

EDITORIAL
UNITY STARTS WITH RESPECT
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How can we unite? ‘We can start with showing respect to everyone that we’re trying to unite with,’ Jeff Farr writes. ‘We can look for each person’s talent and praise the unique contribution that each person can make.’

Why unite? Why is uniting as a group of Buddhists an important part of practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism? The Daishonin says that “if the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals...” (*The Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin*, p. 618). He also says that “a hundred or even a thousand people can definitely attain their goal, if they are of one mind” (*ibid.*). We unite so that we can win in everything.

But how do we create this unity? How do we all get on the same page?

We can start with showing respect to everyone that we’re trying to unite with. We can look for each person’s talent and praise the unique contribution that each person can make. The Daishonin’s Buddhism teaches that each person definitely has something special—something irreplaceable—to offer the group, to offer humanity. We can find that special thing and give it support.

Wherever the organization is permeated with this kind of respect, it becomes something like a research laboratory for kosen-rufu. Although each person may be working on a different aspect of the project, everyone becomes deeply united toward the common cause. Each feels the overarching goal to be his or her own. Each sees the linkage between what he or she is in charge of and the bigger picture. This is why SGI President Ikeda asks SGI-USA members to “put your hearts and minds together with a sense of responsibility...” (April 7 *World Tribune*, p. 1).

Part of this is also each of us respecting our own talent and sharing it in the organization. This is what President Ikeda did as a young man, setting an example for us. When he once complained to second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda about the organization, President Toda asked him: “Why don’t you go ahead and make the Gakkai into the kind of organization you can really like? Build an ideal Gakkai through your hard work and earnest effort!” (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 5, p. 199). This was the impetus for the young Ikeda to, in many ways, reinvent the Soka Gakkai: He dreamed up cultural activities for the organization, establishing the Brass Band in May 1954 and putting together the first Soka Gakkai sports meet that November. These paved the way for the Soka Gakkai culture festivals. Next year’s eight SGI-USA culture festivals sponsored by the youth division are one result of the vision President Ikeda had for our organization more than four decades ago.

The point is that President Ikeda didn’t back off from the Soka Gakkai or go start his own organization. He didn’t like some of the activities, but he believed he had something distinct to contribute to them. He immersed himself in them, changing them. Eventually, millions of people understood what he was trying to do and joined in.

One reason that the SGI is great is because we have this strong tradition of embracing individuals’ initiative. From the Victory Over Violence project to the Soka Spirit

movement, I constantly hear members' new ideas being voiced and then see them being implemented. It's as if the SGI is calling out to each of us: "Improve me! I know that you can make me better!"

At a recent youth-sponsored introductory meeting in Santa Barbara, Calif., I heard a presentation on Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that was better than any I had ever heard before. Students from the University of California, Santa Barbara, took turns explaining each of the terms in personal ways: through an experience, a song, a dance. It was much more moving—and convincing—than definitions I have been giving by rote for years at discussion meetings. It gave me confidence to see that our organization is being propelled by unconstrained creativity.

And it made me think that we each have the future of our organization in our hearts. All the great ideas that our organization needs must be somewhere inside us. After all, each of us is a microcosm of the universal macrocosm—our organization is like the coming together of many universes to make a new, larger, more wonderful universe than has ever been.

No wonder that "if the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals...." No wonder that when we become a real team, based on respect for one another's talent—and on remembering to make the most of our own talent—anything is achievable, anything at all.