

World Tribune

No. 3139

THE YEAR OF ADVANCEMENT TOWARD THE NEW CENTURY

MAY 16, 1997

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Periodical Postage Paid at Santa Monica, CA 90401
RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED
Return To: SGI-USA Subscriptions
525 Wilshire Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90401-1467

DATED MATERIAL: PLEASE DELIVER BY ISSUE DATE



A dance by Tanya Tansiriprasratkul and traditional long drums (below) are part of the Thai New Year's celebrations.

Thai Language, Culture Come Together at Monthly Meetings

By LEONARD LANGBERG & NEIL CITRIN
CORRESPONDENTS

Panorama City, Calif., April 13

More than 13 years ago a handful of people from Thailand began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in Los Angeles. While actively participating in regular SGI-USA activities, they also began holding Thai-language meetings, and attendance rapidly increased.

Now these vibrant members can pack the San Fernando Community Center, as they did recently in celebration of the Thai New Year's holiday. In addition to the new year, these members celebrated the new lives they discovered when they began chanting Nam-myohorenge-kyo.

Sarina Ann Ng'armklai was one of the early members, joining in 1983. Just before this she had decided to commit suicide with poison. Her suffering had not been ended by the prayers of Hinayana priests or her own prayers to statues of Shakyamuni Buddha.

Before buying the poison, however, she stopped in to see her hairdresser. "I wanted to look beautiful when I died," she explained.



The hairdresser told Ms. Ng'armklai about how chanting could help her change her life, then invited her to a meeting. She forgot all about the poison.

"When I started chanting I began to feel freedom," she said. "My suffering and anger began to leave me."

Looking at Ms. Ng'armklai now, it is difficult to imagine she ever had an angry or negative bone in her body. But she described herself as once being an angry woman. Her anger continued in the early days of her practice, through a storm of obstacles that included the lack of a green card and numerous health problems. With constant

encouragement from seniors in faith and by chanting a lot, she never gave up.

"Now," she said proudly, "I'm an American citizen, and I'm healthy and happy."

To show her appreciation, Ms. Ng'armklai supports her members 100 percent. This attitude, common among the Thai members, led to their phenomenal growth.

Not all of them embraced the Daishonin's Buddhism immediately, however. Sam Imla remembers being very skeptical. "I had an ulcer problem," he said. "A friend told me that this

A Story That Needs To Be Shared

By DAVE MCNEILL
MANAGING EDITOR

Santa Monica, Calif., May 8

The SGI-USA's diversity is becoming famous, and a professor of religion at the University of Hawaii wants to share our story. Dr. David W. Chappell, who knows the organization well through his friendship with SGI President Ikeda and members in Hawaii, will be writing a chapter about the SGI-USA in a new book about Buddhism in the West.

"The most segregated time in America, it is often said, is Sunday morning," Dr. Chappell says. "At that time people go to the church or temple of their choice to be with other people who share their values...and this usually means people of the same ethnic background."

But he says that unlike most religious groups, SGI-USA meetings are often ethnically diverse. "Since this blending of ethnic diversity into a harmonious religious group is a remarkable achievement that is little known and even less understood, and since this new religious expression provides a positive model within our ethnically divided world, it is a story that needs to be shared," he says.

The SGI-USA is fully cooperating with Dr. Chappell's research, setting up meetings with individual members and groups in eight cities in May, June and August. These interviews come on the heels of a recent survey by Phillip Hammond, a professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, who is writing a book on the SGI-USA.

"Along with the book Dr. Hammond is working on, Dr. Chappell's research is another opportunity for the SGI-USA to be presented accurately to the public through the objective research of an established academic, who is not a member of our organization," Al Albergate,

PLEASE SEE THAI, 4

PLEASE SEE CHAPPELL, 4

VOICES

How have you changed poison into medicine in your life?

Members from Los Angeles #4 Joint Territory respond:



My daughter and I did not get along for many years. I love her to death, but there was just such friction between us. After about four years of hell, I have changed that really, really poisonous aspect of our relationship into medicine. I focused on changing myself through my practice. Now she shares her life with me and even comes to me for advice. Through her practice and my practice, too, we now have a bond that I can't even put into words.
— LINDA MALONE, Redlands, Calif.



I teach storytelling (how to tell stories) to gradeschool children. There's a fifth grade class I taught that was just totally out of control. They were not kind to one another. I chanted and chanted to realize a solution to this problem, to no avail, I thought. At last, I received some wise and simple advice from a teacher at the school about how to engage the students and allow them to bond at the beginning of the lesson by participating in a story-reading. The situation has now completely turned around and the students' value and potential within the classroom has revealed itself.
— KAREN KRAUT, Riverside, Calif.

In 1984 I caused an automobile accident. The person I hit assured me that he was fine but later sued me for more than my insurance policy limits. I was not fluent in English at the time and didn't understand what was happening. For one year I chanted six hours a day. At the time, my husband did not support my practice and my altar was tucked away in a small corner. Finally, the lawsuit was dismissed because the man who sued me was discovered by my insurance company to be a fraud. Because of our victory, my husband changed completely and decided to completely support my practice and encouraged our son to begin practicing, too.
— TOSHIKO SHARPESON, San Bernardino, Calif.



One way that I've changed poison into medicine is in my relationship with my ex-wife. I was married for five years and must have chanted millions of daimoku about our relationship. When we were married, we really fought, and I'd continuously go to the Gohonzon and chant to understand. Finally, I reached a point where I felt a sense of appreciation for having such a catalyst in my life to send me to the Gohonzon. Today, though divorced, we get along really well, and there's a sense of completion in the relationship. The poison of the anger and the hostility in the relationship became my impetus to chant. I know now that I wouldn't have chanted quite as vigorously and changed that karma if it weren't for her.
— BEN HELFMAN, Redlands, Calif.

Each week (except when we run "Question of the Month"), members of one joint territory will respond to a question on life, Buddhism or the organization.

Expressions

In the Spring of Things



Balloon-bouncing in Thornbury, Pa. Photo by Jonathan Wilson.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

'How has studying the priesthood issue helped you deepen your understanding of and faith in Buddhism?'

Please be specific and limit your responses to 75 words or less. All responses are subject to editing. Please send your responses and a face photo of yourself to: "Question of the Month," World Tribune, 525 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, Calif., 90401. Fax: 310-260-8910. Or e-mail us at: SokaNews@aol.com.

Deadline: May 26

World Tribune

(ISSN-0049-8165)

The World Tribune (692-720) is published weekly by the SGI-USA, 525 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401; (310) 451-8811; FAX (310) 260-8910. E-mail: SokaNews@aol.com. Subscriptions Office: (800) 835-4558; FAX (310) 260-8970; E-mail: SGI SUBS@aol.com.

Periodical Postage Paid at Santa Monica, CA, and at additional mailing offices.

Subscription Rates (subject to state taxes) \$15 for Three Months; \$28 for Six Months; \$50 for One Year; \$85 for Two Years; \$110 for Three Years.

♻️ Printed on 100% recycled paper

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**WORLD TRIBUNE
MAILBOX**

Grieving Is Important

In reply to Dixon Hamby's April 25 "Perspective," "I Cried Today" — bravo for continuing to speak out against war! I've been involved in cultural exchanges with Vietnam since 1993, and I urge him and all Americans to seek out the voices of the Vietnamese as they are expressed in literature and art today. There are now available many translations of contemporary and classical Vietnamese literature and a number of art exhibits that focus on the work of Vietnamese painters and artists. When Americans are exposed to the healing and forgiving grace of Vietnamese citizens, we can't help but begin to heal ourselves. As we look at Vietnam's long and powerful history, we humanize our former "enemy" and take responsibility for our government's action. This is a lot like the greening that is taking place in Vietnam's destroyed forests — it is slow and difficult and tedious at times but a real miracle nonetheless.

— EDITH SHILLUE, Arlington, Mass.

Dixon Hamby's "Perspective" was a beautifully written testament to the need to express our horror at the events happening in the world today and thus begin to seek an end to them. Daily papers report the brutal murders of children and the slaughter of refugees with such regularity that, without nurturing our grief over the victims, we will indeed find our hearts turned to stone. Like Mr. Hamby, I find that it is necessary to shed tears over these unknown victims and then to strengthen my resolve to face the evil with Mr. Ikeda, Mr. Hamby and my fellow bodhisattvas.

— JOHN GALLAGHER, Duncanville, Texas

Thank you (and Dixon Hamby) for the excellent essay on the importance of grieving. It shows a maturity and realization that the fundamental joy of life does not mean that we simply pretend that everything is wonderful or that we are insulated from the pain of the world. This is well attested to in the Daishonin's teachings: "And yet I cannot help but grieve as I recall the words of the *Ninno Sutra*: 'Once the sages have departed, then the seven disasters are certain to arise'" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 45); and "How could sensible people not abhor this world?" (MW-7, 139); and "Can anyone who understands the true situation fail to sigh in sorrow?" (MW-7, 204).

Of course, Buddhism does not teach us to wallow in grief or to despair and become defeatist: "I, Nichiren, and my followers alone rejoice amid our grieving" (MW-5, p. 151). And SGI President Ikeda has written: "People [of earnest faith] are experts at life who make friends even with suffering. While skillfully keeping company with life's hardships, they can find cause for delight in any situation whatsoever" (*Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 126).

— ED RIPPY, Oakland, Calif.

Letters printed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the SGI-USA or the World Tribune.

In the "Mailbox," we will publish members' comments, suggestions and questions as they pertain to the World Tribune. Because of volume, not all letters can be printed, but they are all read. All letters are subject to condensation.

Please include signature, mailing address and telephone number. Pseudonyms and initials will not be used. Send letters to "Mailbox," World Tribune, 525 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401; or via CompuServe (102137,354) or America Online (SokaNews).

The Rhythm of Peace

PERSPECTIVE

By MICHAEL LISAGOR
VIENNA, VA.

The path to becoming a "first-class" individual in any field of endeavor is not easy. Even though they don't practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, many "first-class" people are engaged in serious, wholehearted efforts in which they exhaust their energies. You will never become a successful "first-class" individual unless you make more effort than anyone else.
— SGI President Ikeda, *Daily Guidance*, vol. 4, p. 381

My oldest daughter, Megan, called from college a few weeks ago to ask me to purchase four tickets for our family to go to a Ladysmith Black Mambazo concert. I thought this was an unusual name for a female singer, but followed Megan's instructions (the parent *does* become the child).

Imagine my surprise when 10 South African men in black pants, tennis shoes and loosely fitting, bright yellow-patterned shirts skipped onto the small indoor stage at the Barns at Wolf Trap. The audience was electrified.

During a question-and-answer session, Joseph Shabalala, the smiling leader and founder of this wonderful a cappella group, explained that Ladysmith is the hometown of the Shabalala family (his sons and brothers are also in the group). *Black* refers to black oxen, the strongest farm animal. And the Zulu word *mambazo* means ax, symbolizing the group's ability to "chop down" the competition in musical contests.

I realized this was the same group that sang with Paul Simon on his *Graceland* album. Their singing and unique, high-step-

ping, Zulu warrior dance style was inspiring, as was their obvious devotion to their traditional culture and to spreading a message of peace and harmony.

Upon returning home, my wife, Trude, and I sat down to perform our evening prayers. As we began to chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo slowly in unison, I was struck by how similar we sounded to the harmonious singing of Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

While our Buddhist chant has a much deeper, spiritual significance from the universal, eternal perspective, both the singing and chanting evoke a positive sense of hope, community and peace. I couldn't help contrasting this with negative feelings associated with discord in a family or relationship, arguments at work, or even acrimonious exchanges among world leaders.

When I'm in a low state of life and try to communicate with others, I don't sound like a Black Mambazo. I'm more like a Purple Hyena. And that's how people react to me. Nothing positive comes from this life-condition. My family just assumes it's because I've skipped breakfast and ignores me.

On the other hand, when I'm filled with a positive life force, my voice can "chop" through someone's negativity, building a bridge of understanding and harmony. This is one of the primary reasons I return day after day to the Gohonzon.

We spend a lot of time trying to construct situational happiness. Some of us worry so much about what other people think about us that our happiness depends on everyone liking us. I can definitely relate to this. Others worry so much about having the perfect job that they spend their whole lives pursuing an elusive, ideal work environment. Or we worry so much about having a disagreement with our significant other that

we plunge into despair when a conflict arises.

My friend Joe recently shared with me a concrete experience regarding situational happiness. (This was impressive considering it was before a Sunday morning world peace gongyo. My deeper spiritual insights don't usually emerge that early.) Joe said that he had recently learned something important about himself. Everything was going relatively well with his great new job, his family, his health and his practice, yet he still worried about things...fretted about performing poorly at his job or someone getting sick or...

He was forced to conclude that the main factor standing in the way of his happiness was himself. Simple, but profound. How much of my happiness, I wonder, do I allow to depend on my circumstances? On the planets lining up just so?

Last October I wrote an article for the *World Tribune* about my wife's battle with a debilitating illness. I'm so grateful that Trude has regained almost all the feeling in her lower body and has returned to teaching full time. This has been a tremendous victory for her and for our many friends who supported us through the crisis.

At the same time, we must deal with the diagnosis — multiple sclerosis. This is a strange disease that affects individuals in unpredictable ways. She will, at a minimum, have to learn to adjust to becoming more easily tired.

And yet, as Buddhists, we understand that as long as we look for our happiness from within, her illness can't overwhelm us. Instead, we can use it to motivate us to live, love and practice harder than ever...to really appreciate each moment of our lives as if it was our last. To become Black Mambazos of true humanism and to share this happiness with the world around us. ❖

What Do You Think?

Please write to us and let us know your thoughts on the World Tribune.

What articles do you like or dislike? Which types would you like to see more of, less of? Do you have ideas to make the paper better? Do you have questions you'd like answered?

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Switched-on Seniors

Dallas members jazz up the lives of retirement home residents

By WENDY DeORE
TEXAS BUREAU CHIEF

"I'll be ready to jam when y'all come back!" This was Catherine Wilson's parting shot as she sat in her wheelchair smiling broadly and waving good-bye. She and the other residents of Park Manor Senior Citizens Residence in Dallas had just been treated to the Spring Fling — a morning of music, song and sharing sponsored by Victory District.

The brainstorm of Victory District Chief David McClure, whose mother is a longtime resident of the home, the Spring Fling was the most recent of Victory District's outreach activities in the economically depressed area of South Dallas. "Victory was the first district in South Dallas, which is a predominately African American neighborhood and a deprived area," Mr. McClure said. "But there are many SGI members here, and quite a few of our district members grew up in this neighborhood."

The enthusiasm of Victory District members to reach out to this community inspired the local SGI-USA Jazz Band, Sunset Chorus and many youth division members to join forces for the Spring Fling. Park Manor residents were treated to a morning full of let's-take-a-walk-down-memory-lane music from the band, vocals by the chorus, refreshments provided by members, and a colorful poster decorated by the youth division.

"This was so nice, so good!" Earnestine Thomas, president of the Park Manor Residents Council, said. "It was something different for the residents, who usually just sit around with nothing to do. The community around here isn't supporting us — but this was good clean fun. The children who drew the pictures were just beautiful



Photo by MARK MANNING

David McClure (l), district chief of South Dallas' Victory District, and his wife, Audrey (r), visit his mother at Park Manor Senior Citizens Residence and bring the whole district with them.

— we especially enjoyed the children."

After swaying through renditions of such old favorites as "Stormy Weather" and "Boogie Woogie," many of the residents responded to the invitation of an open mike to share experiences. Catherine Wilson came forward in her wheelchair particularly to speak to the children. She told them about the streetcar accident in which she lost her leg at age 6. She wanted the children to "remember to mind your parents — if I had obeyed my mother, I would not have had that accident."

Several residents expressed their amazement that the SGI came only to give, to entertain and to share, and was not asking for anything in return. It seems this was

the first time many residents could remember a group coming and not asking for donations or trying to trick residents out of money.

Mr. McClure said that over the many years of visiting his mother at Park Manor, he was always struck by "how hopeless and sad everyone was. I wanted to bring life into this building."

Youth division members who participated also reacted with enthusiasm to the event. Tiffany McDowel, who sang with the choir, admitted that she had made plans to hang out with her friends, and really hadn't wanted to spend her Saturday morning at the retirement home. Afterwards, however, she said: "I had fun working with

the old folks! I want go back again. You can really learn a lot from them — like that even if you're old, you can still do a lot of things."

Victory District is planning a second event at Park Manor for June — just as residents requested: "Don't forget the band when you come again." "Remember to bring the children."

The Spring Fling is the latest in a series of community outreach efforts organized by Victory District and supported by SGI members throughout Dallas. The district is continuing monthly meetings with community members held at the Martin Luther King Jr. Community Center in the heart of South Dallas. Using themes such as "Unity in the Community" and "Let's Take This First Step Together," Victory District and other SGI-USA members have gathered to share the spirit of Buddhism with community members.

Young people have been active participants in these events, too, volunteering to do crafts with children at the center. For one meeting, Japanese members translated the video of SGI President Ikeda's meeting with Rosa Parks, which was a powerful means of introducing Buddhism and the spirit of the SGI to South Dallas citizens.

These community outreach activities are Victory District's response to President Ikeda's emphasis on friendship and the SGI-USA's desire to become a community-based organization.

Within the organization as well, these activities are creating unity and opportunities for growth and friendship among the diverse group of members who participate. For SGI members and everyone in Dallas "these activities," says Audrey McClure, "are our way of actively closing the gap

THAI, FROM PAGE 1

Buddhism can change everything to be better. At first I didn't believe it. I tested it on my problems and bad habits."

Within a short time Mr. Imla stopped smoking and his ulcer got better.

"Now it is gone," he said.

Mr. Imla feels chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo helps people of different nationalities get along. Still, many of the Thai members do not speak English well. To provide them with proper encouragement, the leaders decided to have monthly meetings.

With support from Ted Morino, the SGI-USA Study Department chief, and Sachiko Nakabayashi, the L.A. #2 joint territory vice women's division chief, Thai members from throughout the Los Angeles area gather to learn about the Dai-

shonin's Buddhism.

"Most of the meetings are in Thai," said Mr. Imla, "but if we have a leader like Mr. Morino [who doesn't speak Thai] we will translate."

Meeting organizers plan in advance, using material from general lectures and other sources. They are organized just like the monthly discussion meeting, with a question-and-answer session for guests.

"We always have guests," Mr. Imla said.

Armed with this monthly encouragement, the Thai members return to their regular districts. Pim Bomrungchati finds these meetings valuable.

"It's great because you know your culture," she said. "Understanding a person's culture helps you know where they are coming from, and you can share things. You can learn about them and help them."

Ms. Bomrungchati benefited from this support personally, while fighting cancer.

When she was younger, however, she did not have this support. She faced a lot of obstacles with her friends. During that time her rock of support was her

CHAPPELL, FROM PAGE 1

SGI-USA's community relations director says.

"I believe this will help win further acceptance and understanding of Buddhism, and I believe it will support our members in their efforts to teach Buddhism in this country," he says

Questions Dr. Chappell seeks to answer include: How does the SGI-USA develop a deep common ground in the midst of ethnic diversity? Has this happened everywhere in the SGI-USA?

mother.

"My friends always picked on me," she said. "They were jealous of me. I would go home and chant and cry and chant and cry. Overall I changed my karma with my friends. Now I have wonderful friends, and we share

How does this achievement of diversity relate to the past image of the SGI-USA as aggressive and pressuring people into conformity? How do members understand this experience of diversity? Is ethnic diversity found not only among the membership, but also among those who are heading committees and are active in SGI-USA leadership?

"Answers to these and similar questions will provide a background for an exciting story that needs to be told," Dr. Chappell emphasizes.

"Because diversity is one of

our lives' challenges together."

The Thai members look forward to the 1998 Thai New Year's. It will be celebrated by Los Angeles area members at the World Culture Center's World Peace Ikeda Auditorium in Santa Monica, Calif. **W**

our greatest assets, it's exciting that a noted scholar such as Dr. Chappell will be studying this aspect more thoroughly," Carrie Rogers, SGI-USA public relations project manager, says. "I am looking forward to the results."

Engaged Buddhism in the West is being edited by Christopher S. Queen of Harvard University, who along with Sallie B. King of James Madison University edited the 1996 book *Engaged Buddhism*, which included a chapter on the Soka Gakkai in Japan. **W**

Shin'ichi said to the group: "The Gakkai has been called a 'violent religion,' with accusations leveled against us that we pocket condolence money intended for the deceased's family or maliciously burn a person's ancestral tablets. And you all know what baseless slanders these are — just wild attempts to fan the flames of hatred toward the Gakkai. Mr. Makiguchi used to say, 'Never judge something you don't know anything about.' Youth should always remember to gain a firm grasp of the facts before passing judgment on anything." Shin'ichi wanted to awaken his listeners to this truth.

Their dialogue moved naturally to a discussion of Islam.

The founder of Islam, Muhammad, was born into the Hashim clan of the Quraysh tribe on the Arabian peninsula (present-day Saudi Arabia) in Mecca, around the year 570. Muhammad means "supremely praised." Muhammad's father died before he was born. And he lost his mother when he was only 6 years old. The young orphan came into the care of his grandfather, who died soon thereafter. Muhammad was then taken in by his uncle, Abu Talib.

Though he had someone to care for him, he spent his early life in relative poverty. One reason for this, it is said, was that Arab custom then dictated that as a minor he could not inherit his father's wealth. Eventually, he started working as a merchant in Mecca. The young Muhammad, industrious and dedicated, showed a talent for commerce. He was given the name al-Amin, or the Trustworthy One.

Through his business dealings he came to know a certain wealthy widow named Khadija, whom he married. Muhammad was 25 and his bride, 40. Through this marriage, Muhammad gained a degree of affluence, but he continued to live a very simple life. He got into the habit of retiring to a cave on Mount Hira outside of Mecca to meditate.

One day while meditating, he had a wondrous experience that forever changed his life. It is said that he received, through an angel, a message from God (Allah). He experienced the first of his revelations when he was around 40 years old. At first, he thought he had been possessed by a spirit and was afraid. But Khadija was certain that what Muhammad had experienced was indeed a revelation from God. And she convinced Muhammad of this.

Muhammad continued to receive revelations, eventually coming to think of himself as a messenger of God whose mission was to communicate God's word to others. This was the birth of Islam.

Khadija was the first follower of Muhammad's teachings, which gradually spread among other relatives and friends. Like Christianity and Buddhism, Islam began with a small gathering of believers. What was

The New Human Revolution

BY HO GOKU — ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Volume 6, Chapter 1

Treasure Land

Translation of parts 18–23 of the 'Treasure Land' chapter, as printed in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper. Ho Goku is the pen name of Daisaku Ikeda, who appears in the novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1962.

the central message of Islam? In essence it was "Have faith in the one and only Allah and his messenger Muhammad." The word *Islam* means "to have absolute faith in and obedience to" the one true God. And the followers of Islam, who place their entire beings into the hands of that God, are called Muslims.

The God of Islam, creator of the world, is the same as the God of Judaism and Christianity. Muhammad saw himself as the last in the long line of prophets, which included Moses and Jesus, entrusted with delivering the word of God. Islam counts within its most sacred scriptures not only the Koran, a compilation of the revelations received by Muhammad from God, but also the five books of Moses, the book of Psalms of the Old Testament and the Gospels of the New Testament.

At the outset, Muhammad had no intention of founding a new religion. Two or three years after his divine experiences, he began preaching faith in the one God to others. His ideas were regarded, however, as a dire challenge to the established pantheistic faith of the people of the Arabian peninsula. Most Arabs believed in many gods. And as far as daily life was concerned, morality and proper behavior were determined by tribal custom. In addition, a person's individual worth was judged by whether he or she was of noble birth.

Muhammad preached not only faith and obedience to the one true God, but also that a person's stature depended on the degree of faith in Allah, not on noble pedigree. All were equal, all were comrades, before Allah. Muhammad's brilliance is revealed in his assertion that the source of true human value lies not in such external factors as pedigree or birth, but in the internal quality of faith. This is very similar to Shakyamuni's statement, "It is not by birth but by one's actions that

one becomes a Brahmin [a person of highest respect in ancient India]."

Muhammad's teachings were a religious revolution on the Arabian peninsula.

Gradually Muhammad's followers, most of them youth, grew in numbers. The word of God that Muhammad shared with them was powerful and uncompromising.

In Mecca, there was a temple called the Kaaba, said to have been built by the prophet Abraham of the Old Testament and his son Ishmael. The temple was originally dedicated to the one supreme God, but in Muhammad's time it was filled with images of many other deities. People from all over the Arabian peninsula made pilgrimages to visit the Kaaba,



which greatly benefited Mecca.

But Muhammad refused to recognize any deity other than the one true God. He firmly rejected the worship of images of any kind. The tribal chiefs in Mecca feared that if Muhammad's teachings spread, it would threaten their positions and vested interests. So they painted Muhammad as a defiler of the ancestral deities and incited persecutions against him. Some of Muhammad's followers were banished from their tribes. Muhammad arranged for these followers to move to Abyssinia (present-day Ethiopia), which was ruled by a Christian king.

The persecutions extended even to the

Hashim clan to which Muhammad belonged, but the head of the clan, Muhammad's uncle, Abu Talib, resolutely protected him. Then, in 619, Muhammad lost his beloved Khadija and his uncle, one after the other. With his staunchest supporters now gone, Muhammad found himself in a dangerous crisis. Propagation of the teachings in Mecca became increasingly difficult. His place of birth had no room for Muhammad the religious revolutionary.

Opposition to him was spreading. People threw stones at him and his followers when they tried to preach in nearby settlements outside Mecca. Finally, Muhammad decided to seek out a new place to introduce his teachings and made plans to move to the town of Yathrib, some 200 miles north.

In 622, Muhammad arranged for more than 70 of his followers to head for Yathrib. He would be the last to leave Mecca, but by that time his life was already in danger and he was forced to escape his pursuers by hiding out in a cave.

Yathrib was an oasis settlement. Bitter feuding among Arab tribes had been continuing there for many years. The people were exhausted. They were looking for a leader who could bring an end to the conflict and found that leader in Muhammad. Under him the first Islamic community (*ummah*) was born. The migration of Muhammad from Mecca to Yathrib is known as the *Hijra* and marks the beginning of the Islamic era.¹ To commemorate this event, Yathrib was renamed Medina, which means "city of the Prophet."

In the new city of Medina, Muhammad was not only the religious leader but also the leader of the community, the arbitrator of disputes, the judge and lawmaker. Problems of every sort — from vital issues connected to the very survival of the Islamic community to mundane disputes of daily living — were brought to him to resolve. As the need arose, in response to these issues, Muhammad communicated the word of God.

In this way the moral laws that would govern the entire spectrum of conduct and behavior of Muslims were gradually defined. From then on Muslims based their lives on these laws. Later, this body of Islamic law came to be known as the Shariah.

A distinctive feature that gave rise to Islam's unique civilization is the complete unity of the divine and the secular — of the religious faith of the individual and secular activities ranging broadly from affairs of daily living to adminis-

PLEASE SEE TREASURE LAND, NEXT PAGE

TREASURE LAND, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

tration of the state. The religious teachings of Islam are simultaneously the individual's moral guide for living and the Islamic community and state's laws.

Another unique quality of Islamic society is that though there is a class of leaders at once secular and religious, Islam never established a professional clergy that was separated or aloof from society.

Muhammad energetically devoted himself to establishing his new community, an Islamic state, while urging his followers to fight resolutely against those who attacked and obstructed this undertaking. This is what became known as the *ji-had*, or holy war. He challenged all opposing clans, beginning with those who governed Mecca, where the Kaaba was located. In the decade following the 622 move from Mecca to Medina until Muhammad's death, his followers engaged in some 70 battles, large and small.

But these confrontations perhaps need to be put in the context of life in the harsh Arabian desert, where food resources were scarce, where every clan was susceptible to raiders riding across the empty sands to plunder their supplies. Fighting battles to defend one's tribe and property was a way of life.

In 630, Muhammad, with a large force, made his way to take control of Mecca. He triumphed, capturing the city of his birth. The first thing he did was destroy the idols that filled the Kaaba.

Gradually, the Meccans came to accept the teachings of their new leader. No doubt this was partly because of how Muhammad treated them after taking control of the city. He granted general amnesty and adopted compassionate, magnanimous government policies, seeking the cooperation of the residents. His greatest aim was not conquest for conquest's sake, but to turn his enemies into allies.

After the fall of Mecca, Muhammad forged alliances with many other Arab tribes, his influence gradually spreading throughout the Arabian peninsula.

In March 632, Muhammad led the pilgrimage to Mecca, but by the time he returned to Medina he was gravely ill. His condition deteriorated rapidly. On June 8, at the age of 63, his momentous life came to an end.

It took only 20 years from the time Muhammad received his first revelation from God for Islam to spread throughout

the Arabian peninsula — a remarkable testament to his power and determination. His death was, not surprisingly, an enormous shock to the Muslim community. Some were so stricken that they began to talk of his second coming, his future rebirth.

At this time the first man who became a follower of Muhammad, his close companion Abu Bakr, came forward and said: "If anyone worships Muhammad, Muhammad is dead; if anyone worships God, God is alive, immortal."² His words banished the weakness of those so overcome by sorrow that they could not accept the reality of Muhammad's death and opened the eyes of faith.

Abu Bakr was then chosen as Muhammad's successor, or *khalifa*, from which the English word *caliph* is derived. In his new role, he resolutely overcame a series of crises, putting down revolts by various tribes and clans and consolidating them into a united alliance.

When a religious teacher dies, a disciple who inherits that teacher's true spirit must arise and give new hope and purpose to those who live on. Only in this way can a religion survive and be perpetuated.

The four caliphs from Abu Bakr to Ali (Muhammad's cousin and son-in-law) are known as the *rashidun*, or "rightly guided" caliphs, under whom Islam was ruled by direct disciples of Muhammad who had personally heard his teachings and worked and fought at his side. During this period, the revelations from God received by Muhammad were collected and edited into the present form of the Koran. Because Muhammad's recitation of God's messages was recorded and preserved in written form, Islam survived to become a world religion of firm, unchanging principles that could be passed on to followers through the ages.

Islam continued to grow in strength, bringing Egypt under its dominion and defeating the ancient Iranian Sassanid Empire (226–651). But in 661, the fourth caliph, Ali, was assassinated, bringing

the period of the rightly guided caliphs to a close. This was followed by the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750), during which Islamic influence spread east to Central Asia and northwest India and west to the Iberian peninsula. The following Abbasid Dynasty (750–1258) made Baghdad in present-day Iraq the capital of a mighty, flourishing Islamic empire.

After relating the history of Islam and describing its teachings, Shin'ichi Yamamoto addressed the influence of Islamic civilization on Europe: "Recent studies have shown that the emergence of modern European civilization as we know it would have been unthinkable without the contributions of Islamic civilization. Many



scholars regard Islamic civilization as one of the foundations upon which European civilization rests.

"Arabic numerals and the decimal system are one obvious contribution. And such words as *alcohol* and *alkaline* reveal Arabic roots. Such pivotal inventions as gunpowder, the compass and papermaking came to Europe from China via the Islamic world.

"Even more interesting is that Islamic civilization preserved and expanded on the ancient learning of Greek and Roman civilization and later passed it on to Europe. Medieval Europe remained ignorant of its own cultural and intellectual legacy for many centuries, until it was transmitted again through the work of Islamic scholars. The Islamic world

boasted universities and astronomical observatories, making it one of the most highly advanced civilizations in the world at the time."

Akira Kuroki inquired, "How did the Islamic world develop such an outstanding civilization?"

"That's an excellent question," replied Shin'ichi. "Let's all consider it for a moment. What do you think, Akizuki?" Shin'ichi turned his gaze to the youth division chief.

"Well, I think that it's probably closely linked to the unity of religious faith and daily life in Islamic civilization that you pointed out earlier," said Akizuki. "Islam encouraged what we call in Buddhism manifesting faith in daily life. I think that must have been the source of energy and inspiration to create such an advanced culture."

Shin'ichi smiled and said: "Your use of the term 'manifesting faith in daily life' is one that is easily understood by Soka Gakkai members. I agree with you that something very similar to that principle was at work in Islamic civilization, contributing to its achievements.

"Our view, of course, is that religious law need not govern the laws of the nation or rule every detail of daily existence for religious teachings and ideals to be reflected in our lives. There is the question of whether a religion that completely governs all aspects of human affairs could be acceptable in the future on a global level. But in the case of Islam, this application of religious law to every aspect of life became a motivation for self-improvement and social advancement. It played a major role in creating a brilliant civilization."

Shin'ichi's audience listened intently, a keen light shining in their eyes. They were overjoyed at this opportunity to learn and think about new things through their discussions with President Yamamoto.

(To be continued)

1. The Islamic era began July 16, 622, in the Western calendar.
2. David Waines, *An Introduction to Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 21.

GLOSSARY

Buddha: One who perceives the true nature of all life and leads others to attain the same enlightenment. The Buddha nature is inherent in all beings and is characterized by the qualities of wisdom, courage, compassion, spiritual strength, hope and unshakable happiness.

daimoku: Literally, "title." Refers to the invocation, or chanting, of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Gohonzon: The embodiment of the law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and the life of

Nichiren Daishonin in the form of a mandala. *Honzon* means "object of fundamental respect"; *go* means "worthy of honor." The *Gohonzon* takes the form of a paper scroll inscribed with Chinese and two Sanskrit characters. Together, these characters represent life in its highest condition: Buddhahood. "Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, Nichiren" is written down the center of the Gohonzon.

gongyo: Literally, "assiduous practice." In Nichiren Daishonin's

Buddhism, gongyo means to recite the "Expedient Means" (2nd) chapter and the "Life Span of the Tathagata" (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo in front of the Gohonzon.

Gosho: Literally, "writing worthy of great respect": the writings of Nichiren Daishonin.

ichinen: Literally, "one mind." The life-moment, or ultimate reality, that is manifested at each moment in common mortals.

karma: Sanskrit word meaning "action." The life tendency or destiny that each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds. One's actions in the past have shaped one's reality at present, and actions in the present determine in turn one's future. This is the law of cause and effect at work.

DESERT DISTRICT, TEMPE, ARIZ.

It Takes a District

A mother/daughter team make their district kid-friendly for 10 Boys and Girls Group members.

By DIANA DECKER
PHOENIX CORRESPONDENT

Desert District in newly formed Tempe Headquarters experienced a population explosion recently. The number of toddlers attending monthly district meetings increased suddenly from one child to 10 youngsters under age 5, including four babies.

"All the parents were watching the kids and missing the meeting," Tiffany Horne remembered. "I went to a meeting knowing I would miss most of it, but I did not mind. I wanted my kids to have fun so they eventually will practice." Her three children range in age from 10 months to 4 years.

Tiffany pondered the district's situation for four months, then with her mom, Paulette Aasen, district leader, came up with a plan of action. The goal was for the children to have fun and develop friendships but also feel the atmosphere of the meeting.

The mother/daughter team brought some experience to their efforts: They had been working with the Boys and Girls Group at world peace gongyo

meetings for 18 months. In addition, Tiffany called on her college degree in psychology and several preschool development courses — expertise coupled with experience helped her develop a plan that works.

A few nights before each meeting she makes a schedule for the children, checking with the regular meeting schedule first to avoid conflicts. Activities for the youngsters include working with play dough or doing crafts, playing outside, having snacks, story time and free play. Tiffany calls members to ask what they would like to help with.

She does gongyo before the meeting so that she's free to supervise the youngsters while the others do gongyo. After gongyo, teams of two take turns for 15 minutes at a time.

Although Tiffany's plan was developed to help the children, it benefits everyone. She pairs those experienced with children with those less experienced. And sometimes she pairs a leader with a member who is dealing with a problem. At least the door gets opened, and they can talk later. Now even those who don't



Photos by KENNY SAMUEL

Desert District members work on a musical activity with children. The district has 10 children under the age of 5.

have children want to help.

During a recent Friday night meeting, the strong sounds of gongyo blended with tunes from a child's xylophone. After gongyo, children played Ring Around the Rosie outside in the yard before moving on to make tambourines and necklaces. After the meeting, several commented on the play group formula.

"It is definitely an evolving situation, starting from ground zero," Paulette said. "We knew we had to create something to get the kids' attention, not [just] some place where they have to go and behave."

Tiffany is now the district's Boys and Girls Group representative. "We had a need for such a person," Paulette said. "It's in line with the idea that it takes a village to raise a child. We talked about the play group idea at meetings. Those who don't have children were eager to help with the kids. [It seems] selfless the way people are all willing to do this. It was a test deal, pure necessity."

Maurizio Cristiani enjoys helping with the children. "Parents are much more relaxed at meetings now, not chasing the kids, and that's a benefit for the kids," Maurizio said. "I feel like I am helping people who have to put up with kids all day long. I love kids. I have a 13-year-old daughter, and I don't mind."



Children get hands-on activities in conjunction with the district meeting.

Kayoko Hamajima, a student at Arizona State University, also enjoys working with the children. She is one of the non-parents who help out. "SGI President Ikeda says kids are so precious because they are the future," she said. "Every time I play with the kids, I really enjoy it. English is not my first language. The kids want to know what I am speaking. They are creative and teach me a lot. They are so smart." And she adds: "There is no problem with the 15-minute break from the meeting. I can still listen to others

talking. The set up is good... I support Tiffany."

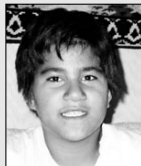
"I think Tiffany has done wonders," district leader Sally McKee said. "We have unity in the district. It's working out really well. These kids will be great leaders some day."

"We are investing in the future," Tiffany said, "making a cause for kids so they will want to practice when they get older. The kids seem to get along with each other and they are busy the whole time. In my view they are practicing already by playing." ❖

KIDS SAY



Brittany McKee, 12 (helps with younger children): "It's better at meetings now. We have a lot more stuff to do. All I had to do when I was younger was bug my mom. It's hard now working with so many kids. One goes this way, one goes that way."



Brian Silva, 11 (helps with other children): "I chant all the time.... I help out with the kids, keeping an eye on the children and playing with them."



Peyton Horne, 4 (a participant): "I thought it [the meeting] was fun. I really liked making the tambourines."

EARTHLY DESIRES ARE ENLIGHTENMENT

What One Desires

SIGN POSTS APPLYING NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS TO DAILY LIFE

By REIKO GROSHELL
SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION STUDY COMMITTEE

Good Friends

The best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a *zenchishiki*, or good friend.... But encountering a good friend is the hardest possible thing to do. (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 6, p. 109)

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin talks at great length about people relying on mistaken forms of Buddhism while slandering the Lotus Sutra. But in the very beginning he touches on the importance of having good friends, especially friends who will support and encourage us to practice.

I truly treasure my good friends. We laugh and cry together, we're concerned for one another. We share everything — from things that are important to things that are just frivolous. My friends care about me unconditionally, and I care for them the same way.

While growing up, I used to think having many friends would make me feel wanted and popular. I did my best to make people like me, but I was variously considered not part of the crowd, too much of an introvert, not attractive enough, etc. And frankly, for a long time, I thought I would never have good friends. How could anyone like me if I didn't like myself?

This Buddhism is amazing, though. Through my SGI-USA activities and the encouragement I received to take on responsibilities, I faced many things that I had to deal with. I couldn't escape. While trying to help others, I had to learn to help myself. It was during these times that my friends really supported me. When I didn't want to hear encouragement, or didn't think I needed any, or when my parents just couldn't get through to me, it was my friends who had the courage to "tell it like it is" and help me self-reflect. I learned I, too, had to be honest with them and help them in any way I could, even if it meant hurting them by telling them the truth.

I think SGI President Ikeda described it best in his "Discussions on Youth": "Friendships among people who cheerfully encourage one another while striving to realize their dreams are the kind that deepen and endure." I don't have many "best friends," but I have just enough. They are my treasures. 卍

BUDDHIST CONCEPT

By DAVE CORBETT
OKLAHOMA CITY, OKLA., CORRESPONDENT

Burn the firewood of earthly desires and behold the fire of enlightened wisdom. (Gosho Zenshu, p. 710)

When we first encounter Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, many of us are introduced to the concept of earthly desires are enlightenment. This is also the title of a letter written by the Daishonin to his disciple Shijo Kingo in 1272.

Simply put, earthly desires are enlightenment means that we can "burn" our earthly desires through prayer. In the process of chanting about our everyday desires, we become more wise and can learn many life lessons.

Living in the materialistic oriented culture of the 20th century, it is no wonder that many of us begin our practice chanting for "goodies," like new cars and

jobs. However, as Richard Causton explains in *The Buddha and Daily Life*, when we see the power of this practice manifest in actual proof — the satisfaction of these various earthly desires — we start to seek a deeper happiness. Our practice naturally transforms into prayer for others and to overcome our weaknesses and shortcomings. In other words, the achievement of earthly desires inspires us to further our human revolution.

What we desire thus gradually becomes more profound — but we do not rid ourselves of earthly desires. The ultimate earthly desire is to attain enlightenment, as SGI President Ikeda explains in his "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra":

The goal is not to eliminate desires; it is what one desires that is important. Earthly desires are enlightenment. The desire for supreme enlightenment, the search for enlightenment, is enlightenment. (August 1996 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 32-33)

Recently a member explained to me how earthly desires are enlightenment had applied to his experience with over-

coming the hell of chemical dependency. He told me that at the outset of his practice he was like the physician's son who drank some poison and lost his senses in the parable from the Lotus Sutra. Only through the gentle, unconditional encouragement of his friends and SGI leaders, who stood by him when all others had given up any hope of his recovery, did he find the courage to take the excellent medicine of this practice.

He explained to me that he felt his desire to self destruct was like a lump of carbon that slowly but surely transformed into a diamond-like life-condition. Now he is fully recovered and devotes much of his spare time to helping others with similar problems. So through this practice his desire to destroy himself was turned into the desire to help others.

He said his favorite passage from the works of English poet, artist and writer William Blake mirrored his experience: Blake wrote in the 16th century that "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." In other words, our desires, tempered by faith, inevitably lead us to wisdom's palace. 卍

PRESIDENT MAKIGUCHI'S BIRTHDAY — JUNE 6

A Life of Conviction

SIGNIFICANT DATE

By JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

SGI President Ikeda recently compared the life of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, first president of the Soka Gakkai, to the sun's travel across the sky. In Makiguchi's youth he devoted himself to improving education "with a vigor like that of the morning sun" and in his later years "brought his life to a most solemn, magnificent conclusion, just as the crimson orb of the setting sun radiates a golden light."

Makiguchi's life was indeed like the sun's steady travel across the sky in that he maintained his convictions throughout.

But it would seem strange to call his life a sunny day. It was full of problems, more than most people experience. Makiguchi's sunrise, his youth, included his parents' divorce when he was just 6, his subsequent adoption by an uncle and his having to work straight out of elementary school.

His sunset, likewise, was not what most people would consider a beautiful one: When the Japanese government tried to force religious groups to cooperate

with the war effort, Makiguchi, then Soka Gakkai president, refused, was imprisoned and died at 72 in a closet-sized cell.

His 40-year career as an educator, too, was one difficulty after another. His progressive educational ideas and practices enraged school administrators, local politicians and parents. Recently, a Soka University graduate discovered seven long-lost articles by Makiguchi, one of which details one of these incidents. In 1919, authorities removed Makiguchi as a school principal when he refused to give preference to the child of an influential local figure, although a group of young teachers and some parents came to his defense.

Makiguchi, born June 6, 1871, thus set an example for us all. Living fearlessly for his convictions, he showed the way a Buddhist should live. Although he faced constant opposition from those who disagreed with his belief in a people's movement in religion and education, he never gave in.

When he took faith at age 57, his study, especially of Nichiren Daishonin's letters, fortified his commitment to such a people's movement. One of his favorite quotes was from Nichiren Daishonin's letter "The Opening of the Eyes": "To be praised by fools — that is the greatest shame" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 188). This

quote describes exactly how he lived his life — true to his beliefs, seeking only the praise of those whom he considered wise, namely 1) Nichiren Daishonin and 2) the common people.

Makiguchi's life shows us what a serious thing — and a wonderful thing — it is to live for our convictions. His efforts live on in the SGI organization and the Soka School System. But many people today, especially young people, not only seem to lack the fortitude to live for their convictions but do not know what their convictions are. One reason for this, it has been pointed out, may be that today's youth, unlike generations past, have not faced serious obstacles like wars, or had great causes to fight for.

Another of Makiguchi's favorite Gosho quotes explains the importance of each of us awakening to our convictions: "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, he understands the meaning of all worldly affairs" (MW-1, 82). Through Buddhist practice, our innate Buddhahood rises like a sun in the skies of our hearts. Then what we should do, the best way for us to go in this world, becomes clear. We can thus live with great conviction — even in an age lacking in conviction — just as Makiguchi did, setting new examples for coming generations to follow. 卍

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech to Okinawa Prefecture representatives at the Okinawa Training Center, Onnasan, Feb. 25.

On the completion of my itinerary in Hong Kong, I immediately came to Okinawa. I dearly wanted to see my Okinawan friends, to chant daimoku here and further consolidate the foundation for Okinawa's glorious, hope-filled future in the 21st century.

At the SGI World Peace Youth Culture Festival in Hong Kong last week [Feb. 21], in which people from more than 100 countries and territories participated, Okinawan youth division members gave a superb performance. Okinawa brims with life and vitality!

Congratulations, too, on the completion of your new Okinawa International Peace Center.

Small gatherings such as this are so important. As a token of my heartfelt appreciation for your warm welcome and hospitality, I will share a few words with you today.

Ensuring People's Safety

On our flight to Hong Kong on Japan Air Lines, the flight was, as always, smooth and the service excellent. I found Captain Shunsuke Matsuo's piloting, in particular, to be impeccable.

Each time I board a plane, I think of the hard work and heavy responsibility that rest on the captain, copilots and flight attendants, who hold the lives of their passengers in their hands. And I am also always deeply aware and appreciative of the dedicated staff and crew on the ground, who are working and praying for the safety of each flight.

Captain Matsuo's father, Shizuma Matsuo (1903-72), was a former president of JAL and is famous for achieving a perfect safety record during his 10 years in that post (1961-71). The late Mr. Matsuo wrote:

I have to be on my toes around the clock, every second, every minute. At any given moment, somewhere in the world our planes are in the air — it might



Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI

According to Shizuma Matsuo, former president of Japan Air Lines, the sense of mission, responsibility and character of the person at the top are vital in ensuring safety in all areas.

Courageous Pilots of Life

be over the Arctic, the Indian Ocean or Japan.... There is no resting or relaxing for a single day. When the phone rings in the middle of the night, I am prepared for anything when I pick up the receiver.¹

I understand his sentiment completely. Words cannot express how earnestly I prayed and worked for the members' safety in the days of group pilgrimages to the head temple. Incidentally, the journey there and back for Okinawan members used to take a whole week. The cruel and malicious behavior of the priests, who trampled on such sincere, pure-hearted SGI members, is unforgivable.

Twenty-four hours a day, there are members working for kosen-rufu around the world. That is why I, too, never relax for a moment.

Courageous Caution

According to Mr. Matsuo, the sense of mission, responsibility and character of the person at the top are vital in ensuring safety in all areas. He maintained that where lives are at stake, one can never be too careful — one must proceed with courageous caution, checking and double-checking that everything is all right. This is exactly how I feel.

Mr. Matsuo often visited the maintenance engineers and technicians early in the morning and late at night to personally express his appreciation for their efforts and to keep morale high. In keeping with the words of the Great Teacher Dengyo [founder of the Tendai school of Buddhism in Japan] that "one who illuminates even a single corner is the treasure of the nation," Mr. Matsuo thoroughly valued those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes as the greatest assets and treasures of the company and the nation. Likewise, those who work earnestly, away from the limelight, are the SGI's treasures.

Showing Appreciation

Mr. Matsuo wrote:

Returning home on days when the weather is bad, the first thing to enter my mind is, "How were today's flights?" Then, almost unconsciously I find myself picking up the receiver and phoning in to check. After being given a detailed report, I say: "Thank you. Keep up the good work," before laying down the receiver.... These words of gratitude for the flight and ground staff, working night and day at each airport, come from the bottom of my heart and are never far

from my lips. I firmly believe that my deep concern directly influences the maintenance of flight safety.²

The greater our responsibilities as leaders for kosen-rufu, the greater thoughtfulness and attention to detail we must bring to our efforts.

Also, when we sincerely thank people for their efforts, it gives them a positive boost.

A Follower's Homeward Journey

On one occasion, Nichiren Daishonin was extremely worried about the safety of Shijo Kingo on a return journey from Mount Minobu to Kamakura after he had come to visit. The Daishonin's loyal follower had been marked by a group of hostile fellow samurai, but fortunately Shijo Kingo made it home without incident. The Daishonin later wrote to him:

Indeed I was deeply worried about your last trip. An enemy will try to throw you off guard so that he may attack. If you should have to travel, do not spare the cost of a good horse. Bring along your best soldiers to defend you against a surprise attack, and ride a horse which can easily carry you in your armor. (*The*

Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 226)

Motivated by deep concern for the safety of one follower, the Daishonin offered perceptive insights into the workings of human nature along with specific precautions for his protection. This was typical of the Daishonin's thoughtfulness and compassion.

Stronger Conviction, Greater Protection

The Daishonin writes:

In the eighth volume of the *Maka Shikan* [T'ien-t'ai's *Great Concentration and Insight*] and in the eighth volume of Miaolo's *Guketsu* [annotations on the latter work] it is said "The stronger one's faith, the greater the gods' protection." This means that the protection of the gods depends on the strength of one's faith. The Lotus Sutra is a keen sword, but its might depends upon the one who wields it. (MW-1, 226)

In other words, everything hinges on one's faith. Those whose faith is strong will be kept safe from harm by the protective forces of the universe. Strong faith means to possess unbeatable resolve, compassion, prudence, courage, wisdom and good fortune.

Everything depends on capable people — capable people with strong faith. I hope that the Soka Gakkai organization in Okinawa will build an indestructible fortress of outstanding individuals for the 21st century.

I continue to pray each day for your safety and welfare, precious comrades one and all, and that each of you may make your way surely to the destination of happiness as expert pilots of kosen-rufu and daily life.

In closing, I thank the behind-the-scenes staff for their hard work.

And to all of you, I say: Please give my warmest regards to your families and the members in your areas. ☸

1. Shizuma Matsuo, *Sora ni Ikiru* (A Life of Aviation) (Tokyo: Daiyamondo-sha, 1966), pp. 18-19.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

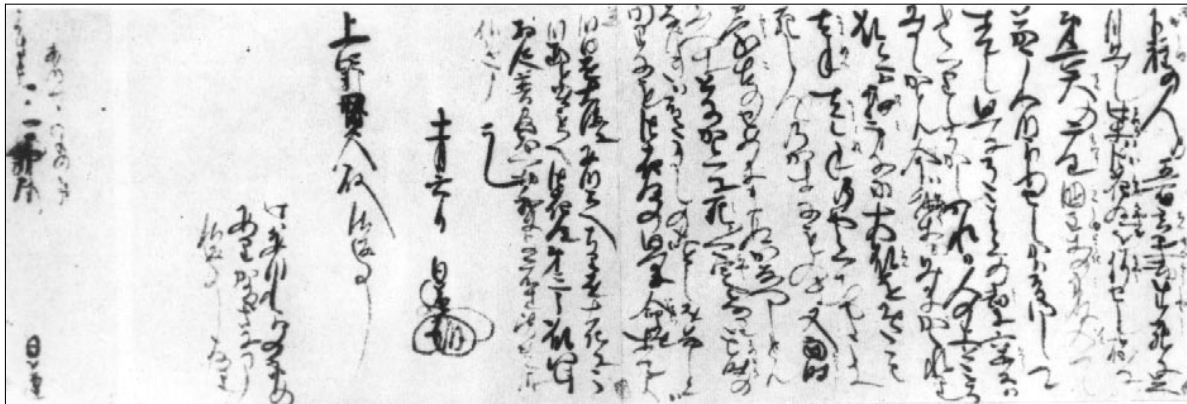
ENSAYO

La Sinceridad y el Espíritu de Nanjo Tokimitsu

Por **CESARINA CARO**
NUEVA YORK

Los miembros de la familia Nanjo habían sido discípulos del Daishonin por mucho tiempo. Nanjo Tokimitsu había conocido al Daishonin cuando apenas tenía seis años, su padre había fallecido cuando el tenía 16 años, y a esa edad, tuvo que asumir responsabilidad de las propiedades de la familia. Con los alientos y consejos de su madre, quien le decía la gran fortuna y privilegio que era poder servir a Nichiren Daishonin.

Tokimitsu hizo el compromiso de hacer esto el propósito de su vida, y desde ese momento, a pesar de sufrir de enfermedades, pobreza y persecuciones que muchas veces pusieron su vida en peligro, protegió sus discípulos y apoyó al Daishonin continuamente con ofrendas.



Una carta del Nichiren Daishonin, 'Una Respuesta al Lord Ueno' ('Lord Ueno' es el título de Nanjo Tokimitsu).

Nanjo Tokimitsu, ejemplifica el espíritu y sinceridad que podemos tener cuando hacemos ofrendas. En una de las muchas cartas de aliento y agradecimiento que el Daishonin le envió — "La Persona y La Ley" — le dice:

"Como bien sabe, uno de los sustras nos cuenta la historia de como Takusho Doji, quien ofreció al Buda una torta de barro, y tiempo después, renació como el rey Ashoka, que gobernó casi todo el territorio de la India. Puesto que el Buda es digno de

respeto el niño pudo recibir esta gran recompensa aunque la torta era sólo de barro. Sin embargo, el Buda Shakyamuni enseña que la persona que hace ofrenda al devoto del sutra del Loto en el último Día de la Ley, aunque sea por un solo día, obtendrá una for-

tuna incomparablemente mayor que la que acumularía ofrendando incontables tesoros al Buda durante cien mil eones. Entonces, ¡Cuán maravillosa es su sinceridad genuina, que lo ha lle-

POR FAVOR VEA TOKIMITSU, 11

YOLANDA MEYRELES, SANTA ROSA, CALIF.

Uno de los Momentos Más Felices de Mi Vida

En este año cumpla 19 años de mi práctica budista, fui introducida por mi hermana, todos me dijeron que con el Gohonzon podía cambiar todo lo negativo a positivo y toda infelicidad a felicidad.

En mis años de práctica he podido sobrepasar muchos obstáculos, acumular buena fortuna y salud, no sólo para mí, sino también para mis familiares y muchas amistades.

La experiencia que quiero compartir con ustedes es la que yo considero uno de mi más grandes beneficios y uno de mis cambios de karma negativo más profundo. Estoy llena de agradecimiento por el daimoku y apoyo

de todos los líderes y miembros de esta organización en una época tan difícil de mi vida.

Después de dos años de práctica, mi esposo y yo nos separamos, no eramos felices juntos, a él no le gustaba vivir en este país, y regresó a la Republica Dominicana, nuestro país natal. Hice la determinación de crear junto con mi mamá y mis dos hijos un hogar feliz.

Mis hijos habían estado practicando desde pequeños, pero cuando el menor Ivan tenía 13 años y el mayor Luis 15, Ivan me dijo: "Mamá, yo no quiero practicar más, ya yo no necesito al gohonzon." No lo tomé muy en serio, pues pensé que era "cosas de muchachos de su

edad" y me dije ya regresaré.

Ha los seis meses de que él dejó de practicar, noté que que todas sus amistades habían cambiado, sus amistades eran para mí muy raras... no pasó mucho tiempo para darme cuenta de que estaba metido en una de las pandillas más grandes, vendía drogas y no quería ir a la escuela, estaba incontrolable. ¡Que dolor, cuando yo descubrí todo eso! No lo podía creer, Ivan había sido un niño tan estudioso, inteligente y de buen corazón, me preguntaba, ¿cómo era posible que pudiese cambiar tanto en seis meses? Cuando trataba de hablarle, me decía: "Tu no sabes nada mamá, tu no sabes lo que esta pasando en esta sociedad."

Mi hijo estaba en tanto peligro, y él con su inmadurez, ¡no se daba cuenta! Desesperada comencé una gran campaña de daimoku y a llamar a los líderes por guía, quienes me decían: "No es él, es tu karma" pero como venía de la religión Católica, no podía comprender el concepto de karma.

Una de las orientaciones que fue de gran ayuda para mí fue el aliento de sinceramente entonar daimoku para que su vida fuera protegida para kosen-rufu y cambiar mi karma.

Armada con este aliento, y una renovada determinación doble mis esfuerzos para entonar daimoku, regresaba de las actividades y entonaba daimoku

hasta que él llegara 2 ó 3 de la mañana, muchas veces no venía y yo amanecía entonando daimoku. Hice todo lo que pude, fuí a hablar con la policía, al condado, con consejeros de todas las autoridades, y nadie me daba ninguna esperanza.

Así entoné daimoku hasta el amanecer por un año, cuando se iba, la policía no lo encontraba, pero el daimoku lo traía. Mi vida se llenó de amor y comprensión hacía él, por la crisis que el estaba pasando.

Cuando hice ese cambio en mi vida, supe que había un programa para niños que estaban en peligro, pero que les gustaba estudiar. Había una lista de espera y la admisión solo era posible por orden de juez. Entoné daimoku por cuatro días, casi sin parar, cuando fuimos a ver el juez, enseguida dió la orden para que Ivan fuera a ese programa.

Ese sitio era como una cárcel pero estaba supervisado por excelentes consejeros y maestros. Yo continuaba entonando daimoku por su protección y su vida para kosen-rufu. A los cuatro meses de estar en el programa me pidió que le llevara su libro de Gongyo y su sarta de cuentas. Desde ese momento empezó a cambiar su vida, a los seis meses regresó a la casa con grados "A", pero todavía tenía los amigos rodeandolo, traté de hablar con los padres de esos

POR FAVOR VEA EXPERIENCIA, 11



Yolanda Meyreles y sus hijos Ivan a la derecha y Luis a su izquierda.



Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, fundador y primer presidente de la Soka Gakkai.

EN CONMEMORACIÓN DEL 3 DE MAYO

Día de la Soka Gakkai

Poemas del Presidente Ikeda

Día de la Soka...
Por esta fecha
brilla el kosen-rufu
con grandeza sin par
y crece su ímputo ilimitadamente.

• • •

Amigos del mundo,
Bodhisattvas de la tierra,
¡con qué gran júbilo resplandecen.
Bañados en la gloria,
portando un juramento en su corazón!

• • •

Desde el tiempo sin comienzo,
éste ha sido el día
de la determinación;
de la promesa de embarcarnos juntos
en la travesía que nos llevará a la victoria.

• • •

Envueltos por el firmamento,
coronados de flores,
bajo el verde follaje de los árboles...
¡Ah, qué alegría, celebrar el Tres de Mayo!

Gracias ...Maestro Makiguchi

Por ENRIQUE RUA
MIAMI

Alumnos, de pie
Buenos días maestro,
La juventud del mundo
de todos los tiempos
reubica la historia,
la historia de los pueblos
y toma brillo tu nombre
y tu ejemplo es reconocido
en todo los idiomas.

Hay que ser muy hombre
y muy joven para dar lección

que grabaste en la eternidad,
tu devoción de valor,
18 de noviembre de 1930...
Maestro Makiguchi... fundador
de la Soka Gakkai
su tierra assolada por gobiernos
militares
terremotos ... y ahora
la gran hecatombe...
segunda guerra mundial.

Miseria...hambre, y
niños sin hogar,
la humanidad en su forma más
cruel,

bombas...y muerte
revelas tu verdadera identidad.
conoces el camino del respeto
a la vida, de las dignidades de la
paz universal y la
creación del vaor; cada paso más
firme, rejuvenecías,
repasabas la lección
y más firme tu resolución...
ni el inhumano trato, ni la
tortura cruel, vencieron tu noble
actitud, diste tu vida
por la mística ley... en ella estás
presente...en el daimoku,
en la juventud
y en el siglo que vendrá.

TOKIMITSU, DESDE LA PÁG. 10

vado a proteger al devoto del Sutra del Loto durante años! De acuerdo con las palabras del Buda, es seguro que usted renacerá en la tierra pura del Pico de Águila. ¡Qué gran buena fortuna posee!" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pág. 263; *Los Principales Escritos de Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pág. 269)

En este pasaje del Goshō, Nichiren Daishonin alaba a Tokimitsu por su sinceridad, y le señala la incomparable fortuna que es acumulada al hacer ofrendas al Buda Verdadero — Nichiren Daishonin — en el Último Día de la Ley.¹

Hoy en día, la Soka Gakkai y la SGI es la organización que abraza el espíritu y compasión de Nichiren Daishonin, lle-

vando a cabo la voluntad del Buda Verdadero; cualquier apoyo y protección a la soka Gakkai y a la SGI, es en este sentido, una ofrenda al Buda Verdadero. El 3 de mayo, marca el día en el cual conmemoramos el Día de la Soka Gakkai, y es el mes en el que tradicionalmente tenemos la oportunidad de expresar nuestro agradecimiento con nuestras contribuciones financieras para apoyar el movimiento del kosen-rufu de la SGI en los Estados Unidos. El Presidente Ikeda, en su discurso en la 58ava reunión de responsables de sedes, señaló:

La SGI, descendiendo y está directamente conectada con el Buda original, es un reino de bendiciones incomparables en el mundo, o en cuanto a eso se refiere, en cualquier parte del uni-

verso. La fortuna acumulada cuando nos asociamos y protegemos a la SGI es incalculable.

Con esta convicción, retomemos nuestras circunstancias individuales a través de nuestros sinceros esfuerzos para apoyar nuestra contribución conmemorativa de este año, ofreciendo nuestras oraciones al Gohonzon con una fuerte determinación. ❧

1. En el Último Día de la Ley, el devoto del Sutra del Loto es específicamente Nichiren Daishonin, que fue él que propagó la esencia del sutra y quien cumplió las profecías reveladas en el Sutra del Loto.

Este pasaje también enseña que la fortuna acumulada es retribuida en proporción a la grandeza de la enseñanza o a quien la ofrenda es hecha.

EXPERIENCIA, DESDE LA PÁG. 10

otros niños, pero ellos no tenían esperanzas de que sus hijos pudiesen cambiar.

Aunque él estaba en la casa y con una práctica consistente yo todavía no estaba tranquila, el dormía tranquilo, y yo continuaba entonando daimoku por su protección y su vida para kosen-rufu. Al final del segundo año él hizo la determinación de dedicar su vida a kosen-rufu con la resolución de llegar a ser el mejor discípulo del Presidente Ikeda, de eso hace cuatro años. Desde ese momento, empezó a estudiar el Goshō y las orientaciones del Presidente Ikeda, a quien conoció en su última visita a San Francisco en 1993.

Actualmente, Ivan es un joven muy feliz, de un entusiasmo contagioso, junto a su hermano Luis

(él cual me ayudó mucho a entonar daimoku por Ivan) ha estado practicando vigorosamente, asumiendo responsabilidad en la División Juvenil. El año pasado se graduó del "Junior College" con dos honores en Química, hoy en día, está estudiando en la Universidad de Sonoma. Mi hijo mayor, es estudiante de la Universidad de California a Santa Cruz; ellos son mi orgullo y "gran prueba real," han sobrepasado mis sueños. ¡El poder del Gohonzon es incalculable!

Estoy muy agradecida a mi hermana, los líderes y miembros de esta organización por su gran apoyo, la Soka Gakkai es en realidad una gran familia. Mi determinación es siempre ayudar a todos los miembros para que sean felices, y ayudar a los padres y madres a entonar daimoku para que nuestros hijos sean los futuros líderes para kosen-rufu. ❧



The Mississippi River is a major flyway for migratory birds of North America. A new program by an Army Corps of Engineers crew creates new grasslands for the tired birds.

Breaking Tradition

“
Most confrontations arise because
people lack an understanding of
each other’s position.
”

By **DAVE McNEILL**
MANAGING EDITOR

For David Busse, it began with dialogue and trust. The Army Corps of Engineers’ Water Control Team in St. Louis had one mission: to aid navigation on the Mississippi River. But Busse, the senior water control manager, and his crew thought they could do more. So once a year since 1994, they have had another goal in mind: helping the environment. For about 30 days or so in the summer, they lower the water level in pools that form upstream of dams so grasses can grow along the banks, providing oases for migrating birds, food for fish and oxygen for the river.

What was it that allowed the Corps of Engineers, long considered by some to be environmentally unfriendly, to work together with conservationists? Dialogue, pure and simple, broke through the way things had been done for 60 years.

“In St. Louis, we meet with different groups and hear different opinions,” said Busse, who’s been with the corps for 15 years. “We will go to environmental conferences to get a feel for

what is important to them and see if we can do something. And we invite them to our river engineering conferences. Most confrontations arise because people lack an understanding of each other’s position.”

For years, such confrontations were the norm, according to Busse. Much of the time was spent yelling across the table at one another, with both sides taking up extreme positions. Eventually, though, some people began to feel that that approach wasn’t very productive and began to listen, seeking a common ground.

“The walls started breaking down,” Busse said. “We realized that our two goals — navigation and conservation — weren’t complete opposites. Through continual dialogue, we came to understand that it is not one thing or another.”

As the two sides talked, they began to trust each other, and less drastic proposals emerged. And one day on a boat in the middle of the Mississippi, wildlife biologist Ken Dalrymple made a sug-



Grasslands such as these are growing in pools along the Mississippi River thanks to an innovative Environmental Pool Management system developed by David Busse and his colleagues.

gestion and Busse said simply, “We can do that.” Hungry, tired birds soon had 3,000 new acres of grassland.

The lower water level leaves less of a cushion for the 80,000 ships and barges that pass through the locks each year, but sensitive satellite technology allows the corps to monitor the river’s flow every hour and make any necessary adjustments.

The idea that existing structures of locks can be used to enhance the environment at no extra cost to the taxpayer is catching on. Now called Environmental Pool Management, the principles Busse and his colleagues have developed are being used at

other locks and dams up and down the river. Busse himself was named conservationist of the year by a local organization in 1996.

Though justifiably proud of his team’s innovations and the positive chain reaction they have caused, Busse may be most proud of what started it all: a commitment to dialogue. “You’ve got to trust each other,” he said. “You have to know where each other is coming from.”

With reporting by Cheryl Utley of Prairie Village, Mo., and Richard Papalardo of St. Louis.

TEEN TIMES

A SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION OF THE 'WORLD TRIBUNE'

By, For and About the Junior High and High School Divisions

Issue No. 9, May 16, 1997

You've Got Friends in Utah

Members of the junior high and high school divisions in Utah decided to get together and say hello to everyone across the nation:

Ashanté Esonwune: Hello. I am 17, almost 18, years old. I live in Taylorsville, Utah. I am a fortune child, which means I was born into the practice. I am a black American and in the 12th grade at Taylorsville High School. I like to do a lot of activities, like shopping, partying, dancing and playing sports. My goal when I graduate is to be a hair beautician and study cosmetology at a community college!



D.J. (Dennis Junior) Bennett: 21 years old; fortune child. Weight: 140 lbs. Hobbies: country dance, party. Eyes: brown and blue. Music: country, rock, alternative, rap. Graduated: Granger High, 1994. Workplace: Delta Center, a large sports and activity arena. (interviewed by Ashanté Esonwune)



Dante Jackson: What makes me unique is that I am 14 years old and I am already meeting some rap artists. I am struggling to come every Sunday and be a member of the SGI.



Nakita Swanigan: I'm 13 years old and have been practicing for two years. Some benefits I got are a puppy and other things I can't think of. The reason I chant is to maintain a high life-condition.



Angel Woodrow: I am 22 years old. I have been practicing for a little over seven years now. One of my benefits from practicing is being the junior high and high

school division chief for the past four years. It has been an experience for sure! I went to the Florida Nature and Culture Center last August, and it was a blast to meet the people I will be working for kosen-rufu with!



Cassie Taylor: I'm from Taylorsville. I'm doing good in school, in the sixth grade. I have been in an acting class for two years and we are getting ready to perform *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. I am really hoping to get a good part. I wish you could all come see me! Thanks for letting me do this — it will be really cool to see myself in the "Teen Times"!



Aaron: Hi, I'm 13 years old. I like to play sports, and I have been practicing all my life.



Chris Bey: I'm 12 years old, and I like to play outdoor sports. The thing that is most unique about me is when I want something — like going to California — I keep going for it until I get it!



Denise Brown: I am 15 years, 9 months old. I live in Logan, which is two hours away from the community center. There are five people in my family, and four practice Buddhism. My sister, Cassy, is 25 and teaches English in Japan. My brother, Bobby, is 22 and a massage therapist. Next trimester I have ceramics, English research, biology, drivers ed, and weight training. I like to go shopping, hiking, snow-shoeing, river rafting, to watch demolition derbies, Grizzly hockey games, and *Beavis and Butthead*. When I'm 18 I may get a tattoo and my tongue pierced. **T**



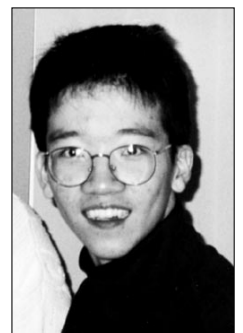
Utah members in front of their community center in Salt Lake City.

Know the Enemy

An Essay on Teen Depression

By JOHN WEN
New York City

The following was written as a high school project.



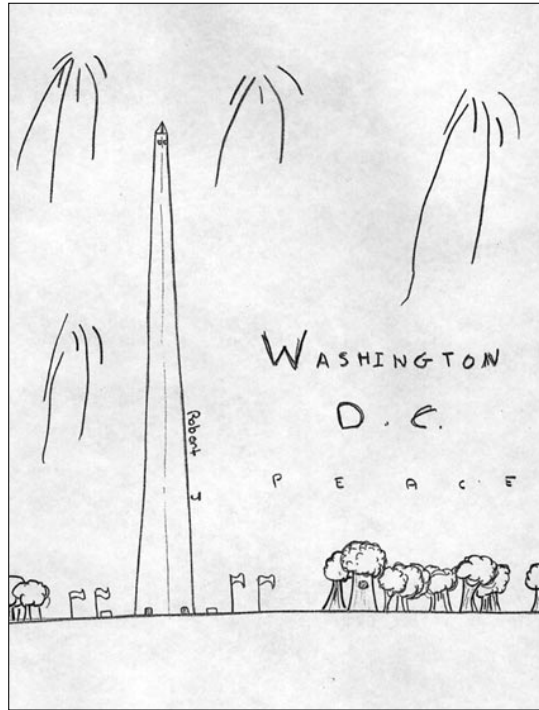
John Wen

At a time when drugs, AIDS, racism, etc., hamper the lives of young adolescents, teen depression is almost inevitable. Adolescents are marked by confusion and problems. They are faced with pressures from school, work, parents and friends. When these feelings last for a long period or occur on a regular basis, then the individual is in a state of depression. According to Michael Maloney, M.D., and Rachel Kranz, authors of *Straight Talk About Anxiety and Depression*, the adolescent will experience "deep feelings of hopelessness, inadequacy, etc."

The three types of depression a teenager may experience are, according to Maloney and Kranz, "low spirits, set off by a life event, and clinical depression." A teen who is going through a "low spirits" depression may feel angry, frightened and worried. It could

PLEASE SEE DEPRESSION, B

Greetings From an Atlanta Artist



This month we are happy to display some drawings by Robert Johnson, who is 11 and from Atlanta.

Robert consistently carries his art book with him and is always ready to draw. He is very inspired by his mother, who is an artist as well.

Robert says that the flower symbolizes

beauty, and he drew the Washington Monument sketch because his mother attended Howard University in Washington, D.C.

After participating for some time in the Boys and Girls Group, Robert recently participated in his first junior high school division activity. Welcome Robert!

Mother's Love

By VERONICA YEATES
Atlanta

When I think of my mother, I feel her warm touch of love. She does many things for me. She helps me with my homework and is interested to know my friends. I know she does these things because she loves me and wants me to be happy. Sometimes I take this for granted and don't realize how lucky I am. So this is the perfect opportunity to express the way I feel.

My mother has gone through many struggles. One month before she got married, her father died of cancer. About a year later, she had a stillborn child. Three years later I was born. Then, when I was in the second grade, my mother had two miscarriages.

My mother has taught me that during my life I should always think of the positive and not the negative. Even though she has gone through some rough times, she always keeps her head up high. When I grow up, I want to be just like her.

I love her not only as my mother but also as my best friend.

I love you, Mom.



DEPRESSION, FROM PAGE A

also be connected to a physical cause, such as lack of sleep, diet or medication. When a teenager unexpectedly loses a loved one in an accident or gets dumped (for example, in a relationship), he or she may experience a "set off by a life event" depression.

Clinical depression is another term for major depression. The main difference between this type and others is that it has no life event to explain the depression.

The causes for teen depression, according to Maloney and Kranz, can be from "buried feelings," attitudes or physical conditions. Buried feelings can be in reference to the past and present. When anyone buries feelings during childhood, he or she builds defenses against them. In a way, the person is not letting those feelings affect him or her. But in the process of becoming a teenager, he or she is unlikely to maintain those defenses due to changes in body chemistry, hormones and weight.

Any incident can prompt buried feelings to resurface. Any feeling can turn into depression when it comes back.

Buried feelings in reference to the present can be anything such as loss of a pet, parents going through a divorce or moving away to another town. Whatever they are, they always come back one way or another.

According to the same source, a teen's attitude can create or lead to depression. At times it can actually make the condition worse. Examples of flawed attitudes include expecting others to be perfect and to one's liking, or expecting oneself to be perfect. Instead of learning from one's mistakes, a teen may be tormented by them.

Sometimes a teen might concentrate on the negative instead of on the positive, like focusing on the one bad event of a day and ignoring the good ones. A teen with a tendency to focus on the past or the future instead of the present can also go through such a condition. A teen might try reason or fault to discredit a compliment

that he receives.

Physical causes of depressions could be anything. Alcohol, drugs or medications (especially depressants) can cause depressions when abused or even in normal usage. According to Judith Galas, author of *Teen Suicide*, a study in Louisville, Ky., found that 70 percent of the teens studied were drug abusers. In 1980, one-third of high school seniors said they had used marijuana in the past month. Sometimes drug abuse is encouraged by parents who abuse drugs. For example, Galas cites a 17-year-old high school senior who was given marijuana by her mother.

In more severe depressions, some teenagers contemplate suicide. Suicide may appear to provide relief from all the problems and pressures of growing up. According to the National Center for Health Statistics, suicide is the third leading cause for death behind accidents and homicide. The center also states that a young person commits suicide every 100 minutes in this country. A 1990 survey of teens listed in *Who's Who*

Among American High School Students revealed that 60 percent knew a teen who had attempted or accomplished suicide. According to Warren Colman, author of *Teen Suicide* (not the same book as that written by Galas), more than 5,000 teens now take their own lives each year in the United States.

Teen depression is a serious matter. It should not be taken lightly. Immediate and future action should be directed at making teens, parents, and families more aware of the types, causes, symptoms and solutions to depression. Some suggestions are for schools to educate teens about depression, provide phone lines for teenagers and their families, and support better communication between parent and child.

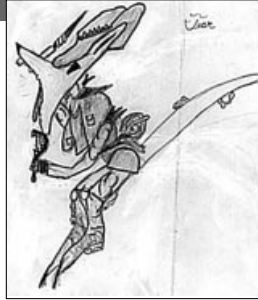
According to the first installment of SGI President Ikeda's "Discussions on Youth," published in the *World Tribune*, teens experience problems with grades, home, health, looks, the opposite sex and friends. Maybe this is why so many teens are shadowed by depression every day.



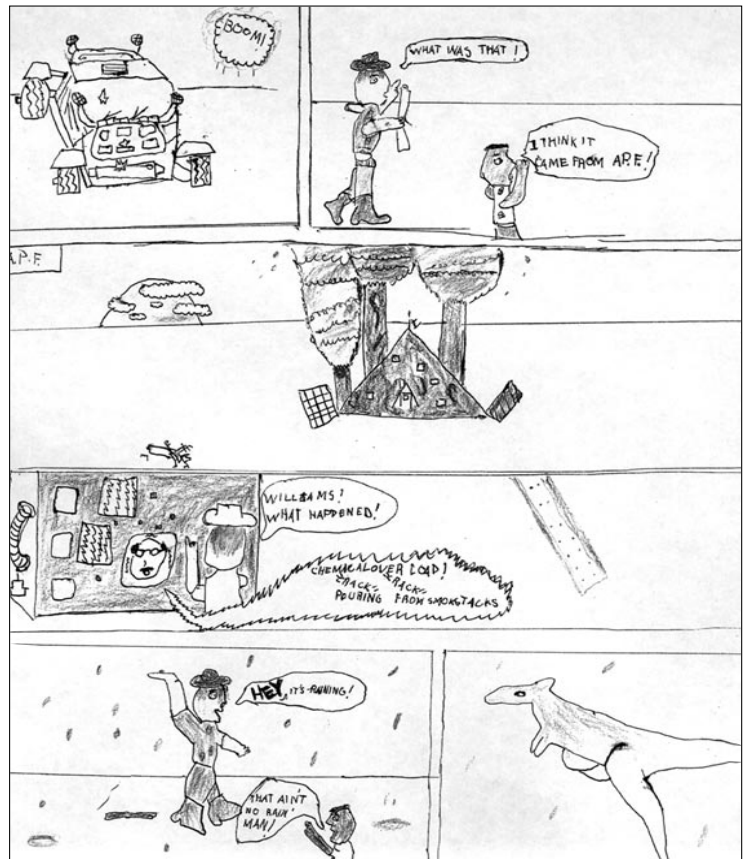
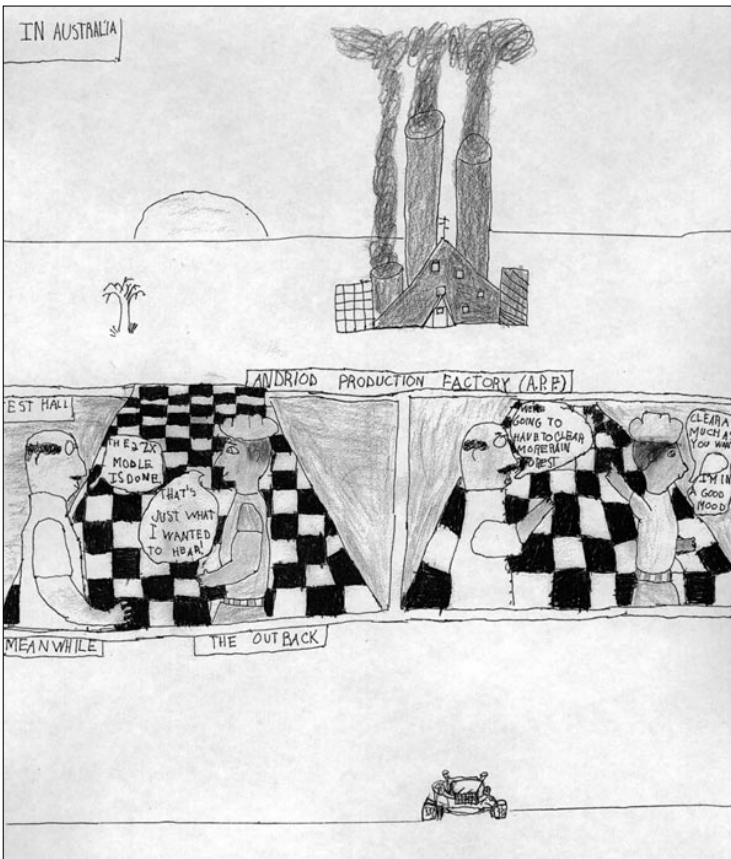
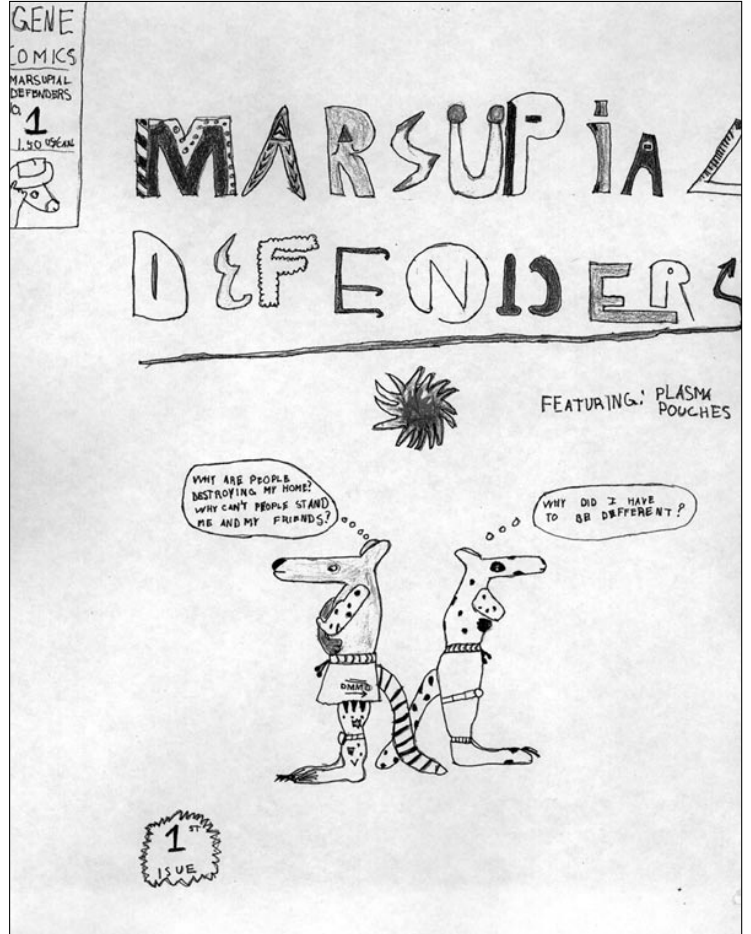
Marsupials To the Rescue!



This month, we are proud to display the comics of Gene Mahoney, 12, from Des Moines, Iowa. Gene likes to play video games and draw, and he loves to read comic books (like the X-men and Marvel comics). Gene has always been interested in Australia and



was saddened when he found out that the continent used to have much rainforest that has since been destroyed. So he created a superheroes idea similar to the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, except that his characters are Australian animals, like kangaroos. His idea was for this comic strip to address environmental issues and prejudice through his characters. Gene entered his creation in the local Invention Convention last year and chanted lots of daimoku to do well. Competing with other students from schools all around the area, Gene was picked to go to the state convention where he received an honorary patent for his idea!



• STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY • STUDY •

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Is Buddhist Prayer Different From Other Prayers?

Q: My friends pray to God and whether chanting is the same. Is Buddhist prayer different from prayer in other religions?



A: Prayer in Buddhism is significantly different from the prayer with which many of us are familiar. If we don't understand the difference, there will be a tendency to continue to pray as though we are trying to communicate with some external power. This would be taking on only the superficial aspects of a Buddha, while inside remaining attached to previous ways of thinking.

Prayer in the Western tradition tries to communicate with a transcendent power that is above and beyond us. It doesn't exist in the life of human beings; it has to be

found somewhere else. Prayer becomes other-directed. This type of religious view is based upon the premise that human beings are originally sinful and, thus, profoundly flawed; inherently "no good." Prayers can become filled with feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

According to Buddhism, the source or power is within us. A Buddhist prayer is inner-directed. We are seeking assistance from our Buddha nature within. In Buddhism, human beings are inherently worthy and good. We possess the Buddha nature. Buddhist prayers are then filled with a sense of responsibility and appreciation.

Traditional Western prayer can be pessimistic and superficial.

Greg Martin, SGI-USA vice general director, offers answers to readers' questions.

Buddhism has an essentially optimistic view of human life. It is profound. The Gosho reads, "One does not throw away gold because the bag is dirty, one does not ignore the sandalwood trees because of the foul odor of the eranda trees around them, and one does not gather lotuses because the pond in the valley where they grow is filthy" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 7, p. 46).

In this we can see the fundamentally positive, optimistic view of human life that the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin possesses. Our prayer should be that we are going to try to gather lotuses in the muddy swamp of our lives. Chanting daimoku to the Gohonzon is intended to open our eyes


to see those lotuses.

It is extremely difficult for us to perceive what is at the depths of our lives.

The Daishonin created a prayer for us to open our eyes and see and reveal the treasure that we possess.

If you are chanting in front of the Gohonzon and searching for some power out there to come to you and bring you a miracle, you are looking in the wrong place.

Our Buddha nature is in the deep, dark storehouse of our lives. It is not easy to find. Within our lives lie not only the cause of suffering, but also the solution to all of our problems.

If you pray with an outwardly directed prayer, your prayers will not be answered. 



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MAY 3 'To Break Free of My Self-Imposed Limitations'

By DAVID EISENBERG
San Francisco

Every May 3, we celebrate Soka Gakkai Day in our local SGI-USA organizations. We have big commemorative meetings and many people make special contributions to the organization. But what does May 3 really signify?

The facts are that on May 3, 1951, Josei Toda was inaugurated as the second president of the Soka Gakkai, and in 1960, on the same date, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president of the Soka Gakkai. That's all pretty cool, but there has to be more that makes that date stand out, right? Well, there is! It's not so much that both these great individuals became the presidents of our organization, but the spirit and dedication they embodied and the determination they expressed as they committed themselves completely to the happiness of all people.

When I reflect on what May 3 means to me personally, I realize that more than just an anniversary, it is a time to reflect on my behavior, to take inventory, so to speak, of my life-condition and

my efforts for the sake of others. It is also an opportunity to make even stronger determinations toward the next May 3.

In his inaugural address in 1951, President Toda stated:

Although I am an unworthy disciple, I hereby resolve to take the office of president with an absolute determination to dedicate my own life to the Gohonzon, having a vivid sense of the Daishonin's advent and cherishing unflinching faith. (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 7)

The power behind that statement is so impressive to me. President Toda was unconcerned with the limitations society or even one's mind might put on our potential. In that same speech, he went on to say:

In my lifetime, I will convert by my own hand 750,000 families through propagation. Until that time, I hope that the clergy will

prepare for that many converts. If my goal should not be attained by the end of my life, you need not hold a funeral for me, but just throw my remains into the sea off Shinagawa, all right? (*The Human Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 33)

At that time, there were only several thousand members in the entire organization. But Toda was unswayed. He understood the unlimited potential of human beings and believed that with 100 percent effort, anything could be achieved. In December 1957, the total membership of the Soka Gakkai reached 765,000 households. Just three months later, on April 2, 1958, President Toda died peacefully, having reached the goal he set only seven years earlier.

In my own life, I always struggle with having the confidence to make such strong and determined statements. There is always a part of me that says, "You

might be able to do it, but what if you can't?" The strength of character that both presidents Toda and Ikeda displayed provides me with the encouragement that I, too, can overcome my limitations and express my unlimited potential. Sometimes just believing that I actually have such great potential is a stretch for me, but the longer I practice this Buddhism, the more convinced I become that I do.

For this May 3, I am examining my actions as a husband, son, citizen of San Francisco and member of the SGI-USA. I am determined to break free of my self-imposed limitations and to challenge my karma every day. The words of the successive Soka Gakkai presidents encourage me and their actions guide me in that journey. I will always do my very best for the sake of others! I close with a quote from President Ikeda from his inaugural address in 1960:

Although I am young, on behalf of President Toda's disciples, I will take the leadership toward the kosen-rufu of substantiation, taking one step forward at a time, starting today. (May 1994 *Seikyo Times*, p. 2) 