

- NEW MEMBERS' EXPERIENCES
- PART 1 OF PRESIDENT IKEDA'S SOKA GAKKAI DAY SPEECH

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

The True Purpose of Religion

In 1979, the May 3 (Soka Gakkai Day) meeting was held a few days after President Ikeda had been pushed to resign. The priests were trying to take control of the membership, and 'it was a pitiful, profoundly sad situation,' President Ikeda remembers. 'The true purpose of religion is to enable people to become happy. How fundamentally wrong it is, then, to turn believers into slaves....'

It was a beautiful, sunny May day, not a cloud in the sky. The Musashino hills were blanketed with azalea blossoms, as if in brilliant tribute to life and the freshness of youth. Beyond the flowers, the fresh verdure of spring shone, emanating the silence of profound truth. Standing in the dazzling sunlight, my wife said to me, "The weather was exactly like this 19 years ago, wasn't it?"

.....

Indeed, the day that I became the third Soka Gakkai president in 1960 was bright and sunny. I remember that night, at our house in Tokyo's Ota Ward, my wife and I gazing up at the sky together, remarking how the stars looked like sparkling fireflies.

My life-and-death struggle to break through the darkness of humanity's despair and build a great realm of everlasting peace had gone on for 19 years.

.....

May 3, 1979. The 40th Soka Gakkai Headquarters General Meeting, at which we were to celebrate the successful completion of the Seven Bells — a vision of seven seven-year periods punctuating the organization's development from its in-

ception — was about to begin in the Soka University gymnasium.

Under normal circumstances, I would have celebrated the Soka Gakkai's triumph with a speech outlining a new vision for kosen-rufu. It would have been a day of great joy, with our members burning with enthusiasm for the next, exciting goal, their hearts filled with the brilliant light of hope. It would have been a day on which these noble champions of kosen-rufu toasting each other with jeweled cups, a day on which they would freely ring the bell of resounding victory.

However, insanely jealous Nichiren Shoshu priests, joined by a number of corrupt and scheming Gakkai members who had discarded their faith and succumbed to the dark world of Anger, robbed our members of that jubilant celebration.

.....

Shortly before the meeting, scheduled to begin at 2:00 p.m., the bus carrying these iniquitous priests pulled up to the university. I stood at the bus door and bowed, greeting them politely, but they refused to return my greeting with

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Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

Soka University Central Tower Completed

The Soka University Central Tower was completed in commemoration of May 3, Soka Gakkai Day. Rising from the center of the main campus in Hachioji, Japan, the 18-story building is meant to symbolize peace and culture spreading in world society in the 21st century.

Calligraphy in the hand of the founder of Soka education, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, reads *Soka University* above the front entrance of the building, which will house the World Language Center, various conferences rooms (including one specially equipped for international academic exchange), the Correspondence Education Office, an alumni center, multimedia-ready classrooms, faculty offices and a restaurant commanding a view of Mount Fuji. A statue of Leonard da Vinci will welcome visitors in the Central Tower's Entrance Hall.

Soka University, which welcomed its first students in 1971, will celebrate exactly 20 years after the May 3, 1979, the first class will also enter Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo (Calif.). The completion of the Central Tower coincided with the cornerstone laying for the Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Library at SUA in Orange County.

Significantly, both events took place exactly 20 years after the May 3, 1979, Soka Gakkai Headquarters General Meeting, held at the Soka University gymnasium. That general meeting came at a tense time just a few days after a conspiracy against President Ikeda had led to his resignation (see this week's essay by the SGI president). In the 20 years since, under President Ikeda's leadership, both the SGI and the Soka education system have flourished.

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Awards that the SGI president receives are proof that our movement is with the people, says Ted Morino.

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Proof That We're Among the People

EDITORIAL

By TED MORINO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

There is news almost daily of SGI President Ikeda being recognized by various institutions and societies around the world for his works as a Buddhist leader, in peace, culture and education. Last year alone, he received 86 special commendations, 11 honorary memberships into various institutions, 11 honorary doctorate degrees from colleges and universities, and honorary citizenships in 18 cities from around the world.



How does the SGI president regard such acclaim? Is it simply a matter of personal prestige, for example? Or is there a deeper, broader significance to be considered?

He has said in the *Daisanbunmei* (Third Civilization) magazine that "all the honorary titles I have received from various nations, universities and cities are the eternal honors directed to all the fellow members who have been staking their lives on building a great rising tide of kosen-rufu. In my heart, they also have been given to my mentors, Mr. Makiguchi and Mr. Toda. This is how I take all the awards presented to me" (Feb. 1999, p. 57).

In other words, all these awards indicate victory for both mentor and disciple — individual and institutional victory for

The awards and commendations that President Ikeda receives have a deeper significance, Ted Morino explains. They 'indicate victory for both mentor and disciple — individual and institutional victory for each of us' as well as 'attest to the openly engaging role Soka movements play within society.'

each of us. They also attest to the openly engaging role Soka movements play within society. This increasingly engaged approach is in stark contrast with the increasingly disengaged, even isolated approach of many other Nichiren-based Buddhist schools and their efforts, the most notable being the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood under Nikken's leadership. As an institution, it is only the Soka Gakkai International that from its inception — envisioned and shaped by the

within society, reserving its honors for these roots, for each SGI member.

President Ikeda always says that each person's true happiness, whether they are SGI members or not, is the ultimate objective of his leadership. When individual happiness contributes to the betterment of society, the real purpose of Buddhism is being realized. **WT**

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Chiba Temple Secedes From Head Temple

First branch temple to leave since May 1995 criticizes the head temple's 'quota-driven faith.'

Ho'on-ji, a Nichiren Shoshu branch temple in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, has seceded from the head temple. Chief Priest Kaido Kasamatsu notified the head temple of the Ho'on-ji board of directors' decision to secede on April 19. Ho'on-ji will remain an independent temple, not connected with the Soka Gakkai in any way, and Chief Priest Kasamatsu says he is ready to reestablish ties with Nichiren Shoshu if "the priesthood's administration policies and stance are restored to share the goal of faith as espoused by Ho'on-ji."

News of this first secession of a branch temple since May 1995 comes at a time when the priesthood is trying hard to start a major new campaign toward 2002, the 750th anniversary of the establishment of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. At that

time, the head temple hopes to have 300,000 members attend a pilgrimage. The head temple is promising many renovations by that time, including a new facility to house the Dai-Gohonzon, and is thus trying to collect \$150 million — \$50 million a year — from its membership.

In Chief Priest Kasamatsu's April 19 letter to the head temple, he criticizes the priesthood for assigning numerical goals to branch temples, calling this "quota-driven faith." Toward 2002, the priesthood has been giving branch temples challenging targets for financial contributions, new members and pilgrimage attendance. Chief Priest Kasamatsu also questions the priesthood's view that the high priest's instructions are "the Daishonin's command," arguing that this is "nothing more than worship of the high priest and a view that equates the high priest with the Daishonin." He concludes that "there is clearly nothing other than the Gohonzon that we must believe in and follow," urging the priesthood to stop treating Nikken as if he were the object of worship.

— SHIN YATOMI

Mailbox

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Photo by IAN NAYSMITH

Art and Mishizu Haavisto and their children: Alan, 2, Aquilla, 4, Alex, 6, and Arthur, 16.

EXPERIENCE — ART AND MISHIZU HAAVISTO, WICKLIFFE, OHIO

Anything But a Typical Family

Mishizu and I met in Japan in 1978, about a month after I received the Gohonzon. Mishizu was born into a family that practiced Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and had received her own Gohonzon a couple years earlier. We were married on May 10, 1979, and will celebrate our 20th wedding anniversary in just three weeks! I don't recall any big discussions on the subject of children prior to or after our marriage (of course Mishizu will tell you that there's a lot I don't recall anymore), so we had no "master family plan" in place. I guess we kind of assumed that we'd be the typical American/Japanese family with one boy and one girl, and we'd all live happily ever after.

Our family turned out to be anything but typical. In 1983 our oldest son, Arthur, was born. Then 10 years later, in 1993, Alex, Aquilla came along in 1995, and Alan in 1997.

It's no secret that raising children is hard work. If you look around at the rest of the animal kingdom, you'll see that they have it easy. The "kids" hang around for anywhere from a

couple weeks to a year, then they're ready to go out on their own. For us humans, though, at the one-year point we've barely made a start at raising a child. To make matters worse, a baby doesn't come with a set of instructions. I believe there is no "right way" to raise a child (although there is a wrong way). Each child is unique and responds and learns differently. As parents, the most we can do is show love to our children, and provide them with the discipline and the example they need to become a responsible human being.

Mishizu's favorite book is titled *Sincere Mother, Bright Mother, Healthy Mother, Buddhist Mother*. This book, written in 1976, is a collection of guidance given by several women's division leaders in Japan. It also contains guidance given by SGI President Ikeda. He states that psychologists have said that there are three important time periods in the development of a child: the first is from age 0 to 3, the second from age 5 to 7, and the third around the age of 10 years. By far the most important is the period of less than 3 years. During this time the baby is

watching the parents' lifestyle day and night.

President Ikeda goes on to say that the baby may not understand what is going on around him, yet during this time the spirit being developed will be carried throughout the rest of the child's life. This is just like the foundation for a building. It doesn't matter how well a building is built, with a weak foundation it will eventually crumble. The baby doesn't know if mother's milk is good or poison; it just drinks without question. Similarly, the baby is absorbing everything the parents do during this period. He says that at this time the role of the mother is most important. She should practice hard because it not only builds fortune for herself, but also for the baby, and he says the most important thing a mother can do for kosen-rufu is raising a child.

We are fortunate that Mishizu can stay home with the children while they are young. This has involved some sacrifice on our part, as we have not always been in the financial situation we wanted. Although she did work outside the home

for a few years, she was able to arrange her schedule so she worked while Art was in school. She worked for a few months after the birth of our second child, but I was able at that time to stay at home during the day. The main reason we moved back to my home state of Ohio was to get to a place where we both wouldn't have to work to make ends meet.

We have never believed in using baby-sitters, even when we lived in Japan and had easy access to a baby-sitter in the form of Grandma. Again, this was not easy, especially in Japan when attending a meeting meant catching a bus or train. Often times I would get home from work and see Mishizu returning from a meeting, hiking up the hill from the bus stop with Art being carried on her back. Even now when we do things, even the more mundane such as grocery shopping, we do so as a family. Of course, Art is getting older and has a job of his own that often interferes with our family plans. And for some reason, I get the feeling that as a 15-year-old he doesn't appreciate hanging around with us as

much as he used to.

I think that the more time a family spends together, the better. Even those ordinary moments are an opportunity to teach the children about life by setting an example. The same is true concerning teaching children about Buddhism. In *Sincere Mother*, Kazuko Fukushima, a Tokyo area women's leader, relates Mrs. Kaneko Ikeda's experience with raising her children as Buddhists. Mrs. Ikeda related to her that President Toda once said that we can soak in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism through the pores of our skin. Mrs. Ikeda's personal experience bears this out. Her first child and second child were only a year apart, and she took the oldest with her to every meeting. When the second child came along, it was just too much, so that child stayed with Grandma. The end result was a major difference in the way the two children developed.

I guess in our family the role of disciplinarian has primarily fallen on me. Mishizu says she can't do that along with everything else; after all we can't both be mean. I think she's joking. In his book *The Creative Family*, President Ikeda states, "After the age of three, the child becomes more autonomous, the self begins to form... and the period from three to ten is when the child's future will be determined by the kind of training received from the father." He goes on to say what children expect of their father: "They want a father with a good attitude toward life." In

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the same book, President Ikeda compares discipline in Japan to the Western style of discipline. In Japan, children are "totally spoiled" at an early age, and are gradually disciplined as they get older. In the West, children are disciplined at an early age, and the reins are loosened as they get older. President Ikeda's conclusion is that the Japanese can learn from the Western way of discipline, and he states, "The most important thing that discipline can do in ... the United States is to develop a person who is independent and self-reliant."

I believe that discipline and training are inseparable: without one the other is wasted. The difficult task is to provide both in a manner that encourages creativity rather than stifles it. What I try to do is use each situation as a learning opportunity. Most often the lessons are simple; such as respect your mother or that there are consequences for your actions. But these lessons also form the basics for our practice, such as respect for the Buddha nature within all persons and the law of cause and effect. I try to encourage my children to try new things. You never know what talents may be within your child unless they are given the opportunity to express them. And again, the most important thing is to set the example. For instance, when I encounter an obstacle, I don't whine about it. I maintain a positive attitude, and go to work at overcoming the difficulty.

I make my living as a technical supervisor, teach a college course, and am continuing my own education. When I get my grade reports from college, or an evaluation from work, the first thing I do is share them with my children, not to show off my good grades (well, maybe a little), but to encourage them to strive to be the best in whatever they do.

Are we perfect parents? Probably not, but we sure try. We have a limited time to raise our children, we want to enjoy it before it is gone. We try to set a good example — believing that if we are successful in this, the kids will follow. When it comes to our Buddhist practice, it is the same. 

Cleveland North District Parents Meet

BY KAREN HANNAN-DEWALT AND
M. LA VORA PERRY
CLEVELAND CORRESPONDENTS

Cleveland North District parents met April 17 at the beautiful East Cleveland home of Mike and Tecka Spencer for the district's first Parents Meeting. While children engaged in slow gongyo and other activities upstairs, supervised by Young Women's Division District Leader Shuna Ash and her crew, parents of all ages gathered downstairs to encourage one another in faith and parenthood.

Long-time members Art and Mishizu Haavisto shared an experience (see p. 3) highlighting the importance of setting a good example, including children in our daily activities,


encouraging children to try new things, and sharing with children our accomplishments and benefits resulting from our efforts in faith. Relaying guidance from SGI President Ikeda, the Haavistos stressed that the efforts we make in raising our families are great contributions to kosen-rufu, and the efforts we make for kosen-rufu result in great benefit for our families — these efforts are inseparable.

Discussion about how to continue to develop a sincere mind of faith was then stimulated by referencing Nichiren Daishonin's "Letter to Oto Gozen" in the March issue of *Living Buddhism* and the commentary that supports it regarding the importance of sincerity. LaVora Perry offered that understanding

our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth in all of our many capacities (parent, daughter/son, partner, employee, etc.) helps us to stay focused on the big picture and not to be petty.

As people shared insights about their own upbringing, some concluded that because children are so deeply influenced by their parents, when we continue to develop ourselves through faith, practice and study, we are encouraging a seeking spirit toward faith in our children as well.

While balancing his animated toddler daughter, Alyssa, as best he could, Northern Ohio Area Men's Division Leader Mark Jenkins concluded the meeting by sharing a question he had asked himself when reading about Oto Gozen: "What

would make a single mother risk life and limb with baby in tow to see how her teacher was doing?" Mark concluded that sincere faith is the invisible, but very real and deep belief in something or someone. In Oto Gozen's case, it was her faith in the Daishonin that fueled her seeking spirit. In Mark's case, he said he wanted to have that same type of feeling toward the Gohonzon and his Buddhist practice. He reminded those present that despite the fact that Oto Gozen was a single parent of a young child, she had the pure, seeking spirit to weather harsh conditions to support the Daishonin. She was a pioneer of sincerity, for which the Daishonin had profound appreciation, and she was a great example for us all. 

New England Region Challenges Prejudice, Celebrates Diversity

BY FLETCHER DALTON
NEW ENGLAND REGION BUREAU CHIEF

When we first met, there was no comprehension of the depth of the experience we were about to have," says New England Region Leader Steve Pottoff, recalling the 1997 formation of New England's Diversity Committee. "Made up mostly of area and region leaders, the committee was divided. Some were calling for change, others didn't perceive that change was needed.

"For at least a year before the formation of the Diversity Committee, minority members formed groups to study the problem of diversity," Steve explains. "Among these were the African American Men's Group, the African American Women's Group and a group combining the two. Members from these groups are active participants in the region's Diversity Committee.

"Our first step," Steve continues, "was to chant daimoku to trust each other — and trust that open dialogue would lead us to mutual understanding."

In 1997, SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitzu announced that SGI-USA would form a Diversity Committee. This action was based on SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's desire, expressed in *The New Human Revolution* and in speeches and lectures, that appreciation of diversity in the SGI-USA would serve as an example to the entire world.



An exciting Brazilian dance at New England Region's cultural diversity festival.

Soon after Mr. Zaitzu's announcement, the New England Region formed its committee.

"At that first meeting," Steve remembers, wincing, "one person brought a passage from Nichiren Daishonin's writings stating that we are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth. 'If we could focus on that point,' she said, 'and recognize our common equality based on our Buddha nature, then our committee could progress quickly from there.'

"Well, the idea was unanimously and vociferously rejected as being simplistic and naive," Steve says. "We are not

ready to go there yet' was the sentiment being expressed. 'First, we have to deal with the many issues that have been silently and negatively affecting our relationships for so many years.' One of the issues was the fact that the metropolitan Boston area has a bad reputation for many, based on riots and confrontations around the issues of school integration and busing, as well as a bitter history of race relations in general. Many members of the New England Region come from and live in areas that bear the scars of racial unrest.

"Our monthly meetings were difficult ones," Steve admits, "but confrontation and crying gradually gave way to laughing and hugging. Friendships deepened and we began to grasp the real challenges of diversity. After nearly a year, we felt ready to embrace the Daishonin's writings and President Ikeda's encouragement as prime points. We could now form our expanded Diversity Committee. We sought representatives from all areas of diversity: race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, dis-

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even a word or a nod. They stalked arrogantly past me with cold, emotionless expressions.

That day the Headquarters General Meeting, a grand tradition of our organization, had none of the Gakkai's usual effervescent joy and dynamism. Instead, an unholy atmosphere pervaded. It was as if everything were under the control and supervision of the "authority of the cloth" — the priesthood.

One leader later said that the atmosphere was so frosty, it was as if the members had been made to sit on cold gravestones. Many were angered by what took place that day.

The applause for me was restrained. The top Soka Gakkai leaders who took the podium — individuals who had referred to me as "Ikeda Sensei" quite naturally at meetings just a few days earlier — did not say a word about me. Apparently, they feared reprisals from the priesthood.

I didn't care what they might do to me. But their actions constituted a betrayal of the sincere faith of the members, who were linked together by strong ties of mentor and disciple that spanned the three existences of past, present and future.

A women's division member at the gathering commented angrily later: "Why didn't the leaders have the courage to proudly declare that the phenomenal development of the kosen-rufu movement was all due to President Ikeda?!"

When I left the meeting, the applause again was hesitant. I had heard that one of the top youth division leaders had told members not to applaud very much at the meeting for it would antagonize the priests — and, in particular, not to applaud at all for me. He had been poisoned by the frightening evil of the priesthood. He had turned cowardly in the face of those bellicose *asuras*.

The eyes of the members as they watched me on stage were earnest, filled with concern. I keenly felt the tremendous effort they were making to control their urge to call out to me.

Leaving the gymnasium, I was walking along a pathway leading to another building, when a group of stalwart women's division members came running up to me. I will never forget that encounter; it is deeply engraved in my heart.

•••••

In a special reception room after the meeting, I once again courteously greeted the priests,

but again they coldly ignored me. Their blatant rudeness made me question their humanity. They will most certainly be judged harshly, in accord with the strict Buddhist law of cause and effect, which operates in the depths of life.

I thought at the time that those unscrupulous operators who had allied themselves with the priests and caused such trouble in the Gakkai were no doubt convinced that they had succeeded. They were thinking that their strategy of destruction had gone according to plan. They were filled with conceit, believing victory theirs.

I could see their treachery and arrogance as clear as day. Their actions revealed them for the sly, duplicitous people that they were.

We must never, never allow ourselves to follow such perfidious, scheming individuals. Whatever oppressive measures they may take, we must remember that faith means endurance. We of the Soka Gakkai are practicing in complete accord with the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin. We are devoting ourselves selflessly to propagating the Mystic Law. We should always wear the gentle armor of endurance.

Those self-serving priests who bore hostility toward the Soka Gakkai, borrowing the guise of the Daishonin, sought to turn the true emissaries of the Buddha — the Gakkai members — into pawns, exploiting them and finally destroying the Soka Gakkai. We were confronted with an insane rampage of the terrible, insidious nature of authority.

It was a pitiful, profoundly sad situation. The true purpose of religion is to enable people to become happy. How fundamentally wrong it is, then, to turn believers into slaves of the priests and into servants of the temples and halls that symbolize priestly authority.

•••••

With the feeling of an even heavier burden on my shoulders, I left the campus and, without even stopping at home, went directly to the Kanagawa Culture Center in Yokohama.

At the center, one of the leaders, a close aide, told me that my name had appeared in the newspaper that morning. The May 3 *Yomiuri Shimbum* carried an article featuring the results of a U.S.-Japan opinion poll. One of the survey's questions was "Who do you admire?" On a list of the 20 most admired people among the Japanese respondents, my

SGI President Donates Books to University of Colorado at Colorado Springs

On April 27, SGI-USA General Director Zaitso, representing SGI President Ikeda, presented 118 books in 13 languages to the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs. Chancellor Linda Bundle Shade, who said in a letter to Mr. Ikeda that the books "will be treasured by many generations of students and teachers to come," accepted the books on behalf of the university. The books cover a great variety of philosophical and religious topics. They include President Ikeda's dialogues with some of the world's leading intellectuals and children's books. Last year, UCCS helped SGI-USA bring the "Children's Rights and Realities" exhibition to Colorado Springs.



Photo by CHRIS RISOM

General Director Zaitso presents a gift of 118 books to UCCS Chancellor Linda Bundle Shade, April 27.

— CHRIS RISOM

name was No. 6.

Long-serving postwar prime minister Shigeru Yoshida (1878–1967) was first, followed by bacteriologist Hideyo Noguchi (1876–1928), agricultural technologist Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), educator and writer Yukichi Fukuzawa (1835–1901) and Emperor Showa (1901–89). Then came me.

I felt something deeply mystic in that such an article was published on May 3, just a few days after my resignation as Soka Gakkai president. I felt as if my fellow members were warmly supporting me, encouraging me, in this time of adversity.

A few days after that, I received a letter from a leading intellectual, who expressed his surprise at the results of the poll and concluded that "in the category of living ordinary citizens, you are actually No. 1. You are also the only person chosen from the sphere of Japanese religion. This confirms that you really are the king of the religious world. How happy Mr. Toda would be!"

•••••

The Daishonin asserts with absolute certainty: "Great events do not have small omens. When great evil occurs, great good will follow. Since the worst slander already prevails throughout the country, the supreme True Law will spread without fail" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 161)

I decided that, no matter what others might say, I would triumph by holding fast to my convictions. And so I began my struggle, all alone, cherishing an even grander vision for our movement than I had before.

Mr. Toda often used to say to me, "The lion seeks no companion." I firmly believed that, though I was alone, true companions would one day naturally join me again, without my saying a word. We would unite in the oneness of mentor and disciple to strive, to soar, to advance, to triumph together, without limit. I was waiting for the new companions of a new era to appear.

Kanagawa — specifically, the port of Yokohama, of which the Kanagawa Culture Center commands a view — is a gateway to the world. It was there that I renewed my commitment to carry out the Daishonin's injunction to propagate the Mystic Law throughout the entire world. And it was there that I took up my calligraphy brush and wrote the single word *justice* in Chinese characters. I entrusted the small group of disciples at my side with the mission of passing on and conveying to later generations the spirit with which I wrote that word.

That was May 5.

•••••

Having returned for a short time to Tokyo, I then headed to the Tachikawa Culture Center, the base for our activities in Tokyo's

outlying areas.

It was close to dusk as I made my way there by car. For a long while, I soaked up the otherworldly beauty of the setting sun, as it gradually sank beyond the horizon.

When I arrived in Tachikawa, night had fallen, and the moon appeared in the sky — its countenance so pure and lovely that I wanted to lay my cheek against it. I composed a poem:

*In the west, the majestic setting sun,
In the east, the full moon glows radiant,
Dusk delightfully colors the heavens,
The serenity of this moment —
Together creating a magnificent painting
Of life without beginning.
My state of mind, too,
Is free and unfettered.*

This is the poem I wrote in my diary on May 11.

The SGI is like the sun. With the same vital force as the sun, it will continue ever spreading the Daishonin's teaching, advancing without rest! And it will continue just as surely to triumph!

This series is published as "Thoughts on The New Human Revolution"

NEW MEMBERS SHARE *their Journeys in Faith*

Photo by ALICIA SULTZMAN

Experience — PAMELA DOWELL, RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, CALIF.

Being in Charge

OF MY OWN LIFE

I have been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism now for seven months, and I must say I have seen a lot of really good benefits. My husband, Edward, was diagnosed with Hepatitis C and in January, the doctor prescribed some medicine for him that can have very bad side effects. We found out our insurance would not cover this drug. The cost of it is \$1500 a month. We don't have that much extra money, and the doctor can't guarantee that it will even work. With everything that was happening at this time, I became so angry. I didn't care about anything outside of my own environment. The anger I had made me determined to chant more and change this in our lives.

When my husband first was told he had this, I knew I could help him get better, but

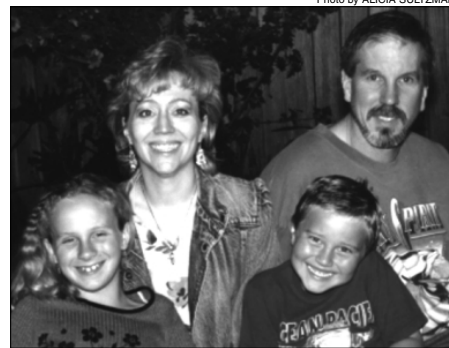
I felt that this was his disease. From talking to a very dedicated SGI member, I realized that this was also my disease because it affects not only my environment but also our kids. So the first month I was having these emotional outbursts, I could be anywhere and just cry. In talking to another member one night, she said you have to chant for the right medicine for him. After I talked to her that night, I never had another outburst. I realized I had to change my karma and not become a young widow. By chanting I took control of the situation.

After Edward's February exam, some of the enzyme counts were better; one was actually normal. So we resubmitted a claim to our insurance company and told them why it is medically necessary for him to have this medicine. On March 12, we got word that the insurance approved the medication. But

the fight wasn't over yet, we had to find a pharmacy who would bill the insurance so we wouldn't have any out-of-pocket expenses.


I called every big pharmacy there was. All I kept getting was no. We had come this far I wasn't going to give up. I got the phone book out, and the first one I called, the man said I would be more than happy to help you as long as they will pay me. So he called later to say it was fine.

There are so many really wonderful members in the SGI but I have a special group of four: Jack and Trisha DiPietro, Christina Friedman and Simon Holding. These people have helped me so much, more than they will ever know. I am writing this because as a new member, it is so important to have other members to call.



Pamela and Edward Dowell, with Rachel, 8, and Logan, 6.

I don't know if I could have gotten through this as well as I did without these wonderful members' help.

Through my Buddhist practice, I have developed so many wonderful benefits, not just material ones; it is more of a feeling of being in control of my life — 100 percent. Life seems to go so much smoother now. I know that there will be other issues that will come up, but with this practice I know I can overcome anything, and I know I have the help of my really special friends. 

Experience — STEPHÁN EATON, SEATTLE, WASH.

FEELING A PART *of the 'Chorus'*

Photo by GILL

It was New Year's Eve of 1997, and I wondered what will be my resolution for the year? I didn't know but I wanted something different — I wanted a change. I was tired of living in Boston. When I arrived in 1983, I vowed this wasn't the place for me to settle. I would give myself 10 years and then move on.

It was now 1997. I was working two jobs; sometimes it would alternate between one full time, one part time or both would be full time. Either way I still didn't have any money. I was sporadically supporting financially an overbearing, controlling ex-lover who was incarcerated. I was miserable and unhappy. I wanted to peel away all of these dead layers of skin that just seemed to have weighed me down.

Little did I know big changes in my future were going to happen when I met a young woman on June 7, 1997, at a social gathering in Boston. We talked the night away but not once in our conversation did she mention that she was Buddhist. I knew I wanted to spend as much time as I could with her before she left for Seattle. Kenya was new life to me. She made me think about things positively and pointed out to me that I am responsible for my karma.

***'I've been seriously practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism since August 1998. I still stumble on some parts of gongyo, but I now challenge that stumbling block. My practice keeps me grounded.'* — Stephán**

One day while visiting New York, I heard gongyo for the very first time when Kenya sat down to recite her morning prayers. It was music to my ears. Not knowing what to do, I sat very still, not wanting to disturb the rhythmic music I was hearing. This was my introduction to the Buddhist practice.

I had heard the words Nam-myoho-enge-kyo before, but it was obvious that there was much more to this phrase until now. We spent part of the day looking for the New York Culture Center. When we found it, I was floored — there was a lot of genuine concern, passion and happiness among the people. I was

wondering, "Where have I been?" I wanted to be a part of this.

As our relationship blossomed, so did my interest in the Buddhist practice. My first visit to the SGI center here in Seattle was on Jan. 1, 1998, New Year's Day gongyo — I was excited. So many people, so much rhythm, I wanted to belong to this chorus. Not knowing the words to gongyo, everyone going so fast, I followed along in the book until they came to a part I did know: Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. I said it with such passion and conviction that I felt good that I was able to say my part and feel like a part of this chorus.

As I was introduced to various people and observed others around me, I could see and feel that people were genuinely vibrant and lively as they were in New York. Seven months after meeting Kenya, I was not feeling as weighed down as I had when the new year of 1997 rang in.


I wanted to be a part of this faith. Other faiths I've encountered never made me feel like I belonged nor did I want to belong. Upon my departure back to Boston, I was given the prayer book.

When left to your own vices, some of us are more apt to settle and this is what I did when it came to learning gongyo. I

settled to chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo only because I was afraid to challenge myself to learn the whole prayer. However, there were certain parts I could pronounce that lead to my desire to stumble through other sections of gongyo.

I remember one day feeling down and unhappy, but was determined to do and get through all of gongyo. I was chanting so hard, oblivious to the rainy weather conditions or anything around me. I couldn't help thinking, "Wow, there is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, just as Nichiren Daishonin says."

Since I started to chant, I've severed all communication with my ex. I never thought I would drive cross-country by myself, from Boston to Seattle, but I did. Kenya and I are engaged. But most of all, I feel alive. I feel lighter and I am relaxed.

My days are not as hectic. I don't always feel overwhelmed. So I will continue to chant whenever possible. I know if I can do it, anyone can do it. 



Kenya (left) and Stephán.

Experience — LISA MAXWELL, MAR VISTA, CALIF.

I'm Not Turning Back **NOW!**

I am 36 years old, and experienced years of despair and depression as a slave to alcohol and drugs. I tried to quit many times, but always turned back to chemicals when reality became too hard to face. I crashed cars, stole from my own family, and put myself in many compromising situations to get what I needed. Finally, two years ago I became so desperate that I wanted to die. I had studied music for most of my life and had an impressive career behind me as a saxophone player, but I hadn't played in months. I couldn't get out of bed. I felt like a shell of a human being.

With the help and compassion of others who had been through the same thing, and a modicum of faith, I made it through to the other side. I was free of chemicals, but I still felt a giant void in my gut. I knew that nothing on the outside would fix me; that true happiness is an inside job. I had no idea where to turn to find this faith I knew I needed to live a fulfilling and useful life.

A friend who had helped me get over my drug problem used to quote from the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. Everything she said made perfect sense to me and I wanted the peace of mind and wisdom she had. I asked her to take me to one of her meetings and on Jan. 1, 1998, I cried through my first Buddhist meeting in the Sherman Oaks District. I felt like I was home, like I had been chanting all my life.

Within a week I was doing a complete gongyo. I bought several books and studied about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I was so ready for

this practice! I once heard someone say, "It's not that the gates of heaven will open up and you will live in heaven on earth, but that the gates of hell will open up and let you out." This is exactly how I felt, and so began my own human revolution.

Two months after I started chanting, my apartment was broken into and all of my saxophones and jewelry were stolen. Nothing was insured and I suffered a loss of over \$13,000 as well as the sentimental value, which was worth more than money. I felt violated, and couldn't understand why this had happened to me. My Buddhist friends said, "Congratulations! You have many obstacles!" I did not see why this was a reason to rejoice, but continued chanting with all my heart. One month later, I received a settlement from a prior lawsuit that had been ensuing for five years. The money I received was just enough to pay the lawyers and buy new saxophones.

In the meantime, I called every musician I knew to tell them to keep an eye out for my stolen instruments. One of the people I called was an old friend named Julie whom I hadn't spoken to in many months. She and her husband, Steve, were happy to hear from me and invited me over to see them. They had been composing the music for Warner Brothers cartoons and put me to work reorganizing their home offices.

At our district meeting, I was told to be specific while chanting in front of the Gohonzon. I chanted for lots of high-paying work as a musician that did not involve much driving. Four days later, Steve asked me if I wanted to start orchestrating for him on the cartoons for "lots of money." He would fax

me his musical sketches and I could work from my home. Of course I accepted.

I love my work and am making more money than I have ever made before. It turned out that on the other side of what I thought was the worst thing in the world was an enormous benefit.

Marcel Proust wrote, "To goodness and wisdom we make only promises; pain we obey." It is certainly true for me. It took deep pain and desperation for me to be willing to try anything for relief. It was with this willing attitude that I found Buddhism. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo blasted its light through the darkness I once felt and has illuminated my life with immense faith.

On Sept. 4, 1998, I received the Gohonzon and it was one of the most exciting moments of my life. The other night I was chanting and suddenly realized that I am a part of something huge — this Buddhism! President Ikeda's lifelong efforts toward kosen-rufu have touched me profoundly, and I wish to thank him. The joy and inner peace that I found as



Lisa Maxwell

a result of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism have changed my life in a way that I did not know was possible. If I can help even one person with what I have gone through, it has all been worth it. **W**

Photo by IRENE TIRADO



Alfonso Diaz

Experience — ALFONSO DIAZ, NEW YORK CITY

I FELT THE PEACE **Within Myself**

My daughter, Irene, practices Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and on several occasions, she invited me to visit the SGI-USA New York Culture Culture as a guest. I also attended meetings at members' homes.

During those visits to the culture center, I observed and experienced the harmony, tranquillity, togetherness and serenity of the surroundings. But above all, I felt the peace within myself.

Whenever I visited my daughter or

she visited me, we talked about Buddhism. At no time did she ask me or tell me that I have to practice Buddhism. One thing I recall her saying to me is; "Pop, chant. It will help you."

For some time I have had problems with my vision in my right eye. So I started chanting without my daughter's knowledge, praying that my eye condition would improve.

One day my daughter had to visit her eye doctor and she invited me to accompany her. While I was at the doctor's office, I decided to speak to the doctor about my condition. After he ex-

amined me, he said I needed to have an operation; otherwise, I would lose the sight in my eye. That day I went home very disillusioned and scared, but thanks to my faith and positive thinking, I kept chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

The day of the operation, I remember the doctor talking to me since I was awake during the whole procedure; I was chanting during the entire time. Now I feel much, much better and I can still see clearly. At age 78, I am very grateful that everything has turned out for the best. After all this time, I received the Gohonzon three weeks ago, on May 2. **W**

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MAY 1 SPEECH

When Our Hearts Are One

In part 1 of his Soka Gakkai Day speech, the SGI president stresses the importance of the mentor-disciple relationship to the kosen-rufu movement. He says that 'when the hearts of mentor and disciple are one, there is no prayer that will not be answered.'

Congratulations on May 3, Soka Gakkai Day! Happy Soka Gakkai Mother's Day! I celebrate this joyous occasion with all my dear fellow members throughout Japan and the world.

Three cheers for the Soka Gakkai!

Three cheers for the women's division!

Three cheers for all SGI members!

And three cheers especially for the arts division members here today!

How great are our SGI activities! They are filled with song, poetry and dialogue. They give us the chance to study philosophy and expand our circle of friends. We can learn something from all these activities. They are all part of our Buddhist practice.

Each effort we make becomes our strength. Through SGI activities, we naturally develop into well-rounded individuals. There is nothing more wonderful than this.

We have entered a time when dialogue is becoming increasingly important. The time of unilateral commands from above is over.

In the SGI organization, too, it is anachronistic for leaders just to talk to people in a one-sided, top-down manner. We are all human beings, all of us just ordinary people.

Buddhism is based on the



The African women's drum troupe ADAWE performs at the cornerstone laying for the Daisaku and Kaneko Ikeda Library at SUA, Aliso Viejo, May 3. The Dedication Day for the university will be May 3, 2001.

principle that everyone is equal. Fellow members reaching out to each other in friendship, linked arm in arm, eager to talk with one another and have enjoyable activities — this, I believe, is what SGI meetings should be like.

Please respect and treasure all women's division members.

On today's date, May 1, in 1278, Nichiren Daishonin wrote to one of his followers: "Though the sun and moon may fall to the earth and Mount Sumeru may crumble, there is no doubt that women [who embrace the Lotus Sutra] will attain enlightenment. How encouraging! How reassuring!" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1390).

This is a promise by the Daishonin that women who practice the Mystic Law will definitely attain Buddhahood.

In a letter to another follower, Kubo-no-ama Gozen, the Daishonin writes: "In this turbulent world [rampant with persecution] that conjures up images of howling winds buffeting the grasses and lightning striking terror in people's hearts, it is most wondrous that you should maintain your trust in this faith. It is said that if the roots of a tree are deep, the leaves

will not wither, and if there is a gem in a spring, the water will never run dry. Likewise, your faith is always fresh and resolute, probably because the roots of your faith are deep, and the gem of courageous faith shines in your heart. How respectable and admirable this is!" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1479).

The Daishonin frequently praises the courageous faith of his women followers. Today, they correspond to you, our Gakkai women's division members. Rest assured that the original Buddha is wholeheartedly applauding your efforts! You are foremost in the world, foremost in the universe. I hope that all of you will have a wonderful Soka Gakkai Mother's Day!

Yesterday, I had an informal discussion with some women's division representatives. During that meeting, several proposals were made: 1) "On May 3, Soka Gakkai Mother's Day, all husbands should buy their wives a present!" Gentlemen in the audience, what do you think of that? Since you all seem to approve, I'm tempted to ask you all to report back to me later, and let me know how it went! And don't forget, if you fail to keep the promise you've just made, you'll disqualify yourself as leaders!

In any event, I ask that the men's and young men's division members respect and treasure the women's division members. I hope that you will have the thoughtfulness to give some small gift of appreciation — what it is, doesn't matter. Remember, one's heart is the most important thing.

Three other points came up during that discussion: 2) "On Soka Gakkai Mother's Day, husbands and children must do whatever their wives and mothers say." That means *all day*, from morning till night! 3) "On that day, husbands must pray especially for the health and long lives of their wives." And 4) "On that day, the men will take on responsibility for everything — propagation activities, delivering the *Seikyo Shimbun*, soliciting new subscribers and organizing and running meetings — and give the women a complete rest."

Although I won't have these four points made law here today, I hope that all you gentlemen present will capture their spirit, and put them into practice!

Even on just this one day, please thank the women's division members for their efforts, personally seeing every last one of them off on their way home from the community center or meeting place. Men should have that kind of magnanimity.

Everything depends on the central figure's leadership and resolute prayer to the Gohonzon.

On the beautiful green hill across the way, visible from this Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall, the new Soka University Central Tower has been completed (see p. 1). In the United States, meanwhile, construction on the proud new campus of Soka University of America in Orange County, California, is progressing steadily. Both are the fruits of your sincere support. I wish to humbly thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Yesterday, the construction company formally presented the completed building to the university in a special ceremony. I heard that the high point was the view of the snow-capped peak of Mount Fuji in the distance from the top of the 18-story structure. In the evening, a lovely full moon illuminated this temple of learning. By all accounts, it was a scene worthy of a painting.

Tomorrow, our nearest neighboring planet — the red planet Mars — will make a close approach to the Earth, coming within 54 million miles of us. Many decades ago, I remember writing in my diary [Sept. 7, 1956] of an even closer Mars approach — it was 35 million miles away.

That year, 1956, was the year of our Great Osaka Campaign, which made Japanese society sit up and exclaim that the impossible had happened. I took leadership in that campaign with stand-alone resolve. Everyone said that we were fighting a losing battle, and that we couldn't possibly succeed.

I have always gone to the most difficult places and there taken action, producing the most amazing results. Faith depends on practice. People who fail to make earnest practical efforts, who just get ahead by wiles and cunning, cannot be trusted.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda was particularly

Photos by ROBBIE EVANS

pleased by our resounding victory in Osaka. "Daisaku, you did a great job!" he said.

By contrast, the Tokyo campaign had suffered defeat. My prayer was focused on only one thing: protecting President Toda. I also staunchly supported my mentor throughout the trying times he faced when his business ran into financial difficulty. I paid back all of the huge debts that it had incurred.

President Toda trusted me from the bottom of his heart. He said: "Daisaku, thank you. You saved my life. Thanks to you, I've been able to do my job as Soka Gakkai president."

As soon as the Osaka campaign was over, I immediately launched into the Yamaguchi campaign. Mr. Toda wanted to secure an important foothold in Yamaguchi, cradle of the Meiji Restoration, and he entrusted the task to me. "You'll take care of it, won't you, Daisaku?" "Yes, you can count on me." It was decided in a moment.

The Yamaguchi campaign unfolded over a three-month period, including October and November 1956 and January 1957. At the end of September, just before the campaign was launched, the Soka Gakkai had a membership of 459 households in Yamaguchi. By the end of January, the number had increased almost tenfold to 4,073 households.

There was an increase in the Gakkai's membership to more than 4,000 households in Yamaguchi. And a total of 11,111 new member-households had been achieved in a single month in Osaka.

Everything depends on the central figure's leadership and resolute prayer to the Gohonzon. When one prays to the Gohonzon to realize kosen-rufu, to actualize and prove the validity of one's mentor's words, to truly bring one's mentor joy, results will absolutely follow.

The practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism is dedicated to the realization of kosen-rufu. Genuine faith is found nowhere but in this. Also central to the Daishonin's Buddhism is the mentor-disciple relationship committed to kosen-rufu. When the hearts of mentor and disciple are one, there is no prayer that will not be answered.

Many fellow members fought alongside me in those Yamaguchi and Osaka campaigns. The circumstances were far from

favorable. I had to pay for my own transportation expenses. I worked and strove tirelessly — morning, noon and night. I was 28. I put all my youthful energy into realizing kosen-rufu. Sometimes I was so exhausted when I came home at the end of the day, that I would virtually collapse in the entrance, not even having the strength to take off my shoes.

Looking up at the silvery stars of the Milky Way, I would think, "I'm ready to die, whenever the time comes." That was the resolve with which I fought. That is how I built one foundation after another for kosen-rufu.

It has by no means been an easy undertaking. It has been a history of hard work and trials. The SGI, today a world-acclaimed organization, has been built through such real-life struggles. I hope that all our young successors will never take this for granted, and assume simply that everything was accomplished easily, without effort.

We have chosen to be born on this planet to propagate the Buddhist Law here.

The Daishonin writes: "The assembly where the Lotus Sutra was preached was as vast as not only the entire major world system, but also four hundred ten thousand million asamkhya worlds. The bodhisattvas, people of the two vehicles, people of the realms of humanity and heaven, and the eight kinds of non-human beings, who populated those worlds, all received the Thus Come One's decree and cherished the wish to spread the Lotus Sutra in the respective lands in which they dwelled" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 76).

The scale of Buddhist thought is immense; it encompasses the universe. I am sure that, had such eminent thinkers as Bergson, Kant, Hegel and Marx encountered the Daishonin's great universal philosophy, they would have been deeply impressed and held it in high esteem.

In contrast to the huge scale of Buddhism, how small and insignificant are such things as worldly fame and power!

From among the vast infinitude of space, we have chosen this planet as the place where we wished to be born, so that we



More than 700 people, neighbors and friends of the new SUA campus, attend the cornerstone laying, May 3.

might propagate the Buddhist Law. It is vital that we accomplish that mission. Let us ever continue to take bold action for the sake of humanity — for the peace, happiness and prosperity of all.

President Toda tutored me in classical Chinese in my youth. He had quite a fondness for the subject, even though his specialty was mathematics. There are a number of quotes I remember studying with him. For example: "The whole world is defiled. I alone remain pure." I can still recall President Toda telling me to always have this self-awareness. The only way to live purely is to live based on faith, based on the Mystic Law. This quote is by a poet-statesman named Ch'ü Yüan from the Warring States Period in ancient China.

Another memorable quote

was "To the person who has a gentle heart and a tranquil mind, a hundred blessings will gather spontaneously." These words are from the work *Vegetable Root Discourses*, written by the Ming-Dynasty author Hung Yingming.

In terms of Buddhism, one could say that a "tranquil mind" corresponds to the world of Humanity, while a "gentle heart" corresponds to chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with a fresh, lively spirit. When we chant daimoku in this way, a hundred blessings do come to us quite naturally.

Then there were these lines of verse of the Northern Sung-Dynasty poet Mei Yao-Ch'en: "Why seek fleeting honor? You should seek to be known for a thousand years."

There was also a quote by

the Chinese philosopher Mencius that President Toda strongly urged me to memorize. "Daisaku, make this your spirit!" he said. And I have tried to do just that. It goes, "If one finds oneself in the right, one goes forward even against men in the thousands."

I studied these and many other classical Chinese writings under my mentor's tutelage in the "Toda University" in my 20s. For 10 years, President Toda taught me all manner of subjects — chemistry, science, law and Japanese literature, to name but a few.

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 33rd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, commemorating May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in

NEW ENGLAND, FROM PAGE 4

ability. We also asked the committee members to be diligent in attendance, objectivity and confidentiality.

"The first meetings of the expanded committee were let's-get-acquainted gatherings," Steve explains. "Various techniques and game playing were used to help us develop mutual appreciation. Then came a significant evolution for the committee: We discussed the importance of not just fighting prejudice but also of treasuring diversity. These discussions led to a regional cultural diversity festival, featuring ethnic his-

tory, involving the performing arts, the visual arts and culinary treats. Seven hundred members attended the festival."

The regional committee meets every month and is now proposing activities to further involve the entire membership. Upcoming is a Friendship Meeting, which will focus on small groups of members participating in dialogue, seated around card tables. The goal is to get members to know each other on a personal level, apart from participation in specific activities, to heighten their awareness of each other's goals, problems and dreams,

and to care more deeply for one another.

Something President Ikeda has said defines the Diversity Committee's mission: "I believe friendship is the most genuinely humane relationship of which we are capable. To be understood and appreciated for oneself — as the unadorned human being we are inside — is a vital experience in life."

While realizing that there is much work ahead, Steve is confident about the future of the Diversity Committee. "We are eager to advance with the many opportunities our diversity offers us," he concludes. WJ

'Three But Not Three'

PERSPECTIVE

By ROXANNE RAE PRYOR
SACRAMENTO, CALIF.

At the onset of our May commemorative contribution period, I was reflecting on the profound and positive impact that Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhist practice has had on my life. A quote from Nichiren Daishonin's "The Three Kinds of Treasures" is near and dear to me: "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the



most valuable of all" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 239).

Until very recently, I conceptualized these three treasures as a hierarchy that separates and consequently devalues material wealth compared to heart and health. My mind's eye saw an inverted triangle with cash ("the storehouse") placed at the bottom.

A few weeks ago, however, I was chanting and studying about the treasure of the body when I experienced a strong "AHA!" I suddenly perceived these three treasures in a comprehensive and all-encompassing way.

Regarding the body, a letter to an ill woman follower in "On Prolonging Life," the Daishonin

says: "Life is the most precious of all the treasures. If you are unwilling to take care of yourself, it will be very difficult to cure your illness. One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the universe, so first you must muster sincere faith. A single life is worth more than the universe" (MW-1, 230-31).

In "The Real Aspect of the Gohonzon" he also speaks to the tremendous value of treasures of the body. Regarding the "storehouse," the Daishonin teaches us through his own behavior. His attitude was one of tremendous gratitude for gifts of food, clothing and the mundane materials that supported his daily life.

In the "Gift of Rice," he writes: "I am an ordinary man and find it hard to endure the winter's cold or the summer's heat. Nor do I have enough to eat. Without food, I could not long continue to recite the sutra or concentrate on meditation. Thus your offerings are more than mere gifts" (MW-1, 269).

It was such clear reference to the value of both the "storehouse" and "body" treasures that led me to understand their great value to the heart. These three treasures can dynamically interact to enhance and amplify the Buddha life force of the Universe in a harmonious way. When this occurs, all three function in a mutually supportive

manner and are all of equal value. I discarded my hierarchy as inaccurate.

My new perception of these three treasures looked like overlapping circles.

Sometimes we may concentrate more on one or the other, but from the enlightened perspective they are not separate. Furthermore, my "storehouse" treasure offering during the May commemorative contribution period is not of lesser value in some hierarchy but is an integral aspect of a dynamic interaction of these three treasures that supports the advancement of kosen-rufu.

As the Daishonin states, "It is obvious that rice is not merely rice but life itself." ☐

The Power To Change Reality

PERSPECTIVE

By SANDY PATRICK
VAN NUYS, CALIF.

When we are young, most of us have a kind of hope that is really simply the energy of youth. Life seems to be almost like a series of roads before us. We simply choose the one that goes to where we want to go and start traveling. Some of us get somewhere; many of us don't. Most of us hit roadblocks or obstacles that take time and energy and ingenuity to get past. When we're young, we have the energy to clamber over some of these obstacles. But soon, the future seems to lead to endless barriers and stop signs and we start getting tired. Spiritual fatigue becomes despair. Life turns into something to be survived, no longer an adventurous journey, but a test of endurance.

Eventually, many of us give up on our dreams and let life go stale. This is when we can do our greatest harm to world peace. As we lose the natural hope of youth, we lose interest in our own lives and in the lives of others. Hopelessness is ultimately boring and nothing relieves boredom quite like war.



Indeed, *A History of Warfare*, by John Keegan, a study of war widely considered definitive, argues that the boredom of hopelessness is what makes it possible for the old to get the young to kill and be killed by other young people. Cultural imperatives are the usual excuse, but all that means is that the "culture" is of greater value than life, itself, which, if you have no hope of fulfilling your potential (i.e., achieving a dream), must seem true. War, at home, in the neighborhood, in the world, is an immediate, enormous distraction from the monotony of lives without dreams. This is why we must go on reaching for our

dreams no matter what, beginning again each day to climb the mountain, courageously hopping, even in the face of ridicule. It's our responsibility as Buddhists to refuse to give up on our goals as long as we live.

Hon'nin-myō is a Buddhist term meaning something like from this moment. We use it to describe the never-give-up spirit so crucial to Buddhism because it reminds us that Buddhism teaches that this moment mystically contains all the possibilities in life. To which, a lot of people would say: "So what? So, all possibilities are in this moment. Just how does that help me pay the rent?" If you have ever come

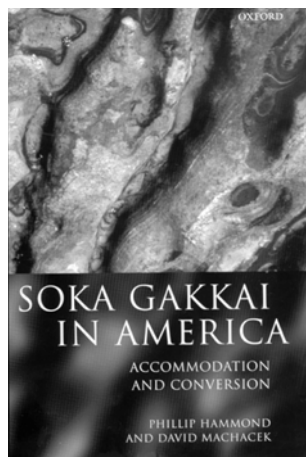
close to eviction, you know this is a perfectly valid question.

Despair is easy. Some of us seem to default to it. Whatever happened to your old dream of owning your own home? Of being a standup comic? Of writing a book? Did it just become impossible one day? Too hard, too daunting, and besides, maybe you haven't got enough talent to write a Pulitzer Prize winner. That's your lesser self yammering, taking control, taking charge of your life.

We have the power to change the grim reality of the moment into the great reality of our dreams — by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. But it's hard

to believe, it's hard to have the confidence that we need to tackle yet another mountain. Here is where the real blessing of this practice comes in. Confidence is expectation, what we expect in our hearts, not our heads. So, confidence is another word for hope. And hope is another word for faith. And faith, this Buddhism teaches, is nothing but chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, regardless of what our heads are mumbling or snarling. Because chanting replaces the darkness in our hearts with enlightenment, with Buddhahood. And the Buddha knows nothing in reality is ever impossible. ☐

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Just Let Go

I'm writing in response to Sean Grover's article "What To Do When Chanting Becomes a Chore?" (Feb. 5 *World Tribune*). It seems like Sean's conclusion is this: When you're having trouble focusing while chanting and want to make a breakthrough in your practice, chant harder. Sweat. Struggle. Beat down the resistance. However, I've had experiences that were just the opposite. One time I remember trying to chant harder, chant better, chant like I was "supposed to," but my practice was just misery. I made a huge breakthrough by just letting go, relaxing and not forcing anything. My inspiration, focus and determination came back naturally (after a generous amount of daimoku). I agree that it's important to really challenge ourselves in our practice, but it can also be very powerful just to let go and let it happen.

— CRAIG NIELSEN,
Corvallis, Ore.

Appreciation Overseas

I am in the U.S. Navy and I am currently stationed in Sasebo, Japan. I have been in and out of Sasebo, on a forward deployed ship, for about a year and four months. It was stressed to me that as soon as I got over here that I should try to connect with the organization. That has been easier said than done....

My initial reason for writing is to express sincere appreciation and gratitude for the numerous issues of the *World Tribune* that have been delivered to me. It is wonderful to be able to read about all the different experiences and diverse members.... As of about July, we will be transitioning from one ship to another.

— EDWARD A.
WILLIAMS,
Sasebo, Japan

Truly From the Heart

Pam and Lauren Nelson (of Littleton, Colo.) had practiced in Chicago West for over 15 years before they moved to

Colorado. Pam's experience regarding the tragedy at Columbine High School in the May 7 *World Tribune* was truly one from the heart and I want to thank her for her experience. We need more like that. They encourage so much self-reflection.

— DONNA DAVIS,
Woodstock, Ill.

Courage in Common

The April 30 *World Tribune* was a great expression of Fred Zaitzu's editorial in the April issue of *Living Buddhism*: "Be Extraordinary Ordinary People." Nancy Kennedy's experience of perseverance was so inspiring. Cesare Civetta's great compassion for his brother brought me to tears. Mark Allen Davis's success as a dancer was great, but his success as a human practicing this Buddhism is even greater. What they all have in common is courage.

And Herbie Hancock's conversation with Daisaku Ikeda felt as if I were there watching them talk. It's good for us to know that people who have achieved fame, people whom you might think would not need or want to continue chanting, still put their practice, for themselves and especially for others, first.

I am so proud of all of them, of all of us in the SGI. Extraordinary ordinary people, indeed.

— JEROME LUDWIG,
Chicago

A Beautiful Forum

Recently, as I was leaving school one morning, I was stopped by a sincere young man who wanted to know if I would like to go to church with him. I explained that I had been practicing Buddhism for 23 years and was very happy with my religion. What followed was a sincere dialogue about religion and he asked me many questions about Buddhism, giving me the opportunity to share our philosophy

with him. He attempted to debate with me, but I was well versed enough in the Bible to disarm many of his arguments. He finally looked at me and said: "Well, what if Jesus is right and your Buddhism is wrong? When you die you're gonna be in a whole lotta trouble." I smiled with confidence and said: "You know I'm just not worried about that. I know if I live a life dedicated to creating value and touching the hearts of others that I will die a wonderful death."

Reading Cesare Civetta's experience in the April 30 *World Tribune* brought tears to my eyes and made me think of that conversation I had with the young man at school. When Cesare encouraged his brother that his daimoku would enable his death to be a "magnificent journey" I was reminded of the great beauty of our philosophy.... So many people struggle with the question of death, and like the young man who spoke to me, worry that they'll be "in a whole lotta trouble when they die" if they don't embrace a certain religion.

Our Buddhism does free us from the fear of death and enables us to encourage others so deeply at the moment of their passing. Thank you, Cesare, for sharing your experience! It is so beautiful to hear of your dedication and compassion for your brother.

I also want to thank the *World Tribune* for continuing to fill its pages with the voices of our wonderful members all over the country. Nancy Kennedy's experience reminded me that as I struggle to attend school full time (to obtain my teaching credential), work full time and raise two young children on my own that this is a path I am walking and I do need to just keep going to "see the full moon over the capital." LaVora Perry's "Perspective" on challenging obstacles is an article I want to share with my district members as they come to me with their struggles. Our *World Tribune* is a beautiful forum that I hope we will continue to fill with lots of experiences and thoughts on

practice. I look forward to receiving my copy every week and open it the moment I get it so that I can find encouragement and enlightenment in the hearts of our precious members.

— CHARLOTTE
MADLOCK,
San Diego

Challenging Arrogance

The Feb. 19 *World Tribune* is of special interest to me for one, because it is my 10th anniversary of practice and two, because it is on my greatest challenge — arrogance. Since it arrived, I have been diligently studying it....

Most of all, on the issue of contribution, I made a vow to the Gohonzon to do all that I could to strengthen my *ichinen* like a pebble in the water for all of the United States so that the United States could become financially independent. That we look to the future for the storage and safety of the Nichiren Daishonin's teachings so that people who are looking for hope will know where to go. That the community centers are like lighthouses for the world and every time someone passes by one they feel something and are pulled in that direction. I hope that we all develop the *ichinen* to "ask not what kosen-rufu can do for you but what you can do for kosen-rufu." I pray that we don't think about benefits but about deepening our faith in the Gohonzon and today build as many community centers for the members who don't have and not think about what we don't have but what the other members need. I feel this is what will bring us joy and benefits.

— WANDA BOYD,
Los Angeles

I was very moved and impressed by the open letter written by Pam Nelson re-

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Babies FOR THE 21ST Century

By Dr. Shari Thompson, Marshall, Mo.

I have been practicing Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism for 17 years. I feel that I have been able to change something deep in my life and karma because of my practice. This has been possible because I chant and have continued for many years, determined to change for the better.

My experience is about my opportunity to work with children. I always assumed that I would have children, but other things were always pressing and there never was a very good time to plan for having children of my own. My other deep fear was that if I had a child, that I would become like my own mother and perpetuate the same kind of conflictual relationship that I had with her. Because of this fear, I put off planning for having children of my own, not wanting to face my own issues.

When I married my husband, I was 28 years old, and although my biological clock was ticking away, I had my career goals to focus on as I was striving toward a career in medicine. There was never really the right time to plan for having children. Then my husband's son, who was 11 at the time, moved in with us. I thought this was my opportunity to have a relationship with him, and would fulfill my desire for having children. In reality, however, my stepson not only did not appreciate me, but did not even like me and openly competed with me for attention from his father. My husband and I struggled together through his adolescence. Because of our practice and many hours of daimoku and determination for him to succeed, he did complete high school and moved out on his own. It was never easy and much to my disappointment, was never the sense of fulfillment and joy that I had anticipated and hoped for.

Ross is now 24 years old and still struggling with his life, but I do believe my relationship with him has improved because I have grown up and he has been able to see his life more clearly.

Just before I entered medical school, we considered having a child, but the time was not yet right and everything seemed too hectic and uncertain so we put things off again. After my second year of medical school, I took a year off to do a fellowship in pathology, partly because my stepson was having so many problems, but also because we wanted to have a baby. My husband and I began seeing a fertility specialist to help us to conceive. Eight months later and after multiple tests and constant anticipation and anxiety, we learned that I was unable to get pregnant. I cannot describe to you how devastated I was by this news. The waves of grief were so overwhelming that I just

had to set them aside so that I could continue with life. For as long as I had put off the decision to have a child, never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that the opportunity to do so would not be possible for me. Having a baby is something that people do all the time. Babies are brought into the world every day who are not even wanted by their parents. Why would this opportunity be unavailable to me? I asked myself many questions as I processed through my grief.

I chanted my way through anger, through grief and through profound disappointment in the karma that I had to accept as my own. I struggled with frustration and jealousy toward women who were pregnant and families with children. I spent many years wondering what I had to change to resolve this sadness. I felt that this was possibly karma that was so deeply ingrained in my life that it could not be changed in this lifetime, the kind of immutable karma I learned about in Buddhism. I chanted to open my life to children in whatever manner that would benefit my life and resolve this deep doubt that I was fighting.

My biggest struggle was that of feeling that there was something wrong with me, that this was an experience that I was not worthy of having. I believe that with this practice there is a responsibility that we have to ourselves to open up to the difficult karmic issues that eventually surface in our practice to win in life. I know this feeling of unworthiness that I experienced stemmed from not feeling appreciated and valued by my own mother. How could I change this?

My husband and I considered many options, which included adoption and foster care. Through chanting I took a real leap of faith and chose to specialize in family medicine — I now deliver babies and care for children on a regular basis. This has been a long process for me of reconnecting with my childhood and learning how to love and value the child in my own heart. Through my experience of caring for children, I have found the spontaneity and joy that I was missing. Each baby that I deliver, I feel very connected to and feel such a sense of happiness to watch them grow and develop. I have experienced a feeling of richness and fullness with interacting and developing relationships with my patients. Where once I was sad because I was not able to have children, now I am so grateful and blessed to have Chase and Isabelle, and Shane, and Allaura, and Rachel, and Olivia, and Robert, and Leah, and Jessica, and Tabitha, and Angelica, and Alli, and Marc, and Ashley, and all the babies who will be born this year and in the 21st century.

Photo by NELLIE BAILEY



Dr. Shari Thompson and her newest addition, Autumn Jewell, born in April, in Marshall, Mo.

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