



Youth section, 'Seize the Day,' celebrates SGI President Ikeda's 52nd year of practice.

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Pittsburgh Celebrates Long Awaited Opening of Community Center

Photos by JONATHAN WILSON

Pittsburgh area members proved the validity of the saying, "a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step," as they celebrated the long-awaited opening of their first community center on Aug. 8.

More than 130 people, together with SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitzu, filled the new 3,500-square-foot structure to capacity at this joyous event that was 33 years in the making.

The first step of the journey began with small meetings at Carnegie Mellon in 1970. The membership then consisted of six pioneer Japanese women who had moved into the Pittsburgh area and practiced as part of what was then Washington, D.C., district. A handful of American college students simultaneously had begun practicing as members of Philadelphia district. Each group didn't know the other existed, yet somehow they eventually found each other, and the rest is history.

In fact, it was auspicious that leaders from both Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. were pre-



sent to share in the celebration. Today the Pittsburgh area is part of Mid-Atlantic Zone, which includes both cities.

Carmela Menchaca, Philadelphia Region leader, expressed her heartfelt congratulations on the opening and recalled her first trip in 1971, when five or six cars of members came to establish an official group in Pittsburgh and encourage the members there. On the way, her car was in an accident. "What could have been a

disaster was instead an experience about the power of this practice that I have never forgotten," Carmela said. "Over the last 28 years, I have come to Pittsburgh many times always to encourage the members. Each time I have always felt that I was the one who got encouraged and refreshed from your tremendous effort and spirit. Today, because of your spirit and effort, we can celebrate a

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The opening ceremony represents, as SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitzu says, 'The crystallization of more than 30 years of efforts of people to develop their lives through this practice.'

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S APRIL 17 SPEECH

We Will Win in the End

SGI President Ikeda says that 'the person who is not defeated, who does not give up, no matter what happens, will win in the end.'

Congratulations on holding this student division leaders meeting!

"If there is no path, I will open a path." These are the eternal words of Dr. Federico Villarreal, the illustrious Peruvian intellectual for whom the esteemed Federico Villarreal National University is named.

If you simply content yourself with following a path someone else has blazed, mindlessly moving along without putting forth any serious effort or hard work of your own, you have lost the spirit of youth. That is a foolish way to live.

Youth means to burn with hope, daring to face hardship and challenge, to forge a new path based on your own philosophy, passion and struggle. To steadily advance on your chosen path one step at a time, as you sketch the picture of your life — this is the essence of the struggle of youth.

Many great individuals have emerged from poverty and hardship.

Dr. Villarreal, whose philosophy underpins the fine Peruvian institution that has honored me today, was a brilliant mathematician who brought the light of an original mind to science and education during the late 19th and early 20th century. Born into a very poor family, he began working at the age of 14, while at the same time struggling to pursue his studies.

How we spend our teenage years forms the foundation of our lives. Many great individuals emerge from poverty and hardship. Beautiful flowers and towering trees grow in the lowest

reaches, in the muddiest earth.

Money alone does not bring happiness. The famous Japanese writer Eiji Yoshikawa says that people who eat too much good food and lead an easy life from a young age are unfortunate. They miss the chance to build character and can't enjoy the satisfaction of achieving their goals one step at a time.

Amid an intense intellectual, mental and physical struggle, Dr. Villarreal made an important mathematical discovery, today known as the Villarreal Polynomial. Some have declared his achievement more significant than that of Isaac Newton's.

How old do you think Dr. Villarreal was when he did this? He was 23 — about the same age as many gathered here today.

I want each of you to make discoveries of your own. I want you to make lasting achievements. And they don't have to make the headlines; they can be ordinary things.

What matters is that you know what you have done. I hope that you will leave something behind, something of which you can proudly declare to the world: "This is my discovery!" "This is how I lived my life!"

What you do should not be false or pretentious. The news is sometimes full of flashy announcements — often outright lies — like those that came from the Japanese imperial headquarters during World War II. You cannot lie to yourself.

In any case, what incredible creativity is forthcoming from the lives of young people who have been forged and tempered

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Learning From Examples

EDITORIAL

By TED MORINO
EDITOR IN CHIEF

In fulfilling his role as a teacher of Buddhism and a mentor of life in contemporary times, SGI President Ikeda often highlights outstanding qualities of historical figures or those world leaders with whom he has personally met. This is to give us inspiring examples of how to challenge ourselves to



live victoriously.

But some people have expressed confusion and concern over some of the examples President Ikeda has chosen. Some, for instance, are military leaders, like Napoleon.

Obviously, President Ikeda does not write about such figures to justify the negative things they have done. Since Buddhism upholds the absolute dignity of life, naturally, he does not defend those actions or policies that have caused human misery. His point isn't to encourage us to disregard the crimes that they may have committed.

After all, there are no perfect people to write about. Even a Buddha possesses the nine worlds. If we wait to write about perfect people who have no bad qualities, we will wait forever.

So President Ikeda finds the good qualities in all sorts of people. Nichiren Daishonin states, "Even a heartless villain loves his wife and children" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 53).

Buddhism teaches that there is something to learn from everyone who has challenged themselves — from people who have been victorious in a wide variety of fields. And, they don't have to be perfect for us to learn something from them about winning in life.

Take the case of Napoleon: In a recent speech, President Ikeda asks, "What precisely can we learn from Napoleon's life?" One of the points he makes in answering this question is that "when Napoleon achieved one victory, he im-

mediately looked to the next" (June 11 *World Tribune*, p. 6).

Although Napoleon's victories may have caused suffering to others, the point remains that he had the amazing quality of turning one victory into another — of never being defeated. This, President Ikeda suggests in his speech, is a quality we all inherently have.

Also in Napoleon, President Ikeda sees the unlimited potential of a man, which may help people today expand the scope of their dreams for the future — dreams that tend to shrink or disappear before the onslaught negativity in today's news.

Therefore, being aware of the existence of shortcomings that are particular to, in this case, Napoleon, President

Ikeda intentionally focuses on traits that help others recognize their own potential — to help people tap their inherent hope, courage, wisdom, compassion, perseverance and conviction — aspects of Buddhism. In other words, understanding that people may have differing opinions of Napoleon,

President Ikeda boldly brings to our attention what we can learn from elements of Napoleon's character.

President Ikeda continues to seek great examples of all kinds of people, renowned or unknown — figures who can teach us lessons about how we can win in life. And what's most important in reading about these people is to get the point that President Ikeda is making. ❖

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dream come true."

Bill Aiken, who had spent some time practicing in Pittsburgh as a young men's division member in 1971 and later supported the area for many years as a territory leader in Philadelphia, said, "I can't help but think of all the members whose prayers and efforts so much laid the foundation and are now taking form and blossoming today!"

The new community center is located in the Greentree area of Pittsburgh. Six colorful posters of trees representing each district — Centre, Liberty, Mountain, North Star, Rising Sun and West Virginia — were adorned with hundreds of colorful flowers representing an hour of daimoku chanted.

Area leader Bruce Jones recalled his efforts to begin practicing in the mid-'70s and the appreciation he felt for the tremendous support he received from "a handful of Japanese women who were determined to share this practice with Americans." He said: "As we are opening the first community center in Pittsburgh, I feel the same deep sense of appreciation for all of you today who have carried out your faith and practice diligently for three decades. Now we are determined to create a place where anyone can come to chant and receive warm encouragement."

Many of the pioneer members were present at the opening



Photo by JONATHAN WILSON

The new Pittsburgh Community Center is located in the Greentree area of Pittsburgh.

to witness their dream come true. This historic event also drew out members who haven't participated in a while, and even a self-invited guest, Carolyn Tanguy, who just happened to see a write-up in the local newspaper. She said, "I was happy that I found out about the event because I wanted to learn more about Buddhism."

Mayor Tom Murphy sent a proclamation declaring "August 8, 1999, to be SGI-USA Day in Pittsburgh."

Though the community center opening marked a destination reached, the long journey for kosen-rufu in Pittsburgh is

just beginning. As Carmela said: "Let us not view today as an end but as a new beginning. Let's unite together in our determination to create a new era of hope and peace in Pittsburgh, based on the Mystic Law."

Alain Kouyate, Pittsburgh area YMD leader, pledged to "foster and nurture youth that will take care of our new castle of kosen-rufu.... This community center," he said, "will become a beacon of hope in all of western Pennsylvania through the power of its members and will draw many people to chant in this area. I will dedicate my life in the next years to sharing

this practice with all youth in the Pittsburgh area."

Mr. Zaitzu congratulated Pittsburgh on its new community center and encouraged all to "make Pittsburgh and the community prosperous and harmonious, create a new era of rich spiritual prosperity filled with harmony and respect for all, and become the driving force for a second American renaissance." He spoke of the tremendous power of hope that Buddhism offers, citing examples of baseball player Orlando Cepeda's journey from "shame to fame" and the youth division's current "Victory Over

Violence" campaign. "As long as we have hope," he said, "there is nothing that cannot be achieved.... Possessing a dream gives rise to hope and draws forth inner potential and strength and enables us to make dreams come true. Faith sets hope alight."

Mr. Zaitzu also praised the youth's determination and encouraged them to "share this practice and the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with all of society for peace."

—BARBARA FELLMAN

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EXPERIENCE — ROBERT C. FARRAR, ARLINGTON HEIGHTS, ILL.

Enhancing My Relationship With Myself

Robert Farrar discovers the beauty of his own life and more through attending a conference on relationships at FNCC.

My fiancée, Kathy Hawkins, and I had just returned to Chicago from the Enhancing Our Relationships Through Buddhism Conference held at FNCC May 20-23. When I dropped her off at her home, the last thing she said to me before saying good night was, "I'm glad you were able to attend the conference with me because there is no way that I could possibly describe what has happened these last couple of days." Those thoughts echoed in my head as I drove home, trying to decide how I would explain to the other members in our district what we had experienced at FNCC that weekend.

Interestingly, my May 21 issue of the *World Tribune* arrived in the mail the very next day and included an insert about upcoming conferences at FNCC. The flyer began with a comment that FNCC was built for SGI-USA members to "refresh their spirit and determination to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism," and included a comment from SGI President Ikeda that "there should be time for sleeping and time for chanting. People should leave energized and filled with hope." Those statements summed up my experience at FNCC, an experience made all the more powerful by the fact that just one year ago, I had never heard of the SGI, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism or FNCC.

In 1992, I said good-bye to my wife of 13 years and the mother of my two sons after she lost a four-year battle with melanoma, the deadly form of skin cancer. My sons Chris and Patrick and I have struggled since that time as they have missed the tenderness that a mother brings to the family. I have struggled with the demands being an attorney was placing on my time and my energies and with the demands of being both father and mother to two growing, now teenage, boys.

In late April 1998, I received a call from a friend. She told me that she had given my name to a woman who had recently moved to Chicago from the East Coast and was finding that the demands of her career were making it difficult for her to meet people. A few days later, I re-

ceived a call from Kathy, and she and I made plans to have dinner together. Little did I know that that dinner would lead me to FNCC a year later!

A week or so after the dinner, I called Kathy to ask her out again for a Saturday evening. She told me that she had plans to attend a district meeting that night and could not plan a date. Since I had never been to a Buddhist meeting and knew nothing about what went on, and since I really wanted to see her again, I asked if I could accompany her to the meeting. Most importantly, however, I really just wanted to see her again.

The meeting was truly amazing and was unlike any church service I had ever attended. The men's division put on a skit and the youth division provided music for the evening. One of the members, a pioneer member who was about to return to Japan, told her remarkable experience of being one of only a handful of practitioners here in America in the '50s and '60s. I must say that I was a bit confused about the chanting, and trying to follow along in the sutra book while doing gongyo without any point of reference was impossible. But I had a great time and accomplished my goal of spending another evening with Kathy.

As spring turned to summer and summer to fall, we attended more meetings together and met more members, but I still had not taken the plunge and begun chanting. I wanted to make sure that I was doing this because I wanted to do it for myself and not to impress Kathy or anyone else.

Then it happened. Kathy left town for several days on a business trip and I agreed to feed and walk her cats. On my first day of watching the cats, I walked past the room where the Gohonzon was enshrined and warily eyed the altar. I didn't chant because I still wasn't sure if this was right for me. The second day met with a similar result. By the third day, I thought, "Oh, what the heck!" and sat down in front of the Gohonzon. I chanted for 15 minutes. When I finished I thought this wasn't so bad, so I did another 15 minutes the next day. When Kathy called home from San Francisco that night to see how everything was going, I

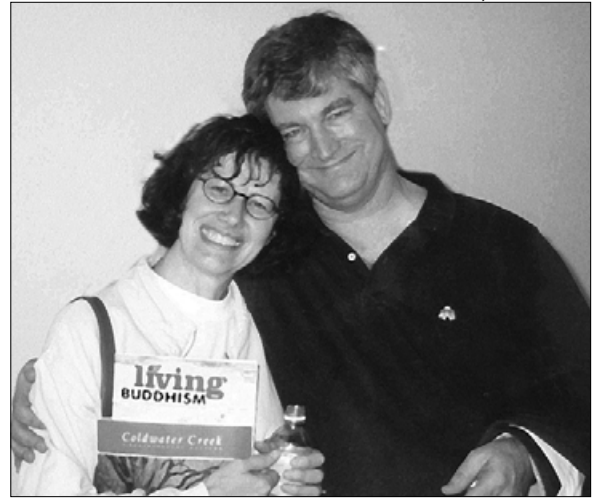
could feel the surprise, but satisfaction, in her voice when I told her that I had tried chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, especially since it was my own choice. I couldn't wait for her to get home to see if I was doing it right and chant with her.

From that point on, things have simply exploded in my life. At our New Year's meeting, we were all asked to set goals for ourselves for 1999. One of my goals was to learn to practice better. Pretty soon I started doing gongyo, slowly and haltingly at first to a blank wall. When we attended meetings together, I was still getting lost during gongyo and wondering why we had to chant at such a rapid speed. Slowly I got better, and I told Kathy that I was tired of chanting to a blank wall. I wanted my own Gohonzon! I attended a new members' class and started the process of becoming a member of the SGI. While all of this was happening, I somehow found the time to buy a diamond ring and ask Kathy to marry me. We became engaged in March and will be married Memorial Day weekend next May. On April 25, I took and passed the Entrance Examination, became a member and received the Gohonzon.

Less than three weeks later, I was at FNCC, marveling at how much my life had changed in the last year.

As the conference progressed, we had the opportunity to meet and spend time with the other participants. So many things transpired that it is difficult to describe them all. Certainly the food and accommodations were first class, but that is not what FNCC is all about. It is about learning. I learned more in one session about the temple issue than I had previously learned from reading the "Questions and Answers on the Temple Issue" booklet. I also learned about how things have changed since the early days of the organization. I learned about relationships, as the discussions were very open and informative and the leaders were exceptional. Their energy and enthusiasm kept things hopping.

The 175 members in attendance were also exceptional.



Robert Farrar and his fiancée, Kathy, visiting Kathy's parents in Punta Gorda, Fla.

Some brought guests who had never heard chanting or been exposed to the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, much like I had been a year earlier. Some came to the conference with difficulties in their lives and their practice. Others had extraordinary tales of their own human revolution and how their practice had helped them overcome obstacles. The group quickly formed an adhesiveness, a spirit of camaraderie. What impressed me the most was the compassion that the attendees exhibited as members opened up and related their experiences or troubles. Surely if someone had looked in on the group they might have thought that everyone's allergies were acting up based on the number of red eyes and sniffing going on, but, in actuality, it was just everyone revealing their humanity and compassion.

As SGI President Ikeda states in his May 1 speech: "Buddhism is based on the 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." This is what I saw happening at FNCC that weekend and in our district meetings.

As the conference drew to a close, I sat down on the patio, gazed out over the lake and wrote a letter to President Ikeda, thanking him for his vision about FNCC and to thank all the members of the SGI for continuing to support this wonderful facility. I was ready to leave FNCC ener-

gized and filled with hope.

As we were waiting to leave, we had the opportunity to attend the South Florida members' Diversity '99 celebration. It was wonderful to see the many displays and exhibits of the various Latin American countries, to listen to the happy sounds of their music and watch them dance in their native costumes. Just when we thought it could not get any better, word began circulating the grounds that Nestor Torres was there and he was going to perform later that afternoon. Just minutes before the buses were to take us back to the airport, Kathy and I sat in the sun-kissed amphitheater, looking out over the clear blue waters of the lake and listened to Nestor play the title song from his CD *Treasures of the Heart*. We sat there, mesmerized by his talent and awestruck by what had happened over the last several days.

As we walked across the campus to the bus, we felt energized and filled with hope. Our spirits were refreshed, and we were filled with a determination to encourage all of the members back home to visit the FNCC and to continue with their practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Correction: Our apologies to Dorothy Sogan, whose name was misspelled in a photo caption in the Aug. 13 issue. Dorothy is pictured at a Renaissance meeting, singing their theme song, "The Spirit of Youth," page 5.

FROM WIN, 1

by continuous effort and challenge! And it is all the more important for us to remember that faith is the wellspring of creativity.

Where have we come from? Where are we going? The road into the 21st century, into the third millennium, lies yet untraversed. Who are the pioneers, the builders, who are constructing this humanistic road of peace, culture and education? Who is constructing this road throughout the world with a fresh, dynamic energy and wisdom and a new solidarity based on an unsurpassed life philosophy? I declare that it is you, the student division members who are my dearest pride.

Today, student division representatives from some 200 universities around Japan, including Soka University, are gathered. You are all young philosophers. As philosophers, I hope you will courageously dedicate yourselves to the pursuit of the highest truth and goodness, not letting yourself be swayed by the famous or the powerful, many of whom are shallow and lack any real substance.

I congratulate you on this auspicious beginning!

Universities must not be ivory towers, separate from society.

Distinguished guests of Federico Villarreal National University, I have just been presented with an honorary doctorate from your pioneering institution of higher learning. I regard this as a great honor and source of tremendous pride. Thank you very much.

This April marks a full century of Japanese immigration to Peru. I feel unparalleled joy in welcoming you, outstanding scholars and educators of that South American country, who have specially made the long journey to Japan for this occasion, despite your busy schedules.

Let us give our honored guests a hearty round of applause in welcome and celebrate a new beginning into another century of warm friendship between our two nations.

A grand celebration commemorating 100 years of Japanese immigration is scheduled to be held in Peru next in May. Some 800 SGI-Peru youth division members, including student division members, will participate in the event, presenting a program of music and dance. My congratulations to them!

Federico Villarreal National University was born among the people in 1960. That same year, I was inaugurated as the third Soka Gakkai president at age 32 and embarked on my travels abroad for the sake of worldwide

kosen-rufu.

The Peruvian school is well known for having produced many capable people dedicated to humanistic ideals, based on its commitment to raising truly humane individuals and putting students first. It has clearly articulated its mission in the 21st century as promoting democracy, freedom and plurality of thought, as well as international exchange, links between government and business, and the creation and spread of culture. These are wonderful ideals.

Federico Villarreal National University also emphasizes taking up the problems and challenges of the region in which it is located, believing in the importance of contributing to the local community. It stands firm in its conviction that a university's inviolable right is to participate in and offer guidance to society, to speak out against injustice.

A university must not be an ivory tower, separate from society. It is the right of a university to fight against injustice. We of Soka University and the SGI agree wholeheartedly with Federico Villarreal National University's ideals.

When a university or its students lose their interest in society and their local communities, forgetting the spirit of contributing to them — or if they fail to get angry at injustice — the nation is stripped of a dynamic force for change and progress. The nation, then, can only decline. This, I'm afraid, is an accurate description of present-day Japan.

The human revolution of a single person is crucial.

Federico Villarreal National University prides itself on being a university of the people, for the people. It is brimming with the proud spirit and tradition of taking on the most difficult challenges and working for the people's welfare. Complete devotion to the people — this is the same spirit that infuses Soka University and the SGI.

Graduates of this esteemed Peruvian university are active on the front lines of society in a wide variety of fields, including government, business, education and medicine. I especially want to pay tribute to the fact that of those graduates, there are many doctors, nurses, educators and technicians working to serve the people in the remotest areas of the country. It is said that whenever you go in the far-flung regions of Peru and ask professionals where they graduated from, quite often you hear the proud response "Federico Villarreal National University!"

Such a beautiful spirit of ser-

vice has disappeared from Japan. Unfortunately, Japan is headed for decline. Many of the so-called elite of our society are self-centered; they don't care what happens to anyone other than themselves. What was the purpose, then, of their education? If such selfish individuals get into positions of power, what kind of society will they create?

Many people of conscience lament this sad state of affairs. Kyoto University professor Terumasa Nakanishi, a renowned authority on international politics, has offered some sharp observations on the decline and possible rebirth of Japan based on a grand theory of civilization. In his recent work *Why Do Nations Perish?* he touches on the late British historian Dr. Arnold Toynbee's theories of history, suggesting that even if a civilization were to disappear from the face of the earth, it could be reborn if "seeds" survived. Professor Nakanishi says that even if it were overrun by outside forces, as long as the foundation of a civilization survived, it could rise and flourish again, even from a single individual.

I agree. The individual is important. The human revolution of a single person is crucial. If an ember burns in the heart of even one true revolutionary, eventually the flames of victory will spread like wildfire.

Professor Nakanishi was one of the first to acknowledge the significance of my 1991 lecture at Harvard University, "The Age of Soft Power and Inner-Motivated Philosophy." Incidentally, the Tokyo-based think tank Dentsu Institute for Human Studies has selected *soft power* as one of the key words for Japan in 1999.

We must always look ahead and anticipate the future.

I once discussed the issue of European unification with Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, founder of the Pan-European Movement. That, too, is becoming a reality.

On April 15, I spoke with Nigeria's president-elect Olusegun Obasanjo about my vision of African unity and the creation of a United Nations for peace, culture and education that would transcend national interests. He evinced deep interest and accord with this proposal.

The world is changing minute by minute. The fresh ideas and activism of youth who keenly perceive the age and are prepared to lead the times are more and more vital. That's why each of you gathered here today is so important. You are the treasure of all treasures.

Speaking of Dr. Toynbee, I fondly recall our dialogue, which



SGI President Ikeda meets with officials of Peru's Federico Villarreal University, April 17. (L-R) Dean of the Faculty of Economics Imelda Tranco Pena, Dean of the Industrial and Systems Engineering Faculty Cristina Alzamora Rivero and former dean of the Industrial and Systems Engineering Faculty Oscar Benavidez Caverro.

was held over a total of 10 days. He had expressed a strong desire to meet me, but as he was in poor health, he couldn't make the trip to Japan. So I went to visit him in the United Kingdom.

Our dialogue began around 10:00 each morning and continued until about 5:00 in the evening. Each afternoon at teatime, Mrs. Toynbee would bring us cakes. She and my wife sat with us and listened to our dialogue.

I hope that all of you will read good books, such as those by Dr. Toynbee. You're the ones who will lose out if you read bad books.

In 1965, Dr. Toynbee visited Peru. He highly praised its beauty, calling it "otherworldly." I have also visited Peru and agree that it is a wonderful country. There is something about both its natural scenery and the hearts of its people that makes one feel at ease.

Dr. Toynbee focused his penetrating gaze on locating the center of the ancient Andean civilization. It was not among oases on the Pacific coastal desert. Instead, the greatest marks of this civilization were found in remote, forbidding regions that were exposed to the fearful attacks of enemies. Why was this? Dr. Toynbee's answer was crystal clear.

It is important to be clear. The SGI has come this far because we have always been straightforward and unambiguous. Nichiren Daishonin was a master of clarity. He reduced the enormous body of Shakyamuni's teachings — often referred to as the "80,000 teachings" — to a single phrase, the seven Chinese characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Facing challenges leads to our growth and development.

According to Dr. Toynbee, areas that always challenge and respond to the constant pressures and onslaughts of outside forces are where the energy to achieve

great things is aroused. In other words, facing challenges, competing and winning over one's enemies, produces growth and development. It is then that victory and creativity are realized. This is a law of civilization and life.

A comfortable, easy atmosphere is nothing more than an illusion. It will fade like a mirage. Nothing will remain.

A person who undertakes no struggle will leave no mark in this world.

The Daishonin declares, "It is not one's friends but one's enemies who assist one's progress" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 186). A group or organization that faces challenges is one that grows and triumphs. When challenges disappear, an organization becomes slack and begins to fall into ruin.

The SGI is strong because it fights against those who would destroy Buddhism. Without opponents, it would decline.

I hope that all of you, the student division members for whom I have such love and respect, will spend your youth courageously, boldly taking on society's challenges.

In his study of history, Dr. Toynbee also focuses his attention on people who are not defeated even when knocked down by adversity, people who rise up again stronger than before, and on those groups who use a defeat to spur themselves on, with increased determination, to further action. Such situations reveal the true strengths of an individual or group, he says.

It is only natural that in life's long struggle, we will sometimes encounter unexpected difficulties. But Buddhism is about being victorious. The Daishonin's Buddhism teaches us that we must triumph. The person who is not defeated, who does not give up, no matter what happens, will win in the end.

The weak will be defeated. Those who settle for defeat are

sad, regardless of the excuses they may make.

The strong, on the other hand, always enjoy life, whatever happens. They do not give up. They do not fall to pieces.

There is no need to fret and worry. Remain calm and dignified, and wait for the right time — make the right time. Never forget to have patience, courage and wisdom.

I want to see all of you, without exception, win in the end. I want you to take responsibility for our imperishable SGI.

Incidentally, Professor Manuel Rodriguez of Federico Villarreal National University, who is not here with us today, has used my dialogue with Dr. Toynbee, *Choose Life*, as a classroom text for 15 years. I wish to express my deepest respect and appreciation to him.

We must struggle against evil, until its roots have been eradicated.

In 1821, right after he suc-

ceeded in liberating Peru from Spanish rule, South American hero José de San Martín established a public library in the Peruvian capital of Lima and donated his own precious book collection to it. Education is power; San Martín believed that spiritual awakening is far more effective than military might in sustaining independence. The power of the spirit, our unity, is stronger than any economic clout or authoritarian force.

Our ignorance, on the other hand, is an invitation to frightening despotism and dictatorship. This is what San Martín, humanistic leader that he was, feared.

Aware and informed people are warning that Japan is heading once again toward nationalism. We must clearly see evil for what it is. It is crucial that we put all our energy into education that enlightens the people and makes them wise.

The same goes for religion. A religion that has not evolved to a

universal level of education will unflinchingly lapse into self-righteousness. From that perspective, I hope you'll recognize that your activities as student division members are indispensable.

Peru experienced two-and-a-half centuries of the terror and unbelievable cruelty of the Inquisition. I visited the museum that now stands on the site of the Inquisition's tribunal in Lima. I shuddered at the horrors that had taken place there.

It is believed that more than 500,000 people were persecuted by the Inquisition—all in the name of religion, all because of the dictates of monsters in the guise of priests. How terrifying is the envy of priests who have grown twisted and perverse!

All the persecutions that the SGI has endured until now have also been the result of jealousy at our growth and development. We know this from painful experience, and we must never forget it.

Regarding jealousy, the Incas,

whose empire extended throughout Peru and other parts of South America during the 15th century, had these sayings: "Jealousy eats away at a person from the inside and makes him rotten." "The jealous person brings on his own downfall." This is precisely what happens to those who, devoured by envy, seek to destroy the SGI, our beautiful alliance of the people.

One of the stanzas of the rousing Peruvian national anthem goes: "Lima keeps its glorious vow! / With fierce anger, she drove out the tyrant! The tyrant who long oppressed us is now powerless!"

We must never relax in our struggle against evil. We must never drop our guard. We must never forget our determination to defend what is right — until the roots of evil have been eradicated.

In the time of your youth, give your all to speaking out for justice and propagating this Buddhism.

A wonderful motto appears as part of Federico Villarreal National University's crest: "My words forge the human race." The spirit behind these words seems to say: "Through the power of education, through the power of words and culture, let us further strengthen humanity, leading it to greater wisdom! And let us link and unite humanity on an even wider, deeper level!" What a noble, magnificent motto Federico Villarreal National University has!

Buddhism teaches that "one's voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708). I hope that all of you will boldly use your voices to inspire and touch the lives of friends and neigh-

bors, one after another. This is what it means to be young, to practice faith and to lead a fulfilling life.

Now, in this time of your youth, give your all in the struggle to speak out for justice and truth and in the propagation of Buddhism. Doing so will definitely become one of your life's treasures.

I call on you to build an alliance of good. I call on you to defeat the negative forces that we find in society. I call on you to spread justice and happiness in society and combat the spread of egoism.

You are the ones who will lead the way in that direction. As you take your place on the stage of the 21st century, I want to hear you shout cheerfully, your voices ringing high into the heavens, "We have won!"

In March 1974, I visited Peru's beautiful green capital. At that time, I was fortunate to be the first private citizen to receive an honorary citizenship from the city. I wrote in the City Hall's visitors book: "From today, I will work for Lima! From today, I have that responsibility. I will pray harder than anyone for the increased development and prosperity of Lima and Peru!" My determination and commitment have not changed in the least.

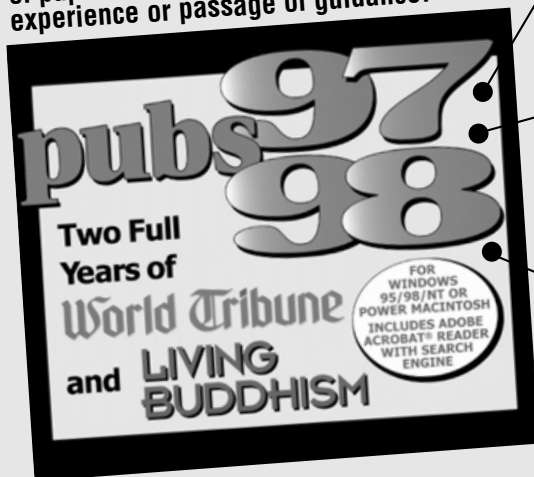
I close my speech today with the humble promise that I will continue to pray all my life for the boundless development of my beloved new alma mater, Federico Villarreal National University. *Muchas gracias!*

SGI President Ikeda's speech at a student division leaders meeting at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, April 17.

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TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

The Voice Does the Buddha's Work

From This Speech:

Buddhism teaches that "one's voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708). I hope that all of you will boldly use your voices to inspire and touch the lives of friends and neighbors, one after another.... Give your all in the struggle to speak out for justice and truth, and in the propagation of Buddhism. Doing so will definitely become one of your life's treasures.

1. What does Nichiren Daishonin mean when he says that "one's voice does the Buddha's work"?
2. How have you used your voice to inspire others? To change someone's life?
3. What are some of the ways in which we can "speak out for justice and truth, and in the propagation of Buddhism?"

My Heart's Release

PERSPECTIVE

By LEE K. WOLFSON
PITTSBURGH

The Florida Nature and Culture Center is like a wonderful song that you just can't get out of your head. On my third trip to FNCC for the Fourth Annual Culture Department Conference, the song began days before I left. It's not easy to write an FNCC experience because FNCC is not so much about doing as it is about being. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to capture my most recent experience of being there.

From the moment I boarded the plane with a fellow member from Pittsburgh, the nonstop dialogue began. Animated discussions picked up in the van as we excitedly made our way to the Center. Being the only SGI Buddhist psychologist in Pittsburgh, I could not wait to join with other members of the healing arts division. Thursday proved to be a wonderful warm-up to a weekend of intense, enlightening and humorous dialogue with everyone I encountered. That night I fell asleep easily and quickly, probably due to a last-minute dip in the jacuzzi.

I have been deeply immersed in my work as a psychotherapist and in my study of Buddhist psychology. Since there are few psychologists in the SGI, I found it necessary to go outside of SGI publications to satisfy my enthusiasm for this subject. Little by little, I have been able to link the growing body of works written by Western Buddhist psychologists with SGI President Ikeda's guidance and Nichiren Daishonin's *Major Writings*. Much of my time at FNCC was filled with wonderful discussions on this subject. I was having a great time!

It was during Culture Department Advisor Masao Yokota's lecture that doubt began to creep in. Mr. Yokota, as always, was lucid, concise and uncomplicated. Buddhism is about friendship. It's about how we treat one another as human beings. He said we don't create friendships with other people for any other reason than that this is the best way to live as human beings. Examples



from his personal experiences with President Ikeda illuminated how we can live as kind,

thoughtful human beings. I was moved to stand up and ask a question. I told Mr. Yokota how much I appreciated him sharing his personal experiences with President Ikeda since I do not have that kind of relationship with him. I told him of my passion for Buddhist psychology and my frustration in not finding the resources that I need in the SGI or in President Ikeda's writings. I said that I realized President Ikeda is not a psychologist, and perhaps I was being unrealistic in my expectations. I wondered if it might

be part of my mission to give expression to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the realm of psychology. I inexplicably found myself expressing my lack of confidence. Mr. Yokota's response was heartfelt and compassionate. I honestly don't remember everything he said, so deep were the emotions I was experiencing at that moment, except this. He said, "President Ikeda is not a psychologist, but he is such a great human being there is so much we can learn from him."

Later in the hallway, I thanked Mr. Yokota again, and he warmly smiled at me and said: "Please be confident. You are a pioneer!"

The organizers of the conference had told us the first night that they hoped every single person would get exactly what he or she needed. My encounter with Mr. Yokota gave me exactly

what I needed. I felt refreshed and encouraged and ready to return to my work with a renewed determination and new appreciation of President Ikeda.

On the plane home, I was reading Richard Hayes' book, *Land of No Buddha*, a collection of essays on Buddhism in the West. Richard Hayes is a professor of Buddhist Studies at McGill University in Canada. In the spirit of the weekend, I chose to read his essay "What is a friend?"

I was stunned when I came across this paragraph: "Buddhism has in common with some of the ancient Greek and Hellenistic moral philosophies that it bases the discussion of proper human conduct entirely within the domain of what we can observe in this world about the effects of our conduct on the beings around us. While acknowledging that human be-

ings do perform actions in the hope of gaining some kind of future rewards beyond the present life, the Buddha emphasized that good actions performed in the hope of gaining a better birth in some future life were worth only a fraction of good works performed out of motivation of simple *metta*, (friendship), that is friendship or goodwill towards other beings. The Buddha said, "Monks, whatsoever grounds there be for good works undertaken with a view to rebirth, all of them are not worth one sixteenth part of that goodwill (*metta*) which is the heart's release; goodwill alone, which is the heart's release, shines and burns and flashes forth in surpassing them all."

Indeed, spending four days at FNCC with so many wonderful friends, I found my heart's release! ☐

How To Be an Everyday Buddha

PERSPECTIVE

By MIKKI ROYCE
SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

In order to be an everyday Buddha, it's not important to be able to maintain a lotus position for long periods of time. Nor do you have to shave your hair off and wear strange clothing. But it is important to recognize that each and every one of us is a Buddha, depending on our life-condition — a simple statement that you've probably heard before. How many of us actually believe it?

In the movie *The Empire Strikes Back*, the character Luke Skywalker meets Yoda, a wise Jedi. Yoda teaches him that a Jedi's strength flows from a power within known as "the Force." Luke watches in amazement as Yoda demonstrates the power of the Force to retrieve Luke's spaceship from the bottom of a muddy swamp. There it

sits, wet and dripping with gooey things, but the spaceship is out of the muck and Luke says, "I don't believe it!"

Yoda responds, "That is why you fail."

The difference between success and failure in being an everyday Buddha rests on whether or not you believe you are a Buddha.

Of course, when I hear things like this I've said, "That's easy for you to say, but I don't see it in myself." OK, so let's talk about something you do see in yourself — the Ten Worlds and mutual possession. We all know what the Ten Worlds are. Everyone experiences Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Tranquillity, Rapture, Learning, Bodhisattva. And when it happens, we're certain of it, we can feel it. There is no question of whether we believe in those nine worlds or not because we are experiencing them.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo — every time we chant — we are experiencing Buddhahood.

The tenth world is Buddha, and I am (and so are you) the Buddha as well.

Let's look at what the word *Buddha* means. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a Buddha is an awakened human

being with all their strengths and flaws. This means that an ordinary person — warts and all — can perceive the truth. A Buddha is not a god or supernatural being who can perform magic, or some incredibly calm being who rises up above the everyday world, blissfully unaware and unconcerned with reality. A real Buddha is right down here in the trenches with everybody else, but they make the best decisions to create value for themselves and for everyone around them.

Secondly, we all have that "diamond life-condition" that we've heard about. It's inside everyone's life, equally large. When you practice this Buddhism, you are constantly uncovering more of it. Even Nichiren Daishonin had to awaken to his Buddhahood. At first he referred to himself as "a votary of the Lotus Sutra," until he realized that he was the Buddha. At that point he was enlightened. The same goes for us.

We aren't practicing to become a Buddha. We already are. We are practicing this Buddhism to uncover our own Buddha nature.

And then there is the age-old question of "What about karma?" Well, we may prove that we are Buddhas through our karma. How can we do

that? Our karma, or some of the previous causes we have made that have created our present circumstances, are the very tools that will help us achieve our enlightenment. What a concept! Awakened to our Buddha nature, we take every experience in life and make a positive breakthrough without creating other negatives. With this Buddhahood, this diamond life-condition, we can be either self-defeating or victorious.

In his letters, the Daishonin said, "One who perceives the truth is a Buddha, one who doesn't is a common mortal."

Merely thinking is mortal. Feeling and knowing with our whole lives is Buddha!

Seeing the beauty of my existence is Buddhahood. Believing that we are the Buddha will allow our inner beauty to flow, then we can achieve unbelievable things.

As Yoda would say: "My ally is the Force. Life creates it, makes it grow. Its energy surrounds us and binds us. Luminous beings are we. You must feel the Force between you and me, the tree, the rock — everywhere."

We must honor our lives. When we truly honor our lives, everything will honor us and there is no greater honor than proclaiming Buddhahood. And may the Force be with you. ☐



EXPERIENCE — LARRY MASLAND, CONCORD, MASS.

Conserving Energy on the Job

Larry Masland manifests his childhood dream of improving the quality of the environment.

As a sixth grader on a weeklong field trip at a camp in New Hampshire, along with a group of classmates, I watched our instructor dig a hole in a pine forest. When he finished, he showed us layer by layer how the pine needles decomposed and returned to the soil to become nourishment for the trees. This ecological revelation that occurred 36 years ago subtly influenced my educational and career decisions.

Almost 20 years passed, and my boyhood ideals about contributing to environmental quality became buried in self-doubts about my ability to influence change. My friend Rachelle encouraged me to use chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo to find a job. My doubts about getting an environmental job were great, but I took her advice and chanted to be an editor. I succeeded. I became a free-lance editor, working as an etymologist for the second edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*.

I loved the work. I remember riding in a car with a fellow SGI member and telling her about my marvelous experience and how happy I was. When I finished and awaited the praise and encouragement that I typically heard after describing this unparalleled benefit, she asked, "What do you really want to do?"

After insisting, rather unconvincingly, that being an editor was my destiny, I mumbled something about environmental work.

With this thought in mind as I chanted, a year and a half later I confidently decided not to renew my contract as an editor and dedicated 100 percent of my time to finding a job in which I could work to improve the quality of the environment. At the time I also held two environmental jobs, one research-oriented and the other, the Energy Conservation Service, people-oriented.

As an Energy Conservation Service auditor, I visited people in their homes and encouraged them to use energy efficiently. After a while I chose to do the Energy Conservation Service job full time because meeting and encouraging people one-to-one, for me, was similar to

telling people about Buddhism.

In fact, I remember SGI President Ikeda has said that whenever we meet a person, we must treat it as our only opportunity to teach them about Buddhism through our actions. Having also read that faith equals daily life, I was all the more determined to do my best with each customer.

Taking this approach to my work, I began to get a lot of recognition in the form of letters from my customers to the sponsoring utility companies. I was honored as "auditor of the month" and two customers even arranged blind dates for me! — an unheard-of experience among my fellow auditors.

I eventually became a technical director and oversaw training and quality control of auditors for a large organization. Shortly before my first daughter was born, this organization lost its major contract, and I was told that I would be laid off. My Buddhist practice had so filled me with confidence that I had no doubt about finding an even better job.

Before leaving, I had accepted a position at a small utility company, where I did energy efficiency work not only for residential customers but also commercial and industrial customers. I had expanded my world of environmental work through energy efficiency.

My relationship with the person who had hired me deteriorated through the years. A few years later the company merged, and my boss was transferred to the corporate headquarters in New Hampshire. I stayed at the local distribution company in Massachusetts, developed a wonderful relationship with my new boss and became an invaluable employee throughout the company.

Then, as fate would have it, my former boss met with me and told me my job would be under him again and if I wanted to keep it, I would have to move to New Hampshire. I commuted over 130 miles a day to a job where my boss hated me and wanted to get me fired.

Again I remembered a lesson from my Buddhist study. If a person is causing us to suffer, we can chant for that person's happiness in order to change the relationship. I began to chant for my boss'



Larry Masland and his wife, Pamela, with Fiona, 9, and Anna, 6, vacationing on School House Pond at Sachem Lodge in Rhode Island.

happiness and a new job.

With my long commute and child-care responsibilities, I was having a difficult time working eight hours a day. My boss gave me an ultimatum to tell him how I was going to fulfill this obligation. As I chanted for his happiness and the upcoming meeting with him, I realized that, among other things, I had to discuss our relationship.

At our meeting, which initially didn't go well, he spoke for almost 10 minutes during which time I looked at him with the compassion that chanting for his happiness had given me. After he calmed down, he told me that I should forget about everything that had happened in the meeting.

The company hired a new chief executive officer who initiated a program that I could only call corporate Buddhism. He required management to give up their command-and-control attitude and adopt an approach to their employees that would allow them to blossom in their jobs and contribute positively to the company. It reminded me of how in Buddhism we talk about everyone having a Buddha nature.

I received a significant raise with a potential for even more money. My now former boss and I were at the same level in the organization, and I was working directly for the president on a number of important strategic initiatives. I had essentially stopped looking for another job.

During this time, Massachusetts passed a law that restructured the electric industry. One section of the law required that utilities invest more money in energy efficiency—over \$100 million dollars a year for five years! I noticed in another section that a state agency, the Division of Energy Resources, had oversight and coordination authority for this money. I applied in late August and was offered the job, but the money was less than I was making. Six weeks later they offered me more than I was making at my current job. I took it.

I am now the program director for the Energy Conservation Service. I oversee the same program under which I did in-home surveys 15 years earlier. I also help draft the regulations and guidelines that will define our agency's role in providing oversight and coordination for energy efficiency. As the program director, I am responsible for redesigning the program so that it is more energy efficient. I work with more than 40 individuals representing different special interests, other state agencies and the legislature.

Since it provides invaluable guidance, I will reread President Ikeda's speech on soft power which he gave at the Kennedy School (November 1991 *Seikyo Times*), as I work with others to create a program that will be a model for promoting residential energy efficiency and improve the quality of the environment. WT

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THIS BEAUTIFUL EARTH: PHOTO ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

‘The Light and Splendor of Florence’

Florence, a city of flowers, shined in sunlight. The panorama from Michelangelo Square that day was like a famous painting, transcending time. The city itself is a living museum of art. Stone walls and reddish-brown roofs stand before beautiful rounded hills. Depending on the angle of sunlight, the town displays a subtle range of hues, from golden to lavender. It looks no different today than it did some 500 years ago, at the height of the Renaissance.

As you walk through the streets of Florence, you almost expect to see, stepping from the shadows, Dante, the divine poet; Leonardo da Vinci, the multi-skilled genius; or Michelangelo, the master artist.

The Renaissance was Europe's youthful period. It embodied all the splendor and sadness of youth. And the center of this Renaissance was Florence—city of youth.

Referring to Italy, Goethe, writer from the north, intoned with admiration, “Knowst thou the land of flowering lemon trees? / In leafage dark the golden orange glows.” Geniuses, both famed and unknown, competed with

one another in this sun-bathed, free city. And in this city, whose coat of arms is the proud lily, blossomed flower gardens of artistic beauty.

I visited Michelangelo Square in May, 1994. It was the day after I had arrived in Italy, the country of light, from Germany, the land of Goethe, and had come to visit this green hill of which I held such fond memories. It was my third visit to the spot, the first being in 1981 and the second, in 1992.

In 1981, there had been only a handful of SGI-youth division members in Italy, but now their ranks had multiplied by some fifty times. Their brilliant smiles, like blossoms of varying colors and shapes, shone with unique individuality. Youthful Italy! I was happy to witness their momentum in creating a second Renaissance, aimed at bringing about a springtime for humankind.

Renaissance means rebirth. It means a blossoming of life's innate dynamism that insures that “winter will always turn to spring.” Before Italy's springtime, there was a succession of war and conflict, and the economy and government faced one crisis after another. Millions of people died from the plague.

Hopeless visions of doom prevailed.

But amid the darkness, people began to search the ancient texts for a glimmer of light, asking, “For what purpose am I living?” It was their inquiry into how to live that led to a revival of art and literature.

At last, the people became joyfully aware that each human being constituted a miniature cosmos. The universe was itself an untiring creator; human beings, in like manner, were destined to expand their capacity without limit. There was nothing they could not accomplish if they wanted to. It was from this awakening that spring began to visit again and again.

Sandro Botticelli's famous painting “Primavera” (The Allegory of Spring) depicts the Roman goddess Flora, deity of flowering plants and symbol of Florence, wearing a crown of flowers and a floral wreath around her neck. Lovely flowers adorn her entire body. And the green surroundings where the goddess stands is abundant with flowers.

Roses, strawberries, daisies, pink violets, forget-me-nots, bluebottle-sanemones, hyacinths, dandelions.... It is said that the painting depicts some

five-hundred varieties of flowers that bloom in the fields around Florence.

“We shall each let our full potential blossom!”

The Renaissance man was not an aloof artist but an engaged artisan. He was always ready to roll up his sleeves and get to work. The city of Florence pulsed with the energy expressed in the spirit, “We'll do whatever it takes!” And from the muddy waters of difficult struggle, flowers bloomed.

If you approach the edge of Michelangelo Square you look down upon the Arno River. Its emerald waters flow calmly, reflecting the eternal sky.

Art lives long. Power is short-lived. The complex intrigue and cunning schemes of the past have been washed away by the river of time, and only culture, into which the people have put their heart and soul, remains, unaging and undying. A youth into which one has poured one's heart and soul never withers. Florence is a city of such immortal youth.

Five in a series

BECOMING A BUDDHIST

A Perspective on President Ikeda's First Soka Gakkai Meeting

by Shan Serafin, SGI-USA Vice High School Division Leader

Tuesday of this week marks a significant day: the 52nd anniversary of SGI President Ikeda becoming a practitioner of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. As do many members, he has a remarkable story about joining the Soka Gakkai.

1947 — at age 19, Daisaku Ikeda was very well read. Living in post-war Japan amid streets strewn with rubble, he struggled hard to make out a living. Difficult financial times were compounded by the fact that he suffered from a dry cough (tuberculosis — it turned out), so it was an auspicious moment indeed when two of his grade-school classmates came knocking on his door to invite him to a Buddhist meeting.

How did the young Ikeda respond to the idea of a new philosophy? His interest was piqued! Since he was already searching and researching the essence of life (his bookshelf was packed with heavy literature — Nietzsche, Kunikida, Byron, Bergson and more), a lecture by Josei Toda seemed a perfect investigation of philosophy.

The night of the meeting, young Daisaku's classmates were ready to escort him to the meeting, but

he, plagued with bad health, was grappling with a high fever. He told the members he would wait for his two other friends to come, but in truth he didn't really want to attend the meeting.

His friends finally did show up and, ultimately, they all ended up going.

How fateful!

Daisaku Ikeda's first moment in a Buddhist meeting was to hear Josei Toda in mid-lecture. Everyone in the meeting was riveted to Toda's words, including young Ikeda, who sat down and immediately felt a connection with him. In fact, in writing about this moment, President Ikeda recalls that he thought Toda was paying him special attention — eye contact! — to which the young Ikeda boyishly averted his glance.

Toda spoke to Ikeda in very familiar terms, making him feel comfortable and welcome. It was as if they had a relationship that went far back in time.

Ikeda spoke up and asked several questions: What is a correct way of life? What is a true patriot? What is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?

To each question, Toda offered a succinct, profound reply. The logic and power of his words was astounding. Young Ikeda knew he had found a special philosophy and a great man to teach it. His conviction was so intense that he spontaneously announced his resolution, conceiving the following poem:

*Traveler,
From whence do you come?
Where do you go?
The moon has set,
But the sun has not yet risen.
In the chaos of darkness before the dawn
Seeking the light,
I advance
To dispel the dark clouds from my mind
To find a great tree unbowed by the tempest
I emerge from the earth.*

With such dauntless determination, it is little surprise that young Daisaku received his Gohonzon just 10 days later and began his practice of Buddhism. ♪

OUR TIME IS NOW

The Theme of Youth

For many of us, the first time we see tangible proof that our practice is valid stands as a terrific experience, a precious memory, which won't soon be forgotten. Even "fortune babies" (those born to parents who practice) can identify some specific moment in their youth when they made a major advancement in their faith, some one episode of tangible proof or deep struggle.

Examining the background of President Ikeda's first meeting offers many insights. In particular, his history beautifully illustrates the idea of timeliness. Young Ikeda was 19, smart, bold, sick and struggling.

He was a typical youth, daydreaming and discussing idealistic notions about society, yet gradually rising above the self-righteousness prevalent among peers. Until meeting Toda, young Ikeda knew he hadn't yet found a satisfying basic philosophy or actually *any* philosophy for conducting daily life.

Many of us are much like the 19-year-old Ikeda was. We are desperately seeking answers to funda-

mental questions: What is life? Why do we die? How should we live? How do we stop war and violence?

Such questioning becomes very powerful if coupled with action. Consider what President Ikeda states in his latest peace proposal:



President Ikeda at his first meeting with President Toda.

"We may talk of a third millennium, but the mere change in calendar dates will not bring about a sudden change in the nature of the age. Only human will and action can create history and open up new horizons" (May *Living Buddhism*).

Understanding that both ambition *and* action

are needed, we see that now is an amazing time to be practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, which holds both prayer and action as essential.

Imagine if today's teenagers (reminiscing from, let's say, the year 2050) could look back on this time and say, "1999 is the year I stood up!" Clearly, this would be a major component to a successful turn of the century. There are four months left till next year — a big chunk of time available to unleash that extra effort and gather momentum for the next millennium. If we strive, then, as President Ikeda says for those who work hard as true leaders for world peace: "Cause and effect is absolute. You will receive great benefit in this lifetime and throughout all future lifetimes, lasting generation after generation" (July 14 *Seikyo Shimbun*).

Read More About It!

- Get a copy of *The Human Revolution* — Retelling of the above scenes were based on volume 2, number 4, of *The Human Revolution*.
- Around the nation, read the reactions of other youth members as they discuss impressions of President Ikeda's anniversary on page B. ♪

Impressions of President Ikeda's 52nd Anniversary of Practice

WHAT AUGUST 24 MEANS TO ME

Courtesy of Seikyo Press

TINA MAY, PHILADELPHIA
Mid-Atlantic Zone Youth Leader



I love reading about President Ikeda's first encounter with Buddhism — his first meeting on Aug. 14, 1947, and his conversion 10 days later. At the time, due to his poor health, he reflected on the possibilities of being physically capable of giving his whole being to a religious and social revolution.

Now 52 years later, we can see the tremendous power of Buddhism based on President Ikeda's life. He is leading the worldwide kosen-rufu movement, which is now in 128 countries, introducing the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin to all kinds of people.

Because of his efforts, I was able to begin my practice at the age of 20 while studying in Germany. I was at that time emotionally very dependent on my family and friends and had no specific goals. I can look back on my view of life and the sense of hopelessness and pessimism I had about my future in this crazy world. Over the years, because of President Ikeda's example, I have studied and tried to live up to his guidance. I have achieved an inner revolution I could not have otherwise done. I am very hopeful about life and very committed to helping other people gain hope about their individual futures. I feel I owe him a tremendous debt of gratitude.

Thank you, Sensei and Happy Buddhist Birthday! ♪

MATTHEW ANTON, NEW YORK
Northeastern Zone Youth Leader



When I think of Aug. 24, I am always reminded of President Ikeda's first discussion. Wouldn't it have been exciting to be there in that packed room with President Toda on that hot and humid summer night? I wonder what the other people in the room were thinking as this honest and sincere young man spontaneously recited a poem. Some probably thought he was a little strange!

At the time of their first meeting, young Daisaku was 19 years old and President Toda was 48. Mystically, Toda had been 19 and President Makiguchi had been 48 when they met for the first time — also on an August night.

Reflecting on the significance of President Ikeda's joining the Soka Gakkai, I am reminded of

the awesome power of *shakubuku*. Two young friends brought the teenage Daisaku to a discussion meeting. They had the courage to invite him — and because of their effort, he was able to take his first step in faith. How many future leaders are also waiting to be told about the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai organization?

We don't need to be experts in Buddhism. All we need is the courage to invite our friends to activities — and then help them join and develop in faith. Who knows? The friend you invite today could be a future president of the SGI. ♪

MIMI KUBIAK, DALLAS
Texas/Oklahoma Region YWD Leader



I sometimes wonder what my life would be like if President Ikeda hadn't joined the Soka Gakkai. I ask myself: 'Would I be practicing now? Would I have the opportunity to transform myself into a better person?' I look at the changes that have occurred in my life, through my chanting Nam-myho-rence-kyo and participation in SGI activities, and I cannot imagine any other way of developing into a better person.

Through his example and guidance, I have been able to chant for strength, courage, wisdom and compassion. Of course, I haven't fully developed all of these qualities, but I now know that these qualities will continue to mature throughout my life. Through the SGI, I have learned to appreciate everything as an opportunity for me to do more and grow.

If I were asked to single out one quality that President Ikeda possesses that has touched me the most, it would be the quality of acceptance. He has reached out to so many people — Rosa Parks, Linus Pauling, Nelson Mandela, Fidel Castro — just to name a few. He has educated me by recounting the problems they faced and encouraged me by discussing their triumphs. I now understand that I must accept people for who they are and that I can learn something from everyone. I appreciate all the lessons that I have learned from President Ikeda every day through his example and guidance. ♪

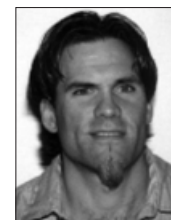


President and Mrs. Ikeda at the conferral of an honorary doctorate from Argentina's Flores University, Jan. 15 at Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial hall

DAVID EISENBERG, SAN FRANCISCO
Northwestern Zone Youth Leader

Wow! President Ikeda joined the Soka Gakkai 52 years ago! At the age of 19, he was able to discern the greatness of Josei Toda and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Since that time, he has dedicated almost an entire lifetime to the people, selflessly pouring his entire being into each person he meets. Tirelessly and without hesitation, he has left for us clear and concise explanations of Buddhism, a great philosophy that can bring peace and true happiness to everyone.

Aug. 24 is also Men's Division Day. What will I do when I join the men's division? Will I be a role model for the younger generation? Will I be able to offer others encouragement as they struggle through



their youth, infusing them with hope and courage? This, I believe, is my future responsibility. President Ikeda and countless others are, by their example, showing me how. And if I can show the same kind of actual proof as my seniors in faith, then I will be able to continue in the rich tradition of the Soka Gakkai.

As I reflect on the depth of President Ikeda's 52 years of practice to the Gohonzon, I'm filled with determination about my own life. I must make the most of this precious lifetime, putting my whole being into every action I take and never regretting a single moment of this great opportunity I have to create change in society.

My mentor, President Ikeda, has taught me how to do this. He has given me the encouragement and nourishment I need to change the seemingly impossible into reality. Now the rest is up to me. Only I can put forth the effort required; only I can chant daimoku; only I can do my human revolution. ♪

YOUTH *Study* SEPTEMBER

"GENERAL STONE TIGER"

The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, pp. 225–27

Background and Overview of "Letter to Niike"

by David Tempest, Los Angeles

"Letter to Niike" was written by Nichiren Daishonin in February 1280 while he was living at Mount Minobu. He retired to the distant and secluded Mount Minobu in order to spend his last years transmitting his most profound teachings and raising disciples who could propagate Buddhism after his passing. He was 59 years old at the time, and the letter was written only four months after he inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon and two years before his death.

This is a very profound writing, but it was written as a personal letter addressed to Niike Saemon-no-jo, who was not a priest (as many might think), but a samurai. Nichiren Daishonin transmitted his most significant teachings to anyone who sincerely sought to practice Buddhism, regardless of their status or title. Niike was so called because he lived in an area of the same name.

"Letter to Niike" is almost a road map as to how to practice Buddhism correctly, and contains several well-known passages, as well as seven key points of instruction for our faith. The points are:

- Being vigilant not to commit any of the 14 slanders. Ultimately, though, what is important is to act in accord with the spirit of the Lotus Sutra rather than simply the words.
- The correct spirit of making offerings is out of gratitude for the immense benefits we receive from being able to practice Buddhism.
- The importance of continuing in our practice and not giving up halfway. This is illustrated by the famous passage "...the journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop on the twelfth, how can you admire the moon over the capital?"
- With his remarkable insight, the Daishonin uses the story of the Kankucho bird to describe human nature and teach us not to be swayed by good circumstances, fame or fortune. It is important to develop our fortune, even when times are good, so that we have nothing to fear or regret later.
- Warning about priests who appear saintly but who slander the Law. In Buddhism, it is important to seek substance, and not be deceived by someone's title or appearance. Regardless of how great someone looks or saintly their appearance, we should be careful to see if what they preach will really lead to our happiness.
- Using the analogy of an egg developing into a bird, the Daishonin explains that it is completely natural for us to become a Buddha. The purpose of the Lotus Sutra is to nurture the potential Buddhahood within our lives (the egg) into the Buddha nature, which expresses itself in our lives and actions.
- The Daishonin admonishes us to resolve our doubts so that they do not hinder our faith.

Standing Firm in our Journey of Faith

by John Plummer, New York

In the United States, we are surrounded by constant displays of both wealth and fame. Some are really glamorous, but some are totally outrageous. Magazines, TV shows and the Internet all tout the latest, richest, hippest, most beautiful, most popular megastar. There is a new multi-million dollar celebrity to watch every minute. The silent question all these images ask is: "Wouldn't you like to be as rich/famous/happy as I am?"

If you are reading this article, you probably practice the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, and are a member of the SGI-USA. Or you're at least interested in learning more about this Buddhism. In any case, you are undoubtedly human, and so are not immune to the "winds of fame and fortune [which] blow violently" (MW, vol. 1, p. 255). Fortunately, the Daishonin wrote about these winds in a letter titled "Letter to Niike."

This letter was written to the Daishonin's disciple, the samurai Niike, in order to convince him of the joy of practicing Buddhism and of the need to continue in his journey of faith. But his warnings apply to us as well. Specifically, he says that fame and fortune are like winds and, when such winds blow, "the lamp of Buddhist practice is easily extinguished." Which is to say human beings are naturally swayed from their noble ideals by money or fame, and even Buddhists can be easily distracted from developing their mind of faith.

But why is faith necessary? Many of us practice Buddhism in order to establish happiness in our lives and fulfill our desires, so if our desires are fulfilled, isn't that the point of our Buddhist practice? In this letter the Daishonin reminds Niike that the treasures we gain from our practice are fundamentally about improving our character and our state of life. Fame, fortune, status — none of these things guarantees happiness. In fact: "Once one falls into such an evil state, even a throne or the title of general means nothing. He is no different from a monkey on a string, tormented by the guards of hell. What use are his fame and fortune then?"

Buddhism is not separate from life; it is life itself. Becoming successful in all aspects of our lives — in our families, in our careers, in our interactions with others — all of this is part of our Buddhist practice. Based on the principle of cause and effect, as we struggle hard in our practice and each day move closer to our Buddhahood, it is natural that we will succeed in the world. But such success follows our growth as people. Developing ourselves is the point of our faith — success follows from that. However, putting worldly success first is like putting the cart before the horse, and we can, without realizing it, for-

get the point of Buddhist practice — our ultimate growth as human beings.

So, how do we stand firm against the winds that threaten our growth? The Daishonin tells us, "Strive ever harder in faith and never give in to negligence. Everyone appears to believe sincerely when he first embraces the Lotus Sutra, but as time passes, he tends to become less devout..." Fame and fortune are passing. The universe is eternal. Our Buddha nature, which is made of the same stuff as the cosmos, is likewise everlasting.

The point is that we must be careful not to abandon that practice as our status in the world grows. In this way, it follows that the more success we have, the more earthly desires we are likely to face. But we can use these obstacles as opportunities to strengthen our faith even more. In this case, our development in faith leads to success in our lives, and this success in turn fuels our development as people.

However, we know that when faced with difficulties, it can become a challenge to continue in one's Buddhist practice. Some days it may be easy to sit and chant to the Gohonzon and to find faith. Other days it might seem like an impossible task. The important thing is consistency. "Keep learning from [the Daishonin] the truth of Buddhism and continue your journey of faith."

In other words, continue to study, to chant and to take action. In a recent "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," President Ikeda noted: "If you're going to practice Buddhism anyway, you might as well enjoy it rather than complain about it! When you're faced with a challenge, do you sigh deeply and say, 'Oh no, not again?' Or do you confront it head-on, determined to use the situation to accumulate still more good fortune? This slight distinction in attitude makes a world of difference in the end" (June *Living Buddhism*).

In the same "Dialogue," Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito states: "No matter how wealthy one may be, material possessions themselves cannot enable one to grasp life's fundamental issues, like old age and death. That's why it's necessary to teach people about the Law" (*Ibid.*).

The writings of Nichiren Daishonin are living documents. They speak to us today with compassion and wisdom. Read them. Chant with them in your mind and heart. Live them with your life. Speak to others about your faith and your practice. Use hardship to develop your life and your faith. Worldly success — becoming famous, becoming wealthy, or even just gaining recognition for our accomplishments — all this is great, but developing our Buddha nature and contributing to the happiness of others is the greatest kind of success we can accomplish. Run the race of life to the absolute finish line, and you will be a true victor. ♪

SUGGESTIONS AND IDEAS FOR YOUTH STUDY MEETINGS

- 1) Find passages in this letter and share your thoughts on why they are meaningful.
- 2) Using the article "Standing Firm in Our Journey of Faith" as a basis for the meeting, ask people why they practice Buddhism.
- 3) Read the story of the Kankucho bird. Ask people what this story means to them. What Buddhist principles does it elucidate?
- 4) Discuss the various passages in this letter that warn us not to be deceived by appearances, and to seek a true teacher regardless of his or her superficial appearance. Use parts of this letter as examples. "... even if one embraces, reads, and praises the Lotus

Sutra, if he betrays its intent, he will be destroying not only Shakyamuni but all other Buddhas in the universe" (p. 253). And "No matter how learned a person may appear, if his ideas are warped you should not listen to him.... But if a person has the wisdom to know the spirit of the Lotus Sutra, no matter how lowly he may appear, worship him and serve him as though he were a living Buddha" (p. 257). Why does the Daishonin make this point so insistently? What lesson does this impart in our own practice? This might be a good way to discuss the distinction between the SGI and the temple, and to open a discussion about the entire temple issue.

Share Your Ideas ABOUT MAKING A DIFFERENCE

ALL junior high school, high school and student division members: It's your turn to make a difference! But how are you going to do it?

How Can I Make a Difference in Society?

Name _____
City and State _____
School Name _____
Age ____ Grade/Year _____

Please place
your photo
here.

"How Can I Make a Difference in Society?" album pages are now being collected from all junior high, high school and student division members across the United States. The pages will be compiled at the SGI-USA Headquarters into albums to be presented soon to SGI President Ikeda.

The hope is that through this project, all of you who participate can express your determination to make a difference in society.

Be as creative as you like. Your thoughts can be expressed through a poem, drawing, essay, etc. And the way you express your thoughts is totally up to you.

Please keep your expression to this one-page format for easier collection and binding purposes. There is also a place for a photo. Don't worry about having to take a new one - you can use one you already have.

Also, please feel free to make as many copies of this page as you need for the junior high, high school and student division members you know.

Please send the completed sheets by Sept. 15 to:

Valerie Thomas
SGI-USA Headquarters
606 Wilshire Blvd.
Santa Monica, CA 90401

Thank you! ♪