

World Tribune

No. 3136

THE YEAR OF ADVANCEMENT TOWARD THE NEW CENTURY

APRIL 25, 1997

Photos by GREGORY NAKASUJI

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Festival Brings Out Volunteers' Best

By **PATTY JACOBS**

CORRESPONDENT

Las Vegas, April 13

More than 1,200 people clapped, stomped, hooted, hollered, ate exotic food and enjoyed the 1st Las Vegas Spring Family Festival. The carefully planned event was held in peaceful Lorenzi Park, in the heart of the city. Las Vegas took to heart the spirit to make friends of the SGI by going out into the community.

The members decided to put on this Spring Family Festival, but no one knew exactly how to do it. Nevertheless, the commitment was made and the whole Las Vegas SGI-USA community put its prayer, talent, energy and desire into making it a success.

Visitors, including two busloads of SGI members from Los Angeles, and Las Vegas SGI members were greeted by a large banner surrounded by balloons.

Mayor Pro Tem Arnie Adamsen said he really appreciated the festival's warm family atmosphere. "Our community needs more events of this type," he said. "I wish you well."

City of Las Vegas Councilman Matthew Callister and his wife and daughter also attended



Locals enjoy Las Vegas' Lorenzi Park and an SGI festival, a first for the territory and the volunteers who organized it.

the festival. He was amazed at the diversity of the organization and said: "What a bright spirit. I am pleasantly surprised by the way people are conducting themselves."

What the councilman didn't know is that more than 300 people in Las Vegas Territory were involved in making the event a success. Most of them worked behind the scenes, like Jeddie Kemuku.

Being involved in the behind-the-scenes activities has created a stronger SGI community, Ms. Kemuku said. "I was asked to get involved in Byakuren, and I

PLEASE SEE FESTIVAL, 4



Coping With Stress Is a Matter of Attitude

A research psychologist tells an audience at the Phoenix Culture Center that our perceptions dictate how we handle everyday stress.

By **JAN RUTKOWSKI**

CORRESPONDENT

Phoenix, March 30

"Do you have some kind of stress?" That's how a seminar on health and stress started at the Phoenix Culture Center today. The audience response was a roar of laughter. And SGI members and guests laughed for the next hour. Of course stress does

not always make people laugh, but Dr. Kimio Hashimoto's cheerful presentation gave both an informative and humorous perspective on our perception of stress in daily life.

"Our perception is the key factor in our experience of stress," said Dr. Hashimoto. "Stress is a neutral word. We experience stress as negative or positive."

Dr. Hashimoto, a professor at Kyushu University in Japan, is studying psychology at Arizona State University. He is also a member of the Soka Gakkai scholars division and is in the United States to set up a joint project between Kyushu Uni-

versity and ASU. He agreed to present some of his research at the culture center before he returns to Japan in June.

Dr. Hashimoto focuses on stress and health rather than stress and disease. One aspect of his talk was what to do with accumulated stress. According to Dr. Hashimoto's research, people in different cultures deal with stress differently, as do men and women. American men, for example, talk a lot more than Japanese men to cope with stress, he said.

"Actually, the mechanics of stress in our daily lives is something with which everyone is familiar," Dr. Hashimoto ex-

plained. "Our whole environment can be considered a collection of stressors in the form of not-so-good human relationships, accidents or an illness. Again, it's our perception of these events that is significant. If we perceive those events as negative, the effect can be revealed physically as well as emotionally."

A chart clarified the process of stress perception. If a life event or stressor is big, then our cognitive appraisal will be big, and consequently our experience of stress is big. Also, a small stressor is interpreted cogni-

PLEASE SEE STRESS, 5

VOICES

What do you focus on when you chant daimoku — and how do you keep yourself focused?

Members from Washington, D.C., Joint Territory respond:



It is very easy to lose focus, but I either focus on world peace or continuously on "I am the Buddha of absolute freedom." When I am faced with a crucial moment my focus is to never give up or "I better not be defeated."

— MARVA TELEMAQUE, Silver Spring, Md.



I focus on myself, my activities, my family and friends. Chanting gives me courage and energy to understand and to take action in my daily life. I stay focused through prayers and determinations to change and connect my life with Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

— YOLA JEAN-GILLES, Germantown, Md.



What helps me is knowing my goals will be realized through chanting daimoku. Anything is possible with the Gohonzon. Knowing this is the impetus to keep me chanting.

— ROBERT AKINSEHINA, 15, Silver Spring, Md.



I focus on my desire to teach peace with my life. As an artist I offer deep appreciation for my talents and skills. In addition, I offer prayers that my creations serve as medicine that heals Earth and all of her children.

— RUTHIE CARROLL, Washington, D.C.



I focus on my Buddha nature while chanting. To stay focused I start chanting for my friends and fellow members who are presently suffering. When someone I care about forgets that they have a Buddha nature it makes me remember my mission to chant for the happiness of others and that their happiness is my happiness.

— MARY JO GALLAGHER, Silver Spring, Md.



My main focus is my school work and grades. While I'm chanting I picture papers with A's on them and report cards with straight A's. I also chant for the happiness of my family, and I picture my ideal family in front of the Gohonzon.

— NONI PEARSON, 15, Silver Spring, Md.

I focus on the characters *myoho* on the Gohonzon. I try to fuse my Buddha life with the Gohonzon. I think about my goals and dreams first, then I just chant to become one with the Gohonzon. If my mind starts to wander I refocus on the *myoho* characters and once again remind myself of my goals, my family and the members. I want to become happy.

— JANICE WATCH, Silver Spring, Md.

Expanding Our Ability To Care

EDITORIAL

Expansion is the first of the six challenges General Director Zaitzu shared at the start of this year. Certainly it expresses the essential purpose and intent of Buddhism. The term *kosen-rufu*, literally "to widely declare and spread broadly," suggests an expanding movement of dialogue to broaden understanding of the law of life that Buddhism teaches.

Human revolution, too, is expansion. The Lotus Sutra symbolizes expansion with the emergence of a grand and majestic treasure tower, representing the supreme potential of our lives, from the Earth, representing our mundane limitations.

Josei Toda, the second Soka Gakkai president, characterized human revolution as an expansion of the sphere of our personal perspective and concern from that which encompasses simply our own happiness or that of our immediate family to that which embraces and includes the happiness of friends, acquaintances, community, nation and the world.

In that sense, human revolution is an expansion of our capacity to care. How many people can we care for, how deeply do we care, and how consistently can we act to support them and to help them reveal the treasure tower within? Herein lies the basic groundwork for *kosen-rufu*.

Growth is generally a desirable proposition. Economists view a growing economy as a positive sign. A child who steadily grows makes his or her parents happy and full of pride. Personal growth is something most people want to achieve.

When faced with the opportunity for growth, however, not all groups or individuals can easily achieve it. Several things may happen: First, no growth or expansion may take place. If we are constructing a building, for example, we need a good blue print, a solid budget, a workable timetable, a commitment to get it done, and a good team of dedicated, capable people. Without these elements, the designer's drawing may continue to hang on our wall, but we will never enjoy a 10th-floor view.

Second, expansion might take place, but it may be wild and uncontrolled, lacking a real foundation or sustaining substance. Any progress with-

out a solid basis is bound to regress. Back to the building: If our aim is merely to finish the job quickly and cheaply, without concern for the safety, convenience, health and well-being of the occupants far into the future, then the consequences can be catastrophic. Any expansion that comes at the expense of individual happiness, health or well-being is nothing more than a castle built on sand.

The third and ideal option is that healthy growth will take place, that the expansion will benefit and enrich everyone involved and send ripples of value and progress into society. The building, the treasure tower, we construct will then be enduring. Everyone who enters it will feel joy, hope and courage and be inspired to reveal their own treasure towers from within.

On what should we base our expansion? In his treatise "Repaying Debts of Gratitude," Nichiren Daishonin writes: "If Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being..." (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 272). As the Daishonin suggests, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo itself expresses the Buddha's great and encompassing compassion; it is only such compassion that drives the advancement of our humanistic Buddhist movement.

The SGI-USA is now at a crossroads — we are reorganizing by neighborhood, streamlining and solidifying our foundation for fresh development and growth into the new century. Everything hinges on whether each of us takes this opportunity to expand our power and capacity to care, to pray for each person's happiness and growth, so that not a single human treasure falls by the wayside in the process.

As SGI President Ikeda recently said: "Prayer is a struggle to expand one's life. When we sincerely pray, then, without fail, the Buddha wisdom to know how to encourage others will well forth in our lives. Our movement of *kosen-rufu* is an effort to expand this world of encouragement." ☸

Correction

In the caption on p. 12 of the April 11 *World Tribune*, we incorrectly identified Mahatma Gandhi as Indira Gandhi's grandfather. We know better — really, we do. We apologize for any confusion this may have caused and thank the many readers who brought this to our attention.

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**WORLD TRIBUNE
MAILBOX**

Gender Difference, Not Bias

In reply to John S. Rajeski's letter in the March 28 issue: Young men do not get pregnant. Their "insistent advances" therefore do not put them in the same category of risk as they do women. There is no gender bias here, only the fact of real gender differences. I am always pleased and impressed that SGI President Ikeda courageously deals with issues that are "touchy," and that he does so with much diplomacy and respect for human dignity. Read more carefully, John.

— JOY HAMPTON, Norman, Okla.

Spousal Abuse Is Not 'Extremely Rare'

I was offended by the blatant ignorance in Robin Beck's uninformed and outrageous statements in the March 21 "Mailbox" regarding spousal abuse. I was struck by what I perceived to be a prejudicial attitude and a strong sense of divisiveness in the remarks that certain types of lifestyles and relationships invite spousal abuse....

Spousal battery is not "extremely rare" and crosses all economic, social, racial and religious barriers. I am a survivor of domestic abuse by my ex-husband. I grew up in a caring family with a strong ethical and moral foundation. My marital status was monogamous, heterosexual (which seems to be such an important issue for Mr. Beck), with no former children by myself or ex-partner. There is no typical batterer or battered spouse — and Robin Beck's convoluted reasoning for "root causes" of domestic abuse has its roots in irresponsible reporting based on an obvious lack of correct information....

There are many courageous and decent women all over this country who have survived or are in the process of extricating themselves from domestic violence. They are, like Tina Turner, shining examples of the human spirit.

June Cleaver only exists on black-and-white film. The greatest examples of human strength and dignity rise up like the phoenix from the real-life struggles and pain of ordinary human beings. There are no convenient little boxes you can stuff people into to satisfy a concept of "normal." To imply that an abused person lacks character is a myopic view and, for all intents and purposes, a form of bigotry.

The statement was made about the "obvious bias against traditional marriage." It seems Robin Beck has a bias about who the battered women in our society are. It would be just as ridiculous to say that the only drug problems exist with the poor, uneducated and in the inner city.

One need only to visit a battered women's shelter or local library to learn that domestically abused woman have many faces and come from diverse backgrounds.

The reason we chant and practice this Buddhism is not to criticize or pass judgment about what we find upsetting or distasteful — but to change it, thereby changing ourselves.

— ELLEN LEGER, Lexington, Mass.

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

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

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

'I Cried Today'

PERSPECTIVE

By **DIXON HAMBY**
FEDERAL WAY, WASH.

I cried today. It may not seem like a big deal to you, but crying comes to me about as often as we elect a president.

I started out with my normal weekend routine. Up early. Gongyo. A morning run. It's spring and I could hear the red-winged blackbirds singing as I passed by the wetlands. Then cereal and the newspaper. First, the important stuff. The sports section. Had to read about the Mariners' win. Then the technology section. How much more of the world does Microsoft own?

Next, the front page. I glanced down and there it was, that picture again. You've all seen it. The naked, running Vietnamese girl. Beneath it Associated Press writer Anne Gearan writes: "Phan Thi Kim Phuc's family had taken refuge in a pagoda, which took a direct hit. Two brothers died instantly. The napalm burned her clothes, and she ran screaming...."

Then the article. It tells of John Plummer who ordered the bombing of Tang Bang. Another rain of fire on another faceless village. This was the 24-year-old's job. But the next morning he saw the picture. He told Gearan: "It just knocked me to my knees.... And that was when I knew I could never talk about this." John Plummer had been assured there were no civilians in the village.

John went through three marriages and two divorces. Drank too much and tried to forget. Then one day he quit his job with a defense contractor and became a minister. But there was no avoiding the photo. What John needed was to be forgiven. Well, he got that when he finally met Kim and fell into her arms sobbing. And she told him: "It's all right. I forgive. I forgive."

I was a young man in 1965 when I received my draft notice and joined the Air Force. Friends died. Friends killed and parts of them died. As a Vietnam veteran friend of mine told me, after a year of killing, nothing was ever the same.

The piece of paper said Sgt. Hamby report to Da Nang Air Force Base, Vietnam. I had felt enough of war and refused. I went home instead. But I still have blood on my hands and have felt guilt over abandoning those who went.

"Nothing is more barbarous than war. Nothing is more cruel" (*The Human Revolution*,



I have seen that when men of different races and cultures see others cry, there is a change in their hearts. The sharing of grief is more powerful than any argument, logic or gun. My experience is that when you see another man reveal the depth of his grief, you see him and all men differently and recognize the heavy burden that mistrust and hatred creates in your heart.



vol. 1, p. 9). And as Michael Meade writes in *Men and the Water of Life*: "Living at the end of the 20th century is like walking through a great weeping.... All the hopelessness felt about the loss of forests and animal species.... The anguish over lives wasted and shot down on city streets.... The losses that pile up as statistics in news reports about this or that atrocity cannot be carried without the heart turning to stone."

I wish I could cry more, then maybe I wouldn't be so angry. In gongyo we recite: "*Jo e hikan. Shin zui shogo.*" ("Constantly harboring such feelings of grief,

they at last came to their senses....") Mr. Meade writes, "If the head won't bend, the heart won't open, and grief held too long can make a stone of the heart."

Malidoma Some, an African tribesman, once said he was amazed at the amount of grief American men hold. You see, his culture has rituals for grief. It's encouraged. And when men returned from war they went through a cleansing ritual. They knew better than to bring that killing energy back into the village.

Michael Meade observes: "If a man is overwrought with burning heat and inner rage, deep weeping joins him to the sorrow of the world and diminishes that rage. It calms an excess of aggression and cools the heart.... When tears are shared, the stones that might have been thrown at each other become part of the cairns of grief instead." I have seen that when men of different races and cultures see others cry, there is a change in their hearts. The sharing of grief is more powerful than any argument, logic or gun.

My experience is that when you see another man reveal the depth of his grief, you see him and all men differently and recognize the heavy burden that mistrust and hatred creates in your heart.

Fortunately I have the tools to stop repeating my mistakes, gongyo and the Gohonzon; and an organization, the SGI, that is creating a society that no longer sanctifies war. And most important, a master in life. SGI President Ikeda said in February 1990, "Once we awaken to our Buddha nature, we need not be grieved any longer." So let's not be afraid of our tears, for they are the opening of our lives and the pathway to touch others.

There is a proverb: "The elders are wise because they know more dead people." Because of war my generation knows too many dead people, so I say to the young: Never go to war. Never kill. Never let those with political power, talk of the "other" or the false security of a gun lead you astray. Stop. Talk to an elder. Beneath that false pride and anger you will find grief, the opening to your heart. **W**

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Photos by GREGORY NAKAGAWA

FESTIVAL, FROM PAGE 1

didn't know anything about it," she said. "But now that I have been a part of this festival, I see where this is very important. We need to do this annually so that people can come together, stay involved in the organization and help kids stay off the streets and out of trouble. I'm glad I did this."

Ms. Kemuku is a transplanted Hawaiian and was born into the practice, but she said she didn't really have an appreciation for the internal workings of the SGI until she became involved in the young women's division. "My mom was always chanting, and I got bored with that," she said. "But once I started going to YWD activities, I started chanting more and I wasn't bored and getting into trouble. I think there are a lot of kids in Las Vegas who could be involved in an activity like this family festival. It would keep them involved in something positive and help them stay out of trouble."



The Las Vegas Dancers' version of 'Singin' in the Rain' is one of the highlights of the entertainment.

Byakuren and Soka Group members stood at strategic places around the perimeter of the festival to direct traffic and answer questions. Visitors strolled by tables with SGI literature, T-shirts commemorating the festival for sale, a 12-foot scroll being signed by all present to be sent to SGI President Ikeda, a TV tent for viewing a videotape of the SGI president's travels and the Tina Turner-Larry King interview, and booths for games and food.

The Las Vegas members even organized their own security force, thus relieving the City of Las Vegas Marshals and park security company of much of their duties. Las Vegas Marshal David Payne said: "This group took care of everything. Everyone had a good time, and there were no disturbances. This group has such wonderful cooperation. I have never seen so much harmony in one place before. I want to find out more about how they make it happen."

And what about cleanup? Few people like that detail, but SGI member Bert Esquivel did. "I signed up to help with cleanup and the next thing I know they tell me I'm in charge," she said. "It was a big responsibility for me. I never did anything like that, but I had a very strong determination to not get tired and keep going. One of the members of the crew is 76 and has trouble walking, but she just kept cleaning up and never stopped the whole time. She inspired me to



Las Vegas nightclub act Forward Motion closes out the day's event.



The Boys and Girls Group cheers the crowd with their dance number.

keep working. "We started at 8:00 a.m. and, even though the festival finished about 4:00 p.m., we stayed until 5:30, cleaning up the kitchen and making sure everything was spotless," she said. "One of the park employees told me that the park kitchen had never been this clean before. It felt good to be a

part of something important like the festival."

The games, only 25 cents each for children, were made and staffed by SGI-USA members. One game that always had a crowd of children around it was the Wheel of Fortune, a table-top model of the wall-mounted casino game. But this



The American Victory Orchestra came from Los Angeles to support.

is Las Vegas, so it isn't unusual to see a game of chance as the favorite. Las Vegas SGI member Charles Bell bought the materials and built the Wheel of Fortune. "I wanted to do something special for the children," he said. "I'm glad it was so popular."

The center of attraction for the whole festival was the en-

tertainment, which looked like the United Nations. "Diversity" is Las Vegas Territory's middle name, and it showed in the lineup of entertainers. The Boys and Girls Group, junior high and high school divisions and youth divisions each had hip-hop and

PLEASE SEE FESTIVAL, NEXT PAGE

Coping With Stress Is a Matter of Attitude, Researcher Says

Photo by GEORGE NAKAMURA

STRESS, FROM PAGE 1

tively as small, and the resultant stress is small. However, there are individuals who sometimes perceive small stressors as big stressors. (Many of the audience laughed self-consciously at this point.)

Conversely, there are some who are so spaced out that the really big stressors are interpreted as small. Dr. Hashimoto joked that "some of these people may be leaving us soon."

Dr. Hashimoto also covered stress and peak performance. He showed that there is an optimal level of stress that our lives can handle.

"If the experience of stress becomes extreme we may become emotionally shaky, have various mishaps or even an accident," Dr. Hashimoto said. "On the other hand, if our stress is too low, we may feel bored and not able to perform well either. It is important for each of us to understand the balance and to bring out our inherent strengths to perform at the optimal level."

How can people deal with stress? The professor showed three main coping mechanisms: First people can eliminate the stressor.

For example, if someone is making a loud noise you can move away from them. However,



Dr. Hashimoto (l) gives a simple demonstration during his talk on stress.

if your boss is the source of the stress, you cannot easily move to a different job. "The problem with this coping response is that it is totally dependent on external factors," he said.

The second coping mechanism also uses externals. Activities such as eating, shopping, drinking, even exercising do not fundamentally relieve stress.

"We're like a mouse chased by a cat," he said. "We are always running away from the stress."

So how can we change the way we perceive stress? "Positive or forward thinking can help," he said. "Some companies offer training classes to help people become more positive in their thinking, but it is difficult to become forward-looking or

positive. If a serious life event occurs, you can be positive temporarily. For example, you can tell yourself 'I'm going to use this to grow,' or 'I'm going to

handle this.'"

But Dr. Hashimoto said that the attitude to use stress positively needs to be felt from within. "This is possible with a life philosophy that enables us to actually live like this," he said. "The Buddhist concept of good friends and the process of chanting allows people to deal with any stressors in life as growth opportunities. Daimoku allows us to strengthen our life determination."

He proposed to the audience that by having a big dream in life they could eliminate a lot of stress. He likened this to surfing. The surfer is exhilarated by the biggest waves. "Take advantage of the waves and have a good time," he said. "Have the atti-

tude that you want to challenge your big life stressors."

Dr. Hashimoto closed by saying, "Let's encourage one another to overcome stress in our lives so we can experience life like high-flying eagles." He emphasized SGI President Ikeda's view of problems: Suffering is there for us to overcome; problems are there for us to become strong; and faith is there for us to create victory.

Dr. Hashimoto talked informally with some participants after the seminar. Someone expressed appreciation for the good laughs the professor's talk generated. Another joked about the old folk remedy, "Laughter is the best medicine."

Everyone laughed. W

FESTIVAL, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

didn't know anything about it," she said. "But now that I have been a part of this festival, I see where this is very important. We need to do this annually so that people can come together, stay involved in the organization and help kids stay off the streets and out of trouble. I'm glad I did this."

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The Las Vegas members even

The 1st Annual 'World Tribune' Essay Contest

THEME: *Human Diversity*

CATEGORIES: *Elementary School; Junior High; High School; College/University; Open (All Ages)*

The World Tribune invites all members to share their thoughts on one of the most important subjects of our day: human diversity. There are so many different kinds of people in our country. Whether we differ in our race, our gender, our size, our background or our sexual orientation, we all share one thing: We are all human. What joys have you experienced in celebrating this diversity? What have you learned about yourself when you've met someone different from you? What prejudices have you faced? What needs to change in ourselves and in our country so we can rise above prejudice and discrimination?

We are looking for short, personal essays no more than 750 words long addressing these questions and any other ideas you have on human diversity. A special committee will judge the essays on the quality of writing as well as on clarity and originality. The top three finishers in each category will have their essays published in the World Tribune. Plaques and other non-cash prizes will be awarded to the top three finishers.

To Enter: Send your essay (double-spaced, typed) to "Essay Contest," World Tribune, 525 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA, 90401. Indicate which category you are entering. Only one entry per person. Include a self-addressed stamped envelope. All essays become the property of the World Tribune. Any essays not double-spaced and typed or exceeding 750 words will not be considered.

DEADLINE: JUNE 30, 1997

Children's WORLD

Arron Rose Kay Arnold, 7,
Camp LeJeune, NC

I have been a member of the SGI since I was born. I was finishing my bath when my gold ring went down the drain. I screamed and cried because this was the ring that my cousin K.C. from the Philippines gave me. I went to the Gohonzon and prayed a whole bunch that my daddy could find it. He went under the house, opened the drain and found my ring. I thanked the Gohonzon for letting us find it. I am glad to be a Buddhist.



The New Human Revolution

By HO GOKU — ILLUSTRATED BY KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Volume 6, Chapter 1

Treasure Land

Translation of parts 9–11 of the ‘Treasure Land’ chapter, as printed in the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper. Ho Goku is the pen name of Daisaku Ikeda, who appears in the novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1962.

I am very happy to meet you all,” Shin’ichi said, gazing at the faces of the Thai members. “You must feel lonely sometimes with so few members here. But please be assured that in the near future, Thailand, along with Hong Kong, will be an important center of our kosen-rufu movement in Southeast Asia. I will do everything in my power to support you.

“We have to leave soon today, but on our way back from visiting Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Greece, Egypt and Pakistan, we will return to Bangkok for an overnight stopover. So let’s hold a discussion meeting at that time.”

The central figure of the Thai women’s division, Anne Miyako Raiz, smiled happily and said: “There are currently 21 households practicing in Bangkok. I’ll contact those who aren’t here today and make sure they attend.”

“There’s no need to pressure everyone into coming,” Shin’ichi said. “Just those who can make it will be fine.”

Noticing that she was wearing a maternity dress, he inquired, “Pardon my asking, but you’re expecting a baby soon, aren’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Please go easy on yourself, too. Make sure that you get plenty of rest so that you can give birth to a happy, healthy baby.

“Let me add that it is absolutely important to avoid placing unreasonable demands on the members or behaving in a manner that offends or causes misunderstanding. Here, in a country where the Gakkai is unknown, people will form impressions about our organization based only on your attitude and behavior. If your speech or conduct lacks courtesy or common sense, people will conclude that this is what the Soka Gakkai and the Daishonin’s Buddhism are all about.

“So it’s important to exercise wisdom and good sense in pursuing your Buddhist practice, taking into account this country’s culture, customs and traditions. If the Soka Gakkai comes to be perceived in this society as extreme or antisocial, it will set our movement here back 10 or 20 years.

“Leaders must act responsibly. It’s only natural that we are enthusiastic in our activities. But if we think that’s enough, then all our efforts will just be self-serving. Before we do something, we have to stop and think. We have to reflect carefully on the meaning and possible consequences of our actions. We have to look ahead. In other words, it’s important to use wisdom. And wisdom arises from a strong sense of responsibility.”

Shin’ichi’s greatest concern was that Japanese members living in foreign countries and holding leadership positions might, through lack of thought or consideration, inadvertently cause friction with their local communities. The ones to suffer most in such a case would be the members living in those countries.

Time flew by quickly as Shin’ichi talked with the local members. “Are we all right with time?” Shin’ichi asked one of the youth division leaders accompanying him.

Akira Kuroki looked at his watch and gasped: “My goodness! I’m sorry. It’s almost departure time.”

“Is it? In that case, let’s all meet again at the discussion meeting on our return trip to Thailand,” Shin’ichi said, bidding the local members farewell till the next time.

When Shin’ichi and the others got to the boarding gate, they found the waiting area empty. A clock nearby read the exact time that the flight was scheduled to take off. The party hurried across the tarmac toward the plane, perspiring in the sweltering heat.

Walking briskly with the others, Eisuke Akizuki asked, “The plane won’t take off without us, will it?”

“I’m not sure,” Akira Kuroki replied. “They may be very strict about that sort of thing.”

An airport attendant who saw them approaching the plane signaled them to hurry and they all broke into a run.

“I guess we’ll make it after all,” Yusuke Yoshikawa said.

The moment they boarded the plane, the door closed behind them. It took a while before they could get their breath back.

Youth Division Chief Eisuke Akizuki turned to Shin’ichi and said:

“I or one of the others should have checked the time sooner. I’m very sorry.”

“These things happen,” Shin’ichi said. He added: “Whenever we go abroad, everyone’s so relaxed that we forget who is supposed to be keeping us organized. I guess we’ll always remember coming to Bangkok and having to run a marathon!”

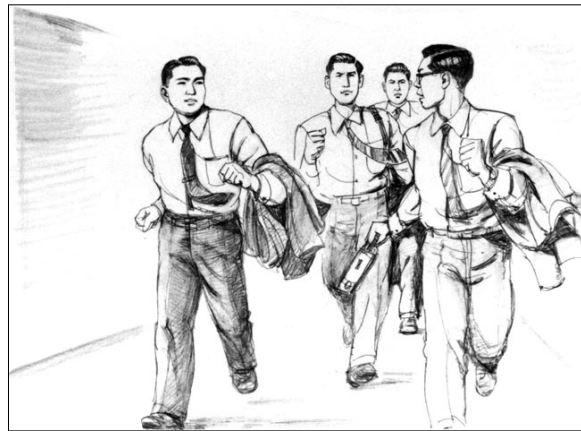
The others joined Shin’ichi in laughter. Failing to keep track of the time had

been a serious oversight. Had the youth division leaders been oblivious to or completely unfazed by their negligence, Shin’ichi no doubt would have strictly pointed it out to them. But he knew they deeply regretted what had happened, so he tried to make them feel better.

One important responsibility of a leader is to guide people in such a way that they will take care not to repeat their mistakes, that they will work with enthusiasm and enjoy what they are doing.

Approximately two-and-a-half hours later, the plane arrived at its next stopover, Calcutta, India.

After a short stopover in Calcutta, the plane continued on its way. In a little more than three hours, they arrived in Karachi, Pakistan, their fourth stopover. From there it was just a short distance to Tehran, the capital of Iran, the first country they were scheduled to visit.



They arrived in Tehran close to 1:00 a.m., Jan. 30. The time difference between Iran and Japan was five-and-a-half hours, which would make it about 6:30 a.m. in Tokyo. That meant roughly 19-and-a-half hours had passed since they left.

Despite the late hour, two people — Yoriko Ueno, a Gakkai member, and her husband, Hideo — had come to the airport to greet Shin’ichi and the youth division

leaders. The couple had moved to the Iranian city because of Hideo’s work. Mr. Ueno was not a Soka Gakkai member, but fully supported his wife’s practice. He happily volunteered to show the visitors around Tehran during their stay.

It was well past 2:00 a.m. when the party finally arrived at their lodging, the Dar Band Hotel. Located on a high plateau at about 3,800 feet above sea level, Tehran at this early morning hour was unexpectedly cold and dry. In the space of a little less than a day since leaving Japan, they had experienced extreme

changes in temperature.

When they rose in the morning, they could see a range of snowcapped mountains in the distance. Shin’ichi stepped out onto the hotel terrace.

Here in Tehran U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin had held their first summit over a four-day period beginning Nov. 28, 1943, at the height of World War II.

Various strategies came out of these talks, later known collectively as the Tehran Conference, including a joint landing by British and American forces in northern France. It was also reconfirmed that the Soviet Union would join the Western Allies in declaring war on Japan after a German surrender had been realized.

The conference was extremely significant in that it largely decided the subsequent direction of the war and the post-war balance of power. Most of the talks were held at the Soviet Embassy, but the Dar Band Hotel was also reportedly used on a number of occasions.

Now, 18 years later, these three countries were divided into two camps. The world was entangled in a new tragedy, the Cold War between East and West in which the United States and the Soviet Union were the key protagonists.

Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had tried to change the course of world history through military strength. Now, Shin’ichi, through the power of the human spirit, aimed to blaze a trail toward harmonious coexistence, the unity among all people and

the realization of lasting peace throughout the world. For this purpose he had come to Tehran, without fanfare or publicity, on the first leg of his Middle Eastern tour.

It was certain to be a long, arduous journey, but this was the road he must travel to fulfill his mission.

(To be continued)

CATHY ANEKE, JERSEY CITY, N.J.

'Life Is the Most Precious Treasure'

I was very surprised and impressed by the people I met at my first Buddhist meeting — a mixed, integrated crowd of confident, friendly people, very united. I decided right then and there to receive the Gohonzon. That was 10 years ago.

I jumped into young women's division activities like Drill Dance and often traveled early in the morning from Staten Island into Manhattan for activities.

I met Festus at college, where I studied social work, and we married soon after graduation. It was a happy time for me: I had a good job in my field and knew my life had grown markedly with the Gohonzon.

My husband was in the military, and we soon transferred to Kansas, where I felt uprooted and lonely. I had trouble with military life and this unfamiliar environment.

Soon, my new marriage was clouded by my uneasiness and negativity. I resented leaving a good job in New York. I felt like a misfit in the military compound. The only job I could get was custodial work, an insult after I had worked so hard to earn my way through college.

Festus, who does not chant, was very patient, kind and supportive, and I then felt a lot of compassion and guilt. I got guidance often and was told to chant to appreciate and support him. That was a turning point in my practice.

I chanted earnestly to make the best of things in Kansas. I got up at 6:00 a.m. every day to sit in front of the Gohonzon. Little by little, things began to feel better. I was learning about both the stand-alone spirit and how to be a good wife — that is, how to really commit to my marriage. It was the crucial foundation for my family life, which made it possible for me to survive what was to come.

After six years, Festus decided military life was not right for him anymore. We came back to New York in high spirits. I returned to my same old Manhattan district with a great sense of reunion. Two weeks later, I found a good job again as a social worker.

Then, almost a year later, I was pregnant. I was confused and downhearted — this was completely unplanned. Festus and I discussed abortion because we did not feel ready.

I chanted a lot about my decision, and gradually came to feel

that this might be my only opportunity to have a child. I developed courage through my daimoku and decided to have the baby.

Five months into the pregnancy, complications with my pregnancy began. My life began to revolve around the many doctor visits — the waiting, the bouts of illness and the uneasy feelings. I chanted mornings, evenings and in between, shuttling back and forth on my daily three-hour commute to work, exhausted.

In mid-August '95, I started having severe back pain. Doctors prescribed total bed rest for a week, and I used the time to chant for my baby. Two days after returning to work, I felt a sudden need to go to the community center to do an extra-powerful evening gongyo. Just as I returned home after that special gongyo, contractions began.

My husband rushed me to the doctor, who told us I was having a miscarriage. Festus passed out on hearing this — I remained calm and helped him. When he revived, I was sent directly to the hospital.

Daimoku had made me calm. I was still leaking fluid and, of course, very troubled, but I felt protected and was not really in pain. I continued chanting — what else was there to do? I would not lose control. I would fight for the baby.

At the hospital, I remained in an elevated, stretched-out position for hours, chanting upside down. Festus stayed up all night with me. The next day, I was still upside down and leaking and now on antibiotics. We had averted the miscarriage, but the baby was still in grave danger. I had to stay in the hospital with strict and absolute bed rest, unmoving, for weeks. I felt paralyzed. I had to face my whole life. I cried often, worried for the baby's life.

To make matters worse, my kindly Dr. Herzog was getting pressured by the hospital administration, who apparently saw no point to his efforts for my baby. At five months, they felt, my baby could in no way survive. It was not worth this extraordinary effort to keep going.

After all I had done to reach my decision not to abort, and then to fight for my baby's survival, now they wanted to force me to abort after all.

But I had the Gohonzon, and my determination grew so

fiercely that it communicated itself to my doctor. He became equally determined to do whatever it took to save the baby's life.

Dr. Herzog decided to transfer me to another hospital, in spite of the risks, where they would be more likely to fight for my baby's life. A mere two hours after the transfer, my water bag finally broke for good. I was terrified, but I kept chanting. I asked my doctor finally, "Am I losing the baby?"

He said, sadly: "Yes, Cathy, you are. But I know you tried."

That whole night, I was in a terrible, hopeless labor. All this agony to give birth to a dead fetus. I was concerned for Festus and did not want him near me in the delivery room to see the dead child being born. But my husband insisted on being with me no matter what. He would face anything now.

Everyone kept telling me how sorry they were that the baby had died, after all my efforts. There was no movement or sound, and the fluid was disgusting. I cried a little, but overall began to feel peace and acceptance and kept chanting through the labor pains.

Dawn came as the labor approached 14 hours. A bit later, something possessed my dear Dr. Herzog to put the fetal monitor back on me "just for the heck of it."

Lo and behold, there came a strong little heartbeat! "THIS CHILD IS STILL ALIVE!" the doctor cried. Everyone around me sprang into action. I was weak; my fever and blood pressure were still climbing. The baby had to be gotten out quickly to save my life as well.

Because of other complications, they opted for a regular delivery, not a Cesarean. I was in a lot of pain and so worried about the baby's condition. Could it possibly live?

When my little girl was born, she was perfectly intact, but she was very small, incredibly small — smaller than a can of soda, less than one pound.

The Neo-natal Intensive Care Unit sent an emergency team of specialists. I asked a passing doctor, "What will happen to my baby?"

"I really don't know," he said. "She's only at 23 weeks, so it looks doubtful..." And then they whisked the little bundle away and wheeled me out in a daze.

I named her Faith. Members visited me in the hospital and called me on the phone, telling me over and over to have strong faith — there wasn't a more ap-



Cathy with daughter, Faith: 'This experience changed the way I view life....'

propriate name for my little precious one.

The NICU director told me that babies like Faith have only a 1 percent chance of survival. I determined 100 percent that my baby would be in that impossible 1 percent. Daimoku gave me strength and courage.

There were nonstop ordeals for a child born 17 weeks ahead of nature's timetable. The hard part for me was that, after all this, I could not hold my baby because of her extreme vulnerability to germs. I could only occasionally poke my sterilized finger through a little hole and whisper daimoku.

My little girl was screaming and suffering, straight jacketed with tubes from head to toe, pumped with fluids and medications, and deprived of human touch and play. Every week brought new life-threatening, heart-stopping scares. She needed all the daimoku that could surround her. Members were sending it from everywhere, I knew.

Festus was working two jobs and totally supported us. He drove me to the hospital whenever he wasn't squeezing in extra shifts to pay for everything. When he was working, I would journey for hours every night to see Faith, with knots in my stomach, not knowing what to expect, facing her endless series of illnesses and infections. Each time, it was life or death.

"WAIT and SEE and PRAY" was my motto for six long, agonizing months. Slowly, she gained a few ounces — two pounds, then three. Finally, one day, incredibly, the doctors said that she could come home. She

had survived. Faith was a proud member of that 1 percent.

Faith turned out to be the earliest, tiniest, most premature baby ever to survive in Staten Island. Because of her, I showed everyone the power of this practice.

This experience changed the way I view life and challenges. A New York newspaper even ran an article about how I "kept the faith" and about the little wonder baby who survived incredible odds.

Faith is now 20 months old and going strong. She has more energy than I do, sometimes. She celebrated her first birthday last fall, happy and healthy and surrounded by friends, children, well-wishers, members and a birthday clown. There are many challenges in everyday life for our family, including financial and health struggles, but we're doing great.

Because of my experience giving birth to Faith, I reawakened my lifelong dream to care for others. This fall, I will begin to study nursing! In this way, I can give back some of the wonderful care I received when I most needed it.

I read Nichiren Daishonin's Goshō "Reply to Kyo'o" with new understanding now. I take special comfort in knowing it was written to encourage another struggling mother of a baby fighting for her young life: "A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith." Another passage that touches me is from "The Gift of Rice": "Life itself is the most precious of all treasures. Even the treasures of the entire universe cannot equal the value of a single human life." ■

Photo by MIKE MULLEN

By JACKIE MATTHEWS AND
RON BAIRD
SAN FRANCISCO CORRESPONDENTS

We felt like we were in a swamp," remembers Jackie Matthews, "but we had to act for kosen-rufu in Vallejo."

For years the Northern California town of Vallejo has suffered from drugs and crime. The recent closure of a large naval base contributed to an economic slump. Over the holidays last December, a terrible murder was committed in a local fast-food restaurant. Then a series of bombings began.

This spurred Vallejo Central District members to continue in their effort to stand up and stop the violence.

It started a year ago, after their traditional Saturday morning gongyo together. The members of Vallejo Central District agreed — they just had to get out there and do something about the violence.

In July they planned a small program in Jackie Matthews' backyard. But when other groups also showed interest, Jackie's backyard became too small. They held their first summer festival on the nearby waterfront. During the festival they watched a crime scene one block away with police cars and helicopters. (See the Nov. 1, 1996, *World Tribune*.)

A second event was planned for this February. "Vallejo residents are starving for this type of program," Roger House said. Chanting together and focusing on encouragement from SGI President Ikeda helped keep their spirits up. The SGI president has said: "Winning people's hearts is the most important thing of all." "The human being is the point to which we must return and from which we must depart anew."



Vallejo Central District members initiate efforts for peace in their strife-torn community.

Stop the Violence

Vallejo Central District Joins With Other Groups To Take Back Their Community

The February event would be held in the John F. Kennedy Library auditorium, with dancers, drummers and performers of all cultures, as well as a presentation of Buddhist books. Fliers invited other groups to join in, and 25 community service organizations responded.

The planning group, initiated by several SGI-USA members, also received support from the Vallejo Cultural Commission, the Arts Foundation, the Chamber of Commerce and the Visitor and Convention Bureau, in addition to newspapers and radio stations. The collective group took the name Friends for a Great Vallejo, based on SGI-USA Women's Division Chief Wendy

Clark's comment in the *World Tribune*, "Let's make a great America!"

When the holiday murder occurred, the district members strengthened their determination. Only two weeks before the festival, 30 sticks of dynamite were found outside the library. Two days later national television reported a bank bombing. Friends for a Great Vallejo realized their event might be canceled due to safety concerns. But the district members refused to succumb and chanted together to reach their goal.

Days later, national news focused on the latest disaster — the Vallejo Courthouse had been bombed. In the face of powerful

negativity, the district focused on the writings of Nichiren Daishonin: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... You should be neither frightened nor influenced by them" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 145). Many district members experienced both a sense of awe and a feeling of joy from their practice.

Four days before the festival, the library received yet another bomb threat. The building was evacuated, but police found nothing. The members continued to chant with the conviction that "nothing will stop our efforts for peace." They invited TV

stations in hopes of positive coverage in the midst of destruction. By week's end the bombers had been caught, thanks to the police department.

On the morning of Feb. 9, a day of victory and magic began. The library bustled with energy and laughter. Rhythms by the young women's division taiko drummers resounded blocks away. The three-hour festival unfolded to a standing-room-only audience. Ten performing groups, many with children, included Mexican folk dancers, Native American drummers, jazz musicians, country singers, Afro-Cuban dancers, gospel performers, and hip-hop dancers. Friends for a Great Vallejo served tea and coffee and signed people up for the next community event. The librarians forgave the noise for the day, as they tapped their feet to the music.

That evening a Bay Area TV newscast began with the words: "There's a lot more in Vallejo than bombs and bullets — Vallejo citizens are fighting back!" Following this intro, several members of Friends for a Great Vallejo were interviewed about the event.

The next events are scheduled for May 10, Vallejo Children's Day, and July 19, which will be a bigger community festival with an entire day of multicultural performances, exhibits by 60 community organizations and food from around the world. President Ikeda's encouragement to reach out to the community and to never give up enables the Vallejo members to keep their dream alive.

"Our dream is that someday Vallejo will be a wonderful place, and we're chanting daimoku behind every move," Jackie says. ❏

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 Thus Come One" (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo in front of the Gohonzon.

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

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

karma: Sanskrit word meaning "action." The life tendency or destiny that each individual creates through thoughts, words and deeds. One's actions in the

past have shaped one's reality at present, and actions in the present

determine in turn one's future. This is the law of cause and effect at work.

kosen-rufu: Literally, to "widely declare and spread (Buddhism)." To secure lasting peace and happiness through the propagation of true Buddhism.

Latter Day of the Law: The period beginning 2,000 years after Shakyamuni's death, when his teachings lose their power and the true Buddha appears to lead all people to enlightenment.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo: The fundamental component of Buddhist practice, which expresses the ultimate truth of life and allows each individual to tap his or her innate enlightened nature directly. Although the deepest meaning of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is revealed only

through the practice of chanting it, there is a literal definition for each of the component words: *nam* (devotion) means to fuse one's life with the universal law; *myoho* (Mystic Law) is the fundamental principle of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations; *rengo* (lotus flower) refers to the lotus, which blooms and seeds at the same time, symbolizing the simultaneity of cause and effect; and *kyo* (sutra, or teaching of a Buddha) broadly indicates all phenomena or the activities of all living beings.

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82): The true Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. *Daishonin* literally means "great sage" and is used as an honorific title for Nichiren. He inscribed the Gohonzon and established the invocation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo as the universal practice to attain Buddhahood.

SIGN POSTS

APPLYING
NICHIREN
DAISHONIN'S
WRITINGS TO
DAILY LIFE

It's Simple

By CRAIG GREEN

SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION STUDY COMMITTEE

To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who embrace this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties.
(*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 127)

When I began to practice, it seemed pretty easy. There was an incredible simplicity to it all: Chant, try to do gongyo, move toward my dreams. Simple.

Then after about a year or two, I began to wonder. I am very impatient, and things weren't as I'd hoped they'd be. I wasn't in the exact place and situation that I had mapped out. I was spending so much time alone, when I'd prayed not to be. It made no sense to me. And worst of all, I had no one with whom I could talk about it. I think it was around that time that I read this letter.


It was written in response to a question from Nichiren Daishonin's disciple, Shijo Kingo, who had been practicing as instructed by the Daishonin but had been continually beset by severe obstacles. He wanted to know when things would change.

Nichiren Daishonin encouraged Shijo Kingo that holding strong to his faith in the face of difficulties was the key to his victory. Not long thereafter, just as the Daishonin foresaw, Shijo Kingo was in a position that far exceeded the circumstances of when he began to practice.

It is very hard to practice Buddhism. It is very hard to fully trust that things can completely change based on our prayers and actions. Easy to accept, difficult to believe.

But when I read this letter from Nichiren Daishonin, I can't help believing that staying with my practice — even when everything around me is not what I'd envisioned — is the key to solving everything.

I have not completely overcome the feeling that I am an eternal loner. Nor have I overcome the pain that often accompanies it. But I firmly believe that staying with the practice is the key. Continuing faith guarantees victory.

Chant, do gongyo, move toward my dreams. Simple. 

Goal-setting Is the Starting Point

Setting goals and sticking to them is never easy, but Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that this process is crucial to developing ourselves. Both immediate and long-term goals allow us to challenge ourselves in Buddhist practice. Below two SGI-USA Youth Division Study Committee members share their perspectives on goal-setting.

Clear Goals Make Prayers Stronger

By SHIN YATOMI

To get somewhere, we need to set a positive goal and point our prayer in that direction. Sometimes we may say to ourselves, "I'm not getting anywhere in my life after chanting and going to meetings for so many years!" This is exactly the time to check ourselves.

What we do now decides where we'll go in terms of our dreams and goals. Nichiren Daishonin quotes the following from the *Shinjikan Sutra* in the Goshō: "If you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 172).

Our innermost state of life, or fundamental attitude underlying our prayer, is like the "gears" to the "engine" of our lives. And our Buddhist practice — chanting and doing SGI activities — is like stepping on the gas. When we have concrete, positive goals for the future, our prayers set the gears into drive.

When we practice out of a sense of guilt or obligation, or just out of habit — with no sense of purpose — our lives get stuck in neutral. No matter how much we chant or how many meetings we go to, we not only stagnate and get nowhere but also become spiritually drained. We feel "low on gas." And when we practice with a lot of doubt, hatred, jealousy or complaint, our lives go in reverse!

It is easier to tell when we are in drive or reverse than when we are in neutral, because of the obvious signs that we see in our lives: the resultant joy or suffering.

When we are in neutral, there is more of a chance of remaining there for a long time without realizing it.

Here is a checklist for ways to get out of neutral:

- 1) Set clear goals to improve our lives.
- 2) Pray in concrete terms.
- 3) Do gongyo and Buddhist activities with self-motivation.
- 4) Rather than complain, express joy and appreciation in our Buddhist practice.
- 5) Snap out of that feeling of being defeated by our problems.
- 6) Maintain a strong seeking mind.
- 7) Do not neglect our daily responsibilities: job, school, family, etc.
- 8) Nurture a sense of mission for the peace and happiness of others.
- 9) Develop a sense of responsibility in the SGI and elsewhere.

Overcoming Fear of Failure Through Goals

By VALERIE THOMAS

During my first year of college I came across the concept called fear of failure. This is used to describe people who only set goals that they are confident they can achieve, avoiding any challenges they think they might not be able to accomplish.

I recognized myself as having this tendency. I was always eager to please others and prove my abilities but did not take risks to challenge myself with anything I doubted I could accomplish.

When I started to practice Buddhism, this was still my tendency. I set the goals I was chanting for low enough that I was sure I could accomplish them.

Through my Buddhist study, though, I started to understand that I was not fulfilling my true potential chanting in this way. My desire to live my life without regret, as SGI President Ikeda often encourages us to do, motivated me to challenge my practice and my life by setting goals that were much bigger than before.


These more challenging goals motivated me to progress in my life, although this did not mean that I necessarily ended up accomplishing them.

Often on the way toward a goal, my life would take a turn that would end up being the right thing — but not my original goal. This was when I realized that not reaching a goal could actually still be a success.

I learned that no matter what the final result was, the process of setting a goal and working toward it was most important — that was where I made the greatest changes in my life.

My fear of failure had been keeping me from advancing in my life and fulfilling my true potential, but I developed the courage and confidence to overcome this. I recognized that I have always had within me the potential — my Buddhahood — to achieve my goals.

Nichiren Daishonin said: "Try practicing as the Lotus Sutra teaches, exerting yourselves without begrudging your lives! Test the truth of Buddhism!" (MW-3, 181).

By aiming for my highest goals, I feel I am practicing as Nichiren Daishonin taught and proving to myself the validity of this practice. 

SGI President Ikeda's Recent Guidance on Goals:

- President Toda declared: "It's perfectly all right for youth to cherish dreams that may seem almost too big. What we can achieve in a single lifetime is always but a fraction of what we would like to achieve. So if you start out with expectations that are too low, you'll end up not accomplishing anything at all." (Nov. 1, 1996, *World Tribune*, p. 10)

- There is no real joy or excitement in a life without concrete goals or direction. In the realm of faith, too, we

grow when we have clear goals — whether it be for propagation or study.... I want you to advance not as if carrying a heavy burden but joyfully and confidently as you earnestly apply yourself to the challenges ahead. To do so, wisdom and conviction are important. (Feb. 21 *World Tribune*, p. 12)

- A person who has firm goals is way ahead of a person who has none. Setting goals is the starting point from which our lives' construction begins.

Youth is a struggle to develop and shape oneself...to train oneself spiritually, intellectually and physically. (Nov. 1, 1996, *World Tribune*, p. 11)

- To be obsessed with the latest fads...is a shallow way to live. To be concerned only about immediate goals and be constantly swayed by your environment is foolish. I hope each of you will glow with vitality and joy, reflecting the fulfillment that adorns the palace in the depths of your life. (April 11 *World Tribune*, p. 13)

A NEW CENTURY OF HEALTH

Buddhism and the Art of Medicine



Kidney Disease [24]

Participants in this installment: SGI President Ikeda, Soka Gakkai Doctors Division Chief Shuhei Morita, Vice Secretary Akihiro Tojo and Kanagawa General Prefecture Doctors Division Vice Secretary Shosaku Narumi.

Ikeda: In Japanese, a common expression for “crucial importance” (*kanjin*) is written with the Chinese characters for *liver* and *kidneys*. This is said to derive from the fact that our liver and kidneys together form a vital source of the body’s energy and vitality. They are, of course, included among the five internal organs of prime importance in traditional Chinese medicine.

Morita: That’s true. Traditional Chinese medicine stresses five main internal organs: the heart, the liver, the lungs, the spleen and the kidneys. The liver and kidneys are regarded as especially important organs.

Ikeda: That’s how something of “crucial importance” came to be denoted in Japanese by a combination of the Chinese characters for those two vital organs. And it is probably because our kidneys have an especially indispensable function that we have two of them — that way, if one kidney fails, we have a spare. Today, we have kidney specialists Dr. Akihiro Tojo and Dr. Shosaku Narumi with us. I look forward to your contributions to our discussion.

Tojo and Narumi: We’re very glad to be here.

Ikeda: Let’s begin then. Is there any easy way to know if the kidneys are malfunctioning?

Tojo: Yes. We can judge the health of our kidneys, at least to a certain extent, by our urine.



[O]ur liver and kidneys together form a vital source of the body's energy and vitality. They are...included among the five internal organs of prime importance in traditional Chinese medicine...

A life based on the Mystic Law...makes all parts of the microcosm that is our individual life, including our five organs, function soundly and vibrantly.

Above: A patient's blood pressure is checked before being connected to a kidney dialysis machine, which will filter her blood in place of her kidneys.

Ikeda: Even in ancient Greece, I understand, the state of a person’s urine was regarded as a sort of barometer of health, wasn’t it? One way it was tested in those days, I believe, was to stir it with a piece of straw and see how viscous it was. If I’m correct, the founder of Western medicine, Hippocrates, also wrote about irregularities in the urine.

Tojo: Yes, he did. He said that urine that was pale or formed a froth indicated some disorder.

Ikeda: Are those statements true even from the perspective of modern medicine? Granted, of course, that we shouldn’t jump to hasty conclusions based on our self-diagnosis.

Narumi: Healthy urine is clear and light yellow. Just because it seems pale does not necessarily mean anything is wrong.

Ikeda: I see. How about foam?

Tojo: When foam stays on the urine for a long time, it can mean that protein or glucose is mixed with it, and that is a warning sign.

Narumi: Still, after vigorous exercise or when running a fever, even healthy people may have protein in their urine.

Ikeda: What about the presence of blood in the urine?

Tojo: Well, it is rare to find urine so bloody that it is bright red. In some cases, urine containing blood is brown, like tea. But often blood in the urine cannot be detected with the naked eye.

Ikeda: What diseases can cause blood to be in the urine?

Tojo: Many diseases can do this, including acute and chronic nephritis [inflammation of the kidneys], kidney stones, or cancer of the kidneys or bladder.

HEALTH, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

Ikeda: What about cloudy urine?

Narumi: Cloudy urine indicates a urinary tract infection [i.e., an infection in any part of the urine-collecting system, which can involve kidneys, bladder, etc.].

Ikeda: Can there be a problem when the amount of urine is small?

Narumi: A sudden, dramatic decrease in urine can signal acute renal [kidney] failure. A large amount of urine, on the other hand, can be a sign of diabetes mellitus, diabetes insipidus, or chronic nephritis.

Ikeda: Some people seem to be bothered by a frequent need to urinate.

Narumi: That can be a sign of cystitis [inflammation and infection of the bladder] in women, or of prostate enlargement in men, particularly if the latter are middle-aged or older.

Tojo: Most cases of cystitis are accompanied by the urge to empty one's bladder, even if you have just done so, or a need to urinate frequently, at intervals, say, of less than two hours.

Morita: In many older men, enlargement of the prostate gland, which is located at the exit of the bladder, constricts the passage of urine so that it takes longer to urinate and often causes them to wake up in the middle of the night needing to urinate.

Ikeda: The kidneys are the body's "urine-producing factory," eliminating its waste products. How do they work?

Tojo: About one-fourth of the blood being pumped out of the heart passes through the kidneys. That amounts to about 400 gallons a day. The kidneys filter out waste products from the blood and produce about 40 gallons of filtrate in a 24-hour period.

Ikeda: That's quite a large amount! 40 gallons — that's the amount it takes to fill a steel oil drum, right?

Morita: If we had to eliminate 40 gallons of urine each day, we'd have to spend the entire day in the bathroom!

Narumi: Yes. Of the water filtered from the bloodstream by

the kidneys, only about one percent — around 2.5 pints — is urine. The remaining 99 percent of water and nutrients, which are essential to the body, are recycled by the kidneys and returned to the bloodstream.

Ikeda: Ninety-nine percent is recycled? What an efficient factory! How do the kidneys filter the blood to produce urine?

Drinking plenty of water and getting the right amount of exercise are good ways to prevent the formation of [kidney] stones.

— Dr. Narumi



Tojo: First, the kidneys filter the blood through the biological filter of the glomerulus, a cluster of microscopic capillaries. Each kidney has about a million glomeruli, as these blood vessels are known individually.

Ikeda: Where does the term *glomerulus* come from?

Morita: It is Latin for "in the form of a ball." The glomeruli wind together to form a ball-shaped cluster.

Tojo: The glomerulus produces the filtrate, which is then concentrated more than a hundred times in the renal tubules.

Narumi: While the filtrate is passing through the renal tubules, the reusable 99 percent — for example, water, amino acids, sodium and glucose — is reabsorbed for recycling

through the walls of the renal tubules.

Ikeda: The living organism that is our body wastes nothing. To the furthest possible extent, it tries to make the best use of everything. It isn't recklessly wasteful. It always seeks to produce value in its own marvelous fashion. It is truly awesome.

This drive to create value is none other than life force. And one of the reasons we practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is to strengthen our life force. By the way, do the kidneys have any other functions?

Narumi: In addition to their function of ridding the body of wastes, they help preserve the proper balance of sodium and

ling blood pressure, I believe.

Tojo: The kidneys secrete a hormone that regulates blood pressure. Also, when kidney function deteriorates, it can lead to improper excretion of excess water and sodium, which are then retained in the blood vessels. This retention contributes to high blood pressure.

Ikeda: People say that when your kidneys aren't working well, it shows in your complexion.

Narumi: Yes. That's because when a person's kidneys aren't functioning well, they are likely to suffer from anemia. The bones also become more brittle. These are the results of the kidneys' failure to produce erythropoietin and the metabolically active form of vitamin D, which contribute to blood production and bone formation, respectively.

urine may suddenly decrease, or blood may appear in it. Blood pressure also rises.

Narumi: Even healthy people will experience swelling in the feet or ankles if they stand for a long period of time. But when swelling can be seen first thing in the morning, it may be a sign of illness.

Morita: Swelling is a symptom of several illnesses in addition to kidney disease, including heart disease and cirrhosis of the liver.

Ikeda: What is the cause of acute nephritis?

Narumi: The most common cause is bacterial infection of the glomerulus, which impairs its function.

Morita: Most kidney diseases are the result of some problem affecting the glomerulus. The glomerulus fails to filter out fairly large particles, such as proteins, as it normally would, and allows them to pass into the urine.

Tojo: Fortunately, with appropriate treatment acute nephritis can be cured.

Ikeda: How about chronic nephritis?

Tojo: It, too, is caused by various malfunctions in the glomerulus, according to which it is categorized into different types of disorder. And unfortunately, sometimes, the causes are not clear.

Ikeda: The symptoms are the same as acute nephritis? Protein and blood in the urine, swelling, and so forth?

Narumi: Yes. But the condition progresses slowly, so the person is almost always unaware of it. Most patients learn they have the disease only during a regular checkup. The kidneys and liver are often called the silent organs. By the time we notice that something is wrong, the disease is usually far advanced. That's why regular medical checkups are so important.

Ikeda: In the past, it was believed that chronic nephritis could never be cured.

Tojo: There are two types of chronic nephritis — one that does not progress very much and one that does. The former often heals on its own. But if the second type

water in our bodies and regulate our blood pressure. They also secrete erythropoietin, a hormone that is important in the formation of hemoglobin and red blood cells, and the metabolically active form of vitamin D, which helps the body absorb calcium.

Ikeda: They certainly have many different functions, don't they?

Morita: Yes, indeed. These small, bean-shaped organs, each of which is only about the size of a person's fist, play a vital role in preserving a constant, balanced internal environment in our bodies — in other words, homeostasis, our electrolyte balance and the concentration of water and sodium.

Ikeda: The kidneys are hard workers. You mentioned earlier that they play a role in control-

Ikeda: The kidneys are vital in a wide variety of bodily functions. From ancient times, they have been regarded as the storehouse of vital energy. And there is considerable truth to that belief. Since they are so important, any damage to the kidneys affects all the other organs and severely disables the entire human body.

Tojo: Precisely.

Ikeda: What kinds of kidney diseases are there?

Morita: Well, for starters there are acute and chronic nephritis.

Tojo: Most cases of acute nephritis are triggered by colds. Just about when cold symptoms such as a sore throat and fever have receded, the eyelids and extremities swell. The amount of

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is left untreated, it may result in renal failure, in which the kidneys nearly cease to function.

Ikeda: Renal failure necessitates dialysis, doesn't it?

Tojo: Yes, or a kidney transplant. But in Japan, dialysis is by far the most common treatment. It places a great burden on the patient, who must undergo four- to five-hour dialysis sessions two or three times a week.

Tojo: The knowledge that this treatment must continue for the rest of one's life takes a heavy toll mentally and emotionally as well.

Ikeda: Nothing is more painful than illness, and nothing is more precious than health. I hope that all who endure such suffering will say to themselves, "I will definitely get better!" and focus constructively on what they can do now, in their present state. For example, if they can't work as others do, they can concentrate on deepening their inner selves, so that they live profound and inspiring lives. They can become examples for others, so that others will say, "I want to live my life with the kind of spirit that they do."

When that is your goal, you are living a truly healthy life, whether you are suffering from illness or not. It is also important that co-workers, friends and neighbors encourage and support someone battling illness.

Morita: Those suffering from kidney disease need a relaxed pace, free of stress and tension.

Ikeda: What other kidney diseases are there?

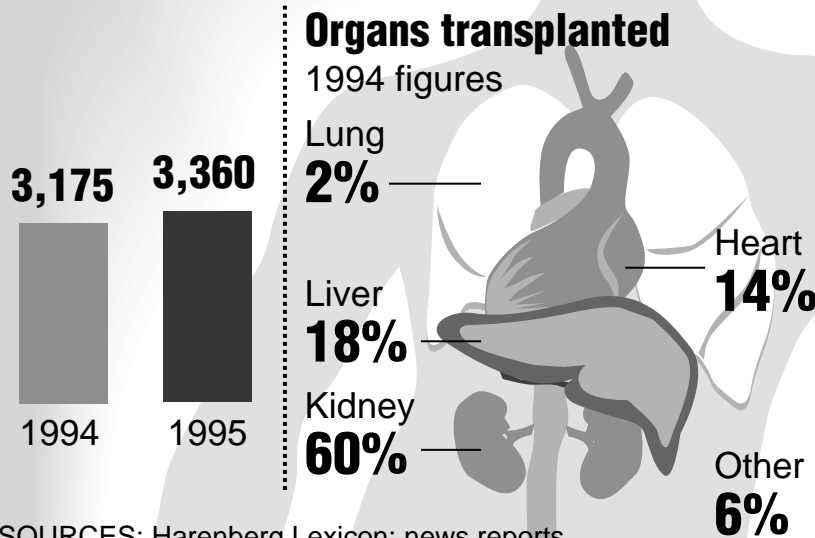
Tojo: Nephrotic syndrome is another common one. The cause is not yet known, but malfunctions in the glomerulus cause the passing of large amounts of protein in the urine and severe swelling [edema].

Narumi: Recently, in Japan, we have seen a significant and disturbing increase in diabetic nephropathy — abnormal changes caused to the kidneys as a result of long-standing diabetes mellitus. The capillaries of the glomerulus malfunction, and the kidneys no longer filter properly. As a result, much protein is passed in the urine, and renal failure can occur.

Ikeda: There are also kidney

Transplants increase

6 percent increase in number of organs in 1995



SOURCES: Harenberg Lexicon; news reports

Nothing is more painful than illness, and nothing is more precious than health. I hope that all who endure such suffering will say to themselves, 'I will definitely get better!' and focus constructively on what they can do now, in their present state.... They can become examples for others, so that others will say, 'I want to live my life with the kind of spirit that they do.'

— President Ikeda

stones to worry about.

Tojo: Yes. Kidney stones are formed when the contents of the urine cement into small particles as hard as stones. Similar stones can also form in other parts of the urinary tract, including the ureter, bladder and

urethra, for example.

Ikeda: They say nothing is more excruciating than the pain caused by such a stone.

Morita: Stones obstructing the ureter, the thin tubular portion connecting the kidneys and bladder, can be especially painful, causing severe pain from the back to the waist. So, in short, yes, stones can be excruciating. And they can also cause blood to appear in the urine.

Narumi: Drinking plenty of water and getting the right amount of exercise are good ways to prevent the formation of stones.

Ikeda: What should we know about preventing and treating

kidney diseases?

Tojo: In our daily lives, three things can badly affect our kidneys: 1) colds, 2) exhaustion and stress, and 3) chills.

Narumi: As we mentioned earlier, a cold often triggers

acute nephritis or its recurrence. Exhaustion, stress and chills hamper the circulation of blood in the kidneys.

Tojo: Sufficient rest and staying warm are very important, as are maintaining a healthy routine that will increase our resistance to infections. Going to bed at a reasonable hour and getting enough sleep are also crucial.

Ikeda: How about exercise?

Tojo: Kidney diseases can raise the blood pressure, so strenuous exercise should be avoided, particularly by the elderly.

Morita: Monitoring blood pressure is indispensable in preventing and treating kidney disease. High blood pressure places an extra burden on the kidneys, so it is important to control it.

Narumi: There is a strong connection between kidney disease and conditions such as high

blood pressure and diabetes. Weight control is also an important factor for preventing kidney problems.

Ikeda: What should people with weak kidneys pay attention to as far as diet is concerned?

Tojo: First, they should reduce their salt intake. Too much salt can lead to water retention and raising blood pressure.

Narumi: Reducing protein intake is also a good idea — remembering, of course, that the body needs protein and one shouldn't reduce it too much.

Morita: Treatment of kidney diseases is usually long term, and it differs depending upon the type of illness and the severity of the symptoms. The best thing is to consult your physician.

Tojo: I know I am repeating myself, but one can't overemphasize the importance of regular medical examinations, including urine tests.

Ikeda: At the beginning of our discussion we mentioned the five internal organs. Buddhism links these five internal organs to the five elements. The ancients of the East categorized all things in terms of the five elements of earth, water, fire, wind and void. And Nichiren Daishonin said that the five elements are the five characters of the title of the Lotus Sutra.

In the Goshō, the Daishonin writes:

Now the entire body of Abutsu Shonin is composed of the five universal elements of earth, water, fire, wind, and *ku* [void]. These five elements are also the five characters of the daimoku [Namyōhō-*renge-kyō*]. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 30)

A life based on the Mystic Law, a practice where faith equals daily life, makes all parts of the microcosm that is our individual life, including our five organs, function soundly and vibrantly. The path of the Mystic Law is the fundamental path to health and to happiness. 卍

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Listening to the Heart

Playwright Steven Sater Blazes His Own Trail

By JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Steven Sater's chosen career is one of the most difficult — playwriting. Today when Steven talks about all the projects he has going on, from his translation of Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* to his newest play, *New York Animals*, it seems like he's in the middle of a whirlwind. But it took him 19 years

and worked on it and worked on it. I developed the play over a few years. I just kept working on it, chanting and going to meetings — it was constant work.

It opened as a Showcase in New York, which means it would be on for only four weeks. And no one got paid. And it was unadvertised. But it seemed to immediately strike a chord in people. It opened on Oct. 12, 1989. People just loved the play, so a few of us put our money down to keep it open

People don't necessarily understand my plays on the page. They think the dialogue's great, but there seems to be no story. My plays are like the untold story of our lives; the engine of the plays is very quiet. What happens is sort of tragic, but it's all underneath. It isn't immediately apparent on the surface.

JF: You've written a quartet of plays about the family in *Carbondale Dreams*. Why did you chose to write about a family?

SS: It seems to me that in the great plays of the past, the way of presenting culture on stage is through a family. You see *King Lear* divide his kingdom among his daughters; and thus you see political division and its outcome. You see what happens to Oedipus and what happens to his daughter. You follow the karma through different generations. I guess if you want to write about a culture, that culture can be represented by a set of its families. The family seems to be where the sorrow and joy of life are, in a way.

JF: What was the hardest time in your career?

SS: A couple years ago. It felt like such a dark time. I had such a body of unproduced work. It was after the success of *Carbondale Dreams*, after the success of *Perfect For You, Doll*, and I hadn't had a production in three or four years — nothing on stage. There were so few opportunities. I had only readings of my plays that didn't lead to productions of any kind. I was really unhappy with my agent, but I couldn't leave her because I truly knew no one else. I just felt like I was at a total standstill career-wise.

But I was advancing as a writer tremendously. So it felt like I had created all these plays for a pile — they would never be done. I would just keep writing plays that would go unproduced. I had plays I'd worked on for three-eight years and no one had done them. It was a very dark, hard time. Now I have somehow cracked through it.

JF: You have said that you chant for your characters.

SS: I chant just to open their hearts — for them to be able to open their hearts — and, in a deep way every day, to understand their sorrow. I've always felt that if you can give voice to sorrow you alleviate it to some extent. By articulating it.

Something I feel in the great plays — and to me that's O'Neill and the Greeks and Shakespeare and Chekhov and Racine — is that there is this opening up of the depth of human sorrow, despair and joy. But there's less of the joy, honestly.

When we think of the greatest works of theater, they are mostly tragedies. I guess

that's why *Hamlet* means so much to us or *King Lear* — these plays give us the words for our grief, our anguish.

For me, writing a play...it's like having a member tell you about his suffering and you being able to listen. It's like being able to let the character open his heart and then listening.

I've always felt playwriting is like sculpting — there's a statue in the stone and you have to keep taking the stone away. You have to keep letting the heart of the character out.

I certainly chant about my characters a lot — and my members! I mean I don't think I could have developed my life this way without being a chapter leader and holding joint territory responsibility in the arts division. In my chapter I chant for each person one by one. That always feels to me like watering plants, trying to nurture them.

JF: How would you encourage people who want to be writers?

SS: I'm unusual, so this may be heretical, but I think you have to learn to love great literature, the value of literature — to invest yourself, to steep yourself in great writing. Let it permeate your being in some way. And chant with a deep prayer. Open up what's in your heart about humanity.

We tend to think of art as self-expression, but that's not how I think of it. You're creating something else. You're letting something else speak — you're finding the statue in the stone, the heart in the character.

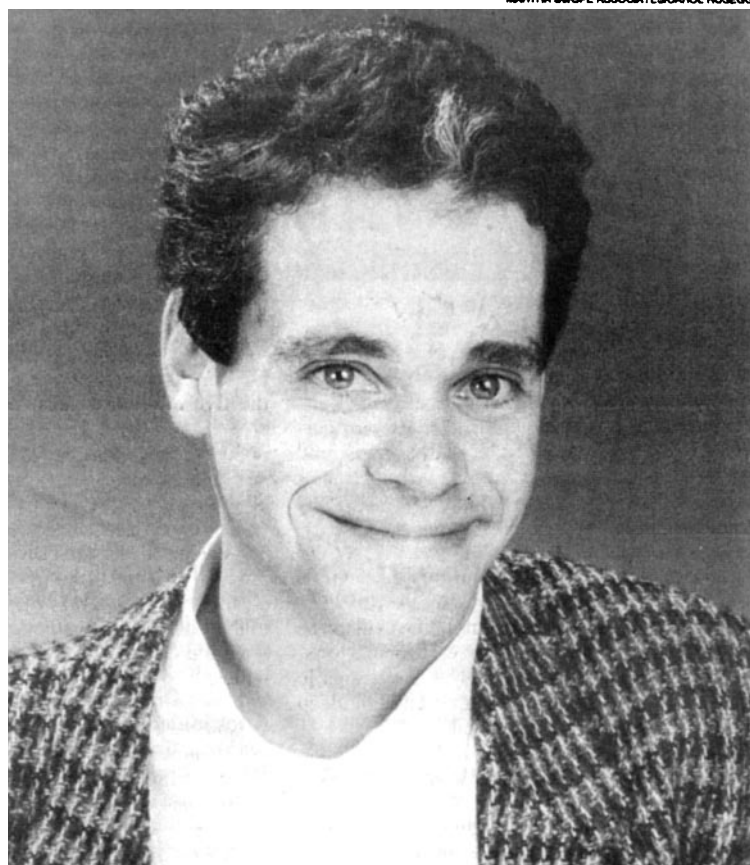
The Goshos probably mean more to me than anything else, but after that there's all these writers. To write without the guidance of great literature, it would be like practicing without a mentor...I don't know how you can find your path without finding writers who can help you on your way. I learned so much from Chekhov. I spent easily a year reading *Uncle Vanya* every day!

There's that passage in the Goshos that "when the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated. Similarly, when one knows the Lotus Sutra, he understands the meaning of all worldly affairs" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 82). I chanted for so many years to understand that. I still feel like I have no real understanding of it. But I've wanted to understand it, to try to understand the meaning of worldly affairs, human affairs. You just keep chanting to try to understand.

JF: What are your plans for the future?

SS: I want to do my plays around the world. SGI President Ikeda has said that the poet is the heart of the world. I made a determination I would be the heart of the world, that I would create work that would become a permanent part of the world.

The way we can think about what we are is informed by what writers have told us we are over the centuries.



MARTHA INHOPE ASSOCIATES/CAROL ROSEGG

Steven Sater credits his Buddhist practice with helping him make breakthroughs in his career.

to get his career moving at this speed. He credits his Buddhist practice of 10 years for helping him break through.

Recently I saw a Los Angeles production of *Carbondale Dreams*, his tragi-comedy about a dysfunctional American family, and was struck by the humanism Steven finds in all his characters. I was interested to find out how Steven's Buddhist practice helps him to write — and why he's so dedicated to this profession.

JF: Tell me about *Carbondale Dreams*.

SS: It began with a word I heard in meetings: *dreams*. I thought: "Oh, what is that? Remember that." I began writing a play about this young guy who's a cokehead, whose dreams are shattered. I worked on it

and move it uptown. We kept holding out and holding out, waiting for *The New York Times*. Finally they came and they raved. Suddenly more people started coming.

It ran for a few months and then moved into another theater for another 10 months. It was still sold out when it closed, but Off-Broadway costs kept growing so much that finally we had to close it.

The play was published. That was the story of *Carbondale Dreams*.

I've been sort of a trailblazer. I don't mean this in a self-praising way. The form I've written in, dramaturgically, is unusual — I've had to find a new way to write plays. Because I couldn't make sense of any conventional way. My plays are deeply traditional, but at the same time they're stretching the form of drama.



Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI

The Las Vegas Music Corps performs at the recent Spring Family Festival to a crowd of more than 1,200. (See festival story, p. 1.)

GLENN SHARP, LAS VEGAS

Arise From the Dead

One person's dedication helps revive Las Vegas' Music Corps

In the long tradition of American kosen-rufu, Las Vegas had power, passion and spirit in the Brass Band. For more than three decades, the Las Vegas Brass Band participated in festivals, parades and countless world peace prayer meetings, encouraging the members to continue their human revolution.

I've heard stories of my father, who was Brass Band chief, and my mother, who was Fife and Drum Corps chief, having band practices at our house in the early days. I also heard that, in the beginning, no one in the band knew how to play an instrument. So, in their desire to start a band, the three charter members of the Brass Band hired professional musicians to teach them how to play.

But in the early '90s, Las Vegas split into two headquarters. My brother, who was Brass Band chief at the time, left to attend Soka University in Japan and his young men's division leader relocated to Los Angeles. Soon after, the Brass Band ceased to exist.

In 1996, after the 21st SGI General Meeting with SGI President Ikeda at the Florida Na-



Glenn Sharp

ture and Culture Center, I felt I had to practice for others. Most of the time I had been chanting to overcome my own sufferings. So I vowed to find a great mission of helping others. But I did not know where to begin.

After chanting and attending many meetings, out of nowhere, I received a call informing me that the Los Angeles Brass Band was going to be practicing every Sunday for the Summer Music Festival. Not having played in the Brass Band for about four

years, I was eager to play my saxophone again. In July, I drove long miles to the World Culture Center in the 120-degree desert heat for four weekends in a row.

There were many problems: First of all, my parents didn't want me to drive alone; for two weeks my mouth was killing me from playing the sax; and my car tires blew out.

I told some old-time Brass Band members of the practices, but no one else was interested. I knew this was something I had to do myself.

The Summer Music Festival was a big success, and the 1st Nationwide Brass Band and Fife and Drum Corps Friendship Exchange was very encouraging. After I came home I realized my mission: to bring back the passion and spirit of the Brass Band that had long been dead.

I got together with two others and practiced the song "Impossible Dream." The Brass Band was back. A week later five people came out to practice. Then in another week, nine members. After I took concrete action, my prayers had been answered. But like always, obstacles arose.

There were many scheduling conflicts, and I was in a dilemma as to how to help the members realize the true mission of the Brass Band and how to base the practices on faith. Communication and rides were not worked out either. There were many times I wanted to say: "Why bother? Forget it all!" But I knew no matter what, I must continue to advance. After

chanting to the Gohonzon and seeking guidance from my senior in faith, I conquered all problems.

After many home visits, the new Las Vegas Music Corps is about 18 members strong, has a communication structure and has begun studying *SGI President Ikeda's Addresses In the United States*. After six months, I have seen all the members strengthen their bonds of friendship and receive benefits from participating in Music Corps activities.

I not only want the Music Corps of Las Vegas to play music for the sake of the members but to play with the passion and spirit of this Buddhism, to inspire the members and actually move them to stand up and take action for world peace. As President Ikeda says in his "Precepts for Brass Band": "Through your performance, I hope that you will move people to jubilation and inspire them to attain their human revolution."

Through this experience I have learned that it takes only one individual to make real changes. It takes courage and faith to have the stand-alone spirit. Nichiren Daishonin wrote, "A coward cannot have any of his prayers answered" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 246). I am attending Soka University in Japan this spring. Andy Choi and Sean Ondo, the new Music Corps leaders, prepared for the Las Vegas Territory Family Festival on April 13 that was held for the joint territory, friends of SGI and the local community (please see story, p. 1).

Los Angeles Fife and Drum Corps

Events

- 1st Fife and Drum Corps and Music Corps Summer Exhibition and Carnival (July)
- Performances at various world peace prayers throughout Los Angeles
- Other meetings scheduled throughout the year

Goals

- Develop strong unity and friendship among all leaders and members
- Develop new capable leaders
- Success of all performances
- Happiness and development of the members in their daily lives as well as in the group
- Develop a greater understanding of faith

San Diego Youth Music Groups Make a New Start

Fife and Drum Corps

B. MITSUKI TAKAHASHI
SAN DIEGO

On Feb. 15, for the first time in more than a decade, the San Diego Fife and Drum Corps performed in front of our joint territory. For our first real debut in San Diego, more than 26 members performed, a far cry from a year and a half ago.

Before August 1995, the San Diego Fife and Drum Corps consisted of a few carloads of girls (at best) who would travel every other Sunday to Los Angeles to practice with the members there. This, of course, meant that there were no performances in our home city.

Not that any of us resent Los Angeles. Quite the opposite! We feel indebted to them for helping us to grow strong enough to be on our own in San Diego and for letting us perform with them in their music festivals.

In spite of the fond memories we have for Los Angeles, we are all encouraged to be able to practice and perform in our own

area. We feel like we are directly affecting the people here in a positive way.

We are even more encouraged to see the Mercury Music Corps (see accompanying article) grow and to perform with them on occasion.

When we started practicing down here again, we decided that we wanted all the girls to have more input into the different aspects of the group.

So we formed committees: Gongyo, Activities, Performance, Study and Public Relations. Every girl belongs to one committee, and any girl can make a suggestion to any of the committees.

This gives them more of a chance to say what they want to study or which music they want to perform.

Currently, we are practicing hard for this summer's joint territory music and culture festival. We are also forming our own taiko drum group, which we hope will grow as strongly and successfully as the rest of the San Diego Fife and Drum Corps. ☐

Brass Band

B. SCOTT HARKINSEY
SAN DIEGO

When the pulse of the organization changed in 1990, many activity groups went through drastic changes throughout the SGI-USA. Inevitably, the San Diego Brass Band succumbed to this same rhythm.

Lack of direction resulted in the stagnation and disunity of the band. Practices suffered anemic participation, many times with only two or three people attending. Most practices would start and end with morning gongyo and maybe an Egg McMuffin chaser.

Beginning in the new year, we have challenged ourselves to renew our sense of mission and get back the foundation of faith. We are using SGI President Ikeda's "Precepts for Brass Band" as our guideline, and we have readopted our original name, the San Diego Mercury Music Corps, which President Ikeda gave to us in 1980.

In the "Precepts for Brass

Band," the SGI president says: "The sound of the Brass Band should be the rhythm of faith. It must roar with the sound of passion, as if to crush the angry waves of the ocean." To create this "rhythm of faith," we chant for unity in front of the Gohonzon and have started having vibrant and joyful practices. This has resulted in the emergence of a sound that roars with "the sound of passion."

President Ikeda gave our band the mission to become the herald and messengers of the Buddha, hence the name San Diego Mercury Music Corps. In Roman mythology, Mercury was the god charged with delivering messages to and from the gods. The band has retained President Ikeda's ideal by instilling "hope

and inspiration" to our comrades in faith.

At our 1997 San Diego Joint Territory Kickoff Meeting in January, the Music Corps accomplished a milestone: The band

performed to a standing ovation. Still today the band is receiving compliments for its performance. The band lived up to President Ikeda's precepts by giving our fellow members "hope and inspiration" to overcome their sufferings."

To create this 'rhythm of faith,' we chant for unity in front of the Gohonzon. This has resulted in the emergence of a sound that roars with 'the sound of passion.'

The Music Corps is looking toward the new century with fresh new faces and activities. We are looking forward to activities within the organization, such as our first joint territory music and culture festival. To make friends of the SGI, we are also actively pursuing activities within our community. ☐

SAN DIEGO VOICES

What Do You Think Is the Best Thing About the Fife and Drum Corps and Why?

The best thing is meeting new friends and looking forward to seeing them every weekend. It gives me the freedom to talk about my religion without worrying about explaining to them what it is I'm talking about. It's like they are my sisters.

— REBECCA TURNER, 13,
Percussion Section

The best thing is how we, as young women, can unite to share Buddhism, study together, do gongyo and chant daimoku each practice. I think this strengthens my foundation of Buddhism and encourages me to practice regularly.

— CRYSTAL PRIOR, 14,
Saxophone Section

I think the best part is everything — from gongyo and performances to being sisters in faith. I think it's wonderful how all of us are like a huge family. Princesses of Myoho is what a leader once told us before a per-

formance. I truly believe that we are both friends and family. Always sticking together when it comes to performances, smiling proudly with what we have accomplished. Being in sync with everyone around us, fighting and striving for kosen-rufu.

We are Princesses of Myoho.
— EMILY SAGE, 13,
Flute Section

The best thing is that girls can come together and learn how to do gongyo and learn about becoming a better person and becoming a great leader within the Fife and Drum Corps first. We will then be better prepared for the world. Girls also get a chance to get to know who they really are.

— HOPE A. WHITE, 16,
Percussion Section

The best thing is how each of us gets to develop a strong foundation for our faith. We all chant together and are encouraged to

be the best we can, without limits. No one says that you can't be or do something because of who you are or how you look. It is very much the opposite of that. You learn to be who you are no matter what and to have respect for yourself.

— MAURA LAMBERT, 17,
Clarinet Section

The best thing is how all of the members are very close and we all come together. And how we are growing as a group.

— LISA SAGE, 15, Tall Flags

I think being at practices is the best thing because we are all together and having fun.

— AMINA ABDULLAH, 13,
Drill Team

The best thing is growing with girls my age who are going through the same things I am. We can really relate as well as encourage and help each other through the practice. In the Fife

and Drum Corps, there isn't any judgment about who you are. It really helps each girl to develop themselves and become able to function as a unique person in the world.

— KRISTEN GUSTKE, 15,
Piccolo/Fife Section

Performances are the best because we get to show other people what we do and try to encourage people. They're also fun.

— ROSIE ALLAIN, 12,
Drill Team

The best thing is making new friends in the practice.

— STAR CARTER, 12,
Drill Team

I think the Fife and Drum Corps is great because we are all sisters in faith and can relate to one another. There is always a girl your age to talk to and get advice from. You don't have to be afraid to talk about your reli-

gion. We can have fun and understand our religion more at the same time.

— MARY ANN GRAHAM,
13, Tall Flags

Pulling together for a performance after practicing for a short time, and encouraging people.

— TIFFANY EPPS, 15,
Drill Team

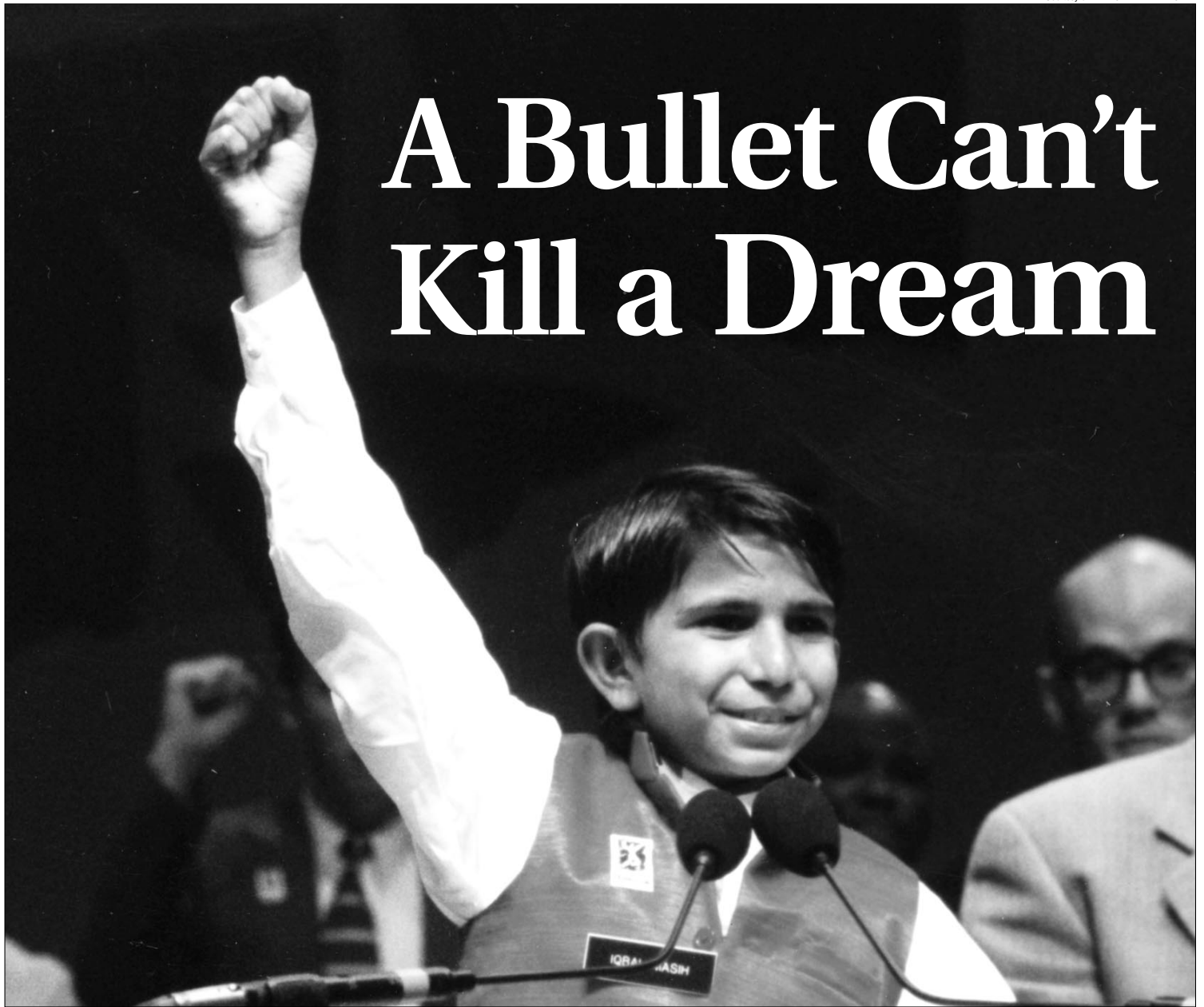
The best thing is that we are like a family, always watching out for one another, and also that we are all working together to invoke peace and happiness. I love seeing people's faces after a performance because they look so proud, like they can change the world.

— COLLEEN GRIFFIN, 15,
Piccolo/Fife Section

I think Drill Team is the best because it is very funny and fun.

— EMERALD GREENE, 16,
Drill Team

A Bullet Can't Kill a Dream



Iqbal Masih at the ceremony in which he received the 1994 Reebok Human Rights Award for his stand against bonded labor.

By TERRY ELLIS
CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

On April 16, The U.S. Department of Labor honored the students of Broad Meadows Middle School in Quincy, Mass., with an award citing their campaign to fight child labor around the world. The date was no accident: It marked the two-year anniversary of Iqbal Masih's murder and beginning of the students' campaign to make sure his dream didn't die with him.

Iqbal, a 12-year-old boy from Pakistan, had visited their school in December 1994 and left an impression that will last a lifetime.

They were touched by his slight figure, stunted by malnutrition, and by his story. At 4, he was sold by his father into slavery for what amounts to \$12. He spent long days chained to his loom, knotting carpets under conditions unimaginable to his American friends. At 10, he stole away to a freedom day celebration and gave an impromptu speech, which was published by local newspapers. Thus began his rise

as a powerful speaker against child labor, which eventually brought him to the United States in 1994 to receive the Reebok Human Rights Youth in Action Award. That award included \$15,000 in prize money, which Iqbal pledged to use toward becoming a lawyer. As an adult, he wanted to continue fighting for the freedom of Pakistan's estimated 7.5 million enslaved children.

On Easter Day, April 16, 1995, only months after receiving the Reebok award, Iqbal was killed in his native town of Muridke, Pakistan. He and his family had received death threats for his activism against bonded labor, the *Christian Science Monitor* reported two months after Iqbal was killed. But the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan concluded his death was not political. Iqbal's friends around the world continue to call for a thorough and independent investigation.

"It was Iqbal's dream for children to be free and to be educated," Amy Papile told the *Christian Science Monitor*. Amy, now a ninth-grader, and Nicole Ferris, 12, represented their classmates in receiving the U.S. Labor Department award.

Iqbal's death shocked the Broad Meadows students into even more vigorous action, using the Internet and traditional letter-writing. According to Ron Adams, their teacher advisor, people of all ages from 50 states and 24 nations eventually were involved in the campaign to build a school in Pakistan dedicated to Iqbal. In February, they accomplished the dream: Iqbal's school in Kasur City opened with 278 poor working children, ages 4 to 12, who are getting their first chance at an education.

As of April 16, Broad Meadows students had raised \$147,000. The Kasur City school now is guaranteed to be in business for at least eight years, Adams said, under the wing of Sudhaar, a small, grass-roots non-governmental organization based in Pakistan.

"So you see," the students loudly proclaim on the web site they created for their campaign, "there is a school for Iqbal, thanks to big-hearted people like you! A BULLET CAN'T KILL A DREAM. Spread the word!" ■

The SGI-USA's Children's Rights Exhibit, which will continue its tour this year, is unofficially dedicated to Iqbal Masih.