

## DISCUSSION WITH SGI-USA CULTURE DEPARTMENT MEMBERS A NEW SUN SHINES ON AMERICA!

**‘We will continue to make our way serenely out into the world,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Today, the Buddhism of the sun is beginning to shine on America and the rest of the world.’**

*On Aug. 23–24, SGI President Ikeda met with representatives of the SGI-USA Culture Department at the Nagano Training Center in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, Japan. The SGI leader shared his hopes and expectations for the new Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo campus and discoursed on such subjects as education, life and Buddhism with the visiting members. Participants in this discussion are: Dr. Eric Hauber, vice president of academic affairs at SUA, AV; Dr. Maria Guajardo Lucero, director of Assets for Colorado Youth and a trustee of the University of Denver; Michael Curtis, doctoral candidate in energy technology policy and sustainable development at George Mason University; and Professor Tadashige Takamura, associate vice president of Soka University, Japan.*

**SGI President Ikeda:** Welcome! Thank you all for coming here from so far away! You all look wonderful. I am so happy to see you!

**All:** Thank you!

**Ikeda:** A millionaire is a person who has money. A scholar is a person who has learning. A politician is a person who has political power.

But what do those who are worthy of the greatest respect possess? It is not titles or academic degrees. No, it is the Law — the Mystic Law.

Nichiren Daishonin states, “Since the Law is wonderful, the person is worthy of respect” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1097). This is a quintessential teaching of Buddhism. Therefore, the most praiseworthy of all are those who propagate the Mystic Law. No one can surpass them.

There is nothing great about corrupt politicians or clergy. It is ordinary people who embrace the Mystic Law who are the true monarchs. That is why I greet you all today with the highest respect and veneration.

### **Mastery of foreign languages will be important in the 21st century.**

**Dr. Eric Hauber:** Aug. 24 is the anniversary of the day you started practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism. It is a great joy to meet you on this meaningful occasion.

**Ikeda:** The honor is all mine. Nothing could make me happier than meeting with all of you today. It is exactly 53 years since I embraced faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

**Hauber:** We plan to hold the entrance ceremony for the first class of students entering Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo on Aug. 24 of next year. I am happy to report that we are receiving many application inquiries. We set up an admissions hotline, with a special ring tone, so that we know when people are calling about applying to the school. We established a system in which our staff can respond individually to each student who is interested in attending SUA.

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**Ikeda:** What do you get the most inquiries about?

**Hauber:** The curriculum. SUA, AV will emphasize language education and international studies. But we will encourage our students to not only master foreign languages but also acquire a deep understanding of that nation's culture. In addition to studying the language of her or his choice, each student will study that nation's or region's history, way of life and thought.

In the third year of study, each student will be required to spend one semester as a foreign student in a nation that uses that language. We want the students to have a chance to move beyond the abstract, conceptual realm and have direct contact with the daily life of other cultures. We want to encourage them to acquire a broader point of view, to see the world from the perspective of another culture. That, we believe, is absolutely essential to educating truly international people.

**Ikeda:** Languages give one the wings to forge ties of friendship with people around the world. A mastery of foreign languages is going to be more and more important in the 21st century.

**Hauber:** We want to carry out the mission that you have outlined for SUA, AV as its founder: to foster leaders of ability and humanism, who can make great contributions to the world. An international person must have a strong desire to be of service to others and to work for society, otherwise all his or her study will be self-serving and of no use to the world.

We want to nurture talented people who will make genuine contributions to society. We want to produce a steady stream of leaders who will lead the world in the coming century.

This is the mission of SUA, AV. We are doing everything we can to create an educational environment that will produce such leaders. We want to create a university in which the founding spirit is alive not only in the curriculum but in the behavior and minds of all our teaching staff, because we believe that spirit will inspire and encourage our students.

### **SUA will be a new fortress for world peace.**

**Professor Tadashige Takamura:** In what respects do you think American educators and intellectuals have high expectations for SUA, AV?

**Hauber:** It varies, but one person made the observation that because SUA, AV is a new university, it is unfettered by preconceived notions, ties and outdated traditions. As such, it can seek the absolute best in education without any restrictions.

SUA also has a clear educational philosophy and ideal, and a profound founding spirit, this person noted, expressing confidence that this would enable it to provide education that puts the student first.

SUA, AV is a university for the 21st century. It will realize the kind of education that has been the longed-for, yet unachieved, ideal of so many educators. I strongly feel the huge expectations that everyone has for the university.

I am also proud that we are in fact beginning to create one of the best systems in the realm of curriculum planning as well.

**Ikeda:** I am really looking forward to the university's opening, and I am deeply appreciative of the outstanding efforts of the entire staff.

SUA, AV will be a new fortress for world peace. I pray that the talented graduates who leave its doors will go out into the world to spread friendship on this planet and exert themselves freely in all spheres of endeavor for the happiness of humankind. I hope that

they will be a shining light of hope that illuminates the next century and the next millennium.

**There is nothing as beautiful as the ties of mentor and disciple.**

**Ikeda:** Dr. Guajardo Lucero, you are looking well! I will never forget the honor bestowed upon me by the University of Denver in 1996.

**Dr. Maria Guajardo Lucero:** The university trustees voted unanimously to bestow an honorary doctorate in education on you, President Ikeda. At the meeting at which it was decided, Chancellor Daniel Ritchie recited your many accomplishments for all the trustees without my having to explain anything.

**Ikeda:** I was deeply honored. The chancellor treated me with such warmth and sincerity. The moment I met him, I knew he was a person of the highest caliber. Please give him my best regards.

**Guajardo Lucero:** I most certainly will. Prior to that, you had spoken with Dr. Vincent Harding of our university. [Dr. Vincent Harding, professor of religion and social transformation at the University of Denver, was a close friend of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He met with President Ikeda in January 1994 in Tokyo.]

I am collaborating with Dr. Harding on a video he is making about the mentor–disciple spirit. He says he wants to pass that spirit on to the next generation and is interviewing elders in communities throughout the United States who have fought for social justice.

One of his questions is “Who influenced you in continuing your social activism?” He wants to show the video to young people to have them learn from outstanding people, so that they are given a great example of the importance of relationships both with mentors and teachers.

**Ikeda:** For a human being, there is nothing more beautiful than the ties of mentor and disciple. There is nothing stronger. The mentor–disciple relationship is the heart of Buddhism.

But we must remember that a mentor is not some higher being. Mentor and disciple are comrades striving together in real life to achieve a shared ideal.

Viewed from one perspective, Buddhism shows us how to live our lives bravely challenging the daunting realities that confront us. At the same time, it expounds a way of life that is natural and unforced, peace-loving and unfettered by rigid formality, brimming with warm human sentiment, laughter, tears and affection.

It teaches the unsurpassed way of human existence—the spirit to fight rigorously against evil and injustice, to fight and triumph unafraid of imprisonment or death. In short, Buddhism is the most humane way of life there is. And Buddhism exists within the living reality of society and daily life.

**Dialogue is the essence of religion.**

**Ikeda:** Recently, Japan has seen a series of instances where youth have committed vicious, brutal crimes. This is a grave problem in many societies around the world. Dr. Guajardo Lucero, if I remember correctly, you are the director of an institute that studies the educational development of young people.

**Guajardo Lucero:** Yes. I am the director of Assets for Colorado Youth. Juvenile crime is a serious problem in the United States as well. In Colorado, where I live, a terrible school shooting took place last year [at Columbine High School, in Littleton, Colo.], in which 15

students and teachers were killed. Most people asked the question “Why did this happen?” but we asked instead, “How can we prevent this from happening again?” and took this as the starting point of our activities.

The important thing is to view children not as a problem but as a resource, full of potential, and as society’s assets.

We encouraged adults to meet and develop connections with youth. Through this process of involvement and dialogue, children can begin to change and have hope for the future again.

**Ikeda:** That is very important. What you are doing is truly commendable. Dialogue—talking with others heart-to-heart—is so important. “In the beginning there was the Word,” as the Bible says. Or as the Daishonin tells us, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708).

The process of overcoming hardships and making harmonious progress starts with discussion. Dialogue is the essence of religion. It is a life-to-life exchange, a source of life-to-life inspiration.

**Guajardo Lucero:** I used to be involved in a community project, where I was working with elementary schools with many poor students. We do not really have the custom of teachers visiting children’s homes in the United States, but we proposed that teachers visit every child’s home.

At one school where the teachers tried this, the children reacted very positively—far more so than we had anticipated. Since then, teachers and parents have remained in close communication, and we have also started an English class, staffed by volunteers, for Mexican-American parents who do not speak English.

As the parents came to know more about their children’s school, and the teachers came to know their students’ family lives, the students began to work harder at school. After we put our home visit program into effect, the grades of the students went up. The school became one of the top elementary schools in Denver.

**Ikeda:** That is wonderful!

**Guajardo Lucero:** I was born into a poor Mexican farming family. But I have lived my life with the conviction that we can each bring forth unlimited potential through education.

I had a hard time when I was studying at Harvard. I graduated with honors, and I wanted my mother to see the graduation ceremony. But by the time my last class ended, I did not even have enough money to pay the rent for my apartment. And even though I had graduated, I could not afford to attend the ceremony myself, much less bring my mother to see it.

That is why each time I have received an award from SGI or SUA, I say to myself, “This is my graduation ceremony.” I have been lucky to graduate several times. Thank you so very much!

### **Never detach yourself from the SGI organization.**

**Michael Curtis:** I participated in the SGI-USA Culture Department training course in Japan in 1991, and it proved to be an important turning point for my life. Over the last nine years, I have worked hard to actualize the determinations I made at that time. But it took me a long time to make my efforts bear fruit.

How one can advance on the right path and fulfill one’s mission without any wasted effort? I want to devote my life to realizing the American ideal that you, President Ikeda,

articulated for us in the new poem that you presented to us in the United States, “Soar— Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!”

**Ikeda:** Thank you very much. The bottom line, essentially, is never to detach yourself from the SGI organization.

No matter what kinds of leaders or members you may encounter there, it is important that you do activities in the organization throughout your life. Why? Because the core of the Daishonin’s Buddhism is kosen-rufu. And faith that is dedicated to realizing kosen-rufu is found only in the SGI.

The reason for your participating in training courses such as these is to build a self dedicated to kosen-rufu. Herein lies correct faith and correct action.

### **Chant to the Gohonzon for whatever it is that you want most.**

**Ikeda:** In addition, the important thing is to chant to the Gohonzon for whatever it is that you want most. The Daishonin described his own spirit to propagate the Mystic Law as having “the same compassion as a mother who urges her child to drink from her breast” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 585). Thus, you should chant to the Gohonzon honestly with whatever is in your heart, free of all pretension, just like a child entreating a parent.

You can chant for anything you like. If you want, you can chant to be wealthy, or you can even chant to be president of your country! All of your prayers will be answered. And they also carry on into future lifetimes. Of course, I am not saying that becoming president will necessarily make you happy!

At any rate, the important thing is to earnestly chant for what you want in your real, everyday life. Please also try to do your best in SGI activities. The SGI is an organization that champions justice and works for good. It is an organization that fights for people’s happiness and for the sake of the Law.

Other than that, please act with honesty and integrity in your personal life—in your job, your family, your friendships. Please advance confidently, honorably and cheerfully, making steady efforts to improve and grow and achieve your dreams.

**Curtis:** Thank you.

### **Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the Buddhism of inconspicuous benefits.**

**Ikeda:** The benefits received by practitioners of the Mystic Law in the Latter Day of the Law are called inconspicuous benefits. Inconspicuous benefits pile up quietly, like snow gradually accumulating.

Shakyamuni’s Buddhism, in contrast, was a Buddhism of conspicuous benefits. These are benefits that are clearly visible and recognizable. The people during Shakyamuni’s lifetime were pure-hearted and good, and the benefits of their faith were manifested immediately.

But in the Latter Day of the Law, most benefits are inconspicuous benefits. The Daishonin’s Buddhism is the Buddhism of inconspicuous benefits.

Some may think that conspicuous benefits are preferable, but if benefits appear immediately, you tend to grow complacent and arrogant. You may not be able to experience the great depth and breadth of life.

Buddhism is the law that governs all things in the universe. We must be confident of this and wholeheartedly chant daimoku.

Moreover, the daimoku that we chant for others ultimately returns to us. Daimoku benefits both ourselves and those we chant for. Benefit is received by all parties and, in

this way, grows exponentially.

To take this even further, the “daimoku savings account” into which we make regular deposits each day through chanting reveals its worth at crucial moments in our life. In our final years, we will be able to declare with deep feeling: “I have truly achieved a life pervaded by eternity, happiness, true self and purity!” “What a wonderful state of being I have attained!” Buddhism, as the sutras and the Daishonin’s writings teach, assures us of such triumph.

A way of life that accords with the Daishonin’s Buddhism, a life dedicated to fulfilling one’s personal mission — this is what Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda taught us.

Please do not worry. No matter what happens, chant daimoku, and never leave the SGI. In faith, there is no special technique you have to master or special form you have to strive for in order to attain enlightenment.

You can build an eternal palace of happiness within the depths of your life, just as you are. This is the Buddhist teaching that the lives of ordinary people and the supreme state of Buddhahood are one. You can attain Buddhahood in your present form. You, as you are right now, possess the state of Buddhahood within. This is called the Buddha of the true aspect of all phenomena. Please be confident that the life-state, the power and the good fortune of the Buddha will quite naturally come to manifest in your life.

### **The SGI must never succumb to authoritarianism and bureaucracy.**

**Guajardo Lucero:** All the SGI-USA members are advancing with optimism and hope. We have a perfect combination in General Director Danny Nagashima, who is passionate, and Women’s Leader Matilda Buck, who is very natural. With their leadership and the poem you wrote us, I feel that a bright new future is opening up for SGI-USA.

**Ikeda:** Really? That is wonderful to hear. Nothing gives me greater joy than knowing that everyone is happy and working joyfully for kosen-rufu. I have great hopes for both Danny Nagashima and Matilda Buck.

An organization hinges on its leaders. That is why people in leadership positions have a tremendous responsibility. At the same time, the higher their position, the graver their offense and subsequent retribution should they betray their fellow members or discard their faith.

During World War II, the Soka Gakkai in Japan was harshly suppressed by the militarist authorities. Mr. Makiguchi, Mr. Toda and 19 other leaders were imprisoned. Of them all, the only two not to abandon their faith were Mr. Makiguchi, who died in prison, and Mr. Toda. This is an undeniable historical fact.

Mr. Toda emerged from his ordeal in prison to rebuild the Soka Gakkai after the war. At that time, too, people of high leadership positions in the organization betrayed him. Also, during the time of both the Daishonin and his successor, Nikko Shonin, many direct disciples — the top leaders of those days — forsook their faith.

We must not tolerate corrupt people, even if they are leaders. We cannot experience truly profound benefit unless we fight against evil. The Daishonin defined benefit (Jpn *kudoku*) as follows: “The *ku* [of *kudoku*] means to extinguish evil, and *doku* means to bring forth good” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762).

By refuting evil, we expiate our own past offenses and impurities, and bring forth a pure, unsullied state of life brimming with good fortune and benefit. This is the meaning of benefit.

No one is superior or inferior in Buddhism — we are all equal. No one is more important than anyone else. Worthy of greatest respect is the person who has a strong, pure faith in the Mystic Law.

We must not succumb to authoritarianism and bureaucracy. Our organization is solely a means for enabling people to become happy. The SGI is absolutely committed to equality and humanism.

**Hauber:** Every time I meet you, President Ikeda, I make new progress. I feel so inspired.

**Ikeda:** The world of the SGI is a world of heart-to-heart dialogue, of life-to-life bonds between comrades.

There are countless living beings on Earth and in the universe. How can we live together in peace and harmony? How can we build a paradise, a utopia for all?

The attempt to answer these questions is one of the starting points of religion. Here, we also find the fundamental meaning of religion. Ultimately, it can be said that neither science nor economics nor politics has answered these questions clearly.

There have been many religions throughout human history. The founders of all great religions — the Buddha, Christ, Muhammad and so forth — were people of deep wisdom, outstanding leaders who wanted to bring happiness to humanity. But as time passed, the spirit of these founders was lost, and their religions lapsed in formality, degenerating into a means for the clergy to make money and subjugate believers to their authority and manipulation.

This might be described as the inevitable destiny of religion. The same thing happened to the Nikken sect. But we must absolutely never ever allow this to happen to the SGI. This is my most fervent wish.

That is why I say over and over again: “Let us return to the time of Shakyamuni! Let us return to the time of the Daishonin!”

The SGI is the only organization in the present age that goes out among the people in accord with the Daishonin’s spirit.

Persecution is a sign that a religion is alive. Because we are an organization dedicated to truth and justice, we are buffeted by strong winds. These are all trials that will help us create a pure stream of faith that will flow forever.

We will continue to make our way serenely out into the world. Today, the Buddhism of the sun is beginning to shine on America and the rest of the world.

*Other SGI-USA Culture Department representatives who attended the training course at Karuizawa included: Mr. Masao Yokota, president of the SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century; Dr. Takao Kato, professor of economics and chairperson of the Economics Department at Colgate University, New York; Dr. Donna Fabian, research assistant at the genetics lab at Emory University; Dr. Alison Hirsch, independent historian; Dr. Lynne Miller, associate professor and chairperson of the Department of Elementary Education, Florida International University; Dr. Patricia Walker, international economic policy analyst; and Dr. Karen Lewis, professor of economics at the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania.*