



EXPERIENCE

Mark Allen Davis' adventure with 'The Lion King.'

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EARLY SPRING

A new chapter of 'The New Human Revolution,' 'Early Spring,' begins in this issue.

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Dialogue on Art and Life

WE MUST OPEN OUR LIVES

Photo by SEIKYO PRESS



In a dialogue with SGI-USA member and jazz superstar Herbie Hancock, SGI President Ikeda explains how 'Buddhism teaches that we must open our lives. The essence of art, life and Buddhism is the same.'

SGI President Ikeda: Congratulations on your latest Grammy Awards! SGI members throughout the world applaud you.

I am well aware of all your achievements so far. You are the emperor of music, the king of music! I am so delighted to see you. Mrs. Hancock, I am very happy to see you, as well.

Herbie Hancock: I am the one who is overjoyed to have this opportunity to meet with you, President Ikeda! I want to present you with the CD for which I was awarded. I was extra careful so it wouldn't break in transit!

PLEASE SEE DIALOGUE, 8

Interfaith Environmental Conference Convenes in Los Angeles

The Los Angeles Friendship Center was the site of an early Earth Day celebration, April 18, when representatives from more than a dozen faiths met for a discussion on "Uniting Faith and Environment." Speakers shared how their faiths value the natural world and the efforts that believers in their religions are currently making to protect our

planet's future.

Larry B. Stammer, a religion writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, gave the keynote address on "The Earth As Sacred Ground." Mr. Stammer, now writing a book on the subject, emphasized how deeply linked religion and environment should be in our lives. "Most of us from time to time need something

in the natural world to stir our imaginations," he said, "to move us to reflect on the quality of our lives, to bring perspective to our comings and goings, and to connect us with something bigger than ourselves."

Looking to the millennium, Mr. Stammer said that "our lives, our posterity and the future of the earth are at a crossroads. The path we take will determine whether we will be at peace within ourselves and live harmoniously with our neighbors and our life-affirming planet or remain estranged from the deepest longings of our souls...."

Later in the day, this theme of securing the future was carried into two consultations: one led by SGI-USA Vice General Director Al Albergate on the Earth Charter, the grassroots initiative to protect the world's environment; another on the United Religions Draft Charter, an interfaith effort that is finalizing its charter at an international conference at Stanford University in June. Feedback from both consultations will be forwarded to the organizers of both initiatives.

— JEFF FARR



Photo by LISA HOLLIS

Larry B. Stammer, a religion writer for the *Los Angeles Times*, speaks with a conference participant at the interfaith environmental conference at the Los Angeles Friendship Center, April 18.

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LaVora Perry takes a look at 'Beloved.'

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San Francisco Gets Involved in Hague Appeal for Peace

Photo by MIKE MULLEN



HAP Youth Scholarship Fund recipients Alex Bardales (left), an SGI-USA member, and Catherine Partha (right), who works for the World Federalist Association of Northern California. Alex's father, Rudy Bardales, listens in on their conversation.

The passionate voice of Grammy nominee and SGI member Roberta Donnay soared through the high rooms of San Francisco's Bahai'i Faith Center on March 27. The words to her song "One World" seemed an answer to the question "How can ordinary citizens build a culture of peace and eliminate the root causes of war in the 21st century?"

The occasion was an orientation for San Francisco Bay Area organizations and interested individuals, including several members representing SGI-USA, who are committed to advancing The Hague Appeal for Peace Conference. The international conference, which marks its centennial this year, will be held May 11-15 in the Netherlands.

The 1st Hague International Peace Conference, organized by Czar Nicholas II of Russia and the queen of the Netherlands in 1899, was the first-ever international conference to focus on world peace. In his 1999 Peace Pro-

posal (coming in the May *Living Buddhism*), SGI President Ikeda expresses his support of HAP's international campaign to bring civil society together with governmental organizations in order to define and take the next steps toward a more peaceful new century.

HAP involves young people at every stage. Fred Duperrault of the Action Coalition for Global Change awarded a HAP scholarship on March 27 to 19-year-old SGI-USA member Alex Bardales, a Santa Rosa Junior College student, so that he can attend the Netherlands conference.

Yasuko Ikeda, a HAP member and member of SGI-USA's Youth Peace Committee, and Patty Duggan, also an SGI member, both described the importance at the orientation of follow-up discussion activities, large and small, to explain HAP to the community at large. A subsequent planning session was held at the San Francisco Culture Center.

— DONNA PARTEN

Temple Issue: Questions and Answers

WHY SHOULD WE PRAY about the Temple Issue?

By JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The real victory for the SGI in the temple issue is when our organization has educated as many people as possible about the difference between the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu — about what Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism actually teaches. To accomplish this education, strong daimoku backing us up is necessary.

We already pray for this victory every day, every time that we do morning gongyo: In the fourth prayer, we pray for the development of the SGI and for our organization to accomplish kosen-rufu, the global propagation of the Daishonin's teachings. The SGI's success in temple issue-related education is a crucial step in this kosen-rufu progress. How is that? The priesthood has attempted to alter the Daishonin's Buddhism, a religion that offers the greatest hope to the world's people, presenting it as something it's not. Nichiren Shoshu's version plays on people's inferiority complexes, reinforcing their self-doubt, telling them that priestly intervention is essential to their becoming happy. This directly conflicts with the Daishonin's assertions that we only attain Buddhahood through our own efforts in faith.

Since the temple's version still has the potential to confuse many more people than it already has, it is a problem for the kosen-rufu movement.

Chanting daimoku for the SGI to be victorious is something concrete that any of us can do, anywhere, at any time, toward a solution. And it's something very important for us to do — in fact, the fundamental determinant of victory in the temple issue, as in all our challenges, will be daimoku.

This year, the youth division's 10 billion "Victorious America" daimoku campaign has inspired many of us to chant more seriously about this issue. We should have confidence that all of this daimoku is going to make a difference. As the Daishonin says in "Reply to Kyo'o": "Muster your faith and pray to the Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 120). When we keep chanting about the temple issue with this spirit, the cornerstone for victory is being laid.

Finally, because chanting about the temple issue is such an essential part of our larger effort for kosen-rufu, we should know that we are sure to benefit from doing so. SGI President Ikeda has recently said that "Buddhism is a battle. Everything is a battle. This is the essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Unless we fight to ensure the success of our kosen-rufu movement, no benefit will be forthcoming." We should have no doubt that great benefit lies in being part of the SGI's education efforts; daimoku can be a starting place for each of us to participate.

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The Issue Is: **COMPASSION**

EDITORIAL

By **TED MORINO**
EDITOR IN CHIEF

SGI President Ikeda's addresses, essays and other works — so many of which have appeared here in the *World Tribune* — display his awesome capacity for compassion. In them, he clarifies from many angles and in myriad ways just how vital and effective the correct practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is in helping each of us weed out our suffering at the root and chart a direct course toward happiness and limitless growth. When we develop this confidence ourselves, and share our conviction in this Buddhism with many others, we are cementing the foundation of a true, enduring peace.

Therefore, when the correct teachings of the Daishonin's Buddhism are threatened, especially to the degree they have been by the priests of Nichiren Shoshu in the ongoing temple issue, we can understand why President Ikeda's strictness toward the priesthood is equally awesome. This stern rebuke of the priesthood's arrogance and negativity, however, is a further display of his limitless compassion for the people and reverence toward the Law.

When the temple issue surfaced in December 1990, the SGI pursued every possible way to resolve the issue through dialogue, intent on furthering the harmonious unity of priesthood and laity for the progress of kosen-rufu. But the priesthood, maintaining it has a special, sacred and inherently superior position in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and is

Nichiren Shoshu. By choosing to excommunicate the Soka Gakkai, however, Nikken actually severed his connection with the kosen-rufu movement. By proclaiming that Nikken's status as high priest is more important than anything else in Nichiren Shoshu, Nichiren Shoshu thus became the Nikken sect.

In Nichiren Daishonin's

of the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo).

The temple issue challenges us to realize the importance of the spirit apparent in the following passage by Nichiren Daishonin: "In the Nirvana Sutra Shakyamuni stated, 'If even a good priest sees someone slandering the Law and disregards him, failing to reproach him, to oust him or to punish

kosen-rufu, we of the Soka Gakkai simply could not allow the Dai-shonin's teachings to be trampled.... The Daishonin's Buddhism exists for all the world's people. We rallied to defend the Daishonin's spirit, and we rose as one. It marked the dawn of a new religious revolution.... For the Gakkai, the excommunication released us from the chains by which the envious, scheming Nikken sect had sought to control the Daishonin's followers and allowed us to claim our true spiritual independence....

"The new humanism of the Soka Gakkai, derived from the Daishonin's Buddhism, is linking people around the globe, transcending national and ethnic boundaries, and earning praise from all as the light of hope for the new century. Leaders of diverse fields who seek a philosophy of humanism and peace come to the Gakkai in a constant stream from all over the world. Isn't this brilliant proof of our truth and rightness?" (Feb. 5, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Strictness in the Daishonin's Buddhism has at its essence compassion. This awareness is vital in carrying out the kind of practice through which we will fully bring forth our inherent Buddhahood — and protect those trying to do the same. ■■■

Strictness in the Daishonin's Buddhism has at its essence compassion. This awareness is vital in carrying out the kind of practice through which we will fully bring forth our inherent Buddhahood — and protect those trying to do the same.

in no way answerable to the laity, refused to talk to the SGI.

Before being excommunicated by Nikken on Nov. 28, 1991, President Ikeda is known to have encouraged those priests who later decided to sever their ties with the head temple to continue to stay within Nichiren Shoshu and reform it through dialogue with their high priest and others. In other words, until his ties with Nichiren Shoshu were forcefully severed by the priesthood, President Ikeda tried to protect Nikken and the priesthood fully by trying to restore Nichiren Daishonin's correct teachings and spirit within

Buddhism, identifying devilish functions for what they are is the first step toward enlightenment, and toward protecting the movement of kosen-rufu. Despite his long devotion to supporting the priesthood's dignity and prosperity, President Ikeda now had to become the fiercest critic of priests who, while disparaging sincere practitioners, cloaked themselves in their presumed sacredness. This he had to do to protect the Law. The past nine years of struggle with the temple bears witness to his relentless resistance to the assault of the priesthood, which is epitomized by the recent destruction

him for his offense, then that priest is betraying Buddhism. But if he takes the slanderer severely to task, drives him off or punishes him, then he is my disciple and one who truly understands my teachings.' Never forget this admonition against ignoring another's slander of Buddhism" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 165). In the above quote, the phrase "even a good priest" means any Buddhist practitioner.

President Ikeda's deepest feelings in regard to the temple issue are well summarized in his recent essay "A Revolution Dawns": "For the sake of

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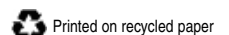
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EXPERIENCE — MARK ALLEN DAVIS, NEW YORK CITY

The Roar of 'The Lion King'

When Mark Allen Davis prayed with an 'I refuse to lose' attitude, he turned his life around, smashed through his darkness and wound up with a part in the Broadway musical 'The Lion King.'

A few years ago I was doing Gajokai (security) at the culture center Villa Sachsen in Bingen, Germany. The building was still under construction at that time. When I was asked by the architect to use a sledgehammer and break up an existing concrete floor, with all of my focus and intensity, I pounded hard into that floor, chanting all the while.

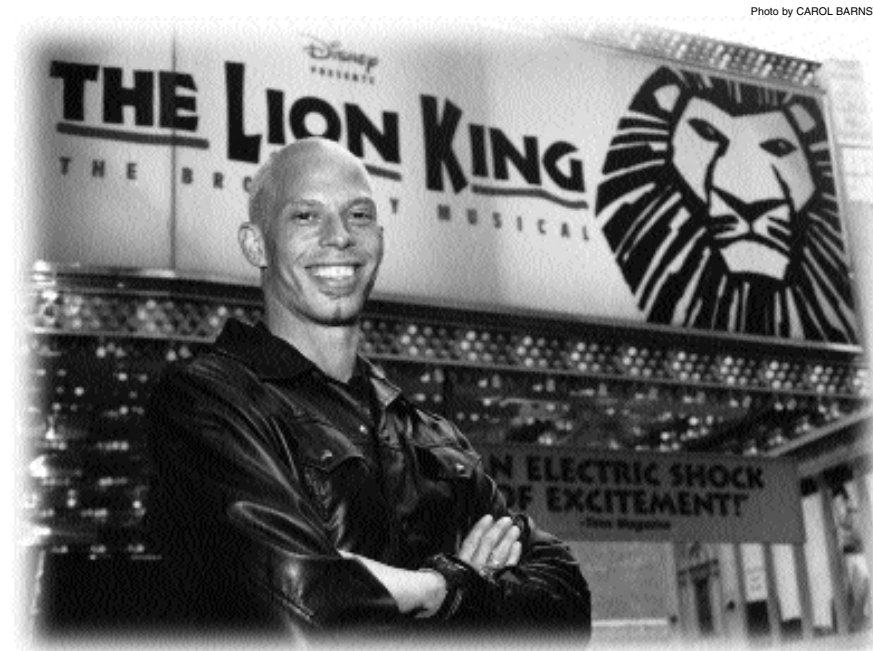
This activity remains in my mind as a powerful metaphor for everything that was to come to pass. I still keep a piece of that broken-up concrete floor sitting near my Gohonzon to remind me.

Soon after, I received an offer to dance with the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company. Bill T. Jones has always been a mentor and an inspiration to me. His work is world-renowned for its innovative, provocative athleticism, and I knew in my heart that this could be the right move for my life.

After 11 years in Europe, I moved back to New York. I immediately started rehearsals and began to tour the world, performing in such places as Australia, Japan, the entire United States and Europe.

It was during one of these tours that my mother suffered a severe cerebral hemorrhage — an aneurysm had erupted in her brain — and she was scheduled to have emergency brain surgery the very next day. Arrangements were made so that I could leave the company and travel to Chicago to be with her.

Never before had I been so confronted with fear. My mind created scenarios of her death, when I should have been full of hope. Somehow, I managed to push away these fears, and I



Mark Allen Davis appears in the Broadway production of 'The Lion King' at the New Amsterdam Theater, N.Y.

ended up chanting for her by her bedside. Later, she told me that she had no recollection of my presence there with her or my chanting.

It wasn't until our New York season at the Joyce Theater (six months later) that I saw my mother fully recovered, moving a little slower but moving nonetheless and looking great.

In my own life, things were getting worse and worse. The dynamic and attitude in the dance company were difficult for me to negotiate. As I traveled, I worried more and more. My role in the company seemed to be constantly changing.

In August 1996, Bill asked if any of us in the company would be willing to commit for the next 18 months. I said yes, and he responded with exhilaration, then promising to allow me to dance a duet as well as a solo in the upcoming New York season.

I was trying to establish my identity as a Jones/Zane dancer and make my career the most important aspect of myself. I had a strategy: I would dance with Bill until 1998 and then pick up where I left off as a teacher/choreographer.

Well, we all know what happens when we make strategies that are not based on the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra! Three months

later, I was let go from the company — boom! There I was, 35 years old, unemployed, in New York City. Where was my fortune, I wondered! What had become of my strategy?

At that time, my mother was back in the hospital for a second brain operation. Now, of course, I had plenty of time to be there with her, and this time I was determined for my mother to know that I was there by her bedside. And for her to feel the full effects of my chanting.

I spent my 35th birthday with my mother in the hospital. We had cake. And though I found the whole scene very sad, I turned to my mother and said: "Isn't this circular? Here we are again, 35 years later, in the hospital together."

Amazingly, my mom recovered yet again.

Back in New York City, I bought a copy of *Backstage* and began looking at the audition notices. The first time, I quickly threw the magazine in the garbage — I was so ashamed to even be considering one of these "rinky-dink jobs." Been there, done that. But my fellow Buddhists kept reminding me to keep looking, and they tried to convince me that something better was there for me. "Yeah, right!" I'd reply sarcastically,

Photo by CAROL BARNSTEAD

He was receiving choreographic grants from the American Dance Festival, and he and his new partner were preparing for a New York season. Though I fought to be happy for them, all I could see was how my fortune had been cut off.

My life revolved around going to the gym and collecting unemployment money. And I was beginning to hate dance. I would suck my teeth and feel lost when people would ask: "What are you doing? Why aren't you dancing with Bill?"

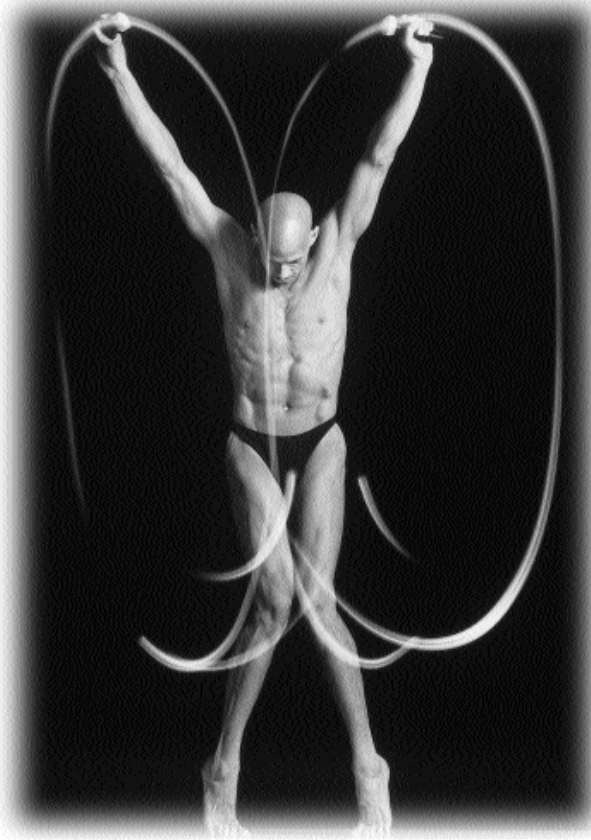
Then, I heard that the new musical *The Lion King* was going into production. I also heard that the choreographer was to be Garth Fagin — someone for whom I have enormous respect and whose dance company is based in my hometown, Rochester, N.Y. In fact, at the very start of my training, I had studied with his company.

The audition was only for Equity eligible or Equity members (i.e., union only). I was neither. And yet somehow the long process of acquiring eligibility was cut short for me — I got my union membership in six minutes rather than in six weeks! This enabled me to meet the requirements to attend the audition scheduled for Jan. 22, 1997 — the exact date, nine-and-a-half years earlier, when I began chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reciting gongyo.

Photo by HOWARD SCHATZ



Photo by HOWARD SCHATZ



While dancing for the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, Mark Allen Davis modeled for American photographer Howard Schatz in 1996 for his book 'Passion and Line,' which featured dancers from America's finest dance companies.

Naturally, I was nervous when I showed up for the audition. My previous auditions for the musicals *Rent* and *Chicago* had been very humbling experiences.

On top of all that, the day before the audition, I wasn't feeling well. My doctor told me that I had a temperature of 102, and that I had developed chronic bronchitis. She suggested that I postpone the audition. My response: "I don't think so." That was the first time in a long time that I had felt real strength. I thought to myself, "This job must be mine!" So I did a six-hour audition with a fever and a determination.

The days following the audition were the most difficult. I would cry hysterically for no reason. I would sob when my cat showed me signs of affection. I felt vulnerable, scared.

It seemed as though I had no control over my emotions, and in this state chanting was very difficult. I considered the possibility that I was clinically depressed or not right in some way.

After three days, I called a friend, Stacey, who lives in Hamburg, Germany. She basically told me that I was far too valuable to be carrying on with tears and

drama. She said: "You've always managed to overcome your obstacles before. Now pull it together." A true friend. Golden.

Thanks to friends like Stacey, as well as my fellow SGI members and my fantastic roommate, I began the long climb out of my hellhole. Though I was behind in the rent, my roommate never asked me for money — he trusted me and what I was trying to do with my life. I began to participate in many SGI activities; I did the study portions for our discussion meetings, which proved to be not only enormously successful for the group but also enlightening for me personally.

Doing Gajokai, I remembered my early training in Germany, and I became aware not only of how profound an experience it had been at the time, but also how it had changed my life for the better. For example, protecting the Gohonzon and insuring the safety of members in such places as the Centre Culturelle European in Trets, France, or at the SGI-Germany culture centers in Frankfurt and Bingen, helped me create lifelong bonds with people from all over the world.

The more I chanted, the more

the joyous memories of these friendships began to refresh my life. I began to treasure the phenomenal experiences I had had. I remembered what it was like learning to speak German and fighting to find my place in that unfamiliar world.

As a result, I threw myself into my New York Gajokai activities and found a forum there in which to express my appreciation and my difficulties. People began to appear in my life bringing me encouragement, nurturing, humor and love.

Still, I hadn't heard anything about my audition for *The Lion King*.

One February afternoon, I received notification of my final callback for *The Lion King*. That meant one more month of waiting. As everyone knows, waiting is a time when the inner devils — fear, doubt, anger — step forward and compromise our vision of victory and success. But through Buddhist practice, I found the encouragement I needed to fight these inner subjective functions by taking on an "I refuse to lose" attitude.

The day before my final callback, a friend said to me: "Three letters, one word: J-O-Y. If there's no joy, then forget it."

A senior leader said to me: "You must chant so that you transform your innermost life, so that your mere presence is enough. So that those producers or whomever will just have to have you in their show."

I knew in order to have that kind of life-condition, I would have to chant a lot. I went right home that night and chanted with the determination "I refuse to lose. Let my innermost creativity shine forth powerfully. Let my true self be revealed. All that I am. All that I have, let it be here, right now!"

I've always struggled with the concept of winning. I've always sabotaged my ability to succeed in one way or another. Quite simply, I had always been afraid to win.

It wasn't a curse on my life that had kept me from succeeding — it was, quite simply, my lack of courage in myself.

The motto from last year's-March 16 youth division meeting also stayed in my thoughts: "Do You Have the Courage to Follow Your Heart?" Something clicked. I wasn't helpless. I could change this. Everything around me could be positively influenced by me

and by my conviction to follow my heart, no matter what!

My final callback was fantastic. But still, I had another week of waiting before I would know the outcome.

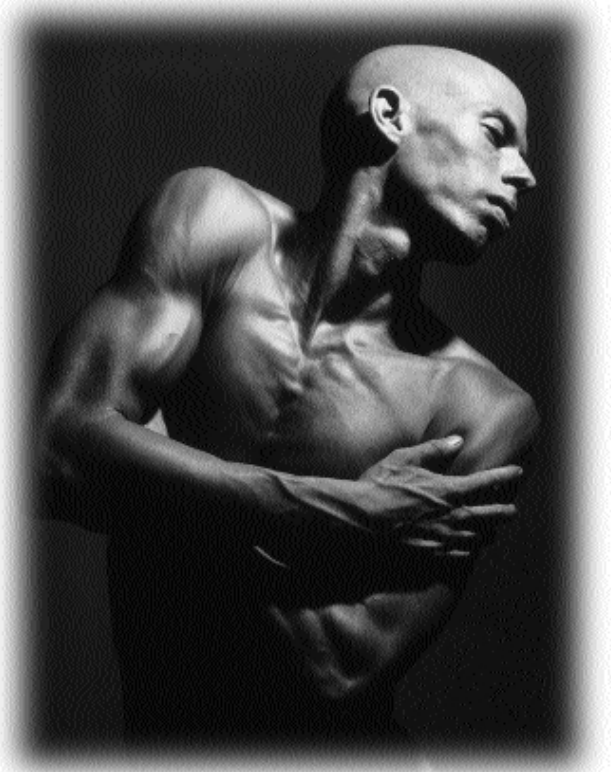
The closer I got to succeeding, the more it seemed that my subjective world was trying to make me feel I wasn't worthy. One evening, as I led chanting at the New York Culture Center, the sweat gushing off my face, I felt a reserve of strength so powerful it seemed as though some new person had taken possession of my body. All the years of fear and doubt, all the months of effort, all of it had contributed to

"Well," he said, "You'll be feeling much better after this phone call."

I am currently performing in the Broadway production of *The Lion King* as an original cast member. I am so grateful to all the people who have supported and listened and cared for me through this most difficult and ultimately rewarding time in my life.

As I called my friends and family and fellow members around the world to share my good news, I began to realize how much joy I had brought to others through choosing to share my struggle toward victory. I had raised my awareness of

Photo by HOWARD SCHATZ



that moment. I could smash my doubts with thunderous chanting, just as I had with fierce determination broken up that concrete floor back in Germany years before. I chanted that night like never before.

I would no longer accept fear as a reason to not do something!

Do I have the courage to follow my heart? Yes, I do.

After gongyo that night, I called my service. There was a message from Disney Theatrical Productions. I returned the call. Before the casting agent came on the line, I began saying under my breath, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes." He finally picked up and asked how I was.

"Fine." I replied.

what kosen-rufu really means — a ripple effect, as my own life moves outward with hope and determination to touch the lives of others.

I feel it is our mission to instill this kind of hope in people's lives. I have always known this, yet I never knew what I wanted. By having the chance to experience my life through this Buddhism, I have been unbelievably blessed.

Dreams really can come true. It's only our perception and subsequent strategies that don't allow them to come to fruition. Sabotage is sneaky and tricky.

Discover your limitations, challenge them and win! ❏

EXPERIENCE — CESARE CIVETTA, FT. LAUDERDALE, FLA.

'Best Friends With My Brother'

Photo by LINDA ST. HILAIRE

Cesare Civetta's Buddhist practice enabled him to close the emotional distance he had with his older brother, Gerald, before Gerald's death.

My brother, Gerald, was eight years older than me. We were never really close growing up. He was very much a part of the hippie movement of the '60s, and to protect me, he frequently pushed me away when I was a kid so I wouldn't see him high on drugs. He was my only brother and as I grew older, the emotional distance between us became frustrating. It's not that we didn't get along; we didn't communicate at all.

Gerald's first major victory in his life was conquering a 16-year heroin addiction. Unfortunately, right after his victory, he was faced with an even greater obstacle when he discovered he was HIV-positive. This battle was made even more intense by his feeling that he had to keep it a secret from his family for 10 years. My dad was fighting cancer, and Gerald didn't want to lay this extra burden on us.

My brother worked closely with my dad over the years, and loved him deeply. My dad's death devastated Gerald, and shortly thereafter, he was diagnosed with full-blown AIDS. Still, for nine months, he kept it a secret, not wanting to further burden my mom.

After he finally told us, I determined that he and I would become best friends, for as long as we shared this lifetime together. I didn't know how this would come about. Gerald's anger about being HIV-positive evolved into depression about having full-blown AIDS. He grew even quieter, and it became practically impossible to carry on a conversation with him. It is so common nowadays to point out the

flaws of our organization of the '80s. However, one thing that same organization taught me was the spirit to never give up. My determination, backed by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and praising the law of cause and effect at every opportunity, enabled me to persevere with this determination. It took three years.

Gerald lived in New York; I had moved to Florida. During this time, I visited Gerald every other month, and he came to visit me on the alternate ones, so we spent a few days together each month.

Because of what he was going through, and because we were not used to being close, Gerald found it very difficult to speak, and at times this was extremely frustrating. On each visit, I racked my brains trying to ignite some dialogue. Sometimes I would ramble on about something, just to fill up the silence, but he often responded with a grunt, or a half-smile.

I kept chanting every day to change this situation. Eventually he stopped reading and watching TV and sometimes during those visits we sat in silence for hours. It drove me crazy, but he seemed to like it. He appreciated our time just sitting together, not saying anything. There was so much I wanted to tell him, to share with him how wonderful life had become for me.

How I yearned for him to know the joy that I have come to know practicing Buddhism. Yet, his heaviness seemed to overpower my high life-condition. I chanted that Gerald would not experience pain, and I continued chanting for us to become best friends.

Even when I was working in China, I found a way to e-mail with Gerald. Upon my return to America, I visited him for one week. The day after I returned home, his wife called to explain that he had fallen off the sofa, and couldn't stand up. She was unable to lift him, and so they stayed on the floor for an hour. I offered to return to New York and help, which he welcomed. I stayed with him for another week, lifting him

and carrying him around the apartment.

He was frightened about dying, and stopped sleeping at night. Now and then he dozed off for short naps, during which time I ran into the next room, where I had set up an altar. I began chanting every moment I wasn't physically with him. Soon I was staying on his bed when he napped, and chanting next to him. The chanting increased until in the last days, I was chanting four, five, six, seven hours each day. The candles were burning in offering to the Gohonzon around the clock.

I asked him what his favorite song was, and he told me it was George Gershwin's "Summertime." We began listening to "Summertime" every day. Midway through the week, my mother and sister arrived to help nurse him. He took to wearing his sunglasses because of the bright light in his apartment. And we listened to Reggae music, especially Bob Marley, and also to Jimmy Buffet.

He was uncomfortable discussing the issues of life and death, but I made a promise to him. I said: "Gerald, one thing I will tell you: When you die, you won't have to worry about anything. I'm going to be in front of the Gohonzon chanting, and you will experience the most magnificent voyage, wherever you're going."

I continued chanting, and he became relaxed and quite light. He made jokes, sang and frequently thanked me. What I had never realized before was that during all those years I yearned to have an intimate relationship with my brother, he, too, had the identical desire. Now that it had manifested, he was incredibly happy.

Every time I stepped into his room, the look in his eyes and the expression on his face were unmistakable: he was just oozing love. He kept saying that he never imagined our relationship would be like this. There was the most beautiful current of love flowing between us. Sure, he was slowing fading,



Cesare at home, in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

but we were on cloud nine.


The night before he died, his wife, my sister and I were all sitting on his bed with him well after midnight, knowing that we'd be up all night again. I proposed opening the two bottles of champagne I'd seen in his refrigerator, to toast the beginning of spring. There was a beautiful view of New York's Central Park, which had burst out into the first green buds and cherry blossoms. We joked, listened to music, laughed and sipped champagne. It was our little party.

The next day, as I rode with him in the ambulance on the way to the hospital (still chanting), he lay on the stretcher, saying: "I'm so happy. I'm so happy!" He spent his final hours mostly sleeping, peacefully, without

fear, without pain.

After Gerald died, I chanted until the next morning because I promised him a magnificent voyage. My sister and sister-in-law stayed up until sunrise. They watched the sun rise over Manhattan and told me later that it was the most magnificent sky they had ever seen during a sunrise, and that they had felt his wondrous voyage at that moment. At his funeral, a friend of ours sang "Summertime" at his tomb.

He'll be back soon, and we will pick up on the beautiful vibration where we left off.

I will always be grateful to our great Soka Gakkai for teaching me to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, to never give up and for enabling me to become best friends with my brother, Gerald. 

EXPERIENCE — NANCY KENNEDY, RYE, NEW YORK

Making the Long Journey THROUGH LAW SCHOOL

Nancy Kennedy challenged her long journey to become a lawyer at 43, with ailing health and not even a bachelor's degree. 'The months, years, countless grueling exams and numerous obstacles passed by,' says Nancy. 'I would have "stopped on the 11th day" on that road to Kyoto long ago without the encouragement and support of SGI members!'

First I must express my deepest appreciation to the members who open their lives and share their experiences in the *World Tribune*. You have all encouraged me throughout the years and helped me move forward just one more day when all seemed to be collapsing around me!!

My experience has just proved what I refer to as the "20-year connection theory." Let me first tell you that I began this practice as a youth in 1967 in Hollywood, Calif. During that time I was a very vigorous member of the first Los Angeles Five and Drum Corps. I am grateful for the strict and compassionate training from my seniors in faith — to this day it has carried me through the toughest of times! In 1971, however, I was sidelined by serious back surgery and eventually drifted away from members.

My SGI friends always stayed in touch though, and I began practicing again in 1978 while recovering from life-threatening abdominal surgery — and have never missed a day since then. I'll get back to the 20-year theory a little later.

At our district meeting last year, a member was trying to recall a quote from Nichiren Daishonin's writings to ask a question of a senior leader. This one I knew from memory and recited

it for her. At one time in history, the city of Kyoto was the capital of Japan. The passage reads: "It takes twelve days to journey from Kamakura to Kyoto. If you travel for eleven but stop on the twelfth day, how can you admire the moon over the capital?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 254-55). To me this meant, if you do not continue to fight on the path for your goals in life no matter what the obstacles are, you will never reveal your hidden potential and complete your journey into the winner's circle.

Hearing this passage made me realize that I started my own journey to Kyoto — the goal of obtaining a law degree — 11 years ago, shortly after I arrived in New York. I had only intended to get a paralegal degree so I could seek employment in the legal field in New York. I had many years of legal secretarial work in the entertainment industry in California, but always wondered if I had any aptitude in "real world" law, not just the realm of preparing contracts for the "stars." Well, never underestimate the power of our practice to the Gohonzon! After earning my paralegal certificate, my inner voice then pushed me forward toward trying to become an attorney. But I was 43 and didn't even have an undergraduate degree. Everyone tried to discourage me from this crazy idea — except my SGI friends.

With support and encouragement from the SGI members, the months, years, countless grueling exams and numerous obstacles passed by. One huge obstacle was just getting accepted by a law school. I achieved my bachelor's degree in political science by 1990. Even though I graduated magna cum laude, I was passed over by every law school I applied to for two years. As the 1992 term started without me, I was very discouraged.

However, in September 1992 one week after classes had begun, I received a call from City University of New York School of Law in New York City telling me that a new law student had broken her leg that weekend and could not continue. They offered me first choice off their waiting

list of hundreds of applicants to take her place. I had to resign from my paralegal job immediately and jump right into classes that teach at a 100-mile-an-hour pace. This also meant getting up at 4 a.m. to drive a long distance to school five days a week. Those law school years were three of the most challenging years of my life, and every day I wondered if I had the strength to keep going. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo abundantly saved me from quitting many times!

Along with this my 85-year-old dad, with whom I was living and was his sole caregiver, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease in my first year of law school. I now had to juggle magnified worry and care for him with the stress and demands of law school. By the third year, Dad was declining rapidly and moved upstate where he could live with my sister and be monitored by a memory disorders clinic. His house was sold in my last semester, and moving vans were clearing it out while I was trying to take final exams and find a place for myself to live within 30 days of graduating. Nevertheless, in May of 1995, I received my law degree.

One more obstacle stood in the way of my goal — the "Mount Everest" of all exams — the New York Bar. There was no time to prepare, with all this upheaval going on, to take the Bar right after graduation, which is the best chance anyone ever has of passing, while the thousands of legal rules are still somewhat fresh. My old enemy, chronic physical illness in the form of severe pancreatitis, also returned at that time! These obstacles caused me to wait for a full year before taking the New York Bar for the first time.

Three times I prepared for months on end, studying day and night while juggling demanding law clerk jobs. Three times I failed to score enough points to pass. Each time, the board of examiners increased the difficulty of the exam to the point that even extremely bright young people were failing over and over, some taking it up to 12 times, then just giving up.

Every day I would read SGI

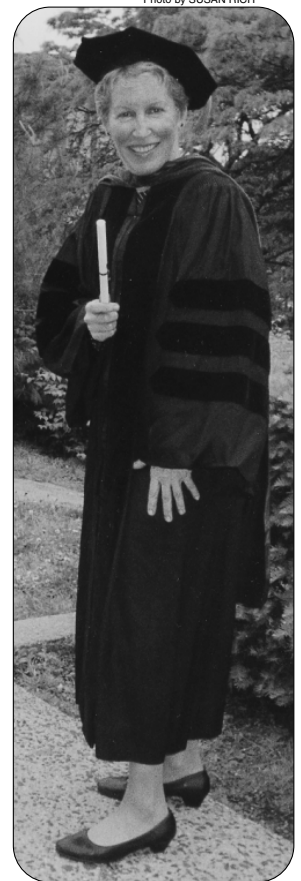
President Ikeda's encouragement and gain courage to keep going forward. Regarding achieving goals he said, "Don't give up when you feel discouraged — just renew your determination. If you fall down seven times, get up eight! The important thing is that you don't get down on yourself and throw in the towel."

I took the Bar for the fourth time in February of 1998, and the results were published in May. It was the most difficult exam ever given with the highest failure rate ever — 53 percent of the people failed. My heart sank when I read that in *The New York Law Journal*. I was certain that I had failed again.

However, I am at long last sharing my experience because — I passed the exam — this time I accomplished the impossible! And with a high score! I can't tell you what sweet victory this has been, but what makes me happiest is that it is our victory — I would have stopped on the 11th day on that road to Kyoto long ago without the encouragement and support of SGI members! I am delighted to tell you that I was sworn in by the appellate court last September and now have a license to practice law in the state of New York.

Now, back to the "20-year connection theory." I was still living in California, and around 1981 I remember that President Ikeda said to give yourself at least a 20-year goal to stick with this practice. Just like an oak tree, you don't see much for the first few years after the seed is planted in the ground, and maybe the tree isn't very tall even after 10 years. We always seem to want to see results overnight when we chant for our goals and dreams. But have patience, he said, and compare your life after 20 years to when you started this Buddhist practice.

In 1978, I had chronically poor health, was in and out of hospitals undergoing three major surgeries, had no confidence or stamina to hold any job other than typing and small office jobs. I was told by doctors that my disks were disintegrating in my back. They said I would be unable to stand or walk for the rest of my life by the time I was 40.



Nancy Kennedy on graduation day from City University of New York School of Law in 1995.

Well, I'm certainly past 40 today! As my health improved and strengthened over the years, I began to both work and go to school instead of just barely getting through an easy eight-hour work day.

The only thing I added to my life in 1978 was this practice — steady and constant, day in and day out.

It was 1998 when I stood to take the oath to become an attorney, exactly 20 years later. The comparison to whom I was in 1978 is overwhelming. Over the years I've constantly challenged adversity with this practice and have undergone tremendous inner-life changes that have enabled me to achieve things that I never dreamed could happen! By the way, my dad, against all odds, is holding his own against the devastating effects of Alzheimer's and will soon be featured in an upcoming segment of *Dateline NBC*. I continue to learn that with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in your life, each day is a priceless treasure and absolutely nothing is impossible!!

DIALOGUE, FROM PAGE 1

Mr. Hancock wrote the following inscription on the CD jacket: "Dear President Ikeda, it is through being inspired by your courage and winning spirit that I was able to create the music on this record. I will continue to strive to reply to you, my mentor in life. Thank you, Herbie Hancock." The CD is titled *Gershwin's World*, and features recomposed and reconstructed arrangements of works by American composer George Gershwin; it was produced in commemoration of the centennial of Gershwin's birth last year.

Ikeda: I was very impressed by your words that the performer's stage is like a surgeon's operating table — it is a life-or-death struggle.

Hancock: Yes, I did say that.

Ikeda: These are the words of a first-rate individual. They apply to all fields of endeavor. By the way, I listened to your award-winning album *Gershwin's World*.

Hancock: Really? I can't believe it!

Ikeda: It's true. My wife is my witness.

Hancock: Nothing could make me happier!

Ikeda: I am just an amateur, but I thought it was fantastic. I was surprised at just how great it is, and I was deeply impressed.

Hancock: Thank you very

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA AND HIS WIFE, KANEKO, WELCOMED HERBIE AND GIGI HANCOCK TO THE SEIKYO SHIMBUN BUILDING IN SHINANOMACHI, TOKYO, ON APRIL 13. MR. HANCOCK WAS PRESENTED WITH THE SOKA UNIVERSITY AWARD OF HIGHEST HONOR IN RECOGNITION OF HIS EFFORTS TO INSPIRE HOPE AND COURAGE IN PEOPLE THE WORLD OVER. MRS. HANCOCK, WHO IS GERMAN-BORN, RECEIVED THE SGI-GERMANY PEACE AWARD. DURING THEIR DISCUSSION, THE SGI LEADER AND JAZZ SUPERSTAR TALKED ABOUT ART AND LIFE. ON FEB. 24, MR. HANCOCK WAS THE RECIPIENT OF TWO GRAMMY AWARDS, MR. HANCOCK'S SIXTH AND SEVENTH GRAMMYS.

much. But you are not an amateur — I have heard you play the piano, and I can say that music is another field in which you are highly gifted!

Ikeda: I hope they don't put that in the newspaper! What were you thinking about while you were producing *Gershwin's World*?

Hancock: There are many songs on the album, and I wanted each one to be different and to have its own identity. I also wanted the album itself to have its own identity. There have already been a number of albums paying tribute to Gershwin, and it was my goal to create something unique, a whole new musical environment based on the essence of each piece.

Ikeda: Such a challenging spirit is the key!

Hancock: That's what I learnt from you, President Ikeda: Courage. Creativity. You are constantly encouraging all SGI members to be creative, to live our lives with creativity.

I was determined this time that I would make a truly orig-

inal album, and I challenged myself on many different levels to achieve that goal. Toward that, I needed to awaken something within my own life. In my experience, the only way to release my inner creativity is to continuously go back to the Gohonzon. There is no other way. I firmly believe this.

Ikeda: I am very moved by your words. Buddhism teaches that we must open our lives. The essence of art, life and Buddhism is the same.

Mr. Hancock has attracted attention in the jazz world since the 1960s. He became an instant success with the release of his first album, Takin' Off, in 1962. The following year he joined the renowned Miles Davis Band. In 1973, he created the now-legendary band Headhunters. His fusion of rock and jazz has had an unprecedented impact on popular music. In 1976, he formed a new band, V.S.O.P., with Wayne Shorter (another SGI-USA member) and others, which toured worldwide. A classical pianist as well as a revolutionary jazz artist, Mr. Hancock has received numerous accolades

besides his Grammys, including an Academy Award in 1987 for the original score to the motion picture Round Midnight.

Ikeda: In 1997, you received a Grammy Award for the album *Manhattan*, along with your late sister, Jean. I was so sorry to hear that Jean died in an airplane accident. I pray for her repose from the bottom of my heart.

Last year, you came to Japan with the reconstituted Headhunters. It was in 1963 that your song "Watermelon Man," from your debut album, became a huge hit, wasn't it?

Hancock: Yes, that's right.

Ikeda: How did that album come about?

Hancock: I was 22 then. It was my first album under my own name. Someone had suggested that half of the record be comprised of songs that people were familiar with, so that it would have a better chance of selling. The other half, he said, could be original.

I thought, however, that maybe I could write something totally original that was still catchy enough to sell the record. I wanted more than anything to honestly, sincerely convey my own experience. And things turned out exactly as I had hoped!

Ikeda: Not only are you a great artist, you are also a great human being! It is often said that artists in the entertainment business in Japan lack strict discipline and training these days. They do not struggle painstakingly to challenge themselves as artists.

By the way, Happy Birthday! [April 12 was Mr. Hancock's birthday.]

Hancock: Thank you!

Ikeda: Don't worry, I won't disclose your age!

Gigi Hancock: You are welcome to give away his age, as long as you don't reveal mine!

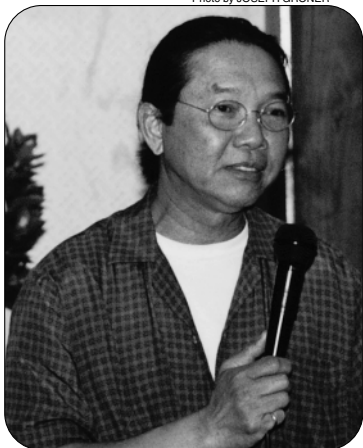
Ikeda: I heard that he just turned 59. Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher stated [in her resignation speech] that life begins at 65. From my experience, too, I can honestly say that life begins in one's 60s.

Hancock: In that case, my life is just beginning! I have such hope! There is so much to look forward to!

Ikeda: In youth, we have immense freedom and are filled with hope for the future. But in our 60s, we possess the wonderful treasure of life experience. Each golden day of our 60s is spent utilizing this treasure, as we adorn our life in its third stage. This applies to the realms of art, study and life itself.

Hancock: That's fantastic! Your words are so inspiring! I have always viewed my life in decades. My 30s were better than my 20s, and my 40s better than my 30s. But whenever I would think about turning 60, I couldn't help but feel that things would be downhill from there. I couldn't imagine what I would do, what I could hope for. I am therefore very grateful for your encouragement.

Photo by JOSEPH GRONER



Thai and Cambodian MEMBERS MEET in Santa Ana

(Left) Tears well in the eyes of Thai member Charlie Janlekha as he shares his visit to the Florida Nature and Culture Center during the March meeting of the Los Angeles and Orange County Thai and Cambodian members. He said that visiting the FNCC opened up a gold mine in his life.

It was no ordinary meeting. The more than 70 Los Angeles and Orange County Thai and Cambodian members who met at the Santa Ana Community Center on March 14 heard a rags-to-riches experience, an impression of the joy of visiting the Florida Nature and Culture Center, that there is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and that a mission is something we create and determine on our own.

The meeting was topped off with an international buffet and many sounds of joy and laughter. Many of the women had stayed up all night cooking their countries' traditional foods for the buffet.

"There are so many people out there in trouble or very unhappy who need to go to the FNCC, who need this Buddhism," said Charlie Janlekha, as he shared his story of visiting the FNCC and the determination to introduce his friends to the practice that he strengthened there. "People have so much trouble today — drugs, alcohol, divorce, crime — society is very mixed up. People have no place to turn. We've got to help them, before it's too late. The only way we can is by introducing them to this Gohonzon!"

— JOSEPH GRONER

Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI



Herbie Hancock says that with his award-winning 'Gershwin's World' CD, he wanted to 'create something unique, a whole new musical environment based on the essence of each piece.'

Ikeda: Nichiren Daishonin writes, "You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 158). Those who practice this Buddhism actually become younger, their lives overflowing with vitality and radiating with beauty. The principles of perennial youth and eternal life are the essence of Buddhism.

Hancock: It is certainly true that the longer I practice Buddhism, the younger I feel. I genuinely feel like a youth again. [Mr. Hancock joined the SGI in 1972.]

Ikeda: You are living in accord with the Goshu. What's more, this youthful life never dies. The life and artistic spirit you have forged will continue forever. This is the principle of the inseparability of life and death.

Incidentally, I heard that you have said you are very proud of your mother for her courage in battling discrimination. [Herbie's mother, Winnie, was born and raised in Georgia, where racism was rampant.] She got married at a time when African Americans didn't have much hope for the future. People had lost all confidence, families were plagued by discord and violence, and juvenile delinquency and drug abuse prevailed. However, your mother had great dreams and a vision for the future. She was determined to change her life, to give it meaning and to provide her children with the opportunity to do the same.

Hancock: That is correct. She is a wonderful mother.

Ikeda: I understand that it was also your mother who made sure you got a piano when you were a boy. You were constantly playing the piano at your friend's house and, realizing that you had an interest, she persuaded your father to purchase a piano for you, despite

the financial hardship. The piano arrived on your seventh birthday.

Hancock: That's exactly how it happened!

Ikeda: She also managed to save enough money to send three children to college.

Hancock: That's true. I don't know how she did it. It really seems like a miracle. She really struggled to provide for us.

Ikeda: I hear that your parents are well and residing in Chicago.

Hancock: Yes, they are fine, although they have become a little weaker with age.

Ikeda: They must be filled with joy to see you doing so well. It is only natural that we slow down in our old age. But your mother continues to do gongyo. That is great! Without a doubt, she will possess sharp faculties and boundless fortune in her next life, too.

Hancock: Thank you so much!

Ikeda: There is something I want to say to you, as your friend and as a huge fan: To win in the end is to achieve ultimate victory. True victory is to continue to struggle and score victories until the very end of your life. Your life is beginning now. Your true battle starts from today.

Hancock: Thank you. Your words penetrate my being. They are very significant to me at this time. I feel as though I am entering a new phase of my life. I am still growing. I am in the process of development.

Ikeda: "New phase of life" — what a great expression. Human beings have

two choices: to fall into apathy and face deadlock or to continue striving upward, challenging higher mountains.

Fame is not everlasting. And, the farther up the mountain we climb, the narrower the road becomes. It can get slippery, and some may even plummet downward. So we must proceed with caution. We practice faith so that we will win in the end. This applies to art and life.

Hancock: Reflecting on my life, I see that there have been many stages. I have practiced Buddhism for a number of years, but I feel that I am now starting again from the basics. I have reached a point where I need to dig deeper into my life. I feel as though I am grasping to find my core, my relationship with the world and life around me. It is difficult to explain, but I feel that I am beginning again.

Ikeda: That is very admirable and respectable.

Hancock: Thank you very much for your incredible encouragement, Presi-

dent Ikeda. I am a member of Canyon District in Los Angeles, and the members there asked me to convey their best regards to you. I am going to report to them immediately about our wonderful meeting today. They will be thrilled.

Ikeda: Please give each and every one of them my warmest regards. To live as you are, sharing your life with your fellow members, is noble. We who are dedicated to working for others, for the Mystic Law, for ourselves, for our ancestors and descendants, are living lives of ultimate value. There is no life greater than this.

Hancock: I will never forget this time we have spent together. It will be a golden memory! Thank you!

President Ikeda presented Mr. and Mrs. Hancock with the photo album, Memorable Encounters, writing in it, "Music of a Great King, Melodies of a Victor in Life."

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the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

'EARLY SPRING'

VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 3, PARTS 1-2

The story of one of Germany's SGI pioneers: a coal miner from Hokkaido who, inspired by Shin'ichi Yamamoto's guidance that youth should go abroad, moves to Germany to dedicate himself to worldwide kosen-rufu.

That winter, Europe was hit by a severe cold wave. But the joyous flame of kosen-rufu burned brightly, as if to melt away the ice and snow.

On Jan. 12, 1963, the day that President Shin'ichi Yamamoto had attended the America West General Meeting in Los Angeles, a new chapter was formed in West Germany. Preparations for this event had been conducted by Eisuke Akizuki, Shoichi Tanida and Yoshihiko Oya, members of the Europe delegation that had been dispatched in concert with Shin'ichi's overseas trip.

They had flown from Tokyo's Haneda International Airport, leaving around 10:00 p.m. on Jan. 9 in Copenhagen, Denmark, after a stopover in Anchorage. In Copenhagen, they met up with Eiji Kawasaki, the Soka Gakkai's contact person for Europe, who traveled with them on to the Swedish capital of Stockholm, where they arrived around 9:00 a.m. on Jan. 10. There, a shimmering world of white greeted them.

Kiyoko Ohara was practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in Stockholm, where she lived and worked as a maid. The visiting leaders conducted an oral study exam for her at the hotel where they were staying, and that evening held a discussion meeting there. It was a very small gathering: the three leaders from Japan, Eiji Kawasaki, Kiyoko Ohara and a guest she had brought along, a young British man, an engineer. At that humble meeting, Ohara's friend decided to join the Soka Gakkai.

After the discussion meeting, the leaders made plans for the Swedish organization, and the following morning, Jan. 11, they announced to Ohara the formation of Scandinavia District and appointed her district contact person.

Their mission in Sweden completed, the group made their way to Düsseldorf to encourage members who worked in the coal mines of West Germany's Ruhr industrial district. Many Japanese had come to this region to work as coal miners, and there were eight or nine Japanese Gakkai members employed at mines

in the cities of Castrop-Rauxel and Gelsenkirchen.

A young man named Koichiro Sada was the central figure among the members who were miners in Castrop-Rauxel. Sada was born on Hokkaido's Rishiri Island. He lost his father at age 7, and his mother was left to raise him and three younger children alone. From a very young age, Sada worked to support his family. As a result, he was unable to regularly attend elementary school.

When he turned 18, he got a job at a coal mine in Kushiro, in southeastern Hokkaido. But a short time later, his mother died. She was only 41. Sada then

practicing Buddhism, he decided to join the Soka Gakkai. That was in April 1957.

Luckily, his leg was spared, and his injuries healed completely. Sada joyfully engaged himself in Gakkai activities as a young men's division member.

His first dilemma as a member was his inability, due to his lack of schooling, to read the Chinese characters employed in Japanese writing. He was unable to read such works as "Precepts for Youth" or "Youth, Be Patriotic!" that President Toda had dedicated to the

there dedicating his youth to worldwide kosen-rufu. But he thought it was an impossible dream for someone who didn't even know a word of any foreign language.

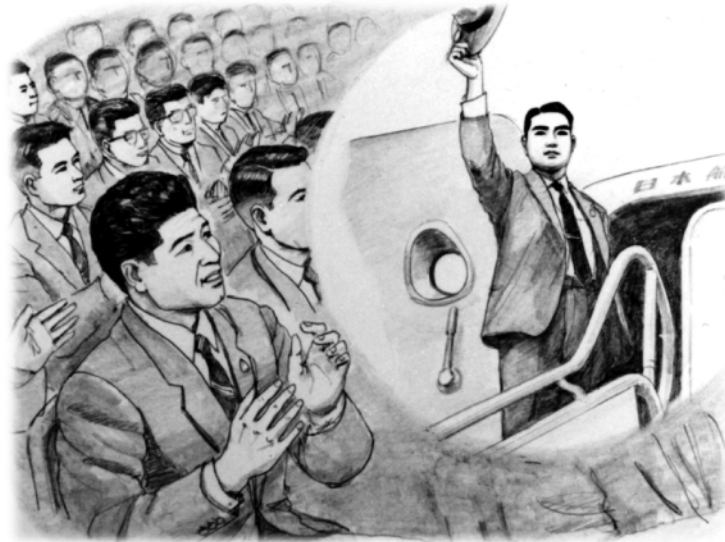
Then he learned that coal mines in West Germany's Ruhr district were recruiting foreign workers with coal-mining experience. Although he felt he had little chance of being selected, Sada decided to give it a shot and applied. Contrary to his expectations, his application was accepted — he was offered a job.

Sada was amazed. He reflected that it must mean he really had a mission to work for kosen-rufu in Europe.

In October 1961, just before his departure for West Germany, Sada paid a visit to the Overseas Department at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo. While he was there, a staff member took him to see Shin'ichi at the Seikyo Shimbun Building. Shin'ichi had just returned from an overseas trip, and he greeted Sada with a warm smile.

"So you're the young man who is going to West Germany and will be working for kosen-rufu there!" he exclaimed. "I appreciate your stopping by before leaving. Please set your mind at ease — I've just been to Europe to open the way for the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism there. There are Bodhisattvas of the Earth waiting there, and many more members from Japan will follow in your footsteps in the future. So there is no need to rush things. Please move ahead surely and steadily, as if climbing a staircase one step at a time."

To be continued



suffered a serious work injury when a mine car ran over his left leg.

Sada cursed the miserable destiny that seemed to doom him to one misfortune after another.

The doctors told Koichiro Sada they might have to amputate his left leg, and his future appeared to him as dark as a pitch-black mine shaft. He saw not a single ray of hope.

It was then that a fellow miner told him about the Daishonin's Buddhism. Hearing the miner's confident assertion that he could change his destiny through

YMD. He was forced to ask members often younger than himself how the Chinese characters were read and to jot down the pronunciation in simpler Japanese script.

Soon it was 1960, and Shin'ichi became the third Soka Gakkai president. Starting with his first visit to cities in North and South America in autumn that year, Shin'ichi had embarked on travels for peace throughout Asia, Europe and the entire world.

Inspired by Shin'ichi's guidance that youth should venture abroad, Sada came to dream of going to Europe and



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

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

A Lifeline

I've been chanting since the spring of 1975. I am 250 miles from other members in Lincoln and Omaha. *Living Buddhism* and the *World Tribune* are a lifeline to my practice. I read them from cover to cover. Thanks for your continued inspiration.

— PHILIP MEDCALF
Ainsworth, Neb.

An Omission Regarding China?

I am writing in regards to the March 19 *World Tribune* article titled "Forgetting Is the Easy Way Out." I am puzzled how after dealing with the Jewish Holocaust of World War II, China is then brought up without any mention of the 1.2 million people (nearly 1/4 of the population) who have already been killed in Tibet, the destruction of almost all the 6,000 monasteries there, and the Chinese population transfer program that threatens to complete the annihilation of the Tibetan people. Could you please explain this omission and the SGI's stance on the Tibetan situation?

— JESS CONVERSE
Bound Brook, N.J.

Editor's response: The article from the March 19 *World Tribune* you referred to in your letter is a

speech given by SGI President Ikeda earlier this year. The subject of his address was individual people who have displayed admirable human qualities that can serve as an example to all. In this speech "Forgetting Is the Easy Way Out," he covered two main topics: his personal relationship with Premier Zhou Enlai and the premier's wife, Deng Yingchao of China; and the life of Dr. Simon Wiesenthal, founder of the center named after him in Los Angeles.

President Ikeda and all SGI members object to the killing in Tibet and elsewhere. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI uphold the sanctity of human life above all else. This speech, however, was not addressing policies of the Chinese government. President Ikeda, as a private citizen, conducts his efforts for peace, culture and education in a person-to-person manner. For instance, if you are familiar with his series of articles titled "Recollections" that have appeared in *Living Buddhism*, you are aware of his impressions of many statesmen, artists and educators around the world. In each case, there is a lesson in human behavior that can illuminate the great potential within us all. This is his purpose in the speech in the March 19 *World Tri-*

bune.

Please read his annual peace proposals that he submits to the United Nations. The 1999 proposal will appear in the May issue of *Living Buddhism*.

Thoughts on Ceremony

Thanks to Liz Carter (Feb. 12 *World Tribune*) for voicing some of my concerns. Apparently she and I read the same training materials and were both guided by caring leaders who helped set up our altars and corrected details in our gongyo, thereby increasing our appreciation for the depth of this practice.

I treasure the consistency of bell, book, candle and greens, but am not a slave to these guidelines. Sometimes my candles are green, sometimes red. I have a living plant by the side of my altar and my candlesticks and incense burner are crystal.

I think the thing that centers me and focuses my attention is the consistency of ceremony that creates a foundation from which I can concentrate on my prayers. I'm pretty fanatical about keeping my altar cleaned and polished, no candle wax dripping, etc. I ring the bell in the pattern I was taught.

For some time I've been quietly grinding my teeth as one of our leaders chants "Nan-myoho-renge-kyod" and stymied about what action to take. Does no one else hear this? Am I being too picky?

I've chosen to ignore my sensitivities and concentrate on my own practice. But I am concerned for guests and new members. Relaxing the rigidity of our practice doesn't mean letting it go to hell in a hand basket. The ceremonial aspects of our Buddhism have meaning and serve many purposes, yet still allow us to practice in a manner most meaningful to our individual personalities.

— BETSY BELL RINGER,
Richmond, Calif.

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PERSPECTIVE

By **LAVORA PERRY**
EAST CLEVELAND, OHIO

Both the novel and film version of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer and Nobel Prize-winning *Beloved* center around an African American mother named Sethe, played by talk show personality Oprah Winfrey in the film. As the tale unfolds with legal slavery officially over in the United States, flashbacks reveal that, in an act of ultimate resistance, when slave-catchers appeared to return Sethe to the Kentucky plantation from which she and her children escaped, she murdered her baby daughter with intentions of killing all four of her very young children and herself, so desperate was her resolve to keep her family out of slavery's relentless grip. *Beloved* was inspired by the documented case of a woman named



'Beloved': When All Hell Breaks Loose

Margaret Garner, a Kentuckian who escaped slavery with her children, fleeing to Cincinnati. Historical records indicate that Garner's was not an isolated case among mothers in bondage.

Today we may judge these women's actions as insanely horrifying, but perhaps they nonetheless reflected the savage and mad cruelty of their circumstances as slaves.

In *Beloved*, a time comes when it appears that Sethe may be able to piece together a happier future, in spite of all that she's endured. It is then that *Beloved*, the ghost of the murdered child who has haunted Sethe for years, materializes in full flesh, and eventually wreaks agonizing havoc upon Sethe's household.

That *Beloved* grows more defiant at the very moment that a possibility for a better life appears on the horizon for Sethe relates to Buddhist practice. At times, when we resolve to overcome the barriers to our happiness and bring forth the power of

the Buddha from within our lives, it seems that all hell breaks loose. Nichiren Daishonin thus related the following warning: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere.... If you are frightened by them you will be prevented from practicing true Buddhism" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 145).

In other words, if we are frightened by our obstacles and therefore don't challenge them, we will not attain enlightenment. Those very same obstacles are transformed into benefits to the degree that we face them without wavering. When we refuse to dodge life at our crucial moments, our inner lives are enhanced immeasurably. This strengthening of our spiritual selves is what is known as inconspicuous benefit—the intangible yet most valuable reward of steadfast Buddhist faith and practice.

In *Beloved*, we witness Sethe

achieve inner growth analogous to the kind to which I am referring when, finally, she ferociously faces her own demon. She wins but is left battle-weary. Scarred but whole and free, Sethe pulls herself up from the depths of hell and enters the realm of humanity.

The Daishonin taught that the greatest thing we can do as human beings is to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and share this awesome practice with others. Reflecting on the Buddhist parallels within the story of *Beloved* (which I've only slightly touched on here), I'm inspired to renew my determination to do my best to live up to the Daishonin's teachings.

I also hope others will journey through the pages of the novel *Beloved* and watch the film to experience first-hand this life-moving tale.

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Youth IN ACTION

By STEPHANIE CELANO, Staff Writer

It's not a thing of the past. Youth throughout the SGI-USA have been and still are seriously asking themselves how the temple issue relates to their lives and what exactly they can do about it. They're creative, motivated and taking action!

CHICAGO

Making their prayers heard, the youth of the three regions that comprise the SGI-USA membership in Chicago have focused their efforts in chanting a lot — supporting the nationwide “Victorious America” 10 billion daimoku campaign. A four-divisional committee formed the Sunshine Group — the name is based on Aesop’s fable the “North Wind and the Sun,” illustrating that compassion (the sun) is the greatest influence. The group is committed to awakening, within themselves first and then others, the desire for education and dialogue. One of three main goals is: to challenge injustice in their own lives, winning over their own negativity.

NEW YORK CITY

New Yorkers have the spirit — the Soka Spirit that is — and they're showing it off! The Soka Spirit Room is an ongoing exhibit created by a committee involving the youth, and it is located on the fifth floor of the New York Culture Center.

Highlights of the exhibition include a time line of the history of Buddhism, videos and panels on “What is the temple issue?”; the United Nation’s Declaration of Human Rights; and the First Amendment. Members are able to

use the room as a resource for information regarding the temple issue to bring back to their districts.

SAN FRANCISCO

For those on the Internet, the Soka Spirit group, San Francisco style, has created a Web site to reach members nationwide. Initiated by Andrew Templeman, the site offers the basics on the temple issue as well as topics of interest including letters of interviews from former priests, issues concerning the Nichikan Gohonzon and viewpoints. To visit the Web site: <http://www.sokaspirit.com>

LOS ANGELES

On top of prayer and information, discussion is deepening to include a wider range of viewpoints. The Los Angeles youth are broadening their understanding of the temple issue. Monthly seminars sponsored by the New Civilization Group concerning human rights, religious tolerance, character development and the future of the SGI inspire dialogue on the topics as they relate to the temple issue. The group’s focus is to apply these topics to their individual lives and understand their impact on a global scale.

The purpose of such groups is to inform and discuss the facts and dispel myths surrounding this issue, providing a clear understanding for all who are interested. On a fundamental level, the temple issue encompasses more than the SGI vs. the temple. It embodies human rights and justice — causes for which SGI-USA youth will never cease championing. **BT**

Photo by STEPHANIE CELANO



The New Civilization Group at the Los Angeles Friendship Center.

welcome to
Soka-SPIRIT
TEMPLE ISSUES STUDY SITE

<http://www.sokaspirit.com>

The Web site created by San Francisco youth.

Photo by OSAMU KANEKO



The Sunshine Group at the Chicago Culture Center.

Photo by ROBERT URUMA



(Above and below) The Soka Spirit Room at the New York Culture Center.

Photo by ROBERT URUMA

