

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR VICTORY OVER VIOLENCE

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*! This year has been filled with meaningful development throughout our organization. What a fitting way to end one century and begin another!

This past fall, each district conducted their general meeting commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai. In October, as you have seen in the *World Tribune*, thousands of people gathered all over the country to celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the founding of the American kosen-rufu movement. Successful gatherings were held throughout the country. Many of these celebratory events were used as forums to share our Victory Over Violence efforts.

The youth division formally began the VOV campaign in 1999. Achieving victories over the violence that affects many of our lives is one of the primary reasons we exist as an organization—it is truly a fundamental premise of our American kosen-rufu movement.

As the year draws to a close, I find myself reflecting not only on the wonderful accomplishments of this year, but also on the sorrow and hardship that were part of those successes. I know that many of you are struggling amidst the many inequities and disregard for human life that permeate our society.

I have met people who live in fear for their family's safety because the community in which they live is dangerous and those who have lost children to stray bullets in crossfire. I know people who have experienced domestic violence and abuse. I have spoken to members whose lives were threatened by addiction. I have also visited members who have lost someone they love to suicide. But in spite of the most severe circumstances, they continue in their determination to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. They have inspired me.

Many of you have heard of the tragic death of SGI-USA member Anthony Dwain Lee in Los Angeles. He was a fine man who exerted himself behind the scenes and was dedicated to developing the abilities of young people. In his teen years, he was a member of a gang, but he left this life behind and established a successful career as an actor. He was a warm, compassionate and committed person who embodied the very best values of our peace movement. Tragically, his life was cut short by a policeman's bullet.

It is always painful to lose someone we love. It is especially tragic when, in the midst of our journey for peace, we lose loved ones to an act of violence that seems impossible to understand.

When we lose someone, we are naturally filled with questions. Why have those people died? What is the purpose of life?

Please remember that we practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to change society for the better. Those of us who have lost people we love to violence or who live in fear of violence should keep this firmly in mind. Through our practice and propagation efforts, we can have a positive impact on our communities.

The message of the writing "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" is that if we are concerned about our own welfare, we must work to establish a better world. The violence so prevalent in American society is the result of a culture that has no respect for the dignity and value of each person's life. But the solution is not "out there," it lies in developing our own lives and using dialogue as a tool to transform the people and

community around us. Through developing our own lives, we can become beacons of hope in our communities, lighting the way to a better society.

In “The True Aspect of All Phenomena”, Nichiren Daishonin states:

Joy as well as sorrow moves us to tears. Tears express our feelings for both blessings and misfortune. The one thousand arhats shed tears in memory of the Buddha, and in tears Bodhisattva Manjushri chanted Myoho-rence-kyo. From among those one thousand arhats, the Venerable Ananda replied in tears, “This is what I heard.” The tears of all the others fell, wetting their inkstones, and they wrote Myoho-rence-kyo, followed by “This is what I heard.” I, Nichiren, now feel exactly as they did. I am now in exile because I spread the five and seven characters of Myoho-rence-kyo. I spread this teaching because “This is what I heard.” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386)

This passage describes the dramatic moment when the disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha, in deep despair because of the passing of their mentor, commenced the work of transmitting his teachings to future generations. Tears expressed the sorrow at the loss of the man they regarded as their teacher, and at the same time, their profound joy at being able to continue his legacy. Nichiren Daishonin used this example to express his sorrow at experiencing persecution, but at the same time, his profound joy at fulfilling his mission to teach Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

When we think about those we have lost, our deep sadness is natural. The grief and bewilderment at our loss is proof of our humanity. But at the same time, let us transform our tears into cries of determination, tears that express our resolve that this aspect of our culture must change. In this way, we can continue the legacy of our loved ones. We can change the lives of those suffering from violence to lives of profound meaning and value.

As I mentioned, I have visited many members who have lost loved ones or have suffered due to violence. Despite the tremendous challenges in their lives, however, these courageous individuals are determined to prove the validity of their Buddhist practice in the place where they are. I have met members who began their practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism while in prison and people who previously led lives of violence. Through their practice of Buddhism, they came to appreciate the value of life and understand the profundity of the Daishonin’s teachings. All of these people are proving that the philosophy and practice we embrace truly has the power to transform our hearts, transform our lives, and transform our communities. They are showing us that the only way to make such transformation possible is to face the reality of our lives and commit ourselves to the hard work of change.

When I think about this, it is clear to me that as we enter a new century, we have much work ahead of us. “The Century of Life” that we have been proclaiming as disciples of SGI President Ikeda will not emerge of its own accord. May 3, 2001, the date we have been working toward for so long, is not a finale or the date on which we will have accomplished kosen-rufu. Rather, at the dawn of a new millennium, we must confirm that our real work is just beginning. And May 3, 2001—the date we have cherished for so long—is our starting point, the date when we take our stand to change society, alongside our mentor.

As we end this auspicious year of 2000, I hope we can savor the great efforts and accomplishments of this past year and these past decades. At the same time, let’s greet the new century, and this new millennium, with great determination. Not a momentary determination created in our celebration of the new millennium, but a profound

determination based on our real experiences and rooted in a firm commitment to change our communities. Let us work together and inspire one another through the sorrow and the joy that awaits us on our triumphant journey.

Once again, thank you so much for what you have done this year, and thank you for your efforts to build our great future together!

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