media critiques of Sōka Gakkai, Ikeda as well as leaders of the Sōka Gakkai have given it greater emphasis. Levi McLaughlin points out:

Since the mid-1990s, Sōka Gakkai in Japan has minimized its historical emphasis on proselytizing in favor of a singular focus on cultivating all members, particularly children born into the movement — called *fukushi* 福子, or “children of fortune”— in discipleship under Ikeda Daisaku. Members are urged to apply the principle of *shitei funi* 師弟不二, or “the indivisibility of mentor and disciple,” to their individual lives as they forge affective one-to-one relationships with Ikeda. (McLaughlin, 2012a: 70)<sup>5</sup>

It is in part because of the emphasis on the mentor-disciple relationship in the Gakkai that no Japanese religious leader in recent history has inspired as much loyalty among so many as Ikeda. To understand how Ikeda inspires such loyalty, it helps to understand how he is a transformational leader who provides an exemplary model of discipleship through his autobiographical writings.

### **Autobiography as a Transformational Leadership Method**

A book that has greatly affected the current trajectory of leadership studies, titled simply *Leadership*, was published in 1978 by the political scientist James MacGregor Burns. In the book, Burns argues that transformational leaders lead people to transcend their narrow

<sup>5</sup> We can also see this at USA-Sōka Gakkai International’s Florida Nature and Culture Center where there is an Ikeda Hall and the American Mentor Disciple Hall, which serves as a museum on the lives of Makiguchi (Sōka Gakkai’s founder), Toda, and especially Ikeda.

self-interests for the greater good of the group by getting them to personally identify with it. Transformational leaders are often seen as charismatic because they inspire loyalty and enthusiasm among those they lead. These leaders often use symbols of success and power to emotionally engage people with their visions (Nye, 2008: 55). They do not achieve power on the basis of their personalities or from the material resources they can give; rather they gain power because of ways they cultivate relationships and engage with the led.

Much scholarship has focused on understanding transformational leadership. A study in 2001, for example, found that a third of the articles published in the journal *Leadership Quarterly* were on transformational/charismatic leadership (Lowe and Gardner, 2001). Transformational leaders, it has been pointed out, might also in certain situations be transactional leaders (Bass, 1985), that is leaders who provide something to people in return for something else. Politicians, for example, who obtain public funds for their constituents' projects in return for their votes, are transactional leaders, as are corporate managers who give pay raises to salespeople for exceeding sales quotas. Transformational leaders, in contrast, tend to minimize transactional methods to affect behavior. Among religious leaders, a transformational style of leadership is common. More than political and corporate leaders, religious leaders tend to use the soft power of persuasion to enhance their authority among those they lead, in part because they often have fewer resources to exert hard power to push people to act in particular ways.

One way transformational leaders cultivate soft power and foster relations with the led is through autobiographical accounts. It is not uncommon for religious leaders to explain doctrine, ideals, or the power of the religions they espouse by referring to episodes in their own lives. These stories act as a form of self-presentation that influence how the communities they lead come to know and perceive them. Leaders need to build trust among those they lead to gain and maintain authority. Stories about themselves are one way in which they do this.

The greatest transformational leaders, however, do more than simply gain the trust of their communities; they transform the very self-conceptions of those they lead. The social psychologist Shamir, along with others, has explained how transformational leaders motivate people at high levels by pointing out that such leaders often affect the self-conceptions of the led in a way that ties them to the leader's vision (Shamir et al., 1993). Ikeda, with his emphasis on the mentor-disciple relationship, is a leader who does this. Those in the Gakkai today, following Ikeda's lead, create a self-conception of themselves as not simply Gakkai members or Nichiren Buddhists, but as disciples of a helpful and caring mentor. Because they conceive of themselves as disciples with Ikeda as their mentor, Gakkai members are more likely to act beyond their own narrow self interests and for the accomplishment of the Gakkai's goals.

If discipleship becomes part of a Gakkai member's identity, how can he or she learn what discipleship entails? The answer for Gakkai members is found largely in Ikeda's self representation of his own discipleship. Ikeda shows Gakkai members what it means to be a disciple by offering autobiographical portrayals of his relationship with Toda as a model to which his disciples can refer to understand the virtues of discipleship. What Ikeda's model

of discipleship involves can be understood from the entries in the diary Ikeda kept while with Toda. By reading the diary not as a historical source that tells us about Ikeda's life in the 1950s, but rather as a text that can act in the present to offer an example of discipleship and to bring readers closer to Ikeda, we are able to see how it contributes to Ikeda's leadership.

### **How Ikeda's Diary Offers a Model of Discipleship**

The diary's first entry is dated May 31, 1949 and the last May 13, 1960. When the diary starts, Ikeda is a 21 year-old, undistinguished member of the Sōka Gakkai, a small lay Nichiren Buddhist organization of about five thousand people, which he had joined less than two years prior. When the diary ends he is thirty-two and has just become the third president of the Gakkai, which had grown to perhaps as many as a million families.

When the magazine *Shūkan genron* began serializing Ikeda Daisaku's diary in 1965, he had already been president of the Gakkai for more than four years. Although few leaders and probably no religious leader wielded more power in Japan at the time, the diary's publication, with Ikeda's private thoughts, was not a scandalous exposé. On the contrary, Ikeda endorsed its publication, as he has continued to do so.

In 1967 the diary started to be released in book form. In the foreword to volume one of the book edition, Ikeda wrote that "I completely understand that a diary is not the kind of thing one shows to people. But we are like brothers. So I thought it would be good for you to know my past unadorned and just as it was" (Ikeda, 1967: 2). He later included the diary in two volumes of his collected works (Volumes 36 and 37). Most recently, in 2005 and 2006 the diary was again published in Japanese in four small volumes.

He has also supported its translation into English. From 1983 to 1996 it was serialized in the *Seikyo Times*, an American-based Sōka Gakkai publication, and then published in 2000 as a book titled *A Youthful Diary: One Man's Journey from the Beginning of Faith to Worldwide Leadership for Peace*. In the preface to the English version of the text, Ikeda indicates why he endorsed its publication. He writes that he hopes "it may lend encouragement to those who share my dedication to the cause of Buddhism" and that "If, through this English version of the diary... [the SGI youth] may respond to the spirit that was stirring in me at that time and gain some measure of encouragement in the business of living, I will count myself most fortunate" (Ikeda, 2000: ix).

The reason for supporting the publication of his private diary was certainly not to project an infallible image of himself. The diary clearly shows him as less than perfect—he neglects to perform daily prayers (10/17/55), he oversleeps (6/22/50), he leaves his pregnant wife waiting for him for an hour in the cold (1/30/58), and he complains regularly about people in the Gakkai, although the individuals are identified only by initials to keep them anonymous. Whatever his reasons were or are for endorsing its publication, the diary can serve to educate Gakkai members about the life of a disciple. While revealing some of his personal failings, which certainly makes it easier for readers to identify with him, the diary also shows how he is devoted to Toda in four ways.

First, Ikeda recognizes Toda in the diary as his ultimate mentor who gives his life meaning. Several diaries entries show this.

Half a year has passed since I went to work for Mr. Toda's company. Stormy and eventful days. All I can do is steel myself to meet hardships cheerfully. Must advance toward the dawn, never wavering in my conviction, following my lifelong—no, my *eternal* mentor. (May 31, 1949)<sup>6</sup>

I am a disciple of Mr. Toda. All my activities, my mission and my practice center around Mr. Toda. (February 13, 1951)

For me, President Toda is my sovereign, teacher and parent in life. Since I was nineteen, I have been by his side, serving him as he guides and trains me directly. Pondering deeply our mystic bond. My true wish is to be with him for life. This way, I can fulfill my mission for this lifetime. (September 27, 1955)

Place all my hope in Sensei's life. He gives meaning to my life, he is my whole existence." (August 29, 1956)

My only life is to fight, advance and survive alongside my mentor. I know I owe my life to my mentor. (December 4, 1957)

Second, he accepts Toda's strict discipline, which is meted out through harsh scolding that he must often endure. These scoldings are painful for Ikeda. He tells how when he is scolded by Toda it feels like he is "falling into the pit of hell" (April 13, 1951) or as if he "had been stabbed in the chest" (May 25, 1954). Yet, he never gets angry with his mentor and never claims that he is being treated unjustly, even when he does not understand everything Toda does. He always takes responsibility and blames himself. Here are a few examples taken just from the year 1954:

President Toda stopped by after his lecture. He severely rebuked us—like an atomic bomb going off. Calling us naïve, he trembled with rage as he spoke. Completely unable to understand his intentions. Severely reproached myself, reflecting deeply. (April 2, 1954)

Visited Sensei's home in the evening. Received guidance on various matters. Was also severely reprimanded. This could not be helped; it was totally my fault. Disciples will forge on and grow, no matter how many times they are scolded. (July 17, 1954)

An evening year-end gathering. Sang the second part of the "Kuroda Bushi." Sensei exploded with indignation—wasn't it the militaristic spirit contained in this song that killed his revered teacher, President Makiguchi? His eyes brimmed with tears. Very sorry. With a heavy heart, I think how foolish I am. (December 28, 1954)

He takes these reprimands to heart and also reproaches himself:

<sup>6</sup> All translations are taken from Ikeda, 2000.



Ashamed of my incompetence as a disciple. (January 22, 1953)

Disappointed at my total incompetence as a disciple. (October 13, 1953)

But he recognizes behind these scolding his mentor's care for him:

Yesterday, I visited Sensei at home to offer my year-end respects. He scolded me severely. Like the strict anger of a father, the intensity of his voice made me want to cringe. Ah, I was at fault. It is exactly as Sensei said. His strict love aims to prevent me from becoming a failure in life. He admonishes me so I will not become a general defeated in battle. (December 27, 1954)

Do not want to be weak or conniving in my practice of faith. Stayed home all morning. Looked closely at photographs of Sensei. He encourages and watches over me with compassion, warmth and strictness. (September 24, 1955)

The third way he shows his devotion is by expressing a desire to protect his mentor:

Bitter criticism leveled at Mr. Toda. I will fight resolutely. I am confident I understand Mr. Toda's great mission better than anyone else. I alone truly understand what is in his mind. Blazing with righteous anger, I will fight with all my life. (December 27, 1950)

No one knows how much I have been quietly protecting him. (March 11, 1951)

Will protect President Toda to the best of my ability—as long as I live. I have but one reason. That is, to protect President Toda is to protect the spread of faith in the Gohonzon. In the way of mentor and disciple, the two must be of one mind. I have only to advance straight ahead along this highest path. Mr. Toda's majestic image never leaves my mind, not even for a moment. (December 18, 1952)

Deepening my determination to strictly protect my only mentor. (March 18, 1954)

Fourth, and finally, he thinks about Toda constantly and longs to be with him.

Did not see Sensei all day. Lonesome. Day and night, the image of his face is often at the center of my thoughts. Is it all right for the relationship between mentor and disciple to be like that of parent and child? There is no one I can ask about this. (July 21, 1956)

Sensei made a pilgrimage to the head temple. His image never leaves my mind. (October 15, 1955)

Can't stop thinking about Sensei, even for a moment. Actually, my lifelong destiny was determined when I met him and will continue to be guided by him until the end. How fortunate! Though I began poor and sick, nothing could be more glorious than to have Sensei watch over me throughout my life. (October 5, 1955)

On the days I meet Sensei, I am happy; on days I cannot meet him, I am melancholy. This is a function of my life. (January 7, 1957)

By showing his devotion to Toda in the above-mentioned ways (namely, characterizing him as his ultimate mentor, accepting Toda's strict discipline, showing his desire to protect him, and by constantly thinking about Toda), Ikeda not only tells of his relationship with his mentor but also models the mentor-disciple relationship for Gakkai members who regard themselves as Ikeda's disciples.

### **How the Diary Fosters Intimacy and Identification with Ikeda**

The diary not only shows the life of a dedicated disciple, but it does so in a way that fosters a sense of intimacy. Diaries are often kept private and not shown to others. The act of sharing the diary thus mimics the intimate act of sharing something private. Readers understand that they are being let in on something that was not originally written for them to see. Ikeda promotes this idea when he writes in the preface to the English version that "I must stress here that the diary was never written with the thought that it might be read by others" and that "it was originally intended for my eyes alone" (Ikeda, 2000: viii–ix).

The diary fosters intimacy in another way as well—the trivia of everyday life. The former president of the American Academy of Art and Sciences, Patricia Spacks points out that one of the pleasures derived from reading a diary is the sense of intimacy one feels from learning about the trivia in the diarist's everyday life (Spacks, 2003). When Ikeda tells readers where he ate dinner on a particular day, what book he is reading, what play he just saw with his wife, what time he went to bed, he is sharing with them minutia usually reserved for close friends who talk with each other frequently. In sharing these trivialities, readers come to see and know him in a way that is more intimate and direct than could be achieved by any description of a notable accomplishment by him found in a newspaper or biography.

The diary in addition to its private nature and its sharing of trivialities, also promotes intimacy in that Ikeda is originally merely writing to himself. Since it is assumed that it is just for the diarist's eyes, there is an expectation of frankness not mediated by concerns for what others might think. Statements are thus taken to be more honest and sincere. The candor in Ikeda's diary is conducive to showing how in many respects he is a quite ordinary person: he smokes, he suffers from toothache, he financially struggles to make ends meet, and is scolded by his wife for not coming home for dinner. The ordinariness of him in the diary fosters the perceptions among reader that he is similar to many others in the Gakkai. He is thus someone who can readily be identified with; someone with whom readers can relate, and who readers can imagine as relating to them.

Yet, the poor health that Ikeda mentions suffering from throughout the diary shows that he is not as physically strong as many young men. His dedication thus required more work and more sacrifice than that of a completely healthy person. His desire to become stronger, to do better for Toda, and his frequent self reproach also shows his vulnerability, which helps endear him to even insensitive readers. Reading entry after entry in the diary in which Ikeda suffers from persistent ailments, works long hours, berates himself, and is

being continually scolded by the man he admires and wants to please, may prompt the admiring Gakkai reader at a certain stage to want to say “Hang in there Daisaku; it will all turn out well.” For the reader of course knows what Ikeda at the time he is writing the diary does not yet know—that he will later succeed in realizing many of his aims.

Ikeda’s ordinariness, his sickliness, his vulnerability, all serve to highlight his extraordinary devotion to his mentor. They also give the diary poignancy and the rhetorical capacity to emotionally involve the reader. A reader can be forgiven for forgetting that this is a man who has had tremendous power for many decades.

Reading hundreds of diary entries, however, is not for the lukewarm disciple. Unlike Ikeda’s novel, *The Human Revolution*, it does not provide a fully formed narrative for the reader. The diary, like most diaries, has gaps of days, weeks, and months. The entries are the raw materials for a story of Ikeda’s youth and discipleship. To tie the entries together to construct an understanding of Ikeda’s life at the time demands work from the reader. Yet, the raw materials and gaps in the text also give the reader greater facility to author a personally meaningful narrative as he or she tries to connect the disconnected entries over time. In fact, we might interpret Ikeda’s act of revealing his diary and the Gakkai member’s active reading of it as modeling the mentor-disciple relationship. Ikeda with his diary offers a personal vision for living based on his own life, but the details of the vision have to be filled in by the disciple using his or her own intellect. This process by which a reader comes to make sense of Ikeda’s life with Toda helps the reading disciple engage more deeply with Ikeda.

The intimacy with which the details of his life are presented, the ordinariness of his life and person, and the potential to create one’s own image of Ikeda from the diary are all conducive to fostering a closer relationship between Ikeda and his disciples who read the text. The intimacy with which Gakkai members often feel they know Ikeda is in no small measure due to autobiographical representations like those in the diary that Gakkai members read. Through these stories they come to know him as not a distant leader but as someone with whom they can identify and who can understand them. The accomplishments attributed to him become all that more extraordinary because he is in many respects as ordinary as other Gakkai members. They also serve as witness to the power of discipleship. The diary provides an outline of a dramatic narrative and evidence, at least for Gakkai members, of a common man made great through discipleship to his mentor. It thus holds out the inspiring possibility to Gakkai members that they too as Ikeda’s disciples can achieve greatness through the mentor-disciple relationship. In short, the diary is conducive to helping Gakkai members not only come to an understanding of Ikeda but also to choosing him as a mentor and thus creating a self-conception of themselves as his disciple.

## Conclusion

Ikeda’s autobiographical accounts of his youth in the 1950s and his discipleship to his mentor, Toda, are a means for leadership. With his diary, Ikeda fosters the idea that the mentor-disciple relationship, which is a central idea in the Sōka Gakkai today, is an empowering one. The diary as a set of autobiographical depictions of his dedication to

Toda offers a model of discipleship for Sōka Gakkai members and encourages them to enter a mentor-discipleship with him. It does this first by giving an intimate self portrayal in a manner that helps readers feel they know Ikeda well and that helps them identify with him as someone not very different from themselves. Second, it does this by presenting the mentor-disciple relationship as an attractive one that can enormously benefit the disciple. Those who read Ikeda's accounts learn that although Ikeda as a youth was in many ways ordinary, he achieved greatness as a leader as the result of his discipleship to his mentor. This holds the promise for Gakkai members that they too can achieve greatness in the mentor-disciple relationship, which in turn helps them see the self-conception of disciple as one of strength. With the self-conception of a disciple, Gakkai members are more likely to strive to achieve goals articulated by their mentor, Ikeda, that transcend their own self interests, such as the expansion of the Gakkai's membership, and the promotion of culture, education, and world peace.

Skeptics might point out that Ikeda's diary, as well as his other autobiographical writings, may have been constructed to present his life in a way that is not completely accurate. Indeed without access to handwritten originals, we cannot verify to what extent the printed version of the diary reproduces the original one. But what makes the diary important is not simply its historical value or veracity for understanding Ikeda's youth but its consequences for Ikeda's leadership of Gakkai members and his relationship with them today and in the future.

As mentor, Ikeda has provided the vision of an exemplary disciple. Various high level leaders of the Gakkai have told me they plan to keep that vision alive. One of those leaders is the current President of Sōka Gakkai, Harada Minoru. During an interview with him in 2009, I asked him about keeping the mentor-disciple relationship alive beyond Ikeda's life 20, 30, 50 years from now. His answer was as follows:

For us disciples, I think that is undoubtedly our mission. That is our mission. We have to do it. That is why in [the Gakkai's newspaper] the *Seikyō shimbun* there is [the series] "Victories of the Young Leader" (*Wakaki shidōsha katta*) and why the newspaper formed a special team of reporters to portray as a documentary the mind set in which President Ikeda while young served Toda. On the basis of that, we are continually documenting [Ikeda's time with Toda] so that we can concretely see how to learn Ikeda-sensei's spirit of discipleship (*deshi no seishin*) and how we must transmit it to later generations.

As President Harada's statement suggests, the Gakkai leadership is committed to promoting depictions of Ikeda's relationship with Toda through publications so that future Gakkai members might know his "spirit of discipleship." Primary among the sources for understanding this spirit of discipleship was, is, and will be Ikeda's personal accounts of his life with his mentor. As sources for understanding discipleship, Ikeda's autobiographical presentations, including those in the diary, exert influence on how Sōka Gakkai members conceive of their own discipleship with him. This indicates that autobiographical texts can serve as powerful sources for leadership even in the absence of the leader who wrote them.

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