

My Trip to Japan
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The first day of the World Youth Training Course in September, we went to Soka University. I became excited when we were almost there. All the signs were in Japanese, but we knew they were about Soka University because they were painted with the three colors. We saw houses and shops with the three-color flag. Then we saw the Makiguchi Memorial Hall from the bus. Everyone jumped up to try to get a picture. It was so impressive and huge. We were told that SGI President Ikeda made it beautiful and grand because President Makiguchi had died in a small prison cell. President Ikeda said that Makiguchi Hall is a place for fighters for kosen-rufu.

When we chanted three times, I was kind of in awe because it was the first time that I had chanted with so many different people from so many different countries. I thought, we don't speak the same languages but in that moment we did. I thought it was really cool.

Our first training session was about the priesthood by the Soka Gakkai youth division study leader Masaaki Morinaka, who had just been in the United States with the youth exchange group in August. He said the temple issue could be called "The Tale of a High Priest Gone Mad." He explained that Nikken has lost the struggle with evil, and that this had caused him to become jealous of President Ikeda and to try to destroy the SGI. Mr. Morinaka also said that we must become the Buddha's true disciples by rebuking evil. If we don't repudiate evil, we can't reveal the True Law.

After that we were given a tour of the building. The eighth floor where President Ikeda meets with dignitaries was like a museum. It was incredibly beautiful. We were also taken to a room where President Makiguchi's Gohonzon is enshrined. We chanted three times and saw personal items of President Makiguchi's and President Toda's.

Because of this experience, I feel differently about President Makiguchi and President Toda now. I hardly ever thought about them before, but now I can appreciate what they started. When we left we were given rice balls, bananas and tea on the bus. Everything was always prepared so that we would always feel comfortable.

The next day's first training session was reports on the priesthood issue by a few different countries, including the United States. The afternoon was a Q-and-A session by SGI Deputy President Einosuke Akiya. One question was from a member from Africa about overcoming political problems in his country. The main thing President Akiya said was that it must start with a single individual. One individual must resolve that he or she alone shall do it. Then another will stand up and then another.

After that we went to exchange meetings we thought were going to be district discussion meetings. We didn't know that there would be hundreds of members there or that it was at a community center! All of us went to Kanagawa Prefecture, and from there my group went to Tsurumi. The preparations that went into the exchange meeting were incredible. They thought of every detail. The most touching thing was that when we arrived at the community center there were hand-painted posters with our names on them welcoming us. They worked so hard to make us feel welcome, and they treated us like we were special.

The next afternoon was the World Youth Peace General Meeting at the International Friendship Hall. President Ikeda, President Halim of the World Federation of U.N. Associations and Dr. Ved Nanda of the University of Denver attended. Both guests gave speeches commending President Ikeda on his peace and nuclear abolition activities. I could see how much they respected and looked up to him.

I thought to myself that they love him just like we do. He looked just like a proud and

happy father. When President Ikeda spoke, it was mainly about the activities of the WFUNA. The one thing which stood out for me was that he wants us to become as big as the Himalayas, just like an Indian farmer thought Gandhi was as big as the Himalayas when he met him once.

The next day was the World Youth Peace Music Festival in Yokohama. President Ikeda attended and it was incredible.

There were 1,300 performers — including two from the United States. The two of them danced and were really great. Aric and Vincent were actually the youngest members to go on the trip from the United States.

They were in the front and center in the finale. It was the most touching finale. All of the performers were on the stage singing and dancing to the final song. You could feel their sheer joy, and I was reminded of my Fife and Drum Corps days and all those great memories.

When we were in the buses preparing to leave, we could talk to the people in the buses next to ours. They were from Malaysia, and it was wonderful how easy it was to make friends with people who couldn't even speak the same language.

The next day was our last day. We had the closing ceremony, and President Ikeda asked us to convey his best regards to all the members, the general director and the women's division chief of each country.

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