

## FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR A SCHOOL TO DEVELOP “LEADERS AND SCHOLARS”

*Greetings to the readers of Living Buddhism.*

I hope you all had a wonderful summer. It is hard to believe how fast time flies. It seems like just yesterday that we were celebrating the beginning of the year 2000, and now we only have four months until the year 2001 begins.

In July, SGI President Ikeda wrote a poem dedicated to SGI-USA members called “Soar — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” I know many of you have been studying this poem, and I would like to share some of my thoughts about it.

I was particularly moved by one stanza where President Ikeda quotes John F. Kennedy:

*— It is said that civilization  
is a race between education  
and catastrophe.  
It is you who will decide  
which of these will win! —*

This passage stresses the significance of education in shaping the future. When we view the condition of society entering this new century, the direction in which we move—toward peace or into violence; toward the development of culture, or into a shallow and materialistic culture—depends entirely upon the character, decisions and actions of the people. This is a fundamental principle of democracy, that the improvement of society depends upon the improvement of the people. Just as this stanza suggests, it is the people who will decide the future of humanity.

It is no accident that our organization was founded by educators. It is also meaningful that the principle of *soka*, or value creation, started as a theory of education. Education and religion both aim to cultivate the human being and give people the spiritual tools to lead lives of integrity and meaning. As I mentioned last month, what the founding president Mr. Makiguchi sought in the realm of education—the means to cultivate the highest potential within each individual—he discovered in the realm of religion, specifically in the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

In this poem, President Ikeda also expresses his hopes for Soka University of America:

*Toward the civilization  
of the twenty-first century;  
for the sake of the young leaders and scholars;  
for the sake of the  
peace, prosperity and joy  
that come from humanistic education!  
Soka University of America  
has been constructed...*

I know that all of us, who are dedicating our lives to sinking the roots of Buddhist philosophy deep within American society, feel tremendous pride that such an educational

institution as Soka University of America is being established in our country. This university is the pinnacle of Soka education, the ultimate expression of an idea that was born in the relationship between Mr. Makiguchi and his closest disciple, Josei Toda. As general director, I can't help feeling the responsibility that supporting this institution entails, and I know from talking to many of you that we share the concern about how to support it.

As I read this poem, I can see that President Ikeda, as the founder of this university, doesn't want to establish a school with a prestigious name. His expectations for this school reach far beyond fame or reputation. He wants this to be a school where people of good character, leaders of real integrity, can be nurtured and developed.

It is clear to me that while the realm of education shares much with the realm of religion, the two are separate. Soka University of America is not a seminary, it is not a school dedicated to teaching or advancing any particular religious doctrine. Rather, when we understand President Ikeda's hope that this will be a school dedicated to the cultivation of the human being, we can see that its purpose or mission is not "religious" in the narrow sense of the word. Because its goal is educating people—"leaders and scholars" in all avenues of human endeavor dedicated to the "peace, prosperity and joy" of all humanity—this university is for the people of the entire world.

I feel that we are living in a truly dramatic, historic time. Or, should I say, through your efforts, you have created such a meaningful time. All of us have chosen to embrace Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism during an unprecedented period of human advancement. It is not a coincidence that, as a new century dawns, Soka University of America is opening in our country. Perhaps only in future generations, decades or even centuries from now, will the significance of this time be fully appreciated.

I am reminded of the grand assembly on Eagle Peak, and the Ceremony in the Air in which Shakyamuni revealed the true teachings of Buddhism and transmitted the essence of the Lotus Sutra to the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. As you know, this event is a grand metaphor for human life and the state of life of the Buddha Shakyamuni. The Treasure Tower and the mystical assembly are all symbols and images of the majestic life of Buddhahood.

But as Nichiren Daishonin states, "the purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni...lies in his behavior as a human being" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 852). The grand and noble state of life called Buddhahood is what we are realizing through our actions in our families, jobs and communities. And the mythical assembly of the Ceremony in the Air described in the Lotus Sutra is actually occurring as each one of us awakens to our mission, and opens the eyes of our friends to the nobility and power within their lives.

President Ikeda expresses his deep emotion in the opening of his poem:

*The Bodhisattvas of the Earth  
have emerged!  
They have arisen!  
They have started to stir,  
to move!*

I feel that this refers to all of us. What we are accomplishing is real. It is the actual appearance of people dedicated to living as bodhisattvas who have emerged from the earth

of humanity, the earth of the real world.

The opening of Soka University of America, and our practice at this time and in this place, foretell an awesome and historic assembly of people whom future generations will certainly celebrate.

With great pride, let's live with awareness of the significance of this age. Let's be convinced that each of us possesses a noble purpose.

Hoping that I can see you in person soon, I will continue to pray for your health, happiness and prosperity and that of your families. I am so happy and honored to work together with all of you.

Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director