



**EXPERIENCE:**

Lisa Shuman and the Blue Sky Chorus sing at Disability Independence Day celebration.

page 7

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Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

SGI members from 55 countriesing 'March Toward the 21st Century' at the Saitama Youth Division Cultural General Meeting, held at Seibu Dome in Tokorozawa, Japan, Sept. 12.

## This Is the Buddhism of Youth

See page 4 for SGI President Ikeda's message to the SGI 25th Anniversary Youth Festival, held Sept. 12 in Saitama, Japan. The SGI president offers three suggestions to the 35,000 participants: 1) that they de-

velop into capable leaders active throughout the world in the 21st century; 2) that they fight evil and win; and 3) that the youth division grows to a membership of 8 million. President Ikeda says that "the Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism

of youth.... The Daishonin urges young people, since they brim with vitality, to use their power and passion to spread to other youth the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the supreme teaching of unlimited hope."

## New York Youth Make Inroads in Victory Over Violence

The impact of Victory Over Violence—the SGI-USA nationwide youth activity to address violence—has certainly been far-reaching. Equipped with the VOV information packet, video, pledge forms bookmarks and pins, more than 1,700 districts have sponsored unique meetings promoting topics of discussion about passive violence, statistics, personal experiences, gang violence, etc. One message is clear: The SGI-USA youth are determined to make a difference.

A metropolis of nearly 8 million people, New Yorkers are no stranger to violence. "In fact, New York City has one of the highest rates of releases of parolees," says Lois Litvin, the Youth

Peace Committee coordinator in New York. "There seems to be a culture of violence and tension that is cultivated here. Ironically, I heard New York is rated as one of the top 10 safest cities in the U.S. I think it's because people are so aware of the potential for violence. Because some violent incidents occurred that really hit home, the YPC of New York initiated the VOV information packet and video to try to address the issue."

To kick off last August's Victory Over Violence campaign, the New York youth division sponsored a preparatory meeting on Aug. 3, to demonstrate how to use the VOV information kit and video. Denise Royal, the former YPC coordinator gave a background on the VOV  
SEE INROADS, 3



Photo by PATRICK GALLAGHER

New York Youth Peace Committee members and guests celebrate the launching of the Victory Over Violence activity during their second annual retreat at the Rose Mountain Cottages in Upstate New York on Aug. 14.

# Some Good News About the Environment

## PERSPECTIVE

By FRANK R. HOTCHKISS  
SANTA BARBARA, CALIF.

• Robins will disappear completely, part of a massive biological wipeout. Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* 1962.

• Crop failures will result in mass starvation in the United States by the 1980s. Paul Ehrlich, *The Population Bomb* 1968.

• Petroleum reserves will be exhausted by the 1990s. The *Limits to Growth*, 1972.

• Thousands of species will become extinct during the 1980s. Norman Myers, *The Sinking Ark*, 1979.

• The worst is already here. Nature has ended. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature*, 1989.

These are dire predictions, and the cause for much despair among environmentalists and others. Fortunately, none of them are true. Robins abound, and there was no silent spring. Crop failures in the 1980s were ephemeral. Petroleum reserves are not exhausted, and may well be increasing with the discovery of new oil sources. Thousands of species didn't die in the 1980s. At most, a handful did, and these are even questionable. So what gives?

One answer is that for the first time, people are beginning to learn the contribution human activities make to their environment, and at first these sound frightening.

Consider that U.S. factories, power plants and vehicles

dump 19 million tons of sulfur dioxide per year into the atmosphere. Sulfur dioxide is believed to be the chief cause of "acid rain." Nineteen million tons sounds unbelievable and horrifying, until you realize the nature makes this atmospheric contribution piddling in comparison. For example, the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines emitted an estimated 30 million tons of sulfur dioxide in just a few hours. Ongoing natural processes such as ocean chemistry place some 100 million tons of sulfur dioxide in the atmosphere each year.

A second answer is that there is money in bleak predictions. The more acute a problem seems, the more money it will attract, whether from government-sponsored funds or contributions from private sources. It is difficult to raise funds with the observation that human activity may have some influence on acid rain, but much easier to do so with the promise that the forests will be bare in 10 years unless money is forthcoming to prevent it. Who wants to see denuded forests? Dire predictions are quoted in the media because they make arresting headlines. These in turn feed other dire predictions. Good news, particularly good environmental news, rarely makes page one. Thus when the *New York Times* printed a story "Air Found Cleaner in U.S. Cities" in 1992, it ran on page 24.

A third answer is that environmentalists represent the planet as a fixed and finite resource. At first glance this seems to make sense. However, it misses the more subtle point that in fact the planet, as all of nature, is constantly refreshing

and recharging itself—cleansing itself, if you will. The apocalyptic view of the world can't take this into account. It's as if people were standing on the beach watching the tide go out, screaming, "The ocean is disappearing!" But of course, it isn't. It's in flux.

This philosophical mindset is very destructive. It lends a fundamentally negative cast, as bad as the smog it hopes to dispel, over the lives of the people it reaches. It encourages hopelessness—for underdeveloped people and countries, and for developed countries as well. Hopeless people act very differently than hopeful people. They tend to act destructively, without concern for others. They also tend to act desperately and irrationally. Lack of hope for the future can even lead to war. So this is serious business.

Buddhism views this fundamental negativity as karmic, and something very much to be combated and defeated. Environmentalism only sees victory in limiting or even eliminating human production, consumption, development and progress. In that sense it is not worrisome, because no one will ultimately buy that. But in the meantime, it wrongly casts a very negative outlook on the real progress human beings have made in modern times. That negative outlook is going to make it difficult for our sons and daughters to think there is a bright future ahead for them—and I believe there is.

In closing, let's look at the keystone of environmental fears—global warming. Man's contribution to global warming is the real environmental chal-

lenge we face today, many people believe.

In fact, global warming and the "greenhouse effect" are quite natural. Without them the planet would be some 60 degrees F. colder than it is.

Water vapor accounts for 99 percent of natural global warming. The remaining one percent of the greenhouse effect comes from carbon dioxide and other gases, mostly produced naturally, and not by man. (Decay of vegetable matter, volcanoes and other natural processes add around 200 billion tons of carbon dioxide to the air annually. Human activity through power production, automobile use, and the burning of forests contributes about 7 billion tons.) This means that the natural contribution to greenhouse gases is 99.96 percent, and the human contribution to greenhouse gases is 0.04 percent. The human factor in global warming—if in fact the globe is warming—is tiny.

To quote George H. Taylor, state climatologist for Oregon and president of the American Association of State Climatologists: "It's true that human beings are producing more greenhouse gases now than before, and that greenhouse gases in the atmosphere are at higher levels than they have been for a millennia. But much of the debate over global warming is really beside the point, because the key assumption—that there is a scientific consensus on climate change—is false.

"In fact, many mainstream scientists say there is insufficient knowledge of the magnitude of natural climatic variations, especially solar radiation and ocean currents, to gauge how large the human impact is by comparison."

Finally, some good news.

Forest growth in the United States now exceeds forest harvesting, and has since the 1940s (*Resources for the Future*, Roger Sedjo). The states of Vermont, Connecticut and Massachusetts were 35 percent wooded 150 years ago. Today they are 59 percent wooded. Comparable figures for New Hampshire are 50 percent then and 86 percent today.

The worst-case estimate for logging harm to U.S. forests in the 1980s is 4–7 million acres "damaged." There are 728 million forested acres in America. That's 0.961 percent.

The percent of earth occupied by human beings is much

exaggerated in the national conscience, where fear of overpopulation—a very real challenge for the future—makes it sound like there will be no more open space in a few years. According to the U.S. Geological Survey, the total "built-up" space in the U.S. (cities, towns, roads, suburbs, homes, offices, airports and other man-made impositions on the land) is 2 percent. Europe is 8 percent.

Dire predictions are made on the basis of existing facts. Thus, in the late 19th century, horse proliferation was called an irreversible peril for 20th-century society.

Are there environmental problems today? Of course. What should be done about them? Whatever it is, we should act on facts and not on fears.

To quote the Heidelberg Appeal issued at the 1992 Earth Summit and signed by 2,600 credentialed scientists, including 72 Nobel winners, Linus Pauling and Elie Wiesel among them:

"We are worried (about) the emergence of an irrational ideology opposed to scientific and industrial progress.... We contend that a Natural State, idealized by movements with a tendency to look toward the past, does not exist and probably has not existed since man's first appearance in the biosphere.... The greatest evils that stalk our Earth are ignorance and oppression, not technology and industry." ■

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## VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE ACTIVITIES

## Montclair District, Fayetteville, N.C.

Our district family was trying to do more than just participate in the Victory Over Violence campaign. We were trying to focus on how to create a better society.

Our district leader, Larry Toliver invited Officer Sports, from the Hope Mills Police Department, to talk to us.

After watching the tape of Victory Over Violence, Officer Sports shared an experience from his youth. He then informed us how we can protect ourselves and others from violence.

Officer Sports encouraged

the young people to respect their parents and emphasized how important unity is between parents and children. Finally, a Q-and-A session was held.

Eiko Blevins, women's division vice district leader commented: "We have to raise our children to be strong enough to say no to people who try to lead them astray in life."

Also through practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism we must gain the wisdom to raise our children the right way.

Jessica Dolphins admitted she overcame her fear of policemen

through this discussion.

Young women's division member Niana said developing one's attitude will affect others around us, while young men's division member Jasper added that we should let more people know about our SGI organization through this Victory Over Violence campaign.

The members of Montclair District really learned a lot about victory over violence; it was a great chance to educate ourselves on how to help create a safer community.

—YONG SUK TOLIVER



Photo by MELVIN MARTEMUS

Members of Montclair District invite Officer Sports, from the Hope Mills Police Department, to their VOV meeting.

## Great Lakes Chapter, Buffalo, N.Y.

One subject. Four very different district discussion meetings.

Following the lead of SGI-USA's Youth Peace Committee, youth division members in New York's Great Lakes Chapter made Victory Over Violence the topic of their August discussion meetings. And just like peach, cherry, orange and damson blossoms, all four of the chapter's districts broached the subject of violence in distinct but equally meaningful ways.

In Lake Shore District, youth division members initiated a discussion about hurtful words and stereotypes, and the insidious scars these can leave on our

lives. Buffalo's Central Park District drew a violence tree to show how passive acts of violence, like name-calling and disrespect, can grow into physical violence.

"My mom used to talk about passive violence," said 13-year-old Jeffrey Ruiz from Central Park district. "She'd say 'Jeffrey, that's violent!' But it wasn't until the meeting that I learned the difference."

Jeffery and his parents attended the Victory Over Violence meeting in nearby Niagara Rainbow district too. There, young men's division members gave presentations on famous peacemakers Mahatma Gandhi

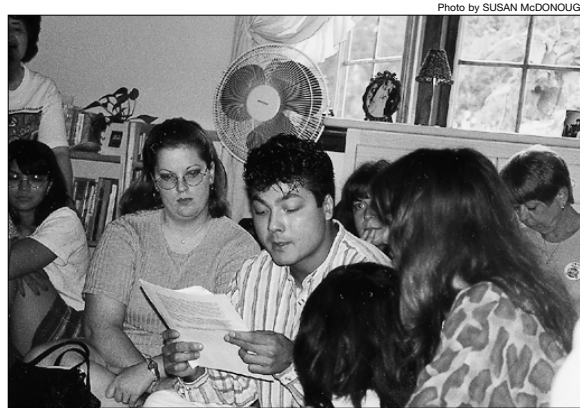


Photo by SUSAN McDONOUGH

Young men's division member Randy Kirker shares what he has learned about Mahatma Gandhi with fellow members in Niagara Rainbow District.

and Martin Luther King.

"The first thing I learned is that there's more than one Gandhi!" said young men's division member Randy Kirker.

Members in Great Lakes Chapter agreed the district meetings were just the beginning of their efforts to win over violence in their communities. But they were very successful first steps.

"We felt these meetings were important because they help parents and children alike to see that passive violence is the root of all violence," said Jeffrey's dad, Jim Ruiz.

—SUSAN McDONOUGH

## FROM INROADS, I

campaign, followed by encouragement. More than 100 youth leaders broke the ice by taking part in the Treasure Hunt Activity. "It was a fantastic opportunity to learn about what we had in common, as well as some of our differences, but most of all it was just plain fun!" said one participant. Overall this event was a real confidence booster and a perfect way to distribute the videos and information packets. Everyone got revved up to host their own meetings within their local SGI-USA districts.

According to Lois, the members have since reported the many creative ways that they've used the information kits and videos to promote dialogue, both in the SGI-USA and in the community. For instance, district leader Christina Mulligan from Newburg Renaissance District in Upstate New York reported that members set up an SGI booth in at a local fair in Newburg, where they shared in-



Photo by FRANK UFERI

Lois Litvin (far left) receives the 1999 Public Service Recognition Award for her outstanding contributions to the community from the U. S. Department of Labor on June 30 in New York City.

formation about the SGI and Victory Over Violence, answered questions and collected over 100 signed pledge forms.

"So many youth have been reporting to the YPC the many successes of the VOV meetings that have taken place throughout the five boroughs and Upstate," continues Lois. "They have been visiting areas in New York supporting meetings and in the community. One women's divi-

sion member, who is a public school teacher, was so encouraged by the video that she shared it with her principal. Together they're working on getting it approved by the local Board of Education in Queens to use it to promote a school campaign against violence. Similar things are happening in a Long Island school."

On a more personal note, Lois, who works as an industrial

hygienist for the United States Department of Labor—Occupational Safety Health Administration. Her supervisor acknowledged each employee's community activities. Over the past three years she regularly shared with her boss her excitement about her involvement as a YPC and SGI-USA member.

Lois gives lectures on workplace violence and other related issues, which was one of her main focuses in graduate school at Hunter College. Recently, she showed the Victory Over Violence packet and video to her boss and co-workers. It seemed to be a natural fit.

Her boss was so impressed that he sent a copy to the regional office administrators with the objective of incorporating it into the region's WIDER (Workforce Involvement Diversity Enhancement Recognition) Program, a program designed to unite management and workers in morale building and creating a more humanistic work environment. Additionally, the video

addresses and supports the initiatives of United States Secretary of Labor, Alexis Herman—particularly her goal to ban the use of child labor globally.

As a result of her efforts, Lois received the 1999 Public Service Recognition Award for her outstanding contributions to the community from the U. S. Department of Labor on June 30. "This award is a result of a joint effort of my Buddhist sponsor and fellow co-worker, Alba Quiñones—who also was commended. She always nurtured me and encouraged me to do more. My job is very challenging, but the training I received in the SGI has been so valuable. It's taught me that doing kosen-rufu means doing my best at work—it's not separate for me."

Currently, the New York Youth Peace Committee is working with the Junior High and High School Divisions to create an exhibit and symposium as a continuation of the Victory Over Violence activities.

—STEPHANIE CELANO

# It Is Your Time

*In his message to the youth culture festival participants in Saitama, Japan, SGI President Ikeda encourages all SGI youth that "it is time for you, my disciples, to join together as one, to take full responsibility for our movement and go on to achieve victory on the great stage of the 21st century."*

To my beloved youth division members, the world's foremost champions of justice and truth: My wholehearted congratulations on this momentous general meeting, a celebration of the advancement of kosen-rufu and the promotion of peace, culture and education!

My profound gratitude also to our fellow members from abroad attending this event.

And my deepest congratulations on the holding of the World Doctors Division General Meeting today.

I am certain that President Makiguchi and President Toda would be overjoyed at today's youth gathering.

I have received a full report on the phenomenal results of the propagation campaign conducted by the Saitama youth. You have achieved a magnificent victory! There is no doubt that the Buddhas and heavenly deities throughout the three existences and 10 directions are ecstatic, heartily applauding your efforts.

I am now at Soka University, greeting an important guest. From the new Central Tower of Soka University, I can see the gleaming white dome of the stadium in Tokorozawa in the distance, where you—35,000 youth division members—are gathered.

Today, I have deliberately chosen not to attend your meeting. Joining you are Soka Gakkai President Akiya, SGI General Director Wada, Soka Gakkai Doctors Division Leader Morita and Saitama Prefecture General Leader Hamano. Youth division leaders Mr. Tanigawa, Mr. Sato, Mr. Sakomoto, Mr. Takanabe, Ms. Terashima, Ms. Igeta and Mr. Yumitani are also there. I want you—the youth who will shoulder the 21st century—to confidently hold today's meeting on your own. Through your youthful energy and efforts, make it the crowning event of your activities this century.

To give you invaluable training, I chose not to attend today. I want you to understand this. United as disciples, please

make today's gathering one that will go down in the history of kosen-rufu.

The time has come for my disciples to take their place at center stage. It is time for you, my disciples, to join together as one, to take full responsibility for our movement and go on to achieve victory on the great stage of the 21st century.

**It is impossible for young people who practice this profound philosophy to be slowed down by any impasse.**

To commemorate today's meeting, I want to share with you some favorite quotes from my youth.

First, "Misfortune it is simply the fire that tests gold." These are words by the Russian author Tolstoy from his work *Walk in the Light*. The problems and sufferings you experience in life, my sensitive young friends, are all the trials that serve to temper and forge you into pure gold.

Buddhism puts us into an everlasting orbit of eternal happiness. As Nichiren Daishonin writes, "It is the power of the Buddhist Law that enables the deities of the sun and moon to make their rounds of the four continents [the entire world]" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 164). The Mystic Law is the great law underlying all things in the universe. There is no power greater than this. It is absolutely impossible for young people who pursue and practice this profound philosophy to be slowed down by any impasse.

Chuko K'ung-ming, one of the protagonists of the Chinese classic Romance of the Three Kingdoms, says, "Genuine friendship neither flowers simply because circumstances are favorable nor loses its leaves simply because circumstances are adverse; regardless of circumstances it is never diminished, growing only stronger through good times and bad."

With such sincerity and loyalty, I have developed circles of genuine friendship throughout the world. All endeavors to promote peace and culture

begin with—and must return to—the one ultimate humanistic philosophy that encourages interaction with our fellow human beings and that, through the power of dialogue, opens their hearts, linking them together in friendship.

I hope that you will live with an unwavering loyalty and devotion to your friends and comrades, like that which existed between Rossi and Bruno in Hall Caine's novel *The Eternal City*. You must never, under any circumstances, become a coward who backslides in faith or a traitor who betrays one's fellow members, ending up with a miserable, morally bankrupt existence.

**Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of youth.**

Today, Sept. 12, is the anniversary of the Tatsunokuchi



SGI President Ikeda greets representative leaders at a conference on Sept. 8, part of the SGI Youth Training Course.

Persecution [the unsuccessful attempt by the ruling authorities to execute the Daishonin in 1271]. No amount of oppression by the arrogant authorities or scheming on the part of evil priests could topple the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law. The Daishonin declares, "It is because the heavenly deities came to my aid that I triumphed even through the

Tatsunokuchi Persecution" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 843).

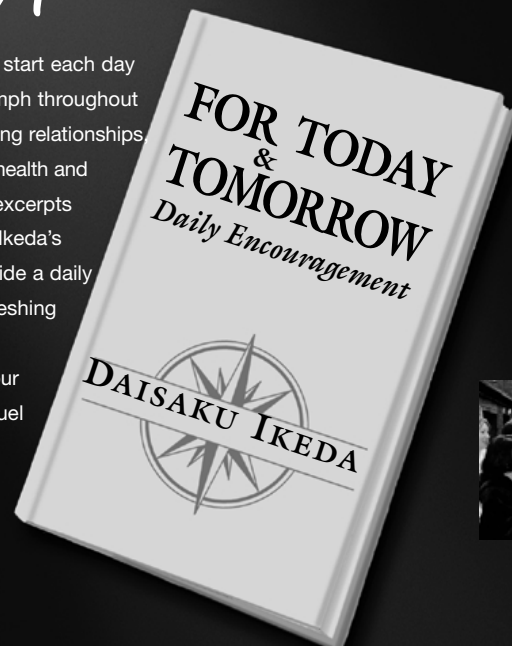
Similarly, the Bontens and Taishakus of the world [Buddhist gods who represent powerful protective forces in Buddhism] have united and worked together on our behalf, providing us with their benevolent support and protection. As a

SEE TIME, 5

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# Another Nichiren Shoshu Temple Secedes

On Sept. 9, another Nichiren Shoshu temple, Daien-ji in Kanagawa Prefecture (close to Tokyo), seceded from Nichiren Shoshu. This is the third temple to



leave Nichiren Shoshu this year. Reverend Bando Sato, Daien-ji's chief priest, said in a letter to Nikken that the revelation of the high priest's doubt in the Dai-Gohonzon (see the Sept. 10 *World Tribune*) led him to his decision. In Reverend

Sato's opinion, the high priest has denied the basis of Nichiren Shoshu's faith and hence is only masquerading as high priest.

Reverend Sato is a middle-level priest, tonsured some 30 years ago, who has always been very close to Nikken. His departure from Nichiren Shoshu was unexpected by the priesthood and a shock to the high priest. Also unexpected was that Reverend Sato left Nichiren Shoshu together with his three sons, all of them Nichiren Shoshu priests as well.

Reverend Sato concludes his letter to Nikken by saying: "Daien-ji was completed as the

10th of the 200 temples whose construction was initiated by Soka Gakkai Honorary President Ikeda. Daien-ji's construction was supported by the sincere donations of Gakkai members in the Yamato area of Kanagawa Prefecture. It was to serve their activities for kosen-rufu. And I believe that this temple should be returned to those members who made the donations for its construction, so that they can use it freely, for its original purpose. This is how I feel about this temple. Returning it to them is the right thing to do."

— TED MORINO

FROM TIME, 4

result, we of the SGI — an organization directly linked to the Daishonin and carrying out the Buddha's will and decree — have resolutely triumphed over the three powerful enemies of the Buddha.

I want to make three suggestions to you, my beloved youth.

First, I want you, the youth division members, to develop into capable leaders active in each area and realm of society in the era of dramatic change that will be the 21st century. President Toda always strongly urged the youth, "Strive tenaciously to become a person who excels at something!"

Second, as a certain philosopher says, "Champion justice and your strength will be dou-

bled." Ours is a struggle championing the highest justice and truth. It is essential, then, that you thoroughly fight evil and falsehood, and win without fail.

Buddhism is a struggle to be victorious. Buddhism is concerned with refuting the erroneous and revealing the true.

In the letter "On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings," the Daishonin states: "The practice of the Lotus Sutra is shakubuku, the refutation of the provisional doctrines." True to the letter of this golden saying [from T'ien-t'ai's Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra], the believers of all provisional teachings and sects will ultimately be defeated" (MW-1, 101). Should youth lose this spirit, they can no longer be called youth.

Third, I want to propose that, through your united efforts, you create a mounting tide of 8 million youth division members in your time. The Chinese character for eight also means to open. In Buddhism, there is also the eight-petaled lotus.

The Daishonin's Buddhism is the Buddhism of youth. The Daishonin writes to Nanjo Tokimitsu, who was filled with youthful vigor: "Because it is you, my young friend, I am telling you this" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1507). In other words, the Daishonin urges young people, since they brim with vitality, to use their power and passion to spread to other youth the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, the supreme teaching of unlimited hope.

FROM SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

## New Guidelines for the Nurses and Chefs Groups

*SGI President Ikeda dedicated the following guidelines to the Soka Gakkai Nurses Group on Aug. 25.*

- First, pursue an ideal.
- First, seek solidity.
- First, face reality.
- First, hold fast to your beliefs.
- First, maintain your high life-condition.
- First, pray.
- First, live with the spirit of Bodhisattva Medicine King.

*President Ikeda dedicated the following guidelines to the Soka Gakkai Chefs Group on Aug. 24.*

- Be a hero of health.
- Be a hero of wealth.
- Be a hero of prosperity.
- Be a hero of hope.
- Be a hero of cheerfulness.
- Be a hero of technique.
- Be a hero of solidarity.

### Uphold in your hearts the slogan 'Adamantly Fight Back!'

It is estimated that the population of Saitama will increase by a million in the next 25 years, making it the third largest prefecture in Japan by the year 2025.

The 21st century will definitely be the age of the Soka Gakkai. May our Saitama members take their place on that grand new stage!

Mighty Saitama, light a beacon to signal the dawn of kosen-rufu for the 21st century! Hold your torch high! With your strength and energy, Saitama, I'm counting on you to secure complete victory for the whole Kanto region! With your iron unity, become a driving force for all Tokyo! Saitama, as solid as steel, be forever an unconquerable pillar of the Soka Gakkai! This I call out to you with boundless trust and expectation.

Never forgive the base enemies of the Buddha, never! Be unremitting in your battle

against them! Fight through to the end against the scheming verbal violence that seeks to undermine the kosen-rufu movement, upholding in your hearts the slogan "Adamantly Fight Back!"

I am praying from the bottom of my heart that all of you who have gathered for this meeting — Bodhisattvas of the Earth endowed with a noble mission — will, without exception, enjoy the best of health, the utmost prosperity and wisdom, and lives adorned with peerless glory and triumph.

Long live the Saitama youth division, the foremost in the world!

Long live the SGI youth division around the globe!

*SGI President Ikeda's message to the Saitama Youth Division Cultural General Meeting, held in conjunction with the SGI 25th Anniversary Youth Festival and the World Doctors Division General Meeting, at the Seibu Dome in Tokorozawa, Japan, Sept. 12.*

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# the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

## 'EARLY SPRING'

VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 3, PARTS 15-16

*Shin'ichi Yamamoto tells a member who's had many struggles as a chef: 'We become people of genuine substance through experiencing hardships. They forge a will of iron, acquaint us with life's real joys and sorrows, and enable us to do our human revolution.'*

After the meeting, Shin'ichi Yamamoto and the other visiting leaders went to Eiji Kawasaki's apartment. It was on the ground floor of an old eight- or nine-story apartment building in the Paris V district, on Rue Lhomond. A small apartment, it was exceedingly modest for the home of a medical doctor.

When Shin'ichi used the restroom, he noticed a bed standing in the bathtub, resting upright against the wall. Kawasaki had no doubt put it there to make more room in the apartment, since so many members would be coming in and out to prepare for the day's inaugural meeting.

and your name will go down in history. When that happens, people will remember how you, a doctor and a great leader, once lived in a very modest apartment.

"When we sleep and when we die, all we require is the space of a single tatami mat. If your spiritual state is broad and expansive, a small house is just fine. Besides, a big house is hard to keep clean!" They both laughed.

Eventually, it was time for dinner. Koji Hashimoto, chef for the Japanese embassy in Norway, put all of his talents, not inconsiderable, into preparing the meal. He had specially requested the opportunity to cook dinner for Shin'ichi and



Illustration by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

was a ship and the skewer and paper its mast and sail. The arrangement celebrated a new departure for the Daishonin's Buddhism in Europe.

"It's wonderful," said Shin'ichi. "Let's enjoy the feast we've been prepared!"

He took up his chopsticks and began eating. "It's delicious," he told Hashimoto. "I feel like we're celebrating a second New Year this year. This is really quite something. Now I see why the ambassador takes you with him wherever he's posted. You must have trained long and hard to develop such skill—that's clear from the taste. Where did you learn your trade, Mr. Hashimoto?"

Mr. Hashimoto beamed with delight.

Hashimoto began to tell his story: "After graduating from middle school, I became an apprentice chef at a restaurant in the Ginza [an upmarket retail and entertainment district in central Tokyo] called Chojiro. The restaurant's owner and head chef was Yojiro Watase. When we first met, he told me that he'd make me a first-rate chef, but that I should be prepared to stick out a 10-year apprenticeship with him if I wanted that to happen.

"He was a real tough teacher. When I made a mistake, he

would hit me with one of the high wooden clogs we wore in the kitchen. He also said that if young people had money they would only waste it, so he only paid me what amounted to little more than an allowance each month.

"Most people who came there to train with him didn't last six months. I thought of running away in the night more than once. But somehow or other I held on, and after five years I received my chef's license. I was even able to get a license to prepare puffer fish at a very young age. [Puffer fish contains a virulent poison in its liver and ovaries. Unless prepared very carefully, it can be poisonous to eat, so chefs in Japan must be licensed to prepare it.]

"After working there 10 years, at the age of 25, I set up my own restaurant in Asakusa [downtown Tokyo]. I got the capital to do it from money my boss had set aside from my pay every month for 10 years. When I learned this, I was so grateful to him. He was strict, but he was also a kind, decent man. He was the one who first introduced me to faith in the Daishonin's teachings, too."

"It's true that it is important to undergo hardships in one's youth," Shin'ichi responded. "It becomes a lifelong treasure. Mr. Toda always used to say, 'Experiencing hardships in your youth.'

"He was very strict in my ed-

ucation and training, too. When his business was in trouble, we sometimes went for several months without receiving our pay. I spent an entire winter without an overcoat. Sometimes Mr. Toda would call me at 2:00 or 3:00 in the morning and tell me to come over right away.

"But the truly great mentors are deliberately strict in training their disciples, setting many tough hurdles for them. They do it for their disciples' sake. I understood that perfectly, and I was proud to serve Mr. Toda. I wrote in my diary at the time: 'Whatever difficulties may continue to beset me in the future, my greatest, supreme happiness will have been the honor of studying with this mentor.'

"My conclusion is that we become people of genuine substance through experiencing hardships. They forge a will of iron, acquaint us with life's real joys and sorrows, and enable us to do our human revolution. But unfortunately, I don't have the personality to be so strict with people. I end up feeling sorry for them and indulging them.

"It may also be that the times are changing. If you are too strict these days, no one will follow you."

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1963.



Illustration by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Shin'ichi said to Kawasaki, "I was surprised to see that bed in the bathtub!"

Kawasaki smiled ruefully and scratched his head. "Oh, you saw that?" he asked. "This apartment is so small, and it's always a mess..."

"No, it's a simple and very lovely apartment. It's perfect for a leader of the people. Someday, you will be an important leader of kosen-rufu in Europe,

the other leaders to commemorate the establishment of Europe General Chapter. Shin'ichi appreciated his sincerity.

There was a large, whole sea bream on the table, with small sea bream, shrimp and other seafood arranged around it. Hashimoto had stuck a skewer into the large bream, attached with a sheet of paper that read "The Propagation of Buddhism in Europe." The large bream

EXPERIENCE — LISA SHUMAN, SANTEE, CALIF.

# Moving People's Hearts With Our Voices

I have been a member of the SGI since November 1980. I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism almost 18 years ago, by a nurse who told me about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo when I was very sick in the hospital. She encouraged me to chant to improve my health condition. Everything about this practice sparked my interest so I began to chant to change many things in my life.

Throughout my years of practicing this Buddhism, I have experienced many incredible benefits. One of my most recent dreams came true when I was able to sing with the Blue Sky Chorus at an important event in the community. Three years ago, I joined the chorus which has been very enjoyable and beneficial. I am also involved with working for the rights of the disabled, which I took a personal interest in because I am disabled. I was born with a spinal cord injury that left me a paraplegic. My years of training in the SGI has taught me to continually challenge myself despite my disability.

Last year, when I was on the planning committee for an event called Disability Independence Day (DID), I made a determination to have our SGI Women's Division Chorus, The Blue Sky Chorus, sing at the following year's event. I felt that it would be extremely beneficial for people involved in the disability rights movement to be exposed to the SGI. The following words from Nichiren Daishonin encouraged me to accomplish this

dream: "All living beings who hear (Myoho-renge-kyo) are the living beings who gain benefit" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 415).

In a message to the chorus members on May 7, SGI President Ikeda stated: "The energetic singing voices of those with strong faith communicate to, move, and elicit a sympathetic cord within the depths of people's lives. Your voices function as a window of life to the universe. All great things begin with the sound of a voice reaching the ear. Only to the degree that your own heart is moved, will your singing touch the hearts of others. With all of your voices of joy and inspiration of faith, please create a spirit and rhythm of courage and advancement throughout the United States."

He has also said: "True art, true culture, strives to enrich the individual and encourage self-expression, while at the same time seeking to reach out, touch, communicate and bring people together. It promotes a spirit where bringing joy and happiness to others takes precedence over fame or wealth.... The SGI's movement to promote culture, reaching from the grass roots to the global level, is also like a bright, colorful garden of flowers spreading across the globe."

Shortly after I made this determination to have the Blue Sky Chorus sing at the Disability Independence Day event, I became ill with a serious kidney stone problem. I was in and out of the hospital for a month due to three



Lisa Shuman


large kidney stones hindering the function of my left kidney. During this struggle, I received encouragement from my seniors in faith. I did gongyo and chanted as much as I could. I was determined to maintain the spirit of the Blue Sky Chorus and the SGI and "win no matter what, to overcome this health problem." I had surgery to remove the kidney stones and quickly recovered.

Soon after my surgery, I went to chorus practice and thanked everyone for all of the loving support and encouragement I had received. I greatly appreciated all of the prayers that many of the chorus members had sent me.

At the beginning of this year, Blue Sky Chorus began singing at events in the San Diego Community. I renewed my determination for us to sing at the Disability Independence Day, never losing sight of my goal. I submitted a written request to the planning committee asking for

our chorus to sing at this year's event. The planning committee's initial response was that we were not "disabled enough," because I was the only one in the chorus with a visible disability. I understood their point because the whole emphasis of the DID event is to give people with disabilities the opportunity to perform. Nevertheless, I spoke to the planning committee again, and followed up with a written proposal including the background of the SGI, Blue Sky Chorus and our mission. I chanted for hours for the chorus to perform.

Finally, the DID committee accepted our proposal and said they were looking forward to the chorus being part of the program. This was a major victory. I knew I still had challenges ahead to accomplish my dream. I started chanting to really touch everyone's heart with our voices.

On the day of the Disability Independence Day Celebration, our chorus performance was a smashing success! Everyone in the audience seemed to love the music and performance. Later, I received wonderful feedback regarding our performance. Several people wanted to know more about the SGI. Others wanted to know if it would be possible to join our chorus. I am so happy and proud to be part of Blue Sky Chorus. Thank you, Blue Sky Chorus, for the support and compassion I have received to enable me to realize this dream. 

## Blue Skies at Disability Independence Day

San Diego's Blue Sky Women's Chorus continued a year of reaching out to the community with a performance at the Disability Independence Day celebration held on July 24, in Balboa Park. Disability Independence Day is a festival organized by community members to celebrate the 9th anniversary of the passing of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). "The ADA was enacted to ensure that people with disabilities would have an equal opportunity to pursue the American Dream," said Royce Hamick, one of the event's planning committee members. The celebration was a day of workshops, entertainment, food and cultural ex-

change. The Blue Sky Chorus participated in the festivities with a lively performance before an audience of about 300 people. Afterward, chorus members had a chance to meet and interact with people from the audience. The response was incredible," said chorus director Glenda Turner. "People were very interested in knowing more about us."

By performing at a variety of events for many different sectors of the community, the Blue Sky Chorus is bringing awareness of the SGI to all members of the community. Since January, this determination has taken the chorus to a variety of places, including the Seven Oaks Retirement Community, the U.S.



The Blue Sky Chorus practices outside the recital hall before their performance at the Disability Independence Day celebration, July 24.

Navy's Cultural Diversity Celebration, a Philippine Culture Celebration and the Children's Rights and Responsibilities exhibit. After every performance, chorus members take the time to meet with audience members and explain what the SGI is about. As the Blue Sky Chorus mission statement explains,

chorus members seek "to be women of unquenchable seeking spirit who strive to preserve the integrity of life by propagating the Lotus Sutra with our voices through music which encourages and comforts the hearts of people."

— LEON FERNANDO

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# An Earth Charter Consultation: Our Experience — Redwood Coast Area, Santa Rosa, Calif.



Participants at the Earth Charter Consultation held July 17.



The SGI Marin Chorus inspires all with the song 'Heart to Heart.'

In his last three peace proposals, SGI President Ikeda has mentioned the Earth Charter as a vitally important document for the new century. In his 1999 peace proposal, he urges all people to be guided by two things: renouncing war and establishing an earth charter to start "a new millennium of harmony and peaceful coexistence founded on respect for the sanctity of life." Elsewhere, he has called it a grass-roots movement, a world document that is coming not from high government officials but rather from the people themselves.

"It is hard to overstate the significance of the Earth Charter, which is being undertaken through the united efforts of concerned people throughout the world from all national and cultural backgrounds," he says in Buddhist Perspectives on the Earth Charter. "I offer heartfelt prayers for the rewarding and successful civil society consultations involved in the drafting process."

If President Ikeda was offering his heartfelt prayers for the success of consultations on the Earth Charter, the members of Redwood Coast Area in Santa Rosa knew they must succeed with theirs.

The Earth Charter is a world document concerned with peace, freedom and justice, as well as environmental protection and economic well-being. Our involvement in it started when two

young men's division members, Craig Ellis and Ivan Meyreles, had a dream of getting involved with the community to promote this "people's treaty" that is so close to President Ikeda's heart.

In October 1998, our local Earth Charter planning meetings began. According to Craig, it was really discouraging for many months. Attendance was poor and the people who came to the meetings kept changing. There was often a lack of unity or focus. At first he didn't see the Charter's value at all, but it seemed so important to SGI President Ikeda, so Craig chanted to understand our mentor's commitment. The tiny Redwood Coast planning group chanted to involve the local community, as well

as many other SGI members, to create a forum to discuss the Earth Charter (which is still in draft form) and become a part of the making of a document that pledges to protect the earth and all life on it. By the spring of 1999, they had breathed enough life and hope into the vision to begin to make it a reality. Ideas were turning into action.

A key organizer of the group, Area Leader Peter Hendrickson, contacted the New College, a private college with a strong emphasis on personal empowerment, diversity, social change and environmental concerns. The New College agreed to co-sponsor the Earth Charter event and offered to hold it on its campus.

Soon Sonoma County Center for Peace & Justice, an organization that seeks to create a community in which people are "nurtured by diverse traditions that foster compassion, solidarity and reconciliation," also agreed to co-sponsor the event due to the efforts of Joelle Goncalves, the office manager and also an SGI member.

I wrote an article on the upcoming event, which was printed in their widely distributed local publication; and Joelle launched a public relations campaign made all over Santa Rosa and nearby towns.

Susan Breyer, from Sustainable Sonoma County, offered to talk about sustainability at the event. That prompted Laura Hendrickson to admit

that many of us didn't really know what sustainability meant. It seemed to be about a lot more than recycling paper and plastic. We needed the expertise of members in the community who were more knowledgeable than ourselves to develop a better vocabulary and understanding of the environment.

We realized although we really didn't know a whole lot about ecology or other things stated in the Earth Charter, such as global ethics, gender equality, and economic well-being, we didn't have to be experts or have all the answers on how to create a peaceful, sustainable world. Trained in the SGI, we were good at organizing, motivating, and most of all at creating an arena for dialogue—a place where people felt free to open their hearts to one another. That was our job.

Our Earth Charter Consultation was held on July 17, and it was more exciting and wonderful than any of us had dreamed possible—more than 100 people participated. The SGI Marin Chorus performed before we heard from speakers Al Albergate and Susan Breyer (see photos this page).

After a short intermission, we read the Earth Charter out loud and broke into eight groups so that everyone would have a chance to participate in dialogue. The next 45 minutes were alive with ideas, criticism, appreciation and lots and lots of rekindled hope. I caught conversations that sounded like we were making an impact. "This is great. We are learning to dialogue, to really listen to others' points of view. Most of the time we stay in our homes and watch TV. We no longer have neighborhoods where neighbors know one another. Dialogue is the only way to create a paradigm shift.... It comes down to individuals making it happen.... We must respect all life, have hope, take neighborhood action."



Photo by LLOYD CARLSON

Speaker Al Albergate (shown here in a discussion group at right) shared some background on the Earth Charter. He related its connection to Buddhist philosophy and its value to all people, saying it carried the message that we must change ourselves and our lifestyles. He talked about the oneness of person and environment, calling the Earth Charter a declaration of interdependence rather than one of independence. He said it was a vision of Utopia, a chance to make a pledge to human life—the way we'd like to live on this planet.



Susan Breyer of Sustainable Sonoma County speaks enthusiastically of her desire to change the world through sustainable living, an important aspect of the Earth Charter. She explained that sustainability recognizes the inter-relatedness of the economy, society and environment. 'Sustainability requires that we not consume resources faster than they can be renewed nor produce wastes faster than they can be absorbed,' she said. It sounded simple but not easy.

Other people talked about doing simple things like carpooling, turning off lights, using ceramic cups at work instead of paper or Styrofoam, and about bringing the Earth Charter into schools and churches. "The world's out of balance. Life's out of balance," one man said. He talked about Native American elders who have said that now is the time to regain balance. "Ask questions: Where are you going? What are you doing? What are your relationships? Build your communities. Be kind to one another."

The Year of Victory in the Community for the New Century is the SGI theme for 1999. We the people of Redwood Coast experienced victory of the community, by the community and for the community as all of us took a joyful step together on our journey toward peace upon this land, our planet Earth.

—SYLVAN WARNER

# AMERICAN YOUTH TAKE A STAND AGAINST VIOLENCE

## All over the Nation...

the youth of SGI-USA have been sponsoring various exciting Victory over Violence activities. Seize the day would like to fill you in on what's been going on.

### Northwest

by Chris Conley and Akemi Fujimoto

On Aug. 14-15, Delridge District Youth put up a Victory Over Violence booth at the West Seattle Art, Nature, and Literature Festival in Seattle. We are so excited about this opportunity to connect with the people in our community. We used our pledge of nonviolence; poems of Walt Whitman; quotes from Mahatma Gandhi and President Ikeda; pictures of Rosa Parks, Jeanette Rankin and Martin Luther King Jr.; and children's stories of "Kankucho" and "General Stone Tiger" to raise awareness of nonviolence in each person's mind. A total of 126 signatures were collected and many were handed out for people to take home. We had many great opportunities to meet and dialogue with all kinds of people; such as a pastor who is on an interfaith committee, a young lady from a peace camp in Seattle, teenagers and preschoolers who shared their stories with us – and who promised not to use violence in their lives! We'd like to express our gratitude for all the support and encouragement from our senior leaders and members. ♪



Northwest Region youth celebrate VOV.

### Northeast

Jr. HS/HS Northeast Zone Conference on Nonviolence  
by Sean and Yuko Grover, New York

At a time when violence is escalating, we may lose hope for our country's future. Though new legislation and regulations may help, can structural changes alone solve the deeply rooted problem of violence in our country?

"Violence only leads to self-destruction," Atiba Joseph, a high school member from New York, commented after attending the Junior High and High School Division's Northeast Zone Conference on Nonviolence. "I'm going to take what I learned here back to my district," added another teen member Renee Angela Samuels.

On Aug. 15-16, nearly 100 teens from New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Boston gathered in the New England Culture Center to chant, study and dialogue about solutions to violence. Teens and parents from the Boston area greeted the buses of visiting Junior High and High School members with cheers and applause. The festive atmosphere continued throughout the weekend as teens exchanged experiences and creative ideas on creating a violence-free society.

In preparation for the conference, the teens studied and created presentations based on President Ikeda's 1999 Peace Proposal. After each area's presentation, they broke up in discussion groups that examine the role of trust and mistrust as a precursor to violence. Dialogue continued into the evening and throughout the generous dinner prepared by the

Boston members.

"The food was great," a member from Albany noted. "New England members are number one," commented Connecticut Junior High and High School member Ken Thompson.

Saturday evening concluded with a dance and talent show. Under the glow of New England Culture Center lights, the teens danced joyfully to the rhythms of Hip-Hop and "techno" music and performed songs and poetry for one another.

On Sunday, the teens toured the Boston Research Center, viewed the Victory Over Violence video created by the Youth Peace Conference, and attended a lecture by the center's director, Ginny Straus.

Ms. Straus related how she struggled to overcome her fear and lack of confidence. She stressed the key to developing confidence is chanting daimoku. "Fear is confidence before daimoku," she commented. She also encouraged each member to discover his or her own mission, noting President Ikeda taught her, "This is the key to happiness."

At the conclusion of the conference, a national Jr. HS/HS leader Jomo Thorne declared the solution for all of society's problems exist within our own lives. "Believe in yourself," he urged, "and you can create a whole new history for yourself and your country." He continued, "Ultimately, the key to victory over

(*"Youth strive..." Continued on page D*)



Northwesterners gather for dialogue on VOV.



Northeast members lay down the vision.

# Peace on the Streets for Miklos Ucha

## The Story of One Young Man's Victory Over Violence

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

An eye for an eye would only make the whole world blind. Such is the analysis of Mahatma Gandhi, who publicized the fact that acts of retaliation only result in furthering harm (rather than alleviating it).

Harm — it's no secret how much America has been bombarded with harm; every week in the news, we find a surplus of reports on shootings and detonations of weaponry. The sickening trend seems to go unchecked. But, hope dawns on the horizon, the youth of the SGI-USA have taken a stand against violence! Right now their Victory Over Violence campaign (VOV) is well under way all over the nation, SGI districts have started exploring what's needed to reverse the tide of violence flooding our cities.

During each rehearsal for the upcoming youth culture festival in Los Angeles, the Southern California youth, utilizing the reality of modern America, stage presentations of the VOV campaign. Seven hundred participants work together to deepen their understanding of nonviolence. One such participant is Miklos Ucha.

Miklos is not a small lad. He stands 6'1" and tips the scale at over 200 pounds. This robust 18-year-old, though quite gentle in manner, would hardly find himself disadvantaged in a fistfight. He could easily dominate almost anyone who'd tempt him.

But, this story is not about Miklos winning a heavyweight title. This story is about both Miklos and his would-be enemy together winning a victory of peace — a victory through nonviolence.

Late in the day, out on the basketball court, comes a pick-up game, where the occasional sharp elbow and NHL body-check are used to keep things competitive; street hoops is a very physical sport and tensions can easily fly. Fly is what they did for young Miklos. An accidental contact led to a fall, and before he knew it Miklos had unintentionally



Miklos Ucha, age 18, Los Angeles.

knocked over his opponent. It wasn't a malevolent deed but the knocked-over young man —let's call him Buster — re-injures his already sprained ankle as he falls, and promptly finds himself in a fury.

So what does Buster do? Buster gets in Miklos's face. And, what does Miklos do? Miklos gets in Buster's face. It's what looks to be a one-on-one bout, but within a hot second, Buster and Buster's brother (tag team) are pummeling Miklos. The brother grabs Miklos from behind while Buster sends two sharp-fisted blows right toward Miklos's eye. Immediately he's cut and blood covers his face. Miklos is in the midst of battle.

But Miklos is not despairing. He outweighs Buster and Co. by a good 50 pounds each, so it's a matter of the elephant shrugging off two dogs, which inevitably happens. The Buster Brothers lose their advantage and opt to flee for the nearest fence.

Miklos pursues, catches up and slams Buster into the chain links. He holds Buster in a dead

grip, completely in control. He thinks of how he's been hurt, not physically, but emotionally — his pride wounded. Everyone on the court goads big Miklos on, cheering for a bloody brawl. He sets up for an attack.

But then Miklos stops. The VOV skits he's been watching at the culture festival practice — all those scenes of harmonizing and finding alternatives to violence — start appearing in his head. "What am I doing?" he asks himself. "I'm supposed to be fighting for peace."

And with that revelation, in the middle of the melee, Miklos releases his arms and frees his opponent. Though his eye is bleeding badly and the perpetrator stands helplessly before him, Miklos chooses not to retaliate. Instead, he takes a triumphant stand over his own inner urge to conduct violence.

Buster is at this point scampering off. And the onlookers are disappointed at having missed the show that "could have been." But, an impression is made on these youngsters through Miklos' courageous example — there's a powerful alternative to fist fighting!

And, what's more, Buster has a victory too. An hour later he returns to the courts, approaches Miklos, and offers a sincere apology. "This whole fight is stupid," he says. "I'm sorry for hitting you."

The two young men share a truce, a moment of peace, which is everything that nonviolence is about — victory for both sides. Instead of escalating a conflict into a feud of fists and maybe later bullets, the two young men advance together toward the very real, very enduring resolution of friendship.

Currently Miklos is happily attending the culture festival rehearsals where he disciplines himself in the extremely physical activity of singing in a chorus. There's a saying in his family: Tell me who you hang with and I'll tell you who you are.

He proudly declares that his friends are those who win victory over violence every day. That says it all. ♪



Teenagers perform VOV skits at Culture Festival rehearsals in L.A.

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# YOUTH *Study* OCTOBER

## "LETTER TO NIIKE"

The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol.1, pp. 253-62

This month, we'd like to present a few passages and some discussion about each one.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1280 to a samurai who lived in an area of Japan called Niike. Remember, this was toward the end of the Daishonin's life. He inscribed the Dai-Gohonzon in 1279, and he passed away in 1282.

### PASSAGE 1.

At the end of this letter, the Daishonin writes:

"Have the priest who is my messenger read this letter to you. Trust him as a priest with enlightened wisdom and ask him any questions you may have about Buddhism. If you do not question and resolve your doubts, you cannot dispel the dark clouds of illusion, any more than you could travel a thousand miles without legs. Have him read this letter again and again and ask whatever questions you wish" (pp. 261-62).

The Daishonin is encouraging his followers to study, and more importantly, to ask questions. Often, we think if we have doubts or questions that this means that our faith is weak, or that we lack understanding. But he also tells us that if we take our practice seriously, we must "question and resolve our doubts."

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Have you ever been afraid to question Buddhism, or question your beliefs?**
2. **How is the kind of faith developed by seeking answers different from "blind faith" or "blind belief"?**

### PASSAGE 2.

"Attaining Buddhahood is nothing extraordinary. If you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with your whole heart, you will naturally become endowed with the Buddha's thirty-two features and eighty characteristics... Therefore it is not difficult to become a Buddha. A bird's egg contains nothing but liquid, yet by itself this develops into a beak, two eyes, and all the other parts which form a bird, and can fly into the sky. We, too, are like the egg, ignorant and base, but when nurtured by the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we develop the beak of the Buddha's thirty-two features and the feathers of his eighty characteristics and are free to soar into the skies of the ultimate reality" (pp. 259-60).

Attaining enlightenment seems like such an abstract thing, something vague that doesn't have much to do with our lives. But in this passage, the Daishonin tells us that Buddhahood is a completely natural part of our lives. If we simply dedicate ourselves to our practice, we will naturally, over time, develop the powerful life-condition of the Buddha. It's important, too, that through this example, he is teaching us that the goal of Buddhism is not for someone else to save us, but rather for us to develop our own lives.

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Have you ever looked at the inside of an egg and thought about how it could actually become a bird? What do you think of this example? Do you see your life as a work in progress?**
2. **Not all eggs become birds. What might prevent you from developing as a person or your potential? How can you ensure that you continue to develop?**
3. **Can you think of an example in your own life where you naturally developed into a better person?**

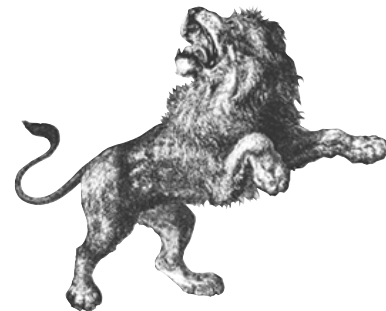
### PASSAGE 3.

"There are two kinds of understanding, true and perverted. No matter how learned a person may appear, if his ideas are warped you should not listen to him. Nor should you follow priests merely because they are venerable or of high rank. 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).

Many priests of the Daishonin's time were powerful, influential and widely respected in society. In contrast, Nichiren Daishonin and his followers were persecuted and virtually regarded as outlaws. The Daishonin criticized established religions because they taught that the path to salvation was in following priests. He stressed that these people distorted Buddhism for their own purposes. He said that the real meaning of Buddhism was that each person could attain enlightenment through his or her own effort and practice. In this passage, he tells his disciples that you should judge people by how well they really understand Buddhism. No matter how virtuous someone appears, if they teach you that your happiness depends on following them, they are distorting the spirit of the Lotus Sutra. ♪

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **Does it surprise you that the Daishonin would be critical of priests? Why or why not? How do you feel about it—should you judge a person by their actions or by their titles or positions?**
2. **What is the spirit of the Lotus Sutra? How can you tell the difference between someone who really knows "the spirit of the Lotus Sutra" and someone who simply appears or pretends to have strong faith?**



GET REAL!



by Steve Mortan,  
SGI-USA High School Division Leader

I have the great benefit of being a teacher at the same high school from where I graduated. As I walk around campus I cannot help but think of the good and bad times when I was a high school student. One memory that I cannot forget is when I was a freshman. As I entered high school, I became very lazy. I would rarely do my homework and would sometimes skip class. My grades were low. I continued this habit through the first five months of high school.

During this whole time, I was vigorously participating in YMD, Brass Band and district activities, but I was not showing actual proof of the practice at that time. At meetings we would have discussions about showing actual proof in society. I would feel so ashamed about my results in school. My YMD leaders would encourage me to do well in school and not give up.

After these meetings, I would go home with a fresh determination to fight hard. I would start to do gongyo every day and after about two to three weeks I would quit. I just could not break my lazy nature. In February, during my first year of high school, I brought my friend to a meeting and my YMD leader helped me encourage him to join the organization. He received his Gohonzon. I made a determination to start practicing this Buddhism for real. I asked myself, "How can I teach my friend to practice if I am not practicing correctly myself?"

From that point onward, each day I consistently did morning and evening prayers. I also started to try hard in school. It was such a challenge. I was so frustrated and I wanted to quit many times. I never stopped chanting and I kept making steady efforts. At this point, I was just chanting not to give up because that was my tendency. So, for the last five months of school I showed a modest improvement and completed the school year. I continued to chant to show actual proof.

When my sophomore year started, I was determined to win. With eight months of consistent practice under my belt, I was ready for school. I ended up completing the whole school year with six A's and one B. I continued to fight this way and ended up graduating with honors. I continued my education and I received my bachelors degree six years after that. I look back on all this as a great benefit. I am so glad I decided to challenge my circumstances. SGI President Ikeda says to us: "Your lives will be enriched and deepened in proportion to the pain and grief you suffer, the degree to which you struggle and the amount of daimoku that you chant. The hardships you face now will all serve to nourish your growth into leaders of the twenty-first century" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 1, p. 16). ♪

# YOUTH STRIVE FOR VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE

("Youth strive..." Continued from page A)



D.C. members surmount a physical obstacle in a teamwork exercise.

Albany," 12-year-old Ashley Bunn added.

The conference proved that teens, as well as adults, can create tremendous value when they base their lives on the life-affirming philosophy of Buddhism. The friendship and trust they cultivated through this conference is the ultimate starting point for each member to pursue his or her own mission and fight against violence.

Fifteen-year-old Junior High and High School member Jason Horton summed up the conference: "We teens can make a difference and can teach younger children about nonviolence. It's my determination that by the time I'm a grandfather, there will be no violence." ♪



D.C. members unify in the great outdoors of Fairlee Manor.

## Washington, D.C.,

Region Kicks Off VOV Campaign with Junior/High Camp-Out!  
by Ariana Bock and Chelsea Honderich

Washington, D.C. — On the weekend of Aug. 6-8, the Washington, D.C., Region youth sponsored a camp-out for the junior high and high school division members at Fairlee Manor in Chestertown, MD. The Victory Over Violence campaign lent an air of great purpose to the weekend activities and made a huge impact on the JHHS members. The whole weekend was a tremendous success! We had a total of 63 participants, including 49 junior high and high school members and 14 chaperones from six of the eight areas in our region — Baltimore, Montgomery, Washington, Virginia, Prince Georges and North Carolina, plus one member from New York!

Participants readily formed new friendships and strengthened old ones — not only among the junior high and high school members themselves, but also with the chaperones. Through developing such bonds together, we also naturally befriended the camp staff, who led us in a Team-building Course and a High-Ropes Challenge Course all day Saturday.

violence is challenging oneself to do human revolution."

After hugging, snapping photos and exchanging phone numbers, the teens boarded their buses for home. "It was great to meet kids my age who chant. We need to do this a lot more," one teen member commented. "It felt really good chanting every day. I'm going to have a strong practice when I return to

For the team-building activities, we participated in a series of problem-solving games and initiatives that encouraged and rewarded teamwork and communication. This activity helped to build trust among us and offered a variety of leadership opportunities that stimulated our hidden potential. The High Ropes Challenge Course, including a tower, catwalk and zip line, tested our self-confidence as we faced new and different challenges — 40 feet above the ground! But everyone provided positive support and encouragement to one another. As we confronted our self-imposed limits, many of us found ourselves loudly chanting "Nam-myoho-rence-kyo!" as we walked along a thin wire rope tied high up between two trees! The staff was wonderful, saying: "That's it, keep chanting, you'll be fine! I gotcha!" The camp staff praised the group's politeness and good behavior, saying they had never seen a group work so well together and learn so quickly with such determination. We were delighted by the praise and felt it reflected our efforts in faith.

Throughout the weekend, we kicked off the Victory Over Violence campaign! On Saturday night, we watched the VOV video and held a wide-ranging discussion of nonviolence, passive violence and Buddhism. Discussion delved also into such issues as name-calling, racism and apathy. Many of the young adults spoke about wanting to share their practice with their friends and parents. Some youth commented that this experience at the camp-out made them feel more a part of their August VOV discussion meetings, too!

By the end of the weekend, no one wanted to leave and everyone was happy to have participated! Many of us were running around making VOV signs with our hands. When some of the youth from Montgomery Area (in Maryland) stopped to eat on the way home, french fries, too, were crafted into VOV formation!

Most importantly, we all joyfully deepened our understanding of our Buddhist practice together, by teaming up with a buddy to chant our morning and evening prayers and reconfirming the importance of Buddhist study and chanting, as well as practice for ourselves and for others. It was a fortune-building weekend filled with vibrant, shining youth having lots of fun and gaining valuable wisdom for our lives! ♪



The evening was celebrated with a talent show.