

World Tribune

No. 3131

THE YEAR OF ADVANCEMENT TOWARD THE NEW CENTURY

MARCH 21, 1997

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Scholars To Study SGI-USA

A survey of SGI-USA, modeled after Dr. Bryan Wilson's study of the SGI-UK, will be conducted by UC Santa Barbara scholars starting next month.

By JEFF FARR

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Santa Monica, Calif., March 13

We're about to find out a lot more about the SGI-USA. How much time do members spend studying Buddhism? Why do members join in the first place? What do members think of other religions? Do they consider them-

selves liberals or conservatives? What is the ethnic makeup of the organization?

These are just a few of the questions that a respected scholar from the University of California at Santa Barbara will ask in a survey to be sent to 1,200 randomly selected members across the country. Dr. Phillip E. Hammond, of the UCSB department of religious studies, with the assistance of doctoral student David W. Machacek, will conduct the survey beginning next month.

The SGI-USA is fully endorsing this study. "Among other things, this is a golden opportunity for a distinguished scholar to study and write about our mem-

bers," Al Albergate, the SGI-USA community relations director, says. "This will provide objective information for other scholars and anybody interested in learning about SGI-USA."

Because the accuracy of the results will depend on a maximum response, Greg Martin, an SGI-USA vice general director, urges those who receive the survey to fill it out and return it promptly. With more than 90 questions, the questionnaire will take about an hour to complete. Most of the questions are multiple choice, with several short-answer questions also included.

At a meeting last June, SGI-USA's Central Executive Committee agreed to open the orga-

nization up to this study, believing, as Mr. Martin explains, that "the interest of respected scholars in our organization can only help to increase understanding of our movement in society." This was the case with a study of the SGI-UK by Dr. Bryan Wilson and Dr. Karel Dobbelaere, published by the Oxford University Press in 1994 as *A Time To Chant*.

Dr. Hammond, whose most recent books are *Religion and Personal Autonomy* and *The Protestant Presence in Twentieth Century-America*, shares an interest with Dr. Wilson in the social and cultural forces that lead people to pick one religion over

PLEASE SEE SURVEY, 4

Life's a Marathon

Photos by GREGORY NAKASUJI



For the eighth time in nine years, Los Angeles-area SGI-USA performing groups entertain fans and runners at the Los Angeles Marathon, March 2. (Above) The Dance Crew takes the stage. The America Rainbow Chorus sings 'Hero' as local members wave SGI flags to encourage the appreciative runners.



Answers to Common Subscriptions Questions

By DAVE McNEILL

MANAGING EDITOR

Santa Monica, Calif., March 13

The new direct mail subscriptions system for SGI-USA publications, which began last month, is well underway. The system makes it easier than ever for readers across the country to pay for their subscriptions.

Naturally, as with any major change of this sort, there have been some glitches. But the subscriptions staff wants to assure readers that everything is being done to identify and solve the problems, answer people's questions and provide the best service possible. Indeed, many of the problems have already been solved, and the office has added a temporary operator to handle the influx of calls.

Most of the subscribers' questions have to do with understanding the renewal notices that were sent out in February. The subscriptions office staff offers these tips to facilitate the renewal process:

- To renew your subscription, you must use the renewal form sent to you. Calling the 800

PLEASE SEE SUBSCRIPTIONS, 4

VOICES

How do you maintain a seeking spirit after many years of practice?

Members of New York #2 Joint Territory respond:



For me it is important to always maintain clear goals. When these are accomplished, I create new ones. It is vital for me to stay close to the members and work side by side with them. Struggling together to make a happy life encourages and inspires my practice consistently. Every day I fortify my practice by studying SGI President

Ikeda's guidance. I have seen members revolutionize their lives with daimoku and study of *The Human Revolution*. Using this practice to find answers to life's problems is the heart of a seeking spirit.

— SUSANA MOROMISATO, Garfield, N.J.



I try to make a seeking spirit my attitude toward life every day — to build on yesterday, to go further than before, to learn as much as I can about life and living. Wanting to continue to always move ahead is based on deep appreciation to the Gohonzon for how far I've come up to now and how much I've changed.

— STEVE PIONTEK, Allendale, N.J.



During my 26 years of practice, I have found three basic things that keep my seeking spirit alive: daimoku, caring for others and study. Chanting daimoku makes my life strong and joyful, and trying to help others become happy forces me to seek deeper compassion, wisdom and courage.

For me, the key to keeping this whole process going is daily study before doing morning gongyo. Then, when I start to chant, I hit the ground running — my mind is already focused on "What can I do for kosen-rufu?"

— BETH POPPER, Englewood, N.J.



In a word, *gongyo*. When I joined in 1969, my district leader told me that *gongyo* was the bottom line of this practice. "If someone is doing *gongyo* then that person will always win," he said. This has remained a guiding principle in my years of practice. During morning *gongyo* and daimoku, I plan my day, determining to challenge my

weaknesses and to implement to the best of my ability Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. After *gongyo*, I study for about five minutes. From these actions naturally flow a seeking mind and joy of practice.

— KENNETH BOYCE, Amsterdam, N.Y.



When the priesthood issue first surfaced, I found it very confusing and it brought up many questions. The general feeling in our area, especially from the people in leadership positions, was not to take sides. It was very difficult for me to take a stand against evil when I couldn't even see it. Only because I sought to understand President Ikeda's guidance and the Gosho in my life did I resolve my doubts and deepen my understanding. Taking a strong stand against Nikken and struggling with this issue has totally rejuvenated all aspects of my practice.

— GAIL LOCKWOOD, Buffalo, N.Y.

Moving Ahead After Divorce

EDITORIAL

A good marriage," said the French essayist Montaigne some 400 years ago, "would be between a blind wife and a deaf husband." It seems, however, that U.S. couples suffer no eye or ear problems, as nearly half of all marriages in this country end in divorce.

People's views on this trend run the gamut. A new book by Barbara DaFoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture*, laments the effects of divorce on children and warns that society may be too easily accepting the two-parent family's decline. Other books, like *The Way We Are* or *The Good Divorce* say that divorce is with us and we should learn how to deal with it and its effects on children. Bookstore shelves overflow with guides for divorced women, men and children. Other volumes urge reconciliation and a return to self-sacrifice and traditional family values. Even so, experts on both sides agree that some divorces are necessary.

While some religions doctrinally oppose divorce, such social concepts as marriage and divorce are not fundamental to the Daishonin's Buddhism. Divorce is a private decision. Touching on the process of reaching that decision, SGI President Ikeda has said: "I encourage unhappy couples to remember that, from the Buddhist perspective, it is impossible to build personal happiness on the suffering of others. Such situations sometimes require painful reflection and forbearance. But through that pain one can strengthen and discipline the internal workings of the conscience.... Ultimately, those concerned are able to minimize the destruction of human relationships that might otherwise result."

Naturally, even after such "painful reflection and forbearance" couples may decide to end a relationship. As practitioners of the Daishonin's Buddhism, everything is a source of our own internal growth, our own human revolution. Even

getting over the hate we may hold for a divorced partner, no matter how painful the past, helps us grow. Couples who've divorced have a connection, and by continuing to chant for the other person's happiness, we expand our own capacity for compassion, and we ultimately benefit.

Every encounter ends with parting. Whether through divorce or death, relationships in this lifetime will eventually end.

"The important thing is to overcome the sorrow that accompanies any type of separation," Mr. Ikeda said in a recent dialogue. "The vital thing is to continue to advance. Do not look back. Just forge on. There must be many reasons why people bid farewell to one another. People have their own thoughts and situations. It may be difficult indeed not to look back. The deep scars within your heart may not heal quickly.

"Yet brace yourself so you can look forward," he continued. "You have to advance, even a step. You should strive to move on as if cutting through the clouds in your heart. As long as you advance, new hope will be born. The sun will also rise. Only when you continue to advance can you encounter an even better, more wonderful 'you.' A new life will unfold for you."

Our faith allows us to use any sadness or pain as a force for our growth, so that we can go on to achieve our goals and fulfill our missions. As Nichiren Daishonin urges Shijo Kingo, "A truly wise man will not be carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 206). Nothing — not the giddiness of falling in love nor the agony that separation can be — should keep us from the path we have chosen for our lives.

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:

With the May commemorative contribution coming up, what is the significance to you of supporting the organization financially?

Please be specific and limit your responses to 50 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.

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**WORLD TRIBUNE
MAILBOX**

Happily Ever After?

We rarely read an experience about happily married, male/female couples. Maybe an occasional pioneer who stuck it out with her military husband. But they are frequently about women who have escaped the cruel clutches of an abusive husband. Or a happy member and his or her same-sex partner.

Actually, spousal battery is extremely rare. Domestic violence usually involves unmarried partners. The typical battered woman has children by multiple partners. The typical "batterer" owes child support to several former live-in partners. It appears that the root cause of domestic battery is a mutual lack of commitment, fidelity and responsibility.

Imagine you are a mainstream member of society. You read the *World Tribune*. You detect an obvious bias against traditional marriage. Would you want to raise your children in this religion?

I would like to see some experiences about some happy, monogamous, heterosexual marriages. I would be interested in the struggles they face teaching values to children in a world where almost anything (except character) is considered normal.

— ROBIN BECK, Momence, Ill.

Are We Truly Open Minded?

Open our minds and hearts through diversity. It sounds easy, doesn't it? We all tend to think we are this way but are we truly? I questioned why the *World Tribune* thought it appropriate to publish condescending comments that members said about each other when we so eagerly strive to develop the positive aspects of each other.

When I read the "Mailbox" letters referring to the "Joe YMD" comic strip I had to ask myself if I am open minded. Ben Model (Oct. 18, 1996), says this comic strip "is misrepresentative of what the SGI is supposed to be about." So then, what is the SGI? It is a home where we can be free to express our ideas, creativity and feelings, to enhance one another and to be accepted for our uniqueness so that we can joyfully contribute to kosen-rufu in the manner that best suits us. This is the beauty of our organization. Do you agree?

As Jessie Newburn mentioned [Feb. 14], I also applaud and now realize the efforts of the *World Tribune* staff in producing a paper that reflects the voices and lives of all the treasured members. It is a prime challenge to constantly cultivate our wisdom to encourage the Soka Group or anyone to participate in activities in whatever way we can....

I don't think "Joe YMD" is intended for us to emulate his actions in any style whatsoever. If we open our hearts we can appreciate the contributions of others and naturally our lives will blossom. And we won't be so offended when our views are different from others. The "Joe YMD" comic strip has created a new opportunity for us to reflect upon ourselves once again.

Thank you so much, *World Tribune*, for printing the diverse opinions of us all.

— VADORA YEATES, Atlanta

P.S. You go, Joe!

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,

Fresh Paint Takes On a New Meaning

PERSPECTIVE

By LYNETTE YETTER
LOS ANGELES

I'm going to paint the ceiling of my kitchen nook the blue of the sky. The bold orange and yellow colors of the sun will outline the hand-sized panes of glass in the bay window, the window that can swing open on its hinges to let the cool morning air tumble in, scented with February L.A. flowers. Yes, the ceiling will be sky blue; the walls a magenta, a fuchsia, a deep, rich, red-violet tone that emanates a life of its own.

The built-in table and bench seats will be the blue of the Sea of Cortez on a summer's day, like the blue of the hand-carved table and chairs that I saw in that shop in Mesilla, N.M. The center of the table was a sunburst, primary yellow with orange highlights.

Oh, how I wanted that table when I saw it. For when I looked at it, and its four matching sunburst-in-impossibly-blue-sky chairs, my heart felt happy and free.

Quite a contrast to the heavy burden I'd been laboring under. I had been lamenting about having to help take care of my Alzheimer's mom — and grandmother with Alzheimer's, too, and my stepmom with her multiple surgeries. And I agonized over the relationship with my (ex?) boyfriend. When I thought our relationship was over, I ached with a deep love for him and cried out with the hope, "Somehow we'll work it out!" But then it seemed that to be with him, I would have to give up my dreams.

The house, mine to live in since my mom moved into the retirement home, was a monochromatic off-white, like a cold, dense fog settling around me, cutting off my vision of the distant vistas of possibility. I feared that maybe Alzheimer's was contagious, and I would get it, too, taking on the house full of possessions and responsibilities that my mother had rescinded in a blank-eyed stare.

I wondered why I should go to

all the work of living my dream of being an artist, when in a few short years, I'd have to pack it all away, like my mom and grandma, and get ready to die.

"I'll help you paint the house," my brother once offered. "What colors do you want to paint it?"

"Oh, just leave it the same," I shrugged, like the long-suffering Eeyore of the *Winnie the Pooh* stories.

Staggering under those perceived burdens, I continued on

It's all a matter of perspective. My Alzheimer's mom is my benefit. "I find that as the physical deteriorates," she told me, "that I am becoming a human being, rather than a human doing."

My grandmother, with Alzheimer's, too, now praises me with the delight of a child and the experience of a lifetime.

"You are so adaptable," she said in a lucid moment, looking me straight in the eye, "I know you will accomplish whatever you set out to do!"

"Oh," she caught herself, suddenly remembering her long-time training and turning to my mom, "but we mustn't tell her that, for she'll just get a big head."

Wow, I thought, if her dementia hadn't caused her to forget her mental habits, I never would have known that she admires me; that the reason she never praised me wasn't because she was disappointed in me but

because she believed that was how to help me grow!

And my stepmother's surgeries are helping her to get healthier!

For Valentine's Day, I started a million daimoku campaign to find my soulmate. My heart is strong with the prayer. Thank you for this opportunity to change my karma in all areas of my life!

And the house, why, it's the type of home that I have been chanting for from day one.

"You can have Buddhist meetings there," my mom offered. "Put your ceramic studio in the basement. Teach pottery classes. Why not convert the hall closet into a darkroom?"

Hey, if I live to be 100, then I still have 62-and-a-half years ahead of me to make art, teach classes, and travel around the world!

Yes, the walls of my kitchen nook need to flow with an inner light. I'll learn how to do that transparent wiping technique that's so popular in the Southwest — many colors layered and blended in streaks that mimic the antiquity of 500-year-old wooden doors set in crumbling adobe walls; the layers of paints, of history, of lives, flaking off, revealing the continuity of humanity. ☐



Photo by JUSTINE GRANT

Lynette Yetter

the journey of consistently chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, studying the Goshu and President Ikeda's guidance, attending meetings, seeking guidance from seniors in faith and struggling to further develop my compassion for others.

Be like the sun, for the sun shines on serenely even though not all of the stars will reflect back its light, and even though some of its brilliance seems to emanate only into empty space... The more you shine your light, the more brilliant your [life] will become. — Daisaku Ikeda

The sun has again risen in my heart. The fog has burned away, and those burdens have become lighter, like a movie prop rock that has all the appearance of a heavy granite boulder, but when you lift it, it bounces in your hands like popcorn.

Like it says on p. 33 of *The Liturgy of the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin*, which we recite every day (as I translate it): "It appears that we are living in the flaming hell of incessant suffering, but in actuality, we are living in the Buddha land, where mandara blossoms of blessings are constantly raining down on us."



Sonya Brooks recites a poem by Maya Angelou at Golden Territory's celebration of Black History Month.

Lifting Every Voice

Nichiren Daishonin, presidents Makiguchi, Toda and Ikeda, Rosa Parks, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Caesar Chavez, Marva Collins — these and others have all lifted their voices in the face of adversity. In celebration of Black History Month in February, Golden Century Territory in El Cerrito, Calif., chose "Lift Every Voice," known as the Black National Anthem, as it's theme for a special world peace gongyo meeting. Though marking Black History Month, the meeting turned out to be a celebration of life, as it brought together people from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds for the sake of peace. "Lift Every Voice" is a song of hope and victory in overcoming life's adversities.

— By Safiyah Scoggins

Lift Every Voice

*Lift every voice and sing
'Til earth and heaven*



All children attending the meeting receive a certificate of appreciation.

*ring,
Ring with the harmonies
Of liberty.*

*Let our rejoicing rise
High as the listening
skies,*

*Let it resound
Loud as the rolling sea.*

*Chorus:
Sing a song
Full of the faith that the*

*dark past has taught
us;
Sing a song
Full of the hope that the
present has brought us.*

*Facing the rising sun
Of a new day begun,
Let us march on
'Til victory is won.*

Lyrics by James Weldon Johnson

SUBSCRIPTIONS, FROM PAGE 1

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SURVEY, FROM PAGE 1

another. Both find the SGI's rapid growth in Western countries of great interest.

"I want to explore the possibility that the path into the SGI presumes that people are somehow, for some reason, dissatisfied with the options that have been historic," Dr. Hammond explains.

The Oxford University Press, based on the success of the Wilson book, will publish the results of the Hammond study on the SGI-USA some time in 1999. While Dr. Hammond's survey was developed with input from SGI-USA members, SGI-USA has no editorial control over either the questionnaire or what will appear in published form. An independent grant from UCSB is providing funds for

printing the questionnaire, the postage and the technical means for analyzing the data.

When the data is in, the fun of writing the book begins, according to Dr. Hammond. "Eventually this [data] will take shape and what I like to call a story line will emerge — it will be apparent how we want to tell the story," he says.

Results of the survey will be compared with the University of Chicago general census survey of the United States in order to see how the SGI-USA membership fits into the American religious landscape.

Responses will also be compared with those collected by Bryan Wilson, which will tell us a lot about similarities and differences between SGI-USA and SGI-UK members. ❏

Expressions

Introductions

This line that is yours
in your palm and blood
is mine and your mother's too.
I will lay this world before you, child
and between sips of lemonade,
will gladly teach you
how to judge the length of roads
from my front porch.

I am your elder aunt
and the prayers I weave for you
are in the expanse of universes
(which are inside you and are your birthright)
Remember your light within as you try to read the dark.
May you retain shapes and sounds
for your greatest use.

Carry what you need to carry.
Discard what is not useful
Your journey is through eternity
You lose nothing
Grow into your greatest self.
When fear comes...
(and it arrives, for us all in various degrees)
Remember that victory resides on the other side of fear
And you can journey there any time you please.

You are a link in generations
Treat others with respect.
But above all,
Respect yourself,
For the root is arrogance which makes us believe it right
to love others and not ourselves.
Do not be afraid to make mistakes
It is part of our learning.
Remember, the need for balance in your life

I trust you already,
and remember that you are you
and not me.
I am your elder aunt
My name is Pam.

— PAMELA PLUMMER, Decatur, Ga.

JESSE BOGDONOFF, SAN FRANCISCO

Sharing Immeasurable Wealth With Others

His joy in sharing this Buddhism with people has brought him fortune in all areas of his life.

When I began chanting 11 years ago, I was bankrupt of the three treasures of life. I was living in a hellish swamp of pain, illness, anger, poverty, loneliness, disgrace and confusion.

But today I am a healthier, wealthier and wiser human being, standing on top of a mountain of the treasures of the heart, body and storehouse.

I am blessed with good health, a loving wife, three wonderful children, harmonious family relations, a comfortable home, an interesting and challenging profes-

sion and a terrific district full of dedicated members and leaders, all here in beautiful San Francisco. I am a living testament to the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin, the mystic wonder of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and the great power of propagation.

Gosho passage to make my point. One of my favorites is from "The Swords of Good and Evil":

Money serves various purposes according to our needs. The same is true of the Lotus Sutra. It will be a lantern in the dark or a boat at a crossing. At times it will be water, and at other times, fire. This being so, the Lotus Sutra assures us of peace and security in this lifetime and good circumstances in the next. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 123-25)

This passage always fills me

about finances, have built a career over the past seven years as an investment advisor. I now represent one of the world's premier financial institutions; I am providing advice and guidance to people seeking to preserve and increase their wealth and create financial security for the future. I work with individuals with just a few dollars to invest all the way up to governments with tens of millions of dollars at stake every day. Through the power of daimoku and propagation, I have become so accomplished at my job that my company has me speaking regularly to all the newly hired investment

hours to Nuku'alofa, the island capital of the Kingdom of Tonga, to meet with His Royal Majesty King Tauf'aahau Tupou the IV, and his financial trustees, the prime minister, minister of justice and minister of finance. To my shock I learned they had already decided to choose another investment advisor. However, due to my strong daimoku and sincere heart-to-heart dialogue with them, the king's trusted advisors changed their minds and placed their trust in me to manage tens of millions of dollars of the country's national reserves.

When they asked me why I was so confident, I told them about my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the glory of the SGI and the wisdom of my teacher, Daisaku Ikeda. As I interacted with these high government officials I could clearly see the value of my years of training in the SGI youth division.

I returned home a hero for winning this account away from other more qualified investment advisors. My success was highlighted on the front page of my company's worldwide newspaper.

I have no doubt this victory was remarkable actual proof of the power of propagation in my life. However, I also have learned from the Gosho that whenever we bring forth our Buddha nature, devils will arise to obstruct us.

So I was not surprised when, after nearly two years of outstanding investment returns, there was a sudden change of leadership in Tonga's finance ministry. Due to the politics surrounding the situation, the new finance minister was seriously considering moving the account to a major competitor without consultation with me or my firm.

Again I headed back to the South Pacific. Disaster seemed inevitable. To start with, halfway to Hawaii to catch my international flight to Tonga, right in the middle of telling the passenger next to me about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I realized I had left my passport back in San Francisco. If I missed my flight to Tonga I would have to wait a week for the next plane — and by then it would be too late. I chanted intense daimoku the rest of flight into

Hawaii, confident that I would overcome this obstacle.

I arrived in Honolulu late in the evening and I went directly to the New Zealand Air ticket counter and told them of my dilemma. They said, "Mr. Bogdonoff, it will be impossible to board you on an international flight without your passport."

I asked them if I were to provide a faxed copy of my passport would they take me, and they said absolutely not. With that big devil obstructing my passage to Tonga, I went and sat on my suitcase and started chanting to create a solution. I prayed for the Buddhist gods to come to my aid.

Within half an hour I remembered some advice I received from a seasoned businessman with interests in Tonga. He had said that if ever I ran into a problem in Tonga, I should contact his friend, the minister of police. After 20 more minutes of daimoku, I remembered his name and called down to Tonga to find him. It was past midnight there, and the duty officer found him coming home from a late night party celebrating Tonga's silver medal in the Olympic boxing competition.

He had clearly been enjoying his share of celebration spirits when I finally got through to him. I told him who I was and about my important business with the government. He agreed to fax up an official memorandum of permission to the airlines, instructing them to board me with a photocopy of my passport and that he would take official responsibility for me while I was in the country. I then chanted that he was sober enough to follow through on his promise at 1:30 a.m.

Next, I woke up my spouse back in San Francisco. She mercifully got up and went out to copy my passport and fax it over to the airlines. Again they told me there was no way they were going to board me. However, they were astounded when an hour later they received the minister of police's official memorandum and agreed to put me on the plane. When I arrived, the immigration



Jesse Bogdonoff (r) with his client, King Tauf'aahau Tupou the IV of Tonga.

with hope in my darkest moments and most difficult struggles. It lifted my spirits last August when I received a call telling me I was about to lose my biggest client.

Remember I said I was flat broke 11 years ago? Due to my own stupidity and mismanagement I had become desperately ill, unemployed and \$25,000 in debt. In the depths of my financial failure I chanted to get rich and to have the wisdom to do it while remaining true to myself and having a good time along the way.

It is truly mystical to me that I, who knew absolutely nothing

specialists, many of them with far more experience than I. The message I try to convey is the power of faith and the spirit of caring and compassion I have learned here in the SGI.

My largest client is the Kingdom of Tonga, located far off in the South Pacific Ocean, halfway between Hawaii and New Zealand. Because of its close proximity to the international dateline, the country's motto is "Tonga, where time begins."

Two years ago, against tremendous odds, I traveled alone the 17

A Great Castle of People for the New Century

SGI Deputy President Einosuke Akiya wrote the following article for the March 1997 'Daibyakurenge,' the Soka Gakkai study journal.

The passion and power of youth will create the new century." These are the opening lines of second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda's "Precepts for Youth." In accord with this guidance, it has always been the youth division members who have stood up in the vanguard and opened the path of kosen-rufu. During the time of President Toda, the youth division, headed by the young Daisaku Ikeda, was the force propelling the entire organization.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the "Buddhism of youth shining like the brilliant morning sun." It could be said that Buddhism was from the outset a philosophy alive with the spirit of youth. Shakyamuni attained enlightenment when he was in his early 30s; throughout his life he traveled far and wide, tirelessly taking action with youthful exuberance. Similarly, Nichiren Daishonin was 32 when he declared the establishment of his teaching. From the youthful pulse in his heart, a world religion of the morning sun was born.

The future of any organization depends on youthful successors, on whether and how they will uphold and put into practice its philosophy and ideals. Efforts to perpetuate a teaching or belief without capable successors are, the Daishonin says, as meaningless as trying to instruct wooden or stone statues (*The Major Writings of*

Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 115).

People the world over are watching to see how the younger generation will carry society forward. Entire organizations and countries, too, looking to their very survival, are putting their energy into fostering youth—those expected to chart the course into the coming century. Cuban Minister of Culture Armando Hart Dávalos, who welcomed SGI President Ikeda to Cuba in June 1996, sees international youth exchanges as an important force for democratization. It was based on this conviction that Dr. Hart came to Japan to visit Soka University and the Soka Junior and Senior High Schools in January 1997.

The task of overcoming the various issues that humankind will face in the 21st century can be entrusted only to youth. Professor Hidetoshi Taga of Waseda University, Tokyo, characterizes the present as a time when the global system centering on the nation is fast becoming obsolete—and when people are opening their eyes to the universal value of human life. He further says that the strength of youth lies in their power to initiate change, take constructive action and understand and reach out to people in distant lands living under radically different circum-


stances. Professor Taga also voiced his sincere desire for the continued success of the international network and wide-range activities of SGI youth.

In his dialogue with SGI President Ikeda, the leading Chinese novelist Louis Cha (pen name, Jin Yong) of Hong Kong said: "The SGI of Hong Kong, upholding Buddhist ideals, has issued calls for cultural exchange and international peace. Because their basic principles are lofty and pure, the group has realized rapid development in Hong Kong." The SGI of Hong Kong has indeed been lauded for its contributions to society; many people have high hopes for the young people who are at the very core of its activities.

Young people have the power to change the world. And SGI youth division members everywhere are pioneering a new current of humanism, paving the way to an age of the people and a century of life. For young people, to play an active role on this global stage is the greatest possible honor. Everything depends on the extent to which our youth, awakened to this keen realization, courageously create friendships and conduct dialogue based on trust with people throughout the world.

Herein lies the mission of today's youth division. Once a person awakens to this grand mission, he or she can without fail champion the cause of kosen-rufu in the 21st century. During one's youth, the important thing is to polish one's inner life. By further training and forging a strong self through heart-to-heart exchanges with people of similar ideals, it is without doubt that we can construct a grand, unshakable castle of capable people for kosen-rufu.

Youth division members are now wholeheartedly standing up in response to the high expectations of the SGI president. And they are once again, with "passion and power" like the youth of our movement's pioneering days, boldly taking the initiative to transform the age. With this clear indication of their willingness and ability to succeed to this great mission, we observe March 16, Kosen-rufu Day—the historic day when Josei Toda entrusted leadership for kosen-rufu to President Ikeda and the youth division.

As we scale the final peak of the 20th century, already we have our sights set on the mountains that lie ahead. What could be more joyful! Deeply reflecting on the significance of devoting our lives to kosen-rufu and of our individual missions for kosen-rufu, let us grow into courageous champions of peace who exultantly ascend from one ridge to the next toward the summit of kosen-rufu in the 21st century. 

Jesse Bogdonoff Shares Immeasurable Wealth With Others

EXPERIENCE, FROM PAGE 5

officers said I was the first foreigner they had ever admitted without a passport.

Once in Tonga I found that the new finance minister was avoiding meeting with me. Each day that I went to his office, his secretary told me he was busy in meetings and would try to see me the next day. So I went back to my hotel room and chanted to break through this new devil.

Then I went back and met with the minister's secretary again to try to size up the competition. He in turn kept trying to find out my proposal so he could pass it on to the competition. But I politely refused and instead ended up discussing life and philosophy.

Tonga is a devoutly Christian country, and this government official declared his deep commitment to his faith. He kept trying to convert me to Christianity so I politely told him about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. He was startled that I was a Buddhist. With little knowledge of Bud-

dhisim, he was sure I needed to be saved in the worst possible way.

For three days we kept meeting to discuss the country's finances, and each day the conver-

sation always turned to our religious beliefs. He was sorry that my trip to Tonga appeared to be in vain and that I was probably going to lose the account.

It was, he said, the result of my lack of Christian faith. Much to his consternation I remained cheerful and kept telling him not to worry, that he would see the power of my prayer to the Gohonzon.

The following Monday, my last day in the country, I finally got to meet again with the king and then with the prime minister, minister of justice and the new finance minister.

My computer had crashed the

night before, so I ended up giving my presentation on a large, heavy, makeshift flip chart. I had to carry this over my shoulder like a giant cross about 50 yards from the treasury building to the prime minister's private conference chambers.

It is only while carrying out my mission of propagation that I experience my most profound sense of joy.

I had chanted all night to somehow convince the ministers—who, according to the secretary of finance, had already decided to pull the account—that I was again the right one to handle their investments.

With total confidence I laid out a well-designed plan of action that would grow their reserves over the next 35 years to more than \$100 million. Again, after two hours of intense heart-to-heart dialogue, they adopted and then committed to my plan.


Afterward, the finance minister's secretary kept shaking his

head in disbelief, saying my presentation was the most incredible thing he had ever witnessed. He was amazed by the reversal in the minds of the government ministers. I shook his hand, smiling, and thanked him for all his assistance.

The fortune and wisdom I have accumulated these past 11 years by supporting SGI activities behind the scenes has enabled me to achieve innumerable victories in my professional life. They in turn made it possible to achieve a long-held dream of purchasing a wonderful home for kosen-rufu in the heart of beautiful San Francisco this past November.

But despite the remarkable financial success my practice has created, it is only while carrying out my mission of propagation that I experience my most profound sense of joy, confidence and vitality. I believe this is what it means to experience my Buddha nature. I always remember these words from President Ikeda's *Daily Guidance*:

What is eternal and indestructible

wealth? It is nothing other than the changeless law of *Myoho* and our faith in it. It is our mission as courageous followers of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to prove the splendor of its fortune within ourselves and share the source of this immeasurable wealth with many others every day. We should never forget the honor and pride of fulfilling this supreme mission. (vol. 4, Jan. 12) 

Commemorative Contribution To Start Soon

The annual May Commemorative Contribution is fast approaching. Beginning April 28 and lasting until June 6, members may make financial contributions to the SGI-USA through their local organizations. Check with your local leaders for more information.

It was very late at night, but Toda continued speaking as if unaware of the passage of time: "Of the Venerable Maudgalyayana, one of Shakyamuni's disciples, Nichiren Daishonin writes: 'Since he himself had not yet attained Buddhahood, it was very difficult for him to relieve the sufferings of his parents. And how much more difficult would it have been for him to do so for anyone else!' (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 7, p. 170). He is emphasizing that attaining Buddhahood ourselves — our personal human revolution — is the key to leading our parents and others to happiness and to creating a more humane society.

"This means that any method of social development arising from Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism will not be a destructive or a radical revolution. Instead, it will be a peaceful and gradual process that begins with dialogue, a process by which the individual strives for self-perfection through human revolution. This is clear when we look at the Daishonin's own struggles. His life was always dedicated to the earnest life-to-life dialogue called *shakubuku* — the spiritual and intellectual struggle to awaken other human beings.

"But so-called Nichirenists of later times distorted the Daishonin's teachings, interpreting them in a nationalist fashion. They abandoned the idea of spiritual struggle and instead engaged in invasions, coups and terrorist activities.

"For example, one follower of Chigaku Tanaka was Kanji Ishiura,¹ who, as operations officer of Japan's Guangdong Army in Manchuria, initiated the Manchurian Incident, which ignited the Japanese invasion of Asia. Another Nichirenist was Nissho Inoue,² founder of the League of Blood, a terrorist group whose slogan was 'one person, one death,' and mastermind behind the assassinations of top politician and former Finance Minister Junnosuke Inoue and prominent business leader Takuma Dan in 1932. Yet another was Ikki Kita,³ who strongly influenced the young officers whose attempted coup d'état in 1936 is known as the Feb. 26 Incident.

"Their actions represented a fundamental perversion of the Buddhist spirit. They were all destroyers and debasers of the loftiest truth. They were truly examples of 'destroying what is exalted and dragging it down among the base' (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 68). They perverted the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, twisted it, and tried to fit its teachings into their narrow and prejudiced way of thinking. Not a single one of them ever focused on the needs of the people, tried to speak to them or engage them in dialogue, or attempted to spread the true teaching and accomplish kosen-rufu. They had all forgotten the most basic challenge: how to accomplish an inner reformation of each individual.

The New Human Revolution

By HO GOKU — ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Volume 5, Chapter 4

Lion

Translation of parts 25–29 of the 'Lion' 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.

"Their actions contributed immeasurably to distorting the Daishonin's Buddhism and creating a mistaken impression about it among society at large. Even today, the name *Nichiren* conjures images of ultranationalistic dogma in many people's minds.

"At the time when these Nichirenists were pursuing their extremist platform, Mr. Makiguchi was proclaiming and practicing the Daishonin's true spirit and teachings. He worked among the people, holding many discussion meetings and devoting his energies to solving the problems that were actually making people suffer. That is the proud and brilliant history of the Gakkai."

Shin'ichi Yamamoto listened intently to Josei Toda's account, deeply absorbing everything. Toda's delivery gradually became more intense: "The reason that we are now trying to achieve the fusion of the law of the ruler and the principles of Buddhism is that government, economics and education have not been contributing to human happiness as they should.

"In the past, Japan advanced with the slogan 'Enrich the Country and Strengthen the Military' and joined the ranks of the world's powerful nations. But though the state became powerful, how did this affect the lives of the people? The wealth of ordinary citizens did not increase. Rather, only a certain sector of the population, the members of the powerful industrial and financial cliques known as *zaibatsu*, really benefited. Then Japan plunged into its disastrous war. In other words, neither government nor big business protected or brought prosperity to the Japanese people as they should have; instead, they brought them great misfortune and unhappiness.

"And what about science? It is certainly true that science has made remarkable

progress, but that progress has also resulted in the hydrogen bomb, which threatens the very existence of humankind and has struck fear in people's hearts.

"Then let's look at education. Educational opportunities for the general populace in Japan have increased rapidly since the Meiji Restoration of 1868. Since the war, secondary education has become compulsory and the number of universities has grown dramatically. But has that really contributed to people's happiness? Though the number of university students has increased, so has the number of people who are lacking in character, wisdom and knowledge. The pursuit of academic credentials has become an end in itself.

"And look at the international situa-

shonin espoused the principle of the fusion of the law of the ruler and the principles of Buddhism to correct this situation, to transform this unhappy state of affairs.

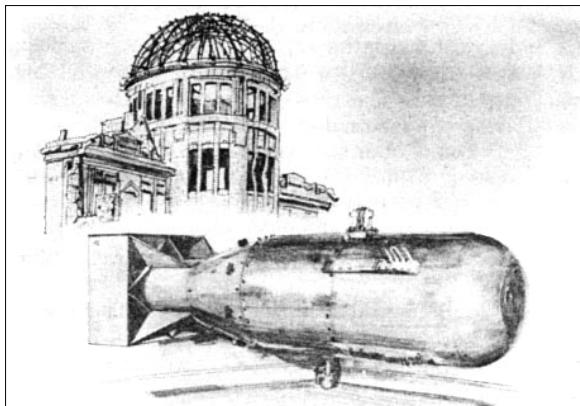
"In my opinion, the fusion of the law of the ruler and the principles of Buddhism in essence envisions all the nations of the world prospering; it means that the prosperity of each society and the happiness of each individual in that society are in complete accord. Government, economics, science and education must all be returned to the people and utilized as means to contribute to and support the pursuit of human happiness. This is the Soka Gakkai's mission and the meaning of Buddhist social activism.

"And this, Shin'ichi, will inevitably become a task that you will have to devote your energies to throughout the rest of your life."

Interpreting the fusion of the law of the ruler and the principles of Buddhism to mean a perfect accord between social prosperity and personal happiness, Josei Toda could not stand by silently and watch the unfolding turmoil of Japanese politics, a sphere that had such important and direct influence on people's happiness. He encouraged several of his disciples, individuals he had personally taught and fostered, to run in local assembly elections and later in the national elections for the House of Councilors (Upper House). Shin'ichi Yamamoto inherited this spirit of Toda's to help actualize a government dedicated to the people's happiness, and continued to send candidates into the political arena after Toda's death.

After Shin'ichi became president of the Soka Gakkai on May 3, 1960, an enormously powerful momentum of propagation ensued, and great strides were made toward the achievement of kosen-rufu. Because of this, members began to ask with increasing frequency what the high sanctuary of true Buddhism should take, and it became an issue that Shin'ichi, having inherited complete responsibility for every aspect of the movement from Toda, could not avoid addressing.

Nichiren Shoshu continued to think of kosen-rufu in terms of establishing a national high sanctuary. The Gakkai had respected the priesthood's opinion in this regard, but Shin'ichi was forced to ponder seriously whether this was in fact Nichiren Daishonin's true intent. The phrase "an imperial decree and a shogunal directive" from the Daishonin's work



tion. Many smaller nations suffer in the shadow of the prosperity enjoyed by the major powers, their interests sacrificed to those of their stronger counterparts. Huge gaps have opened between nations in the areas of economic development and education. The sad truth is that while some nations prosper, they often do so at the expense of other nations, and that even if a nation or society may enjoy affluence, the majority of its citizens often lead impoverished lives.

"This, Shin'ichi, is the problem: There is no solid philosophy to lead the way in government, economics, science and education, no philosophy of life to show people the right path to pursue. The Dai-

LION, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

“On the Three Great Secret Laws” was considered by some to justify the establishment of a national high sanctuary. But did it really?

Certainly, the Mahayana ordination platform that Saicho (Great Teacher Dengyo) had sought to have erected at Enryaku-ji temple on Mount Hiei during the Heian period (794–1185) had been built by imperial decree. But in those days, all priests in Japan had to be recognized by the government, and in a sense functioned as public officials. Privately ordained priests were actually illegal. The sanctuaries or ordination platforms where these official priests were ordained naturally fell under the jurisdiction of the state, and an imperial edict would, therefore, have been essential for the construction of any such facility.

During the Daishonin’s life, the rule of the imperial court had become largely ceremonial; though the emperor retained a degree of authority, actual government was administered by the military rulers — the shogunate — in Kamakura. The distinction between official government priests and privately ordained priests had also disappeared and ordination itself was no longer widely practiced. Nevertheless, the building of a new sanctuary for ordination would have required both a decree from the emperor and a directive from the shogunate as dictated by tradition.

It was also clear that in those days, the widespread propagation of the True Law in Japan could only have been achieved if the nation’s leaders — the emperor and the military rulers — embraced that teaching. This was another reason why an imperial decree and a shogunal directive would have been necessary to build a high sanctuary.

Day and night, even while on the road during his guidance trips, Shin’ichi Yamamoto devoted time to studying the Goshō and researching historical sources and other documents, constantly pondering the subject of the high sanctuary. The Kamakura period was very different from the present in many respects. Freedom of religion was now guaranteed to all,

and building a high sanctuary would not require any imperial decree or shogunal directive.

In an age of democracy, when sovereignty rested with each citizen, kosen-



rufu would be simply the outcome of people freely deciding to embrace Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. In light of this, the contemporary equivalent of “an imperial decree and a shogunal directive” was the will of the people. Moreover, as long as the people complied with all the legal formalities, filing any necessary construction permits and other paperwork, there was nothing to stop them from just going ahead and building the high sanctuary.

It was inappropriate, then, to conclude from the phrase “an imperial decree and a shogunal directive” that the Daishonin was implying a national high sanctuary. But was there anything in the Daishonin’s spirit to indicate that the high sanctuary should be a national institution?

When the Daishonin returned from exile on Sado Island, the Kamakura shogunate offered him land and a temple if he would agree to pray for the safety of the nation — but the Daishonin firmly refused. His decision reflected not only his rejection of support from those who slandered the True Law but also his determination to remain independent as a Buddhist leader, not subservient to the state.

He even referred to the highest figures of the military government as “the rulers of this little island country” (MW-1, 176), and further declared: “Since I have been born in the ruler’s domain, I must follow him in my actions. But I need not follow him in the beliefs of my heart” (MW-3,

171). In other words, though we must obey the laws of the ruler of the land in which we are born, we remain free to follow the dictates of our conscience. The Daishonin also spoke of spreading the

Law widely throughout Jambudvīpa — that is, the entire world.

In light of these facts, any idea of a national religion or a national high sanctuary was in complete contradiction to the Daishonin’s spirit. Making Nichiren Shoshu the national religion of Japan or building a high sanctuary as a national, government-sponsored institution would only serve to make this great Buddhism the property of a single country.

This would be directly counter to the spirit of the Daishonin, who taught the Law for the sake of all human beings.

At any rate, Shin’ichi concluded that the whole concept of a national high sanctuary, which Nichiren Shoshu had adopted from the late Meiji Era (1868–1912) onward, should be corrected. To fail to do so would be to distort the Daishonin’s Buddhism and invite misunderstanding from society at large.

On several occasions, including during their guidance trip to Asia the previous year, 1961, Shin’ichi Yamamoto had told High Priest Nitatsu that he thought the idea of a national high sanctuary was at variance with Nichiren Daishonin’s spirit. Eventually, High Priest Nitatsu came to agree completely with Shin’ichi’s opinion and, in later years, publicly declared that the concept of a national high sanctuary was erroneous, making the following statement:

In the past, it is true, we in Nichiren Shoshu have referred to the high sanctuary to be completed at the time of kosen-rufu as a national high sanctuary. But Nichiren Daishonin spoke of ‘the establishment of the supreme object of worship on the earth’ (MW-1, 81) for the salvation of all the world’s people. Nowhere did he speak of making his Buddhism the national religion of Japan. Given this fact

that the Daishonin’s Buddhism is not a state religion, any talk of a national high sanctuary is meaningless; it is an inappropriate term....

Today, the term *national high sanctuary* invites public suspicion and, in fact, is a hindrance to propagation. For these reasons, we will no longer use this term in our school.

The Soka Gakkai has also used the term *national high sanctuary*, but as a gathering of lay believers of Nichiren Shoshu, this was only because Nichiren Shoshu did so. I do not think it appropriate for people today to criticize the Soka Gakkai for having used the word *national* in describing the high sanctuary in the past.⁴

With the launching of the Komei Political Federation, Shin’ichi felt that the Soka Gakkai had now left the harbor and was sailing out into the open sea on its journey to bring together individual happiness and social prosperity as indicated by the concept of the fusion of the law of the ruler and the principles of Buddhism. The established political parties would inevitably feel threatened by what they perceived as the Gakkai’s increased emphasis on political activism, and would vigorously rise up against it.

Shin’ichi had a premonition of the angry onslaught that would batter the Gakkai in the future. But he also knew that the only way to truly contribute to the happiness of the people and restore government to the people’s control was to advance bravely and unflinchingly toward that brewing tempest. This was the Soka Gakkai’s noble mission, a mission that would bring about a new age of triumph for ordinary people. It was the path chosen by those of lion-like courage who were ready to protect and defend the people.

(To be continued)

1. Kanji Ishiwara (1889–1949): army officer and writer who was a member of Chigaku Tanaka’s National Pillar Society.
2. Nissho Inoue (1886–1967): founder of the Ketsumeidan (League of Blood).
3. Ikki Kita (1883–1937): leading ultranationalist thinker who called for a reconstruction of Japan through a military coup to eliminate the existing leadership structure. Was later executed for his involvement in the Feb. 26 Incident.
4. From a special lecture at the 33rd Soka Gakkai Headquarters General Meeting held on May 3, 1970.

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.
Goshō: 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.

SIGN POSTS

APPLYING
NICHIREN
DAISHONIN'S
WRITINGS TO
DAILY LIFE

The Best Daughter I Can Be

By VALERIE THOMAS

SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION STUDY COMMITTEE

Even strangers were rewarded when they came together and treated someone as a parent. How much more so will be the case with actual brothers and sisters when they treat each other kindly and take care of their own father and mother! (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, pp. 72-73)

I have seen many references by Nichiren Daishonin to parents, but I found this letter to Shijo Kingo especially meaningful. Nichiren tells the story of young men who adopt an older woman, caring for her as their own mother, and the benefits they then receive.

Although I have always considered myself fortunate to have the parents I do, like many young adults I became increasingly critical of them with age. This tension in our relationship increased around the time I encountered this Buddhism. I immediately shared Buddhism with them; they were uninterested and ignored it.

Recently I decided to relocate across the country and accept new responsibility in the SGI-USA. I wanted to share my excitement with my parents, but they were concerned I was making a mistake. We had several difficult phone calls where I tried to convince them otherwise.

Finally, in tears in front of the Go-honzon, I determined to show them with my life that I was doing the right thing. Instead of focusing on what I wanted from them, I looked for what I could give them to help ease their concerns. I arranged to visit them during my move, and they were comforted by seeing my confidence in this new opportunity.

During a recent trip to Japan, I wrote a memo about my family to President Ikeda, who replied with gifts for my parents. A vice president told me, "Even though your parents don't practice, please cherish them and be the best daughter to them." I am determined to treat them with this kind of appreciation, to take care of them as Nichiren teaches. Through my example, my parents will without doubt come to appreciate my practice — and most important, become happy through my happiness. ☐

UNDERSTANDING MENTOR AND DISCIPLE

If Everyone's Equal, Why Do We Need a Mentor?

By EDMOND LEE
PULLMAN, WASH.

When I was in high school, my English teacher always guided me, encouraged me and corrected my mistakes. She once said, "Keep up the good work and continue to study hard." I feel very grateful to her; this experience was instrumental in leading me to seek a mentor in life.

Buddhism emphasizes the oneness of mentor and disciple. SGI President Ikeda explains this in *The New Human Revolution* with the relationship of Hironori Kawanaka, a Kyushu leader, and Shin'ichi Yamamoto:

[Kawanaka] modeled his behavior after that of Shin'ichi, whom he looked up to as his mentor; in any situation, he would ask himself what Shin'ichi would do if Shin'ichi were in his place. In other words, he did not stand looking toward his mentor, thinking of himself as one of the crowd; he instead strove to live side by side with his mentor, facing the same direction in which his mentor's gaze was focused. (vol. 4, chapter 3)

Of course, the oneness of mentor and disciple doesn't mean that the disciple merely copies the mentor. Rather, the disciple takes action with a deep understanding of the mentor's intention. The Soka Gakkai was established based on this spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple. Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, was President Makiguchi's young disciple when the Soka Gakkai was founded in 1930. I have no doubt the reason the SGI organization now has members in 128 countries is because President Ikeda firmly inherited the vision of his mentor, Josei Toda.

As I said, I was determined to seek a mentor in life, someone who could guide me and tell me how to live a happy life, how to fear no obstacles. I was introduced to this Buddhism in 1989. Although I heard President Ikeda's name mentioned many times at meetings, it wasn't until I began reading his guidance in the publications that I affirmed for myself that I had found my mentor in life.

Although I have not met President Ikeda in person, he seems to always be with me. Reading his guidance in the *World Tribune* or *Living Buddhism* is like reading a letter addressed to me personally. These "letters" encourage me and

give me hope; I try to follow his guidance and put it into practice in my daily life.

I came to the United States from Malaysia to go to school here, receiving my undergraduate degree in economics from Washington State University in the summer of 1995. I wanted to go on to graduate school, but I only had enough money to last one semester. The only way I could continue going to school after that

But I kept chanting daimoku and studying President Ikeda's guidance. In *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 2, President Ikeda writes: "When people actually make effort to accomplish something, they will often be confronted by a situation or difficulties they never anticipated. Yet, such real experience is priceless toward developing genuine ability." On another occasion, President Ikeda said, "The

key to victory is to conquer one's inner weakness." Following these words of encouragement, I began to fight against my inner weakness. I learned not to give up in any endeavor. The result was that Washington State University renewed my assistantship — I will finish graduate school without paying anything! I have to express my gratitude for this Buddhism, and a millionfold appreciation to President Ikeda, who is always guiding and helping me.

In Buddhism, everyone is equal. So why do we need a mentor? The oneness of mentor and disciple explains this. Let's use an analogy for it: the roots of a plant and the nutrients they absorb. To deepen our roots of faith, we must absorb nutrients (chanting, studying the Goshu, reading President Ikeda's guidance). The plant of our lives will bear beautiful fruit when it absorbs these nutrients. If we stop supplying nutrients to the roots, though, the plant will wither and be uprooted by a strong wind.

In soccer, teams often have a player/coach, who is the manager of the team as well as a player on the team. To win a match, the other

team players must be well-trained by the mentor and learn from him or her. Mentor and disciple work together, each with his or her own role in winning the match; disciples completely share the responsibility with their mentor.

So what I have learned is that the flower of kosen-rufu will blossom as the strength of the oneness of mentor and disciple expands.

I am very happy that I have found a mentor in life. ☐

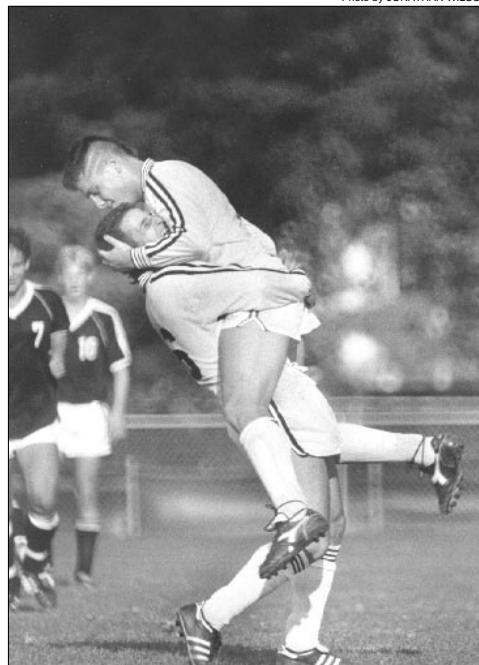


Photo by JONATHAN WILSON

To win a soccer match, team players must learn from the coach and fulfill their roles.

was if I received an assistantship. So I began graduate school at Washington State without an assistantship, using up the last of my money. At the same time, I sent out applications to 12 other universities, hoping to get an assistantship at one of them.

This was a very difficult time for me. I really wanted to stay in the United States and continue my education, so I devoted more time to chanting. I read President Ikeda's guidance with a renewed sense of passion as a disciple. Then something very fortunate for me happened: My department offered me one semester of assistantship, which meant I didn't have to pay anything for that semester. Nevertheless, my goal was to get into another university. I received replies to the 12 I applied to, but in every case, I was either rejected or not offered an assistantship. My life condition was so low. My feelings were hurt something awful.

Questions, Questions, Questions

Do you have questions on Buddhism, faith or the organization? Send your questions to the *World Tribune* for our bi-weekly Q-and-A column. Thanks for your support.

SGI President Ikeda gave the following speech at the 1st session of day two of the All-Japan Representative Leaders Conference, Feb. 1.

The Japanese entertainer and writer Musei Tokugawa (1894–1971) was one of the greatest storytellers of his time. His dramatic reading of the novel *Miyamoto Musashi*¹ during the 1940s on the nationwide radio station NHK captured the imagination of the entire nation.

In August 1957, Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, held a frank, lively dialogue with Musei, as he was popularly known to Japanese audiences, which was published in a leading magazine at the time. President Toda's inimitable skill as a conversationalist left even Musei full of admiration.

'Who Are You Calling a Ham?'

Musei wrote a book called *The Art of Speaking* in which he discusses the art of winning people's hearts through speech and conversational skills. In it, he shares an anecdote about a certain Kabuki actor.²

The actor was performing a play in Nagoya, Japan. Suddenly, the audience bombarded him with derisive cries of "Ham! Ham!" A faint-hearted actor would easily have lost his nerve at such merciless heckling. However, this actor splendidly incorporated a retort into the part he was playing, demanding with a haughty flourish, "Who is it that you call a ham?" then striking a magnificent Kabuki pose.

Unimpressed, the audience shot back, "It is you!" Not missing a beat, the actor then cried out powerfully — with just the right touch of humorous pathos — "Oh no, it is me...?!" Once more he struck a majestic pose. At this amusing response, the theater rocked with tumultuous applause.

Through quick wit and skillful speech, the actor turned a malicious audience into fans.

The Power To Express Oneself

Whatever the situation, you can win people's hearts and change their minds through the power of speech.

Musei Tokugawa declared, "The silence of being unable to express oneself effectively is like a stone, whereas the elo-

quence of being able to express oneself admirably is like a diamond."³ That was his credo.

To remain silent means defeat. The Soka Gakkai and the SGI's strength lies in the diamond-like eloquence of ordinary people, forged and tempered by telling others about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

As leaders, it is vital that you always remember why you speak at meetings. It is not for the sake of merely saying something, but so that all can achieve victory. It is to energize everyone toward victory in their daily pursuits, their lives and their activities for kosen-rufu. It is to inspire in everyone the determination to win. Please avoid rambling on without a clear purpose.

We are living in the defiled age of the Latter Day of the Law. There are few who immediately embrace the Mystic Law on first hearing. But by telling others about Buddhism, we sow the seeds of the Mystic Law — plant the seeds of happiness — in their lives. At the

same time, the greater the abuse and criticism we suffer as a result of embracing the Law, the more we wash away the karmic stains of our past offenses and the more our Buddhahood shines through.

'Be As Fearless As Nichiren!'

Nichiren Daishonin asserts, "It is important to speak with even greater conviction to those who slander [the Mystic Law]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1123). The Daishonin was as dauntless as a lion king when it came to speaking out for truth and justice. He urges his followers, "Be as fearless as Nichiren when he faced Hei no Saemon [the most powerful official of the day]" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 140).

I have fought with that same spirit through all kinds of persecution, including the Osaka Incident trial (1957–62).⁴ I spoke out fearlessly to defeat the corrupt authorities who until the very end of his life

caused problems for President Toda. I stood up to prevent the injustice of arrest on trumped-up charges being perpetrated against countless innocent people like myself.

During the trial, like a true young lion of the Soka Gakkai, I spoke the truth and appealed for justice. In January 1962, the court returned a verdict of not guilty and complete victory was achieved that February [when it was confirmed that the prosecution would not appeal the decision]. I will never forget my Kansai friends, who stood by me through it all.

I wish to pass on to the youth division the jeweled sword of mission, the struggle for truth and human rights through the power of words.

The Selfless Spirit of a Leader

Before I conclude, I will share a story handed down from Shakyamuni's time about a leader who sacrificed himself to buy time to save people's lives.



Musei Tokugawa (1894–1971), a renowned Japanese storyteller, told of a Kabuki actor who used quick wit and skillful speech to win over an audience that had begun to mercilessly heckle him.

Speak Out for the Truth

In Shakyamuni's later years, the tiny kingdom of the Shakyas, which is said to have been located in present-day Nepal, was attacked and conquered by the great kingdom Kosala. This was one of the nine great ordeals suffered by Shakyamuni, who was a prince of the Shakya royal family before renouncing the world.

One day, a leader of the Shakya clan said to the ruthless King Virudhaka of Kosala, who had attacked them: "King, I want you to listen to just one request. I will dive into the pond. While I am submerged, I want you to open the doors of the castle and let my people out."

The king thought he could safely grant this, as the man could only be submerged for a few minutes. It is also possible that the king conceded because the man was a relative. However, once the man was submerged, he remained there for a long time. In the interval, more and more people were set free.

Finally, thinking it strange that the man did not resurface, the king ordered a subordinate to check the pond. What did he find? The man had undone the topknot on his head, tied his hair to a tree root at the bottom of the pond and drowned himself, sacrificing his life to buy time for his people's lives.

According to some historical sources, the members of the Shakya clan who escaped that time later built a new kingdom elsewhere.

This selfless spirit is found in a comrade's loyalty to another, in a parent's love for a child. Altruistic devotion is intrinsic to humanity. It is the inner cry: "I will fight to the last moment. I will offer my life to give you more time. So I ask that each of you strive wholeheartedly to develop yourselves, to advance and, most of all, to carry on my vision."

This is the spirit with which I devote myself to the growth of the youth division. ☸

1. *Miyamoto Musashi*, a well-known novel by Eiji Yoshikawa about the 17th-century master swordsman Miyamoto Musashi.
2. Musei Tokugawa, *Wajutsu* (The Art of Speaking) (Tokyo: Hakuyosha, 1962), pp. 198–99.
3. *Ibid.*, pp. 16–17.
4. Osaka Incident: SGI President Ikeda, then Soka Gakkai youth division chief of staff, was arrested and wrongfully charged with election law violations in a House of Councilors by-election in Osaka, 1957. At the end of the court case — which dragged on for almost five years — he was fully exonerated of all charges.

My Recollections



John Major, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

By SGI President Ikeda

British Prime Minister John Major has been called “the Velvet Steamroller.”¹ He has earned a reputation for being neither arrogant nor conceited, yet he possesses a will of steel which is as if enfolded in soft velvet.

In February 1991, IRA terrorists launched a mortar attack on the prime minister’s official residence at 10 Downing Street. One mortar exploded in the back garden, the blast fracturing the windows of the conference room where Prime Minister Major was meeting with his cabinet members. Unshaken, the prime minister said, “I think we had better continue in another place, gentlemen,” and calmly gathered his papers.²

The prime minister greeted me with a warm, open smile at our meeting in June 1991, a mere seven months after he had become prime minister at the youthful age of 47. In Britain’s still highly class-conscious society, this son of former vaudeville performers had become the nation’s top political leader — an event that captured headlines around the world. Though the days may be waning when senior positions in Britain are dominated by Oxbridge (Oxford and Cambridge) graduates, vestiges remain stubbornly ingrained. And in a society that places such strong emphasis on the “right” schools, the future prime minister had left school at 16.

John Major may rightly be called a self-made man, and his life is a fine example of the saying “Heaven helps those who help themselves.” A country where this spirit of self-reliance prevails will prosper. I feel the real, underlying strength of British society is revealed in choosing a self-made individual for its leader.

When I asked the prime minister, “What is your grand vision for the United Kingdom?” he smiled warmly and replied that he wanted to create a free society, and that the promotion of free markets and a free economy was necessary to achieve that.

He also went on to explain that by a free society he meant a society in which people could develop their potential and achieve their hopes and dreams through their hard work and effort. Behind that vision seemed to lie the prime minister’s anger at social injustices — an anger arising from his bitter struggle against the invisible barriers of class and education.

Suffering can either warp people’s spirits or make them deeply compassionate. What is it that makes the difference?

When John Major was 10, his family’s fortunes took a turn for the worse. His parents had retired as vaudeville performers and were running a garden ornament business, but financial debt drove them into bankruptcy and they had to sell their house. They had lived until then in a working-class bungalow with a spacious backyard. But now the family of five were forced to move into a tiny, cramped, two-room apartment in one of London’s low-rent areas.

Their rooms were on the top floor of a crumbling building. Bath and toilet facilities were communal. Furthermore, the rooms had no heating in winter. At the time, the young John Major’s father was 75 and his mother 49, and both were constantly plagued by ill health.

When one is poor, many are the hurts and slights one suffers. John Major passed the exam to enter the grammar school of his choice. However, his family couldn’t afford to buy him a new uniform, and the secondhand one that he obtained was only by applying for special assistance from the school, a humiliating experience. The young John Major experienced such painful and mortifying situations again and again.

The poverty of his youth is one of the reasons why Prime Minister Major dislikes inflation; he knows firsthand that it has the greatest and most direct effect on the poorest citizens.

To help earn money to support his family, he quit school at 16 and experienced the harsh reality of British social prejudice. He chafed under the common assumption that anyone who hadn’t been to university was incapable and worthless.



SGI President Ikeda shakes hands with U.K. Prime Minister John Major.

He worked as a day laborer, but the work wasn’t steady. He was out of work at one point for more than nine months, and he fought off starvation on the meager unemployment benefits he received. He would never forget those experiences, he once said.

When he served as undersecretary of state for social security during the Thatcher administration, Britain was struck by a severe cold spell (the winter of 1985–86). There were provisions for a special allowance for the elderly under such conditions, but the methods of application and payment were too bureaucratic. He promptly met with Prime Minister Thatcher and the chancellor of the exchequer to negotiate the revision of the regulations — and he succeeded. He was motivated by his conviction that government officials and politicians live on the taxes that the poor have paid from their very limited funds, and as such have a duty to do their very best to help the most needy.

Everyone pays lip service to democracy, but what is the blood that keeps the heart of democracy pumping, alive and vital? It is the commitment of leaders to keep the people’s needs and welfare foremost in their minds at all times and take concrete measures. “Government exists for the sake of the people,” I said to Prime Minister Major. “As a result, I believe that those who govern need to be more aware than anyone else of the sufferings, the pains and the wishes of the people.”

In his youth, face to face with the harsh realities of society, John Major realized that he would simply have to show what he was made of. He had only himself to rely on. He resumed his studies by correspondence. Every day he rose at 5:00 a.m. He worked all day, while at night devoting himself to Conservative Party activities. He never went to sleep until after midnight.

At 19, he lost his father. The senior Mr. Major had always shared the experiences of his rich and varied life, its turbulent ups and downs, with his son. He had never fawned over or flattered the high-ranking or powerful. And he had always been kind to the poorest of the poor.

John Major’s mother also had the same generous spirit. All sorts of people came and went in the Major home. Mrs. Major was always quick to give lodging to those with no place else to go.

From around this time, new horizons began to open for John Major. He found employment at a bank, and he worked with unbelievable energy and determination to demonstrate his abilities. He became a success. He wished his father could have seen him.

During a work assignment at a British bank in Nigeria, he was seriously injured in a car accident and almost lost a leg. He spent a year recuperating, but he never gave in to despair during that painful time.

The prime minister has been quoted as saying, “Nothing

makes me more determined to do something than someone telling me I can’t.”³

While continuing to pursue his career in banking, he became a local council representative, and finally, on his third bid for office, was elected to the House of Commons. Everyone who met him was charmed by the young man’s integrity and commitment. His character had been polished and forged by suffering — probably because he never lost his desire to learn from painful experience.

Common sense, John Major maintained, is extremely important for government officials. He observed that though he might not have an impressive educational record, he had certainly mastered common sense in the “university of life.”

The true mark of such common sense is, no doubt, a humanity that never forgets the cause of the poor. The people are always of foremost importance. Government, the economy and religion all exist for the sake of the people. They are means to bring happiness to the people. When the means become the end, society’s ruin has begun.

What is greatness? Is it to belong to the aristocracy? To be a member of parliament? To have a fancy education? Prime Minister Major struggled against such notions and those who held them, and he won.

Is the fact that he became prime minister the sign of his victory? No. His victory is proven by the fact that he has sought to translate into action his determination never to become the sort of person who looks down on those who have fewer advantages.

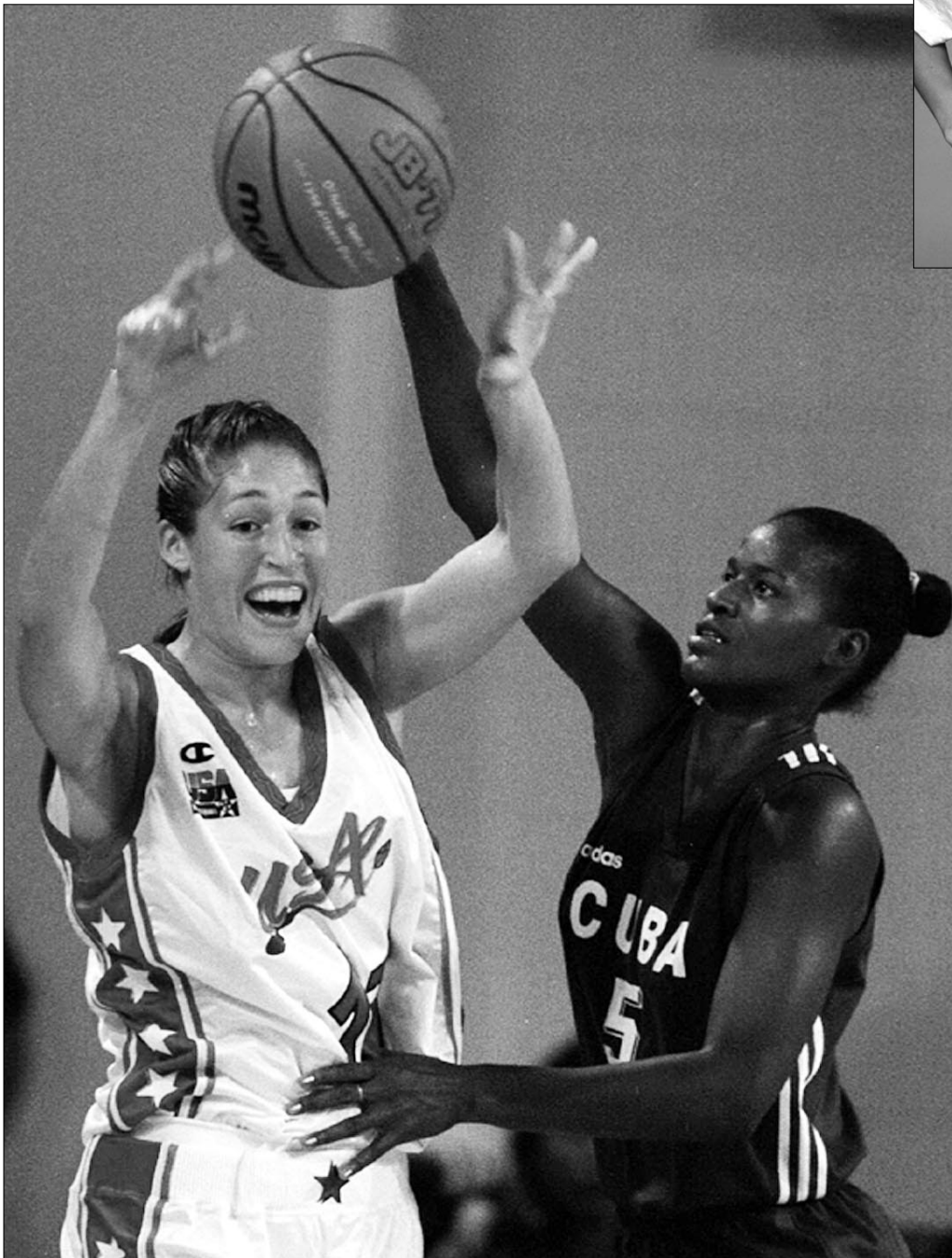
When I asked him what books had recently made an impression on him, he first replied that there were several, and then he mentioned *The Crowthers of Bankdam*, by Thomas Armstrong, the story of the bitter struggles of a family working in a cotton mill in 19th-century Yorkshire. The lives of ordinary people, it seemed, were never far from his mind. ❏

1. Nesta Wyn Ellis, *John Major* (London: Futura Publications, 1991), p. 118.

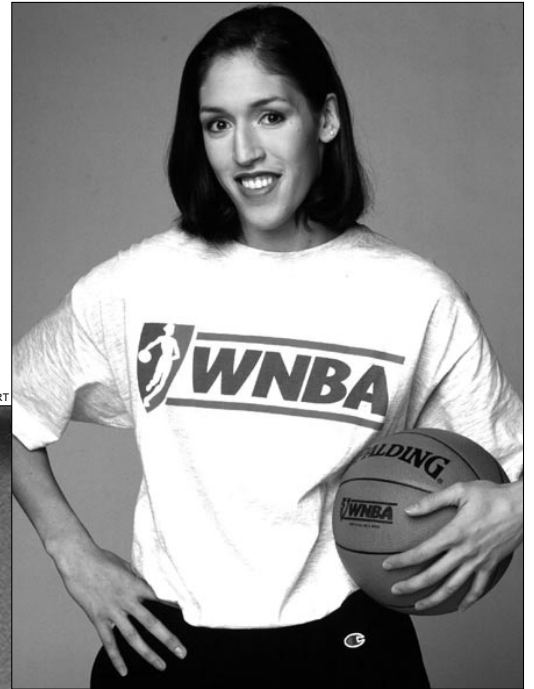
2. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 361.

PLAYING A PIVOTAL ROLE



Rebecca Lobo (l) of the USA passes the ball as she gets pressure from Tania Seino of Cuba during the 1996 Olympics.



Rebecca Lobo poses in WNBA apparel. That league will begin play in the summer of 1997.

By **JEFF FARR**
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Rebecca Lobo has always wondered about her future. Until recently, there weren't many opportunities in America for a woman who wants to play professional basketball. She even thought of relocating to Europe.

But then the New York franchise of the WNBA—the Women's National Basketball Association—made her an offer she couldn't refuse. She'll be playing professional basketball in New York City, in Madison Square Garden no less, beginning this summer. To a 23-year-old who loves inspiring other young people through her sport, and who loves the Big Apple, it's a dream come true.

"She's a great ballplayer, a great person, she relates well to young people," New York franchise Vice President and General Manager Carol Blazejowski recently told *Newsday*. "She's a terrific role model and she's very inspirational and she enjoys it. Kids are our future and she'll be pivotal in that role."

The WNBA, which debuts in June, is targeting girls 7 to 17, according to Val Ackerman, the former University of Virginia forward who is now the WNBA's president. Rebecca Lobo, a role model for that age group, will indeed play a pivotal role in the new league's success or failure.

Her career at the University of Connecticut and her performance at the 1996 Olympics are already the stuff of legends—but can she take women's basketball to the next level? Women's basketball leagues have folded before; only time will tell if the Age of Women has come to professional basketball. Rebecca Lobo thinks it has. ■

TEEN TIMES

A SPECIAL PULLOUT SECTION OF THE 'WORLD TRIBUNE'

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

#7, March 21, 1997



Learning From New Friends

On Jan. 21, local Los Angeles high school division members held an exchange meeting with 40 Soka High School students visiting from Japan. This was one of the last scheduled activities for the exchange students, who, despite a busy two-week schedule, were amazingly bright and cheerful. We learned about some surprising differences in the way teenagers experience school and daily activities in Japan compared to our system in the United States. After a truly wonderful and memorable activity, which included gongyo, snacks, dialogue, songs, exchange of names and addresses, and a "human tunnel" finale, we all left full of appreciation at having this great opportunity to make some new friends.

Granada Hills, Calif.

When I first got there, I was kind of nervous. We did gongyo. I was surprised at how powerful their chanting was. When we were chanting I couldn't keep up and apparently the student next to me noticed. He told the person in front of him and then that person told the person in front of him and then that person told the person who was leading gongyo and on "C" we slowed down. I was thinking to myself they couldn't slow down for me, they don't even know me — but sure enough that's the reason they slowed down.

After gongyo some people intro-

By JOSHUA ANKER

PLEASE SEE EXCHANGE, D

Impressions from Soka High School Exchange Students:

Because this was my first trip to America, I was very excited about learning and experiencing new things. To my surprise, I believe that I have actually grown up more than ever. I have had the wonderful opportunity to meet many, many great people and friends. I feel like I have been infused with more positive energy and power from them. And thanks to my many new friends here in America, my vision, my mind, and my heart have been opened.

From this trip, I can directly compare Japan and America. From my perspective as a Japanese, America is so big! Going back to Japan, I know I will think Japan is small now. Overall, I can see Japan's good points and bad points more clearly now from my trip. And I can see America's good points and bad points.

Finally, I learned that all of us have the ability to contribute to our world's communication among cultures. We have to improve ourselves, not

only in the economic field, but in our ability to help one another in all areas. The heart-to-heart, person-to-person connections are the most important things in this world.

— Teruko Kudo

I have thoroughly enjoyed my 10-day stay here at Soka University of America. I have met so many different people who have really opened my eyes to different ways of thinking. People are different in many ways: their personalities, clothing styles, attitude and looks! But everyone has been so nice to us.

There have been many things that encouraged me during my stay here, and I have thought much about my dreams and goals for my future. While I don't know exactly what I will be doing in the future, my experience here in the United States has awakened in me a global sense of mission. I definitely want to be a woman who can work for world peace.

— Sumiko Koike

This year, the youth division has one set of guidelines (see the Dec. 27, 1996, issue of the *World Tribune*) for everyone rather than separate ones for the young men's division, the young women's division or the junior high and high school divisions as has been done in the past. We strongly feel that, in order to carry forward into the 21st century with solid unity, all of us should focus on the same guidelines, even though we conduct different activities. And as we direct our attention specifically toward the junior high and high school divisions, our determination is that the development of our teenagers is the development of our youth and the future of our country.

About the 1997 Youth Division Guidelines

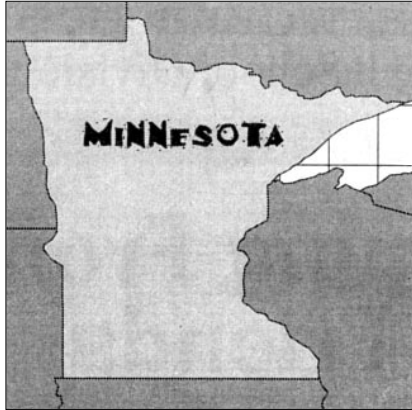
our youth and the future of our country.

This single set of guidelines is part of an ongoing attempt to unify the youth division and stress the importance of recognizing the junior high and high school divisions as integral parts of the SGI-USA youth division. This issue is addressed directly in the guideline "Develop the New Generation":

We need to plan well and communicate honestly with the men's and women's divisions while coordinating carefully

PLEASE SEE GUIDELINES, D

What's Happening in the Midwest Joint Territory



Not Being Swayed

By Niki Steed



Although I love this religion and how we get results so fast, I get angry about what the world thinks we do. When Hanukkah started, everyone on my bus decided it would be fun to tease me because they thought I celebrated Hanukkah — all they knew was that I'm in a different religion.

All of my life I have been proud that I'm a Buddhist, but it can be hard when you share it with others. Some people think it is neat, and they want to learn more about Buddhism. Others just think it is fun to say things like "Devil worshipper" or "Is there a big gold statue in your house?"

When I was in kindergarten we had show-and-tell day, and I brought my prayer beads. My teacher thought they were a necklace or a bracelet. Since I was only 5, I couldn't understand how my teacher, the smartest person in the world, didn't know what they were.

Sometimes I ignore comments people make. Other times I get mad, and I want people to listen. I think we need to be open in both telling and listening. We must be open both ways. I always listen to other people and their standpoints, but I find many people do not listen. They simply judge.

Experience

By Katie Christensen

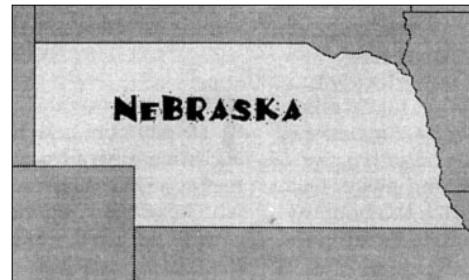


Hello! My name is Katie Christensen and I have a recent experience about a movie I was in. I got to be in a movie called *Citizen Ruth*. After I found out that I had gotten the part, I went to the studio and met Laura Dern, who played my mom. A month later I went to the filming of the movie and it was fun. Burt Reynolds was also in the film. The director, who is from Nebraska, filmed the movie here in Omaha. The movie came out on Dec. 13, 1996.

The movie is about abortion.

It's ironic that I got the part because when my mom was pregnant with me she was encouraged to have an abortion. Her parents felt she shouldn't have another baby, but my mom insisted on having me. When I was born I was premature and had many health problems. My mom chanted 1 million daimoku so that I would get better. But, during this, my mom had heart failure and my grandparents had to help raise me.

This movie reminded my family of how everything has changed. My grandparents do not believe in abortion now. I am grateful for their support, and I am glad my mom chose to have me. I love her very much.



Poem

By Gene Mahoney
Omaha, Neb.

*This place used to be a landmark of my youth
a salvation place of the outside world
where I played and fantasized
i glance at it and see what it became
i turn around and walk away
i have other things to attend to.*



Members of Midwest Joint Territory junior high and high school divisions express themselves at the Omaha Community Center.

What's Happening in the Midwest Joint Territory


From 'Tractor Town'

By Lindsey Eddy

Hello, everyone!! My name is Lindsey Eddy and I'm from "Tractor Town," Lincoln, Neb.!!! I am, though, to your surprise, a normal, corn-pickin' 14-year-old. I enjoy seeing my friends on weekends. Our favorite thing to do is to hang out in the chicken coop and play horseshoe!

Many people say that people in the Midwest just plow, spit and eat corn. Well, you're exactly right! I can't wait till I get my new pair of cowboy boots and high-water jeans!! Well, I'll talk to you later, and remember that without the Midwest where would you get all your veggies?

Seriously, many of you out there probably think that people in the Midwest are farmers. We are just like you! We like to hang out with our friends, go see movies, go to dances, etc.

Practicing here is different in that there are not as many members as in other places. But we are very close. Most of us have grown up together — we are like family. There are a lot of nice people here of all ages to practice with. You can talk to anyone and they will care. So, if you come for a visit, you will see that us "corn pickers" are compassionate for others — although corn comes first!! (Just kidding!!!) 




Joe Burge (r) and friend.

Ice Skating Trip


By Joe Burge

For our last meeting we went ICE SKATING!!! It was a lot of fun. I had never gone ice skating before. I only fell once. I brought my friend Brandon. My dad came along — he fell, too!

Here in Iowa, we study and we love to create plays. A lot of us have an interest in theater so we create a lot of skits and plays. We went on a field trip to an art center. We do slow gongyo at our meetings, and we invite any adult who is just learning to join us so we all can learn together! Last month we drove to Omaha, Neb., to join them for a meeting. It was about a three-hour drive. It was fun! 



Acting

Hi! I'm Georgie Steed. One thing I love to do is act. I'm now in a play at the Omaha Playhouse and I've also been in a few local commercials. Nebraska is VERY cold right now. The other day it was -12 degrees. The Midwest may be considered boring to some, but we get out of school because of the winter here. 



Poem

By Gene Mahoney
Omaha, Neb.

*Space is infinite
In a big round continuum
I am the center*



Midwest Joint Territory junior high and high school division members on a sunny winter day in front of the Omaha Community Center.



What Do You Answer When Someone Asks 'Don't You Believe in God?'

By BRIAN HOLLY

Faculty member
University of Philadelphia

Have you ever been asked,

"DON'T YOU BELIEVE IN GOD???"

I have been asked this question many, many times by friends, family, co-workers, students and guests at discussion meetings. I'd like to share with you some of the ideas I've developed over the years about answering this question.

When we talk to our friends about Buddhism, it is only natural that they try to understand what we say in terms of the religious ideas familiar to them.

In their minds, religion is about *God*, even though they may not be very clear about what that word means.

When they discover that the concept of *God* plays no role in Buddhism, they may have many different reactions.

Some may be pleased; many will be surprised, and a few even

shocked.

Our friends with strong Christian faith may wonder how we can be moral without divine commandments and the threat of heaven and hell to back them up. Or they may fear that we have no spiritual center to our lives without a personal relationship with the divine.

To reply to our friends' questions, we need to know two things: First, we need to know how Buddhism differs from religions that focus on *God* (such as Christianity, Judaism and Islam). Without a solid foundation in study, our answers may only mislead our friends.

Second, we need to know what our friends are really asking. In the course of our heart-to-heart dialogue, we must use our wisdom to truly understand what our friends' underlying concerns are and answer them appropriately.

TO BE CONTINUED IN THE NEXT ISSUE
OF 'TEEN TIMES'

GUIDELINES, FROM PAGE A

with one another — young men's, young women's, junior high, high school and student divisions alike. An atmosphere of friendship and teamwork within the youth division makes all our activities more exciting and attracts young people. Our efforts should always be to cooperate, not compete, with one another. To continue developing the next generation of youth leaders,

let's also:

- use President Ikeda's dialogue with the high school division leaders as a source of encouragement;
- and use the "Teen Times" carried in the *World Tribune* to reach our young members.

So this year, let's really work together with the whole youth division to create the most encouraging activities for everyone!!!

EXCHANGE, FROM PAGE A

duced themselves, then someone gave a short experience.

After we settled down, the American students introduced themselves. We then broke into smaller groups.

At first the Japanese students introduced themselves. Then we talked about sports and school. They were very friendly. A lot of people were trying out their English.

In Japan they rarely have homework, but they do have school on Saturday. Also movie tickets cost \$15. When I told them

it was only \$4.50 here, they all *oohed*. After the discussion groups, we took pictures. People were giving their addresses so I could write to them.

Then they sang a song and gave us some gifts and we took more pictures.

As we were leaving I noticed that a lot of the Japanese students had gone outside.

When I opened the door they were making a tunnel for us to walk through, and they were all cheering. It was really fun, and I hope I have a chance to go to Japan.

By MIKE BYNUM
Santa Monica, Calif.

Some Thoughts on March 16, 1958

Whenever we talk about March 16, its history and significance, images spring to my mind of young people from all over gathering at the head temple, full of anticipation. Included were Brass Band members, Fife and Drum Corps members, and scores of teenagers. I think that many of them undoubtedly were wondering what was going on, and why were they being asked to come to the head temple on this cold and bitter morning. Actually, they had been informed that, in celebration of the completion of the Grand Lecture Hall, the prime minister of Japan was going to be there.

As the attendance grew, finally totaling 6,000, I can picture President Toda standing up to address the youth, despite suffering from severe illness. In the end, the prime minister could not make it, though his wife and son-in-law attended on his behalf. And this auspicious event, which probably lacked the magnificence and formality of a grand ceremony, became the memorable occasion where President Toda entrusted

the youth with the accomplishment of *kosen-rufu*. Their determination as disciples to share the vision of *kosen-rufu* of their mentor is what makes this ceremony timeless for me.

It was only seven years earlier, in July 1951, that the Soka Gakkai's young men's and young women's divisions were formed. Four months later, in November 1951, President Toda wrote an essay that later came to be known as "Precepts for Youth." I am always struck by the strictness with which President Toda encourages the youth in these precepts. It is as if he wanted to stress the importance of always maintaining a strict attitude toward our practice and obstacles, and to clear up any doubt that our attitude should be anything less than serious.

More than anything else, at a time when the youth division was just formed, the "Precepts for Youth" encouraged the members of the young men's and young women's divisions to have a mission. Not just any goal or target, but to engrave within their hearts the confidence that they were walking

the same path as the youthful disciples of Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin, who were all young students. And as such, their determination should not be any less than their predecessors. Only by cherishing this mission deep in their hearts could the youth grow and develop, overcoming all obstacles.

Along with this, in his current dialogue series with the Soka Gakkai high school division chiefs, President Ikeda warns us to be wary of the dangers of betrayal. I was very encouraged when President Ikeda stated that his deepest hope is for his true successors to emerge from among the next generation of youth (Nov. 1, 1996, *World Tribune*, p. 10).

But then he immediately talks about former members whom he sincerely trusted and encouraged, yet ended up turning against him and their fellow members, consumed by their selfish desires. He further states that such people are not limited to the past or only to the world of Buddhism.

Because of this, President Toda wrote that we should continue to advance, stepping over the bodies of those who have abandoned their

faith. I strongly feel that this statement is a plea from presidents Toda and Ikeda for us not to compromise with evil.

And this convinces me even more that the spirit behind the "Precepts for Youth" is very much alive and applicable today.

To get to the point where the Soka Gakkai youth could gather 6,000 participants at the head temple on March 16, seven years after "Precepts for Youth," they had to face numerous challenges.

And in overcoming each one, I'm sure that they developed many true friendships among themselves as they struggled together for those seven years. I sometimes feel that, in a way, March 16 was a victory celebration of friendship and unity, culminating in the passing of the torch.

One of our main goals in the junior high and high school divisions is to develop these kinds of solid friendships with one another. Without being swayed by the various negative forces that constantly try to bring us down, we do our best to encourage one another. If we fall, we stand back up again and re-determine. We keep moving forward, taking care of our present responsibilities without losing sight of the future.