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THE SGI PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE TO THE MARCH 16 YOUTH MEETINGS

# Everything Begins With Action

**M**y heartfelt congratulations on this proud gathering of my beloved youth division and junior high and high school division members of America, who have gathered in high spirits to usher in a new era. Thanks to each of you for your hard work.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, a philosopher of the American Renaissance, whose works I have fondly read since my youth, once said, "The one thing in the world, of value, is the active soul." Everything begins with action. When you act, you will tap your wisdom and see the road that you must take. Since all of you uphold the supreme Mystic Law, you can transform everything into a source of happiness and victory.



The March 16 Northern Ohio Area Youth Meeting at the Cleveland Community Center included a performance by the Eddy siblings, featuring Sean, 12, and twins Dylan, 10, on the violin (above, right), and Caitlin, 10, on the cello (right).

Nichiren Daishonin writes, "When the lion roars, all the other beasts are silenced" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 300). I ask that each of you, as a courageous lion, challenge yourself to advance fearlessly and boldly, and

to speak out for justice in a way that befits youth. When you contribute to others and to society with such a powerful life-force, you will win people's praise and trust, which will in turn prove the validity of this Buddhism.

I am confident that each of you — without a single exception — will grow into a great leader of the 21st century. And I am chanting for each of you every day.

I conclude my message by urging you, my beloved youth division members of America, to score your own victories through justice and perseverance, and through your own efforts to create a wave of propagation in America.

March 1999  
Daisaku Ikeda



Photos by IAN NAYSMITH

## Linus Pauling Exhibition To Open at Caltech

The "Linus Pauling and the Twentieth Century" exhibition, sponsored by the Pauling family, Oregon State University and the SGI, will open in May at the California Institute of Technology in Pasadena. The result of a proposal SGI President Ikeda made to his friend Dr. Pauling, the father of modern chemistry, in 1993, the exhibition traces Pauling's dramatic 93-year life and the great contributions he made to science, peace and health. This will be the exhibition's first showing after its successful debut last fall in San Francisco, where more than 10,000 people visited it.

The new showing is a symbolic return of Dr. Pauling's lifework to Caltech, where he attended graduate school and taught for four decades. Dr. Linus Pauling Jr., his son, deems this "the closing of a circle." He also expresses his hope that many young people will attend the Caltech exhibit and be inspired by his father's example. Dr. Pauling Jr. explains that "my father had the ability to think in terms like this: 'Here's a problem. What do you do about it?' That was part of his success. The whole exhibition is a lesson on how to achieve the future."

The exhibition will run from May 16 through June 19 at Caltech's Winnett Center and will be open on Wednesdays and weekends. The hours are: Wednesdays, 4:00 p.m.–9:00 p.m.; Saturdays, 10:00 a.m.–6:00 p.m.; and Sundays, 12:00 p.m.–6:00 p.m.

Photo by LISA HOLLIS



— JEFF FARR

### STUDY

The temple issue: How can we best explain that the SGI is correct?

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### SURVEY

Let us know what you think about the 'World Tribune.'

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### ESSAY

SGI President Ikeda revisits Hokkaido, Josei Toda's birthplace.

pages 3-4

## Changing Past Mistakes

By MAIA GUEST

SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION STUDY COMMITTEE

Ashvaghosha was prepared to behead himself in order to pay for his past offense, saying, "I have been my own worst enemy, leading myself to hell." But Punyayashas admonished him, saying, "Do not behead yourself! Instead, use your brains and your mouth to praise Mahayana teachings." ("Curing Karmic Disease," *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], pp. 216-17)

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Ota Nyudo to encourage him when he was sick. He tells Ota that it is his karma that has manifested as this illness, and that he can rid himself of it through having faith in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.



### In My Life

NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S WRITINGS IN ACTION

The Daishonin gives examples of various people who experienced similar struggles in order to overcome their past ignorance and unhappiness. He suggests that

Ota's illness is an opportunity for change and is cause for rejoicing.

The above quote is an example of one bodhisattva who wanted to behead himself in order to make up for his past mistakes. This particular sentiment rang true to me, as it perfectly described the pain and humiliation I can feel when I realize that my present unhappiness is the direct result of causes I've made. It can often feel debilitating in the heated moment of recognition and I, being prone to dramatics, always want to take some major course of emotional action — not unlike beheading myself.

Punyayashas told Ashvaghosha to "use your brains and your mouth" to make up for your past mistakes. And the Daishonin encourages Ota to use his faith in the Gohonzon and his wisdom to overcome his suffering. Looking at my life, chanting about it and recognizing the potential to use my stupidity for good, to learn and change and not be defeated by my ego, which is reeling from the blow of not being perfect, is the beginning of real and lasting change and a much deeper happiness. **W**

## GREAT HEAVENLY KING STARS

# Inseparable From the Cosmos

## ON THE GOHONZON

STUDYING NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S INSCRIPTIONS ON THE OBJECT OF DEVOTION

By TERRY ELLIS

CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You could say that the six characters in the second tier of inscriptions on the Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon represent the protective functions that we associate with the world of Heaven. The final of these six is Great Heavenly King Stars.

The "heavenly gods" appear in the Lotus Sutra to praise Shakyamuni for revealing the Law by which all Buddhas attain enlightenment. In this capacity, they represent the protective functions of the universe.

A famous episode in Nichiren Daishonin's life offers an example of these "heavenly gods" at work: Government authorities, instigated by jealous priests, ordered his execution. The Daishonin was a human being, so he must have known fear, just as he felt cold and

hunger. But he showed no trace of it at Tatsunokuchi, where, in the middle of the night, darkness was to mask the bloody scene. He was prepared to die, even encouraging his disciple Shijo Kingo that offering his life for the Law was the greatest privilege. Then, at the last moment, the executioners were scared away by a comet — one so bright that it lit up the dark skies.

How are we to understand such seemingly miraculous events? The prevalent view among Japanese in the Daishonin's time was that the heavens dominated human destiny. Buddhism instead sees human life and the universe as inseparable.

SGI President Ikeda explains it this way: "The individual is the microcosm. The microcosm is itself the macrocosm; the two can never be separated, so the self is in fact the universe" (November 1998 *Living Buddhism*, p. 24).

The Daishonin also explains in "The True Entity of Life" that "all beings and their environments in any of the Ten Worlds, from Hell at the lowest to Buddhahood at the highest, are, without exception, manifestations of Myoho-enge-kyo" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 89). This perspec-

tive goes to the heart of the Lotus Sutra and the Gohonzon.

We can easily just say that our lives and the life of the universe are one, but as President Ikeda says in *Buddhism and the Cosmos*, "unless we relate to the universe and to other people with humility, we will never be able to understand them as they truly are, let alone perceive the ultimate truth." When we face the greatness of the cosmos — and the greatness of humanity — with humility, he points out, we experience an awakening to our own greatness. Our daily practice of doing gongyo and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo awaken us to our true potential.

As for Nichiren Daishonin's experience at Tatsunokuchi, it's referred to as his *hosshaku kempon*, a Japanese Buddhist term that means shedding the transient and revealing the true. It was a turning point in his life and mission. He faced death, and in that moment, his great faith in the Law enabled him to tap the Great Heavenly King Stars in his heart. As a result, his life was, in turn, heralded by the Great Heavenly King Stars in the universe.

Twelve in a series

## NEW TEMPLE ISSUE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

# How Can We Say for Sure That the SGI Is Right?

By JEFF FARR

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The SGI's position is that Nichiren Shoshu's wrong. And Nichiren Shoshu's position is that the SGI's wrong. How can we explain that the SGI is right — beyond just saying that the temple's wrong? What evidence do we have to support what we say?

The real question underlying this is whether the SGI or Nichiren Shoshu is correctly practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Which side is right about what the Daishonin's Buddhism teaches? How do we know this for sure?

The answer can only be found in one place: the Daishonin's writings. Once we've studied the Daishonin's writings thoroughly, we can confidently say that the SGI is right. The SGI is teaching a Buddhist practice completely in accord with what the Daishonin writes. And we can cite quote after quote from his writings to support this.

For example, the SGI believes, exactly as the Daishonin writes, that all people are equal. All people are essentially Buddhas.

The Daishonin states in "Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" that "Shakyamuni who attained enlightenment countless aeons ago, the Lotus Sutra which leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from each other" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 22).

In "Letter to Niike," he says that "attaining Buddhahood is nothing extraordinary... Shakyamuni stated, 'At the start I pledged to make all people perfectly equal to me, without any distinction between us.' Therefore, it is not difficult to become a Buddha" (MW-1, 259).

And in "The Fourteen Slanders," he says, "Bodhisattva Fukyo of old said that all people have the Buddha nature and that if they embrace the Lotus

Sutra, they will never fail to attain Buddhahood. He further stated that to slight a person is to slight the Buddha himself. Thus, his practice was to reverse all people" (MW-3, 207-08).

The Daishonin's writings are full of passages like these that declare we are Buddhas. The SGI puts these passages into practice, sharing this message with the world.

Nichiren Shoshu's message, by contrast, is that we have to have priests — especially the high priest — to attain Buddhahood. We are incapable of doing it on our own, incomplete without that priestly intervention. But this idea is found nowhere in the Daishonin's writings. It's at odds with the Daishonin's writings, almost all of which were written to ordinary people, not to priests. Yet the priests suggest that Nikken is the only real Buddha, that he's the only one who can really understand this Buddhism, that ordinary people never can.

But we can, and we do! In "The True Entity of Life," the Daishonin says that "if you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (MW-1, 93). Of course, we do not become of the same mind as him just by being SGI members or just by chanting. It's when we have the same reverence for the people that he did — the same passion that he did for introducing all people to the liberation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo — that we become "of the same mind" as him. The priests have separated themselves from the Daishonin's mind by rigidly sticking to their misconception that they are "above" us.

The temple issue calls on us to move closer and closer to the core of this Buddhism, to reverence for people. Closer and closer to the people, the one and only reason that the Daishonin founded this Buddhism. Closer and closer to the truth of this Buddhism.

Two in a series

# 1999 'World Tribune' Readers Survey

We need 33 cents and 15 minutes of your time! The *World Tribune* staff needs your support. We want to continue to improve the *World Tribune* but need to hear from you. Do you have suggestions regarding the content and focus of the *World Tribune*? Please fill out this readers survey, and send it to us. It will be taken very seriously and will contribute to our steady efforts to make the *World Tribune* a great newspaper.

**Step 1: Cut out the survey.**

**Step 2: Fill out both sides of the survey.**

**Step 3: Put it in an envelope with a 33-cent stamp on it.**

**Step 4: Mail it to:** WT Survey  
 SGI-USA  
 606 Wilshire Blvd  
 P.O. Box 1427  
 Santa Monica, CA  
 90406-1427

**PART A: Tell us how you feel about the WT. Please answer the following questions:**

**1. How do you feel about the recent changes in the paper?**

	Very unhappy			Very happy	
Overall satisfaction with the WT	1	2	3	4	5
The improvements in paper quality	1	2	3	4	5
The addition of color	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:	_____				

**2. How do you feel about the amount of space given to certain types of articles in the WT?**

	Too much	About right	Not enough		
President Ikeda's guidance	1	2	3	4	5
International news about Pres. Ikeda	1	2	3	4	5
National SGI-USA news	1	2	3	4	5
Local activity news reports	1	2	3	4	5
Experiences	1	2	3	4	5
Study	1	2	3	4	5
Mailbox	1	2	3	4	5
Fine Print	1	2	3	4	5
Perspectives	1	2	3	4	5
Encouragement by leaders	1	2	3	4	5
Encouragement for leaders	1	2	3	4	5
Temple issue	1	2	3	4	5
Editorial	1	2	3	4	5
Friends for Peace (children's pullout)	1	2	3	4	5
Seize the Day (youth pullout)	1	2	3	4	5
List the three types of articles you tend to read first.	_____				

Hokkaido and I are one. Its spacious plains are always in my heart. Whenever I think of our comrades there, transforming suffering into joy in that frozen landscape, toasting one another's mission and happiness, I am inspired and filled with fresh energy.

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA



## HOKKAIDO, HOME OF THE HEART

*President Ikeda praises Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island, in this essay. He shares the experience of an elderly Hokkaido men's division member, whose spirit to widely propagate the Daishonin's philosophy, regardless of what others said or did, epitomizes the pioneering Hokkaido spirit — and the Soka Gakkai spirit.*

.....

That day 40 years ago, Hokkaido was just as beautiful and majestic. I was making my first trip to Asahikawa. I got up early to make the five-hour journey there from Otaru. On the way, I gazed out at the magical winter scenery, snow sparkling like silver as far as I could see.

It was Jan. 16, 1959. We had just ushered in the first New Year since President Toda's death. I had decided to focus on the prefecture where my mentor had grown up. Leaving behind the sadness of the past, I made my way to Hokkaido with the sun, moon, and stars of tomorrow as my companions.

When I got off the train at Asahikawa Station, it was 10 below zero, yet the hearts of the

members who greeted me were as warm and bright as the sun. I went directly to a guidance meeting, for which members from Wakkanai, Abashiri, Kitami, Mombetsu, Rumoi and other areas had gathered. I wanted to meet these precious, praiseworthy friends as soon as possible.

Not all the members could fit inside the meeting place, and many young men's and young women's division members stood outside to hear me,

snowflakes swirling in the air around them. Those standing near the eaves remained unperturbed even when clumps of fresh snow slid from the roof onto their heads. Such was the youth's passionate seeking spirit. When I later heard about this, I was deeply moved and, with profound respect and reverence, offered prayers for their happiness.

.....

Before I left for Hokkaido,

a leader muttered to me, "Why don't you wait until it's warmer?" His remark had a distinct air of reproach about it. I recall that he was a graduate of a leading university and the type of person who always tried to get ahead with the least possible effort.

"It is the responsibility of leaders," I replied, "to devote their attention to the toughest challenges. Isn't faith in the Lotus Sutra, in Nam-myoho-

renge-kyo, about turning winter into spring?"

The true essence of kosen-rufu is taking action where people are experiencing the greatest adversity and to win over all difficulties there. The spirit of a true comrade in faith is to cher-

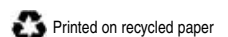
PLEASE SEE ESSAY, NEXT PAGE



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3. Are you better informed and/or encouraged by the articles in the WT? PART B: Tell us a little about yourself. Please circle your answers.

	Not Encouraged/Informed	Very Encouraged/Informed			
President Ikeda's guidance	1	2	3	4	5
International news about Pres. Ikeda	1	2	3	4	5
National SGI-USA news	1	2	3	4	5
Local activity news reports	1	2	3	4	5
Experiences	1	2	3	4	5
Study	1	2	3	4	5
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Editorial	1	2	3	4	5
Friends for Peace (children's pullout)	1	2	3	4	5
Seize the Day (youth pullout)	1	2	3	4	5
Comments:					

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What would you like to see in the WT?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Are you a regular Internet user?    yes    no  
Is it your primary source for news?    yes    no

6. How old are you?

- 0 – 11 years old
- 12 – 18
- 19 – 25
- 26 – 35
- 36 – 50
- 51 – 65
- 66 +

7. What is the highest level of education you completed?

- |                  |     |    |
|------------------|-----|----|
| High school      | yes | no |
| Some college     | yes | no |
| College graduate | yes | no |
| Post graduate    | yes | no |

8. How long have you been an SGI-USA member?

- I am not a member
- 0 – 5 years
- more than 5 years

9. Are you?    Male    Female

- Single    Married    Divorced

- |                  |                   |                |
|------------------|-------------------|----------------|
| African-American | Euro-American     | Asian-American |
| Native American  | Hispanic-American | Non-American   |
|                  |                   | Other _____    |

10. How many other people in your household read your copy of the WT? \_\_\_\_

ESSAY, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

ish and respect as Buddhas and bodhisattvas those intrepidly struggling amid a storm of difficulties and to wholeheartedly encourage and support them.

•••••

On that winter 1959 trip to Hokkaido, I also proudly revisited places that held many fond memories for me — Otaru, Yubari and Sapporo — old battlefields I had fought on alongside Mr. Toda in our struggle for kosen-rufu. I had sung songs in warm camaraderie with my youth division brothers and sisters in those place, and I had encouraged the youth there with all my heart to stand up with the passionate spirit to propagate the Daishonin's Buddhism.

Both Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda had deep links with Hokkaido. My first trip to Hokkaido was in the summer of 1954, 45 years ago.

I will never forget traveling with Mr. Toda to his hometown, Atsuta Village. I stood alone that day on the Atsuta seashore, gaz-

ing at the ocean, envisioning the dream of worldwide kosen-rufu, a journey I knew would be accompanied by both joy and hardship.

•••••

I remember, too, something that took place at the Headquarters Leaders Meeting on Nov. 16, 1979, commemorating the anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding [Nov. 18, 1930]. There was, at that time, a group of crafty, dishonest leaders who wanted to split and destroy the Gakkai. A group of evil priests exploited them in their own attempt to control the Gakkai.

At this meeting, an elderly men's division member, who possessed a most amazing resolve and commitment, gave an experience that reverberated with a renewed, everlasting determination to defend the Gakkai. "I am, as you can see, a granddad block leader of Teuri Greater Block in Hokkaido": His opening words rang through the Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, Tokyo, instantly changing the atmosphere.

Saichi Saga, then 71, was a greater block leader (corresponding today to the position of district leader), and he was the first member to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism on the tiny island of Teuri, located in the Japan Sea. He had joined the Soka Gakkai in 1955 and enthusiastically gone around the island introducing others to Buddhism, even though his fellow islanders jeered and mocked him as being crazy.

The experience he related at the meeting was a wonderful, inspiring one: He told how he had recovered from two major accidents, was now running the best hotel on the island and had become one of the most trusted, respected citizens in his community.

I heard all this sitting in a nearby waiting room. At the end of his experience, Mr. Saga declared: "I am an old man, who will soon be 72. But I still have the enthusiasm of a rushing torrent, a dream as unbounded as the skies above and a purity like that of fresh snow. Striving with an eternally

youthful spirit, I am determined to achieve kosen-rufu on Teuri Island by my 80th birthday!

"If I haven't accomplished this by 80," he concluded, "I will hang on until I am 100, no matter what it takes. I am prepared to keep fighting with iron resolve, until I have achieved my goal!"

At that time, even the top Soka Gakkai leaders, whose purpose it was to defend the organization, had slackened in their fervor to realize kosen-rufu — as if they were being intimidated by these attempts to suppress the Gakkai. An ordinary member from Hokkaido let loose a great lion's roar to keep up the struggle.

I heartily applauded him. After the meeting, I put my arm around the shoulder of this nameless hero of faith and offered him words of support and encouragement.

•••••

Twenty years have passed since then. And today, three quarters of the population on Teuri Island are sympathetic to the Soka Gakkai and 20 percent

are longtime subscribers to the *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper. Now, at more than 90, Mr. Saga is still active as a chapter vice leader. He declares with vigor, "I can still show these young ones a thing or two!"

To do one's best to widely propagate the Daishonin's philosophy, regardless of what other may say or do.... To determine to succeed, no matter what.... This is the Gakkai spirit. It is the pioneering spirit that built Hokkaido, home of the heart, which people all over the world are longing to visit.

As long as this spirit prevails, Hokkaido will withstand every blizzard and storm. The spring of hope of the new century will come, without fail. I will pray all my life for the health, longevity and victory of our hardy Hokkaido members.

This series is published as "Thoughts on The New Human Revolution" in the *Seikyo Shimbun*.

# the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

## ‘FRESH GROWTH’

VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 2, PARTS 35–36

**At the America East General Meeting in New York, Shin'ichi Yamamoto holds a Q-and-A session with the members. (President Ikeda shares here several points on the importance of Q-and-A sessions and how to lead the most encouraging Q-and-A sessions.)**

**G**reetings were then given by Student Division Leader Goro Watari, Young Women's Division Leader Tokie Tani and vice general directors Seiichiro Haruki and Katsu Kiyohara, all of whom had traveled with Shin'ichi Yamamoto from Japan.

Kiyohara had also accompanied Shin'ichi some two years earlier to the discussion meeting where New York District was formed. She was particularly impressed by the tremendous growth of the New York members.

She shared her impression frankly: "I can't believe this is the same New York! You've changed beyond recognition. At the first discussion meeting I attended here, everyone was crying in misery, and the joy of faith was nowhere to be found.

But now you're all in high spirits, and your faces are shining bright. Why, you all look like princesses! I'm sure that in your hearts it's New Year's. Well, Happy New Year!"

The audience laughed appreciatively.

"Let's remember that our work has just begun," she continued. "President Yamamoto often states that we must be courageous in faith. When you think about it, whether we're brave or cowardly determines whether we live happily or unhappily and also decides the direction of society. If we are cowardly, then not only will we be unable to defeat our weakness and laziness, but

we won't be able to say what needs to be said to fight injustice. Exerting ourselves in faith means courageously taking on all challenges.

"I think that you, the New York members, will lead the way for American kosen-rufu as courageous champions of faith," she said.

Shin'ichi, who sat in a chair near the speaker's table, slapped his knee in agreement and exclaimed, "Yes!"

Everyone laughed.

Smiling, Kiyohara went on: "Your victory here in New York will be the victory of America and will lead to the victory of the entire world."

"That's right!" interjected Shin'ichi again.

"Let's stand up!" Kiyohara called.

"We already have!" Shin'ichi chimed in.

"And let's open a new era of worldwide kosen-rufu!"

"Yes," said Shin'ichi, "We'll do it!"

Each of Shin'ichi's interjections drew boisterous laughter, and Kiyohara ended her speech amid general merriment.

January in New York was extremely cold. Outside it was freezing, but in the cheerful warmth of the meeting place, it felt as if spring had come early. The sun of hope, vitality and joy shone brightly in the members' hearts, breaking through all clouds of sorrow and despair.

**A**s the America East General Meeting continued, Shin'ichi again fielded questions from the audience.

Had it been possible, he would have liked to visit each of these friends at home, speaking personally with them, offering them encour-

agement in faith, guidance on individual problems and answering any questions. But given the shortness of his stay and the increased size of the membership, this was just not possible. So instead, he decided to hold a Q-and-A session at the meeting, where all had gathered.

Even in Japan, Shin'ichi strove wherever possible to open the floor for questions. This was to ensure that the meetings weren't always just one-sided affairs with the leaders doing all the talking. He would then give detailed guidance in response to the members' actual problems and concerns.

In such exchanges, the character and substance of the answer are truly put to the test. If the leader isn't trusted by the participants, or has an authoritarian air, no one will even want to raise their hand. The unpredictability of the questions also demands that the leader study Nichiren Daishonin's teachings thoroughly and be able to give appropriate guidance in response to any question.

Equally essential is the ability to provide clear answers in a very limited amount of time. If the leader is unable to give a clear response to every question asked, instead trying to palm people off with vague, unsatisfactory answers, it will only sow distrust in their hearts.

Of course, that doesn't mean that leaders have to have all the answers. It's only natural that there will be things that they don't know. But in those cases, it is important that they later consult with an appropriate person about it or, if it's a study point, go research

it and then get back to the questioner and sincerely try to answer the question.

There may also be questions that aren't to the point. When fielding such a question, a leader should try to help clarify and organize the questioner's points, aiming to identify exactly what he or she is trying to say and wishes to know.

There may also, on occasion, be someone who asks questions specifically designed to embarrass the leader or put that person on the spot. Or someone who asks questions out of the desire to criticize and attack the Soka Gakkai and the Daishonin's Buddhism. Such situations sometimes call for the leader to boldly refute the questioner's claims.

Another crucial challenge of a Q-and-A session is to ensure that one's answers not only satisfy those who ask questions but are also understood and accepted by everyone gathered, serving to inspire everyone to stand up in faith. Leading a Q-and-A session therefore requires qualities like strong conviction in the power of faith, clear, logical thinking and the flexibility to respond to all sorts of situations.

Leaders must never forget that if they do nothing but issue activity directives or give one-sided guidance, they will end up alienating people.

*To be continued*

**Daisaku Ikeda appears in the novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1963. Illustration by Ken'ichiro Uchida.**



# Culture Department Panel Discusses Its Mission

On Jan. 30, 26 Culture Department leaders from across the United States gathered for one day at the new Los Angeles Friendship Center. They met to lay the foundation for opening the new century with a Culture Department reinvigorated with a fresh understanding of its humanistic mission and a firm commitment to accomplishing our SGI-USA goals. Participants were guided in their dialogues by the message SGI President Ikeda sent to them (Feb. 12 World Tribune and March Living Buddhism). The result of that conference is the new Culture Department Mission Statement reprinted on page 7.

Recently, the World Tribune staff sponsored a panel discussion regarding the mission statement with five national Culture Department leaders: Eric Hauber, director; Greg Martin, vice director; Gerry Hall, senior advisor; Linda Johnson, Legal Division director; Gail Thomas, Academic Division director.

**World Tribune:** Thank you for taking the time from your busy schedules to talk with us about the exciting new developments within the Culture Department. Let's begin with the most natural question. What do you believe is the significance of the Culture Department's mission statement, rewritten during the conference? It now reads: "Our mission is to nurture promising, capable people of faith and intellect who are vital to the development of the United States and who exemplify humanistic leadership, embracing wisdom, hope and compassion."



**Greg Martin:** Let me say first how happy I am to now be in the Culture Department. Since its establishment nine years ago, I was an interested observer. Therefore, my comments today may be somewhat uninformed. I see a subtle shift in emphasis. Up to this point, we seemed to put the priority on members developing themselves in their respective fields. Now, the emphasis is enlarged to include nurturing others in the realm of faith. It implies that we have made great strides in our professions, but now it is time to in-



Culture Department Director Eric Hauber addresses nationwide representatives at their one-day conference, Jan. 30, at the Los Angeles Friendship Center.

crease our attention to nurturing others. It reminds me of Nichiren Daishonin's words, "But now you must build your reputation as a votary of the Lotus Sutra and devote yourself to it."



**Gerry Hall:** The heart of this statement is actually the same goal that the Culture Department has had from its beginning. The new phrasing includes the words to nurture, and I agree with Greg that this indicates a new maturity among the members of the department developed over the last nine years.



**Linda Johnson:** The mission statement clearly recognizes that to contribute to a positive change in society, it is vital that we be individuals who earn the respect of our colleagues through our expertise in our field, as well as through the way we behave. We need new role models of humanistic leadership, of individuals dedicated to using their careers to affect their surroundings in a positive manner.



**Gail Thomas:** I agree with Linda. It's a "crystal clear" target for Culture Department members.

The focus on both faith and intellect emphasizes their dual importance. Many of us, including myself, came to Buddhism seeking faith because we realized that our intellect and academic training were not enough. This is an important point to keep in mind when we

think about how to nurture capable people both inside and outside of the SGI. The heart of this thinking is propagation. SGI General Director Wada told us recently that any positive action on behalf of another is propagation.

**WT:** The first objective calls for us "To foster a steady stream of capable Culture Department members, beginning with ourselves." What do you see as some key actions under this objective that can be taken both as an individual and by the Culture Department as a whole?

**Gail:** To foster a "steady stream," I think, begins with a "me first" attitude, i.e., that I will be the first steady stream. Then I need strong and sincere prayer to have the wisdom and courage to truly do it. We are quite conspicuous as SGI and Culture Department members in our work places and in our local communities. In one of his poems (August 1998 *Living Buddhism*, p. 3), President Ikeda said, "The eyes of the whole world are fixed upon you / My magnificent friends of America / Eager to see our splendid work." I felt like he was speaking directly to Culture Department members. I interpreted "splendid work" to mean our actual proof that we display everywhere. This, I think, is the best way to foster and expand the stream of capable people.



**Eric Hauber:** Building on what Gail just said, two strategies strike me. First, developing our personal connection to President Ikeda. This is a foundational element for the Culture Depart-

ment. The second strategy relates to President Ikeda's message in which he asks us to "study more deeply and seriously than ever before." Before we can put the wisdom of Buddhism into our professions, we need to become aware of just what that wisdom is. Soon, the Culture Department will announce a study plan whereby we can discover the deeper elements of Buddhism beneath the surface of our normal study. We will use President Ikeda's *Lectures on the 'Expedient Means' and 'Life Span' Chapters of the Lotus Sutra* to accomplish both of these strategies.

**Gerry:** I think it is important for professionals to realize that they will always encounter stalemates in their careers, and what will enable them to break through deadlocks and set them apart from others in their field will be their inner growth. This invaluable growth of wisdom, creativity and humility can only be gained through acts of compassion, such as practice for the sake of others.

**Linda:** I really like that point, Gerry. Can I continue with it? For me, this first objective calls for each of us to strive to become first-class people in our respective fields, striving to inspire others through the way in which we live our lives. As part of our "steady stream," we shouldn't overlook existing but not yet connected SGI members. We need to look for these new Culture Department members from among qualified members already practicing within the organization but who may not be aware yet of the Culture Department.

**WT:** What strikes you as particularly important, a point you would personally emphasize to an individual Culture Department member, within the second objective: "To contribute to the achievement of the goals of the SGI-USA?"

**Greg:** I believe it's the practical path of mentor and disciple. Do we put President Ikeda's encouragement into action within the organization as role models of faith? This objective also calls on us to subscribe to and read our publications, to participate in our

discussion meetings, to work to develop the youth and to actively strive to accomplish our organizational goals. President Ikeda, in the *Selected Lectures on the Goshō* (p. 33), reminds us that there are two aspects of our mission: "We are Bodhisattvas of the Earth who contribute to society in two ways: religious or essential, and secular or phenomenal. But if we forget that our mission is to propagate and live by the Law of Nam-myōhōrenge-kyo, we will be unable to carry out the benevolent acts of transient bodhisattvas.... If [we] think of faith only as something to help in overcoming our personal troubles, that person will be lost in a very shallow view of his or her mission."

**Eric:** Let me point out the last strategy that asks Culture Department leaders to engage in regular, structured dialogue with their line leaders. Frankly speaking, this portion has been largely overlooked in our recent history. With this dialogue, we will create a satisfying atmosphere of understanding and trust. Members will be much happier.

**Gerry:** I agree that there are many ways to support, through discussion meetings, sharing experiences or writing for our publications, but I feel that the most important thing is to show our own humanity and to actively appreciate and embrace the humanity of others. Our behavior as human beings speaks louder than any lecture, skill or performance.

**WT:** The third objective — "To play an important and unique role in the SGI's mission to contribute to society" — appears to be where the Culture Department has put its emphasis in recent years. Do you see a new focus in this area either individually or for the Culture Department as a whole?

**Linda:** I believe this is a fundamental and unchanging *raison d'être* for the Culture Department. We will continue to seek out ways to apply Buddhism to our careers so that we can create a more humanistic professional culture. For example, as

# Mission Statement

## Our mission

To nurture promising, capable people of faith and intellect who are vital to the development of the United States and who exemplify humanistic leadership, embracing wisdom, hope and compassion.

## We strive to...

### Foster a steady stream of capable Culture Department members, beginning with ourselves.

#### By...

- Continuing to develop our direct connection to SGI President Ikeda by applying his guidance and by corresponding with him directly.
- Studying Buddhism more deeply and seriously than ever before.
- Steadily engaging in dialogue leading to mutual growth and friendship through home visitations, meetings, outings, electronic media, etc.
- Striving for excellence in our respective fields of endeavor.
- Actively searching for prospective Culture Department members from among new and current members, especially youth and graduate students.
- Doing our best to participate in district activities.

### Contribute to the achievement of the goals of SGI-USA.

#### By...

- Being a role model of faith equals daily life.
- Supporting discussion meetings through sharing experiences in faith and presenting topics of interest to the members.
- Engaging the youth division members in dialogue and study appropriate to their needs.
- Contributing to the organization publications (*World Tribune*, *Living Buddhism*, books, pamphlets, etc.).
- Conducting regular communication meetings with appropriate line level leaders.

### Play an important, unique role in the SGI's mission to contribute to society.

#### By...

- Conducting small-group dialogues in our homes where topics of concern can be discussed with professional colleagues, both member and non-member alike.
- Sponsoring community events which enhance society's understanding of the SGI movement of peace, culture, and education and the principles of the SGI Charter (i.e. seminars, symposia, exhibits, presentations, etc.).
- Applying the wisdom of Buddhism to the creation of a new, more humanistic approach to professionalism in our chosen fields.

## CULTURE, FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

a lawyer, it means it is my responsibility to learn how to create a more humanistic approach to the practice of law both inside and outside of the courtroom.

**Eric:** I am particularly excited by the small-group dialogues in members' homes. Quite a few Culture Department members have expressed to me their desire to share more closely with one another, to have dialogues that bring a more rewarding human contact. Why not a small gathering of Legal Division or Healing Arts Division members, together with a few non-member friends, in someone's apartment with refreshments discussing the ins and outs of legal or medical ethics? It would feel so natural to invite peers and friends. Frankly speaking, I think this strategy should precede the sponsoring of community events. Individual members' development and happiness should come first. Then the community events will be remarkable in their effect.

**Greg:** That is a very intriguing and fresh idea. It's also very personal and human. Our new culture of humanism can take root right there. They are also a wonderful and practical way to share Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with others.

**WT:** What do you see as the biggest opportunities or challenges facing the Culture Department at this time?

**Gerry:** The foundation for our Culture Department has been laid. President Ikeda gave tremendous encouragement and showed great personal interest in its first steps toward solidifying that foundation over the past decade. Now it is clear that he has even greater expectations for the members of the Culture Department. The opportunity and challenge for each member is to have confidence that their efforts will make a difference. We need to see our individual actions as a part of the whole SGI movement.

**Greg:** Individually, I think we are being challenged to manifest our Buddhist wisdom and compassion in our behavior in our professions toward "the creation of a new, more humanistic approach to professionalism." To practice what we preach. In our old paradigm of Buddhist

practice, while we practiced to achieve goals or get the things that we believe will make us happy, one's behavior during the process sometimes seemed irrelevant. In the new paradigm, the behavior that we exhibit toward others as we strive to show actual proof in our chosen fields must reflect actual proof of our Buddhist practice. This is a challenging mission and responsibility, especially for Culture Department members who often find themselves fulfilling highly visible roles both within and outside of the organization. Yet as Nichiren Daishonin states: "The purpose of Shakya-muni's advent in this world lies in his behavior as a human being." What a significant and noble mission!

**Linda:** I second both Gerry and Greg. I think the biggest challenge is to create new, less formal and more meaningful meetings for each of the professions within each region. These meetings should focus on deepening our understanding of Buddhism and on our ability to apply it to our daily lives, especially in our chosen professions. This will result in expanded membership within the Culture Department, a contributing factor in "fostering a steady stream of capable culture department members."

**Gail:** President Ikeda noted that we are traveling in an era of wisdom. To me, this means that our society is in great need of leaders with wisdom, compassion and humanism, in addition to intellect. This is our challenge. When we engage in self-polishing and developing, we can attract and nurture other individuals with these same qualities.

**Eric:** I believe that our greatest challenge is: Can I be a person with a great, warm heart capable of embracing all types of people because I view things from a Buddhist perspective? This is the heart and soul of President Ikeda's charge to the Culture Department to create a "new culture for the 21st century." Everything else is an opportunity — to create a self-motivated faith, to stand alone together, to dialogue toward trust and good will, and to work side by side every day with people who are doing their best to live a contributive life. It doesn't get any better than that!



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The *World Tribune* welcomes reader submissions. If you are interested in contributing an article or photograph, please contact us for guidelines. Together we can make a great newspaper.

# FLORIDA WOMEN Celebrate Women's Day

SGI-USA Women's Day, Feb. 27, was celebrated nationwide by some 30,000 participants and guests who attended women's commemorative meetings in February and early March. Many presentations during the gatherings focused on the women's motto for this year: 'Breaking Through the Barriers of Our Own Limitations.'



Photo by NOBUE SHIMOMURA

Biscayne Gardens District (Florida) women's meeting was an inspiration to all 68 attendees. It consisted of a lecture by a new SGI-USA member, Dr. Tania Lopez, on women's health; two moving experiences; group discussions on the topics of health, community, relationships and courage; a western dance; and the singing of 'Happiness in This World' led by two Ikeda Chorus members.

— YOLANDA FERNANDEZ



Photo by TERRY ELLIS

Delray District in South Florida had a 'Friendship Exchange' for their women's meeting. Dialogue centered on friendship: What is it? How do we make and nurture friendships? How do we help a friend without being intrusive? The women also shared talents in art, cooking, writing and doll-making, then enjoyed a buffet luncheon and more dialogue. Each woman left with a pink rose, a gift of appreciation from the men. (Above) Carmen Munroe, Ellen Hargitay and Judy Griffith enjoy further discussion.

— TERRY ELLIS



Photo by MAKOTO FUJII

Universal Dream District was created last August with members who live near Universal Studios outside of Orlando, Fla. To celebrate their first women's commemorative meeting, the entire district worked together to make it a success. To stimulate a lively discussion, questions were slipped into fortune cookies.

— TERRY ELLIS

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## Bringing Out Our Unlimited Potential



The Prometheus Group, a youth study committee based in San Francisco, authors of the following article.

**T**he term *revolution* means to transform. More specifically, the concept of *human revolution* involves a transformation of an individual's life at the core, where the person is able to freely experience joy, where the person is able to create value with no self-imposed or external limitations. Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda was the first to use this term. He described it in this way:

Human revolution means to firmly establish one's views of life and perfect one's self. It means changing from a small or medium objective to a great objective, from a lifestyle of small or medium good to one of great good." (*Why Is Faith Necessary?*, vol. 1, p. 102)

**B u d d h i s m** teaches that each person has unlimited potential and is capable of unleashing it. But what exactly does human revolution involve, and how do we undergo this ongoing



SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

process? One aspect of human revolution is bringing out your potential. From the standpoint of Buddhism, everything that we need to become happy already exists within ourselves. Some people might think, "I am too quiet and weak to do a great human revolution," or, "I could never be truly happy because I am such an angry person." The list of such doubts goes on and on, and these thoughts are quite natural.

However, human revolution, or bringing out our Buddhahood, is not about trying to suppress the personality traits that we have naturally. Instead, it is about living true to ourselves, and therefore determining to use each aspect of our personality in a positive way. Feelings such as anger may seem bad, but a person with a goal can use even a quality such as this as inspiration. For example, a person may feel angry after seeing another being mistreated.

(Continued on page B)

## Carlos' EXPERIENCE

### Incarceration Leads One Young Man To Change



Carlos Granados, Los Angeles

My name is Carlos Granados. I lived in the community of Highland Park in Los Angeles most of my life where I had been a Highland Park gang member since age 12. Although I managed to keep myself out of trouble most of the time, I am currently incarcerated for a shooting that took place in April 1998, just outside my house.

Prior to this incident, I met my girlfriend, Melanie, and we started to go out. At that time, I tried to leave my anger and grudges behind by occupying myself with a job and a college program. I thought I had hung it up, but my pettiness and grudges kept me looking for trouble to the point where I not only gang-banged with rival gang members, but turned against members of my own gang.

I used to be proud of my gang membership and never had faith in anything other than myself. Needless to say, I thought very little of my own life and the lives of others. I always packed the biggest gun, not to mention the biggest ego, and was proud to be recognized as one of the "good homies."

When I was first exposed to this Buddhism, I never thought I would actually be practicing it. Like I said, I never believed in anything. And I thought, "How could having faith bring you happiness and benefit?" I didn't know about karma before this, and although it was evident in my environment at the time that I was making bad causes, I always figured, "As long as you don't get caught, you don't have to worry about what you do." I always believed that "it would never happen to me." I have never been more wrong about anything in my entire life. All the bad karma I created for myself has now come back to me in the form of what I am now struggling with. Cause and effect is very strict!

My mother and I had only seen each other on rare occasions because I was out doing drugs or with the gang. I lost my job and ended up dropping my classes. I would get sick with a fever at least once a month. For a year straight I could not stop myself from getting progressively worse — unhappier. I literally took a nosedive into hell when it happened: my neighbor and I shot at three guys who came by to shoot up our street. We ended up injuring a little girl who lived on the block.

It has taken this, the complete shattering of my life, to break the cycle of bad karma, which I was willingly a part of. This in itself has proved to be a great opportunity as this negative experience was what led me to start chanting in the first place.

I began chanting on April 1, 1998, in a holding cell at the Northeast Los Angeles Police Department and received many

(Continued on page B)

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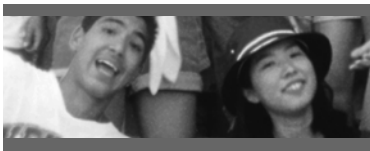
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*(Prometheus Group Continued)*

This anger can be a good thing if the person stands up against the mistreatment or determines never to treat others that same way. Likewise, other personality traits we have as individuals can be potentially good. It all depends on our determination. To this effect, SGI President Ikeda says: "Our personality doesn't determine our happiness or unhappiness. Rather it is the substance of how we've lived that decides. The purpose of Buddhism and education, as well as all our efforts toward self-improvement and growth, exist to enhance that substance" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 1, p. 183).

When we strive toward a goal, our positive qualities shine and negativity fades into the background. ♪

### *(Carlos' Experience Continued)*

benefits. I prayed for the little girl to live through her injuries. Within one month she was released from the hospital and she returned to school in perfectly good health. I have continued to chant for her good health and well-being. My mother and I have a good relationship now. She has realized her own personal mission to help other incarcerated individuals as a Catholic chaplain.

I have real friends in my life for the first time — SGI members whom I met during the Global Family Festival practices, which I had the opportunity to be a part of.

By April 1, 1998, I had already begun to make the external changes necessary to advance in my life. I had left the gang, returned to school and stopped using drugs. However, this was not enough. I still lacked the internal change within my heart, some-



*Carlos with girlfriend, Melanie.*

thing that is necessary to really change.

Finally I had a realization. I have changed my anger and bitterness into a concern to keep others from making the same mistake I made in my life. I appreciate life so much more now. I anticipate the joy of doing gongyo every morning and evening, something I never imagined I would be thankful for. I love to hear about how my mother has also found faith in her life, how my younger cousins are getting good grades in school, and how my girlfriend tries even harder to practice and make something more of her life. I attribute all of this to the one change made in my heart.

I have goals in which to focus my prayer and I have a determination to help people in my community. I would like to help others to realize that they need to change their lives by changing themselves from within, just as I have made a change by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. I feel like I now have a purpose and direction in life.

I still do not know what my mission in life is but I am chanting to know. I still have a long life to live. When I think of the suffering I have brought to my loved ones and myself, I think of Nichiren Daishonin's letter entitled "Happiness in this World." In it he states:

"Never let life's hardships disturb you, after all no one can avoid problems, not even saints or sages.... Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo no matter what happens" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 161).

This is something I plan to do, no matter what happens.

I am proud to say I have now been an SGI member for seven months. I would like to thank the members of El Rio District for welcoming me in a positive way and for their continued support. I will be chanting always with a deep appreciation for being a part of an organization that has helped me to change my life. ♪



"THE MASK"  
 Melanie Sarcedo  
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## The Mask

The mask you wore on your face today was transparent, at least to my eyes, and I saw right through it...

The mask you wear, makes it easy for you, doesn't it? Nobody knows you.

It's not real, and not true. It's something you should not do. But, with the mask evolves a story of your wonderful life...

Whatever you wish to be, just say it and act. But...as I look in the mirror, the reflection so clearly shows that I am, no longer "The Mask Wearer"

*This artwork — poem excerpts and sketch — was contributed by Melanie Sarcedo, Carlos' girlfriend, who was integral in helping his experience get printed.*

# YOUTH *Study* APRIL

## ERADICATING SELF-DOUBT

By Jamie Liptan, Seattle

Self-doubt is as much a part of life today as grocery shopping or tying one's shoes. For many of us, our days are filled with worry and confusion about our own abilities. We can talk about having confidence, but we live in a society where it's hard to have confidence in anything.

Great religions are interpreted in many different, mutually contradicting ways. Violent acts are committed in the name of religions founded on the ideals of peace. In the political world promises are made routinely, but few people seem accountable when these promises are unfulfilled. In fact, decisions are made in the name of the "greater good" but seem to result in the greater suffering for individuals. Even the media seems sensationalistic and unreliable at times. We are surrounded by statements and images that make it hard to have a clear or confident view of life.

In a society like this, there is little wonder that self-doubt plays such a large role in so many of our lives. But, in the above passage, Nichiren Daishonin speaks with clarity and confidence about the power we possess within our own lives.

The "inferior teachings" the Daishonin refers to are not simply other religions. "Inferior teachings" are anything we use to seek our happiness outwardly — money, relationships, social status, possessions. Our entire economic system is now based on the consumer's desire to possess, to possess as a means of solace. In this environment, many people lose confidence in their own ability to overcome sufferings without external intervention.

The Daishonin makes it perfectly clear that our life itself is the Supreme Law and that we should have absolute confidence in this point. There is certain value in the pursuit of mundane things like money and romance, but if these things become the endpoint for our happiness, we're no better off than a hamster in a wheel.

The Buddhist principle of "earthly desires lead to enlightenment" teaches us that through the pursuit of our conscious desires, we reveal what our lives truly need to become indestructibly happy. What the Daishonin says here is that those answers are already within us. We don't need to search for them anywhere else. Through our everyday struggles, we will reveal the truth of our lives — that "Myoho-rengé-kyo is your life itself."

In this Latter Day of the Law, this age of confusion and suffering, Nichiren Daishonin's teachings continue to stand out as a lighthouse on the rocky shores of our suffering. This is a life philosophy in which we can develop absolute confidence and through which we can empower ourselves to act effectively for the sake of others. The Daishonin is unwavering in his pronounce-

## "ON ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD"

*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 3*

**Life at each moment encompasses both body and spirit and both self and environment of all sentient beings in every condition of life, as well as insentient beings — plants, sky and earth, on down to the most minute particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the universe and is revealed in all phenomena. One awakened to this truth himself embodies this relationship. However, even though you chant and believe in Myoho-rengé-kyo, if you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but some inferior teaching.**

## Key Points:

- Nichiren Daishonin goes right to the point — he explains it all clearly and directly!
- The Mystic Law is not outside our life. The key to happiness is within our lives.
- If we look outside ourselves for happiness or salvation, we're not practicing Buddhism.
- We have the power within ourselves to transform where we are right now into the Buddha land.
- All our efforts in Buddhist practice are causes for our happiness.
- Consistent practice is the key to polishing our life.
- With conviction and consistent practice, we will definitely attain Buddhahood.

ment of the incredible power of each individual. Self-doubt, therefore, can be completely eradicated through our practice of this Buddhism.

## NO MAN IS AN ISLAND

By Mark Kaplan, San Francisco

Is there someone in your class you just can't stand? Do you have friendly conversations with everyone at work except one person, whom no one likes anyway?

In this passage, Nichiren Daishonin says that we are all connected. In that sense, as President Ikeda says: "We cannot be truly happy while others remain miserable. Nor is the misery of another that person's alone. As long as one unhappy person remains, our own happiness cannot be complete" (May 1996 *Living Buddhism*, p. 21).

When I read this passage and think about how connected all life is, I realize that I can't just ignore the people in my life whom I'd rather not deal with. For me, the challenge is to crawl out of my comfort zone and seek out those people whom I find most difficult. It's easy to feel enlightened and Buddha-like when you are talking with people you like. But how Buddha-like can you be when you are with someone who bothers you?

Sometimes, however, the people I want to avoid are in fact people who are suffering, people who need a friend. And isn't it the mission of a Buddha (that's us) to lead all beings to Buddhahood?

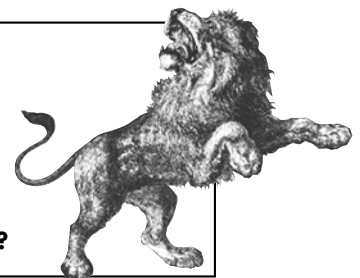
Through the act of helping others, we bring out our Buddha nature. In the passage, the Daishonin explains that the fundamental difference between common mortals and a Buddha is this realization that we are all connected, based on the Mystic Law within our lives. In this sense, helping others is a way to act on this awareness.

The challenge, then, is to reach out to another person, get out of our comfort zone and embrace people we normally wouldn't embrace. Whether we realize it or not, everyone affects everyone.

Propagating this practice is the ultimate expression of the realization that we are connected. Opening our hearts to another person to understand their problems and help them find the wisdom to solve their problems is the ultimate act of kindness. It is an expression of our Buddhahood and Buddha wisdom. ♪

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What does this passage mean to you?
2. Why does the realization that the Law is within, and that our lives are deeply connected with the entire universe lead us to help others?
3. How can we pray for a relationship or a job without looking for the Law outside of ourselves?



# GET REAL

## WHAT MATTERS IS WE ARE ALL HUMAN BEINGS

By Vanness Harris, Los Angeles



Many of us come from interracial relationships. Society, friends, and family then press us into deciding which culture we wish to live in or interact with. We overly concern ourselves with fitting into a certain social structure to maintain a relative sense of happiness. People seem to fear a loss of identity if their ethnicity isn't highlighted or in focus. To truly discover the real self, we must first begin to understand the nature of our lives as human beings.

We must seek to define our value in respect to each other, the environment and ourselves. Then, and only then, will the significance of being born into a particular culture be clear. The beauty of being from a mixed background is the opportunity to digest aspects of human life from different perspectives. But we, as common mortals, blind to the vastness of human potential, utilize differences between us to segregate, alienate, and discriminate against our fellow man.

But, humanity's diversity is really just life expressing its inherent potential — the potential to manifest itself in all phenomena. It is an aspect of our existence that should be treasured and revered, while bearing in mind that physical characteristics give no true indication of a person's value. The only way to truly understand each other is to engage in heartfelt dialogue.

Mentally, we have dulled our ability to perceive the true nature of our existence. We invest most of our time and effort in material wealth. If we were to spend as much time seeking to understand each other as we do searching for transient fortune, we would discover that the human being is life's most valuable commodity. Mankind has created everything that we've been seeking to obtain, so mankind should be at the forefront of our developmental efforts. We must seek to strengthen our intellect through diversity, through cultural exchanges.

What starts as a thought, eventually becomes a reality. Skewed or tainted thinking based on a flawed philosophy often leads to harmful action — racial segregation, hate crimes, even race wars. Buddhism has offered us a strong philosophical base from which to develop our wisdom. With our minds united on a goal loftier than our own self-advancement, our actions will be less likely to inhibit the steady growth of others.

Spiritually, we quest for continual nourishment. On a fundamental level, our survival as a race depends on the harmony we create among each other. In President Ikeda's *Discussions on Youth*, volume 2, he says:

Those unable to see people of other ethnicities as human beings the same as themselves are spiritually impoverished. They have no sound philosophy of life. They do not ponder life's more profound questions. They care for their own petty concerns. Our society is filled with people who are consumed with HUNGER — at the mercy of unrestrained greed and ANIMALITY — picking on the weak and fawning on the strong. These negative tendencies are what make our society discriminate against and ignore human rights. We are all human beings. That is what matters.

When we, as Buddhists, conquer our fears of dealing with diversity, our movement for world peace will advance 100-fold. ♪

# DIVERSITY

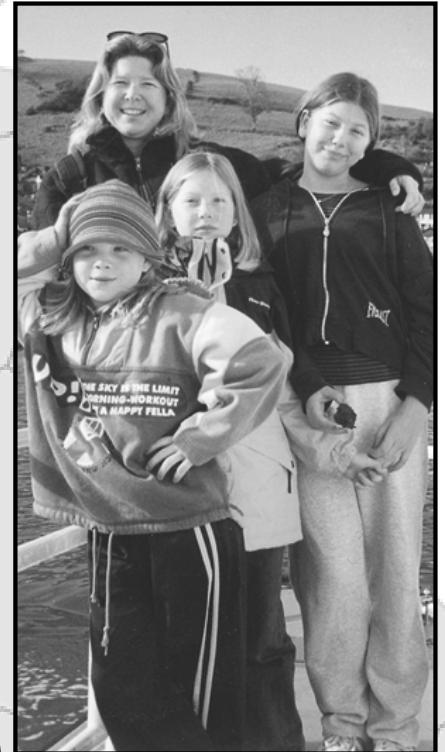


By Alexandra Greene, England

Fourteen-year-old Alexandra Greene recently moved to England from the United States. The change of lifestyle inspired her to write several paragraphs about the idea of culture. These paragraphs express Alexandra's insightful look into both the virtues of British culture and the virtues of the American culture she grew up in.

## Customs

We always eat together as a family. Then we go around the table and say what was good during the day and what was bad, starting with the person who sits in the front that day. For Christmas, I always go to New York or England and spend time with family and friends. That is fun. I always look forward to it. I do gongyo every morning and evening. For Easter, I usually go to Mexico after the Easter Egg Hunt. On Fridays, I meet my mom at a restaurant or a movie theater. I love spending time with my family.



Alexandra Greene (far right) with family.

## New Traditions

My dad comes over whenever he can for dinner. I like this new tradition. I have to share an art class with my sisters. I don't like this tradition. I just started chanting. I have to get up very early every morning. This is a tiring experience. I am on an all-star basketball team. I am very proud of myself. These are my new traditions.

## Cultural Heritage

My grandma lived through World War II. I am proud of that because she didn't get hurt. She also can tell stories of how horrible it was. So then we hopefully don't have to live through it again. My family are fighters. We have had a very serious case of cancer. But some of them from the starting point to the end, had a time of 12 years. My grandma held on for eight years because she wanted to see me grow up. I am the oldest grandchild on my dad's side of the family. I am very proud of them. ♪