

**CHANGING OUR LIVES THROUGH STUDY  
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The SGI-USA Study Department Intermediate-level Exam was held Oct. 25 at approximately 160 locations throughout the United States and the Caribbean, and in Okinawa and Tokyo for the members of Japan's SGI International Group. More than 4,300 members participated.

The exam candidates challenged the circumstances of daily life, taking the time to study in the midst of very busy schedules. It's most likely that hardly anyone had an easy time preparing for the exam. Perhaps some had very hectic work schedules and/or children to care for, as well as attending SGI-USA activities in the evenings. Students had to set aside time for study between classes or after their school study in the evening. Each examinee's circumstance differed, but even with very little energy left at the end of a long day, I imagine many stayed up late to study, even sacrificing some of their precious sleep time.

Those who have not taken a test in a long time may have felt quite nervous. Despite such difficult circumstances, so many members challenged themselves in studying for the exam.

And in addition to the challenges faced by the examinees, we cannot overlook the efforts of many other members who supported them in their efforts. Many studied regularly with someone who would be taking the exam, for as long as three months or more. Some districts conducted more than 20 preparatory study meetings.

Study department examinations have been a precious tradition of the Soka Gakkai since the time of second president, Josei Toda. President Toda urged members to approach Buddhist study with a spirit like that of a master swordsman seeking to sharpen and hone his skill. This means that in spite of our difficult daily lives we must exert ourselves in our practice and seriously pursue the study of Buddhism in order to sharpen our "sword" of faith.

SGI President Ikeda wrote in his foreword to the newly published *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*: "The Gosho is a work of faith, of philosophy, of daily living, of eternal peace, and of boundless hope. It is set with myriad jewels of guidance. SGI members have read a single passage of the Gosho with their entire life, and they have not only changed their lives for the better but have also achieved their human revolution." Also he wrote, "It is practice and study that deepen and strengthen that faith. For us, study must never be a mere accumulation of knowledge. It must be strictly a practical study to deepen one's own faith and elevate one's own state of life."

The purpose of study is not to pass an exam; the exam is merely a means, and expedient, to inspire and motivate us in our study of Buddhism. Frankly speaking, I wonder if there were no intermediate exam, how many of over 4,300 members who took the exam would have studied as hard as they did, with the seriousness and challenging spirit of a "master swordsman" in training.

Also the exam presents each of us with an opportunity to reflect on our own study habits. How many of us who did not have to take an exam this time have been studying steadily every day? Some have, to be sure. But most of us—or at least I can speak for myself—find it difficult to be motivated to study without some kind of goal or objective in mind. In "The True Aspect of All Phenomena," Nichiren Daishonin clearly emphasized the essential importance of study in the following passage: "Exert yourself in the two ways

Title: Changing Our Lives Through Study

Subject: World Tribune 12/03/99 n.3271 p.2 WT991203p02

Author: Eugene Hirahara

Keywords: Changing Encouragement Eugene Guidance Hirahara Lives Study Through

of practice and study. Without practice and study, there can be no Buddhism” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386). In that sense, all of those who have challenged studying in the midst of difficult daily lives have deepened and enriched their lives.

In the process of taking the exam, regardless of the score, all are winners in faith. Many examinees did not achieve the test score required to pass, and both the examinees and those who helped them study may feel discouraged at this. However, I believe those who did not pass the exam this time will make an even stronger determination for future study. In this respect, their growth will far surpass those who received a passing score but slacken in their study of the Daishonin’s teachings. This is because, as I mentioned before, the test exists to help us deepen our understanding of Buddhism. Those who continue to study with a seeking spirit will be the winners regardless of whether they pass any particular exam.

I have heard from many people who took the exam who have expressed their appreciation for this opportunity, regardless of whether or not they passed. Some of their comments are:

“I liked reading the ‘Life Span’ chapter. Now I can understand, when we do gongyo, we’re in the original moment of life, with no beginning or end.”

“Studying ‘The Opening of the Eyes’ for this exam, I gained an understanding of true action and what it means to be a leader, not just someone who says whatever they want to say. In other words, the true aspect of a leader.”

“Preparing for the Intermediate study exam gave me a new perspective on the temple issue. Instead of asking myself, ‘What can I do?’ I began asking myself ‘What must I do?’”

An Entrance Exam and an Elementary Level Exam are scheduled for the year 2000 and another Entrance Exam and an Advanced Level Exam are scheduled for 2001. Regardless of our study level, let’s all involve ourselves in studying together to deepen our faith, to develop the impetus for kosen-rufu activities and to sink the roots of a new humanistic philosophy in the soil of America in the coming century.