

NEW NATIONAL YMD LEADER INTRODUCED



New National YMD Leader Cory Taylor

Seize the Day had the pleasure of interviewing new SGI-USA Young Men's Leader Cory Taylor. He's a creative guy so we knew we had to be creative right back at him. Our strategy was bold. If Cory shows up to the interview with a zany hat, we show up with *two even zanier hats*.

If he uses a large vocabulary, we invoke backward Latin. With Cory, life is intensely creative. He's a hilarious guy, but he's also extremely serious about peace. Read on.

Seize: Cory, can we ask a big question?

Cory: Big is good.

Seize: What's the next focus for the youth division?

Cory: March 16

Seize: Why March 16? What's its significance?

Cory: In order to fully appreciate the significance of March 16, we need to understand the conditions in which it took place. In the 1950s, Japan was run by people in their 50s and 60s. In those days, a young person wanting to impact Japanese society wasn't even able to get into a position to make a difference until they were in their 50s or 60s. But in one decisive move, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, a revolutionary in a sense, created a ceremony whereby he transferred the mission for kosen-rufu to his most treasured disciples, the youth. And specifically, to Daisaku Ikeda. This was an unprecedented statement. Can you imagine? In a society where youth were treated, for the most part, as errand boys and girls, President Toda declared that youth are the true leaders of kosen-rufu! Forty-two years later, treasuring youth is firmly established as the spirit of the Soka Gakkai. If we were to stop celebrating March 16, this spirit would die. This is why we must, now and forever, celebrate March 16. It is our right as youth.

Seize: The stakes are high.

Cory: Yes. It's a right. We don't give up our rights. Our seniors in the men's and women's divisions have already experienced the March 16 of their youth. That is why they support us. They know how important it is.

We can't allow it to die. On the contrary, we need to take it to a new level. I believe the best way for us to celebrate March 16 in the year 2000 is to initiate an enormous wave of propagation across America.

Seize: So, as we advance toward March 16...

Cory: Yes?

Seize: ...what do you feel is your personal responsibility?

Cory: People don't exist for religion. Religion exists for people. There are millions of youth in America. How many of them know about the Mystic Law? How many of them know about SGI President Ikeda? How many of them know how to forge a resolute and unshakable self—a self strong enough to calmly withstand whatever conditions or circumstances one may encounter in daily life and society? President Ikeda says: "If we were to keep to ourselves the means we have found for attaining happiness, not sharing it with others, we would have succumbed to the states of Animality and Hunger. The wish to share the truth with others, to share the means for achieving happiness is the hallmark of philosophy, of education, of culture and of Buddhism." As young men, our responsibility is to be the engine of the organization. How do we start the engine? By propagating Buddhism. My responsibility is to lead the young men's division.

Seize: Propagation is a hot topic.

Cory: Yup.

Seize: What insight do you have about sharing Buddhism with others?

Cory: Caring for people—that's what it's all about. Two things I'd like to share.

Seize: Take us home.

Cory: Number one: Imagine you've been invited to hear a piano recital. There will be two performers. They will play the exact same song, one after the other. The first person—we'll call him Rupert—gets up there and starts to play. Yeah, Rupert's performance is seemingly perfect. Rupe hits all the right keys at all the right times. He keeps perfect rhythm. He's got natural talent. He really knows the song. Sounds just like the CD you once heard. But even though Rupert's doing a great job, you're starting to look at your watch. When is this song going to be over? Sheesh. You start to space out, thinking about laundry. Rupert finishes.

Courteous applause follows.

Seize: Like a golf clap?

Cory: Like a golf clap. The second person—we'll call him Bob—gets up there and starts to play. Same song. Same piano. Bob's clearly not as good as Rupert. He's struggling to find the keys. Occasionally he misses one. But wait! He's really concentrating. He's really struggling. He's pouring his whole life into the song. He knows he's not technically very good. But he's going all out. He's not ashamed. He's pounding the keys with passion, his head upright. Tears start to role down your face. He continues on. Somehow, Bob is communicating something more than just the song. Bob is giving it 100 percent. He finishes. And here we get thunderous applause and tears. Same song. Same piano. Different effect. Why is that?

Seize: Not sure.

Cory: Propagation isn't about technique. It's not about how much we know in our heads about Buddhist philosophy. It's about heart and caring. Let's be confident, natural, true to ourselves. The reality is that people feel the intangible things like effort, and heart and struggle. When it comes to propagation...

Seize: ...we should be like Bob.

Cory: There it is.

Seize: Very cool. You had a second point.

Cory: Point two: Let's get out of the mind trip of worrying about why it's so hard to share Buddhism. Let's just do it! People aren't stupid. Most Americans can distinguish between right and wrong, real or false. We have the privilege of fighting for kosen-rufu together with President Ikeda—the person who has created the greatest Buddhist movement in human history. We should be proud! Let's share President Ikeda's guidance with our friends, families and fellow citizens. Let's display our confidence that we are practicing the greatest philosophy. Let's boldly share with friends our actual proof and development. Let's initiate a new era in the youth of SGI-USA, the likes of which have never been seen before. Now it may be that some people feel that they lack that kind of confidence. Well, it could be said that courage means advancing free from all doubts. But sometimes, it requires even greater courage to advance in spite of one's doubts.

Shea's EXPERIENCE

When I was recently at the Florida Nature and Culture Center for a youth conference, I had the most tremendous experience. I was finally with other youth division members. Not only did we have a lot in common, but we also had a lot to talk about. The encouragement and excitement that filled me were exhilarating. While at the FNCC, I learned more about Buddhism than I ever had before. I realized how much I wanted it to be like this at home in Fairbanks. But I wasn't prepared for the struggle I would have to overcome when I came home filled with enthusiasm and confidence. Other people caught on and saw how great it must have been. I told many people how I hoped that Fairbanks could have the same spirit that I experience in Florida—and I kept hearing the same thing—take charge, start

the change, help lead the youth in the right direction. I wasn't ready to take responsibility, so I gave up. I started attending a new school in Fairbanks even though I didn't want to. I was failing school again and fighting a lot with my mom. Things progressively got worse and worse until I finally dropped out of school and got kicked out from home. This was my rude awakening. Discouraged and depressed I moved in with my best friend. The whole time I was there I was wishing that I could go home and start changing my life. Toward the end of the school year last year, I was becoming very rebellious. A lot of it had to do with my parents' divorce and other hardships that were in my life at that time. I felt such self-pity that I didn't care what would happen to me. So I did whatever I wanted. This was a one-way ticket to jail. In fact, I did break the law and was being brought to the juvenile facility by my mom. I didn't want to go, so I begged my mom to let me stay with her. When she



Mountains near Fairbanks, Alaska, Shea Braniff's home.

matter what, don't give up. He pounded a phrase into my head, "It's not what you did, but what you are going to do about it." This opened my eyes to a lot of things. The second person is my grandma. Even though I never told her what was going on inside of me, she knew. So she called her spies to send me some encouragement. The third person was my friend and regional youth leader, Anthony. He called me at my friend's house and we talked for two hours. One of the things he said to me was that if I wanted to go home for Christmas, I could. I knew what I had to do. When I got off the phone with him, I chanted as long as I could. I went home for Christmas and talked to my mom about myself and she decided to let me come back home. I enrolled back in school and started to practice every day. Then I got this great opportunity to plan a youth division March 16 exchange meeting. This time I was up to the challenge. It was the northern-most kosen-rufu day meeting in the United States and it was a great success!

Later that summer, my grandma asked me if I wanted to go to FNCC. I was very reluctant to say yes, because I thought that it wouldn't be any fun and bore the heck out of me. But my grandma has a way of forcing—I mean, *convincing*—people to see it her way. There were three people who really helped me realize some things. The first person was the man I admire the most—my uncle Bubba. He told me that no

matter what, don't give up. He pounded a phrase into my head, "It's not what you did, but what you are going to do about it." This opened my eyes to a lot of things. The second person is my grandma. Even though I never told her what was going on inside of me, she knew. So she called her spies to send me some encouragement. The third person was my friend and regional youth leader, Anthony. He called me at my friend's house and we talked for two hours. One of the things he said to me was that if I wanted to go home for Christmas, I could. I knew what I had to do. When I got off the phone with him, I chanted as long as I could. I went home for Christmas and talked to my mom about myself and she decided to let me come back home. I enrolled back in school and started to practice every day. Then I got this great opportunity to plan a youth division March 16 exchange meeting. This time I was up to the challenge. It was the northern-most kosen-rufu day meeting in the United States and it was a great success!

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THIS WORLD'S A MESS

(Rap Lyrics)

This entire world is a mess.
The youth deal with drugs and pressure that cause stress.
Because of my state and the things around me,
Hate flooded my thoughts that would eventually drown me.
Now I have dreams about mad schemes
That I will have plannin' on, I wanna drop a bomb.
But I decided no, that ain't the way to go
You wanna change the flow then chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo
'Cause as long as you're sincere in your heart and in your mind
You'll have benefits until the end of time
So don't you worry and don't you fret
'Cause with good daimoku sansho shima's no sweat
Now I know all of this to be true
But when I watch the news I start to feel blue
'Cause I see all of these young people dying
All these mothers, brothers and sisters are crying
And all we can do is chant for the best
And hope one day this world won't be such a mess.
Now I know going through youth is hard
And sometime you feel like you are barred
Up in a cage, and all that's inside is a rage
But when things start gettin' to be too much
You should just sit down and chant a whole bunch
'Cause when you do it will open your eyes
And then one day you might realize
That life ain't about money and things
Or even fat diamond rings
It's about love, family and true happiness
And if the whole world chanted, it wouldn't be such a mess.
No matter how people treat you
Deep down inside they got the Buddha nature too
But there's a new war every few years
Cause the young people forget all the shedded tears
And that's what's happening to our youth today
Only it's not a war that's fought far away
It's a war that's been planned since the beginning of time
And all the battlefields are up in your mind
But just like all wars there's got to be an end
And that day will come when we walk hand in hand
And if that happens I must confess
This world wouldn't be such a mess

—Shea Braniff, Fairbanks, Alaska

MATERIAL REQUEST

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Our youth publication is only as strong as what you bring us.

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...whatever you got, get it to us.

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Attn: Kim Stapchuk
Seize the Day
606 Wilshire Blvd. PO Box 1427
Santa Monica, CA 90406-1427

Email:
seize@sgi-usa.org

("New National..." continued from page A)

Seize: Thank you, Cory. Any closing thoughts?

Cory: May I close with a song?

Seize: No.

Cory: Then I'd simply like to say I hope I can earn

your trust and friendship and that we may together "seize the day" of the year 2000, in the Year of Youth. This is our time, the new millennium. We are alive, together with President Ikeda. There is no limit to how much we can grow when we unite with him. Let's share that fortune! Let's expand our youth movement to include thousands of new friends!

YOUTH *Study* FEBRUARY

"STANDING ALONE and LIVING FOR A MISSION"

by Mark Kaplan, San Francisco

This is the era of youth. Youth do not depend on anyone. Nor do they hang on someone else's coattails. "I will open the way forward myself. I will advance kosen-rufu. I will see to it that the SGI is victorious." This is the spirit of youth and the attitude of true successors who love and cherish the SGI." (*Faith into Action*, pp. 69-70)

The lion goes alone on his thousand-mile journey. He seeks no companion. I too will go toward kosen-rufu. I'll weather the storm, I'll fight obstacles and demons, I'll ride out the raging waves and I'll forge on, no matter what. I'll go, I'll fight." (*Faith into Action*, p. 120)

At a recent conference I attended at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, a young woman said that she didn't like the idea of standing alone. She wanted to be with people. But after attending the conference, she realized that standing alone didn't mean being alone; it didn't mean doing everything by oneself. It meant chanting to come up with a dream, a vision, and then committing oneself fully to accomplishing that vision. Standing alone meant, for her, to take full responsibility and not to depend on anyone else to achieve your dream. The stand-alone spirit means being so determined that you are willing to go through anything for your dream.

When I first started practicing, I also didn't like the idea of standing alone. I didn't like the way it sounded. Standing alone sounded so lonely. But as I developed in my practice, I realized that you never stand alone for long. Or, put another way, when you stand up for something meaningful, when you are absolutely determined to accomplish something of value and every nerve and fiber in your body is focused on your goal, the environment responds to your determination and rallies behind you. People come from seemingly nowhere to assist you.

The history of the SGI bears this out time and again. The first Soka Gakkai president Makiguchi died in prison alone, abandoned by most of the other Gakkai leaders and even by the priests of the religion he was devoted to protecting. But his integrity, his determination to dedicate his life to protect Nichiren Daishonin's teachings inspired one other man, Josei Toda, to stand alone after World War II. By 1957, 750,000 people joined to support this cause. And today, more than 17 million of us have emerged in response to this stand alone spirit. In other words, when we stand alone, we attract others to us.

A person who stands alone is strong in themselves. They manifest their Buddha nature, their true potential. They begin polishing the gold inside that is unique to them and can never be taken away. Even if everyone is against them, they possess an integrity, an inner core, created by their own efforts, sometimes invisible and unappreciated, that makes them strong. They fear nothing because they are willing to go through anything for their beliefs and vision.

By contrast, those who are always following others, never taking the initiative for their lives or dreams, end up very lonely. They are so focused on pleasing others or on trying to win friends that they completely lose sight of who they are. Often, they so desperately look outside themselves for validation or direction that they

have no sense of mission for themselves. Lonely people can be lonely even in a crowd. Buddhism teaches us to never look outside ourselves for the Gohonzon or our Buddha nature.

In a sense, the stand-alone spirit is the essence of the mentor-disciple relationship. A mentor stands alone, and through their example and high life-condition developed from standing alone, others are inspired to do so as well. For example, Nichiren Daishonin would often describe his difficult conditions on Mount Minobu or Sado Island or his various persecutions, but he never complained. He always looked at the positive aspects of his situation, saying in essence that "This proves that I am a votary of the Lotus Sutra." He even said in the midst of his direst persecutions that he was "the happiest man in Japan" because he viewed his difficulties as proof of his mission in life. Seeing how he persevered despite his difficulties inspired his followers to do the same.

People who stand alone can be trusted. But how do we start standing alone, especially if we feel that we are a wimp? We need to have to have a strong mentor. When we are inspired to stand up for a great dream, standing alone means making that dream our personal responsibility. When we take the same dream as the mentor, share the same heart and the same vision, then the relationship between mentor and disciple is stronger than any other bond because both mentor and disciple are willing to go through absolutely anything for their shared vision.

But this also means that we must know ourselves very well. We have to know and find out what our vision is. What is your dream? What is your "mission"? To learn this, we need a strong seeking spirit, and the strong desire to lead a correct and happy life. If we chant, eventually we will develop our instincts and inner strength to stand alone.

As President Ikeda wrote in *The Human Revolution*, "Do not be afraid of people's scornful laughter or society's criticism. When you stand up, have the self-confidence that you can conquer the world. Stand up with ability and conviction. Seek those who will appreciate you 100 generations hence. Do not count on being acknowledged in the present age. Seek the responsibility that is to be entrusted to you and carry it out." ♪

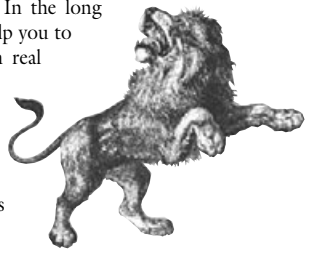
QUESTIONS for discussion

Look at the quotes. How do you feel about this? Why is it especially important for youth to stand alone?

Does it make sense to you that by standing alone you actually attract people, and by living to pursue popularity, you end up feeling lonely and alone? Have you ever seen examples of this?

In your life, how do you view standing alone versus "following the crowd"? Why do you think so many people seek popularity? In the long run, what do you think will help you to become happy, or to establish real fortune and joy in your life?

What does mission mean to you? Do you feel like you have a sense of mission? Do you think having a purpose is necessary? Why or why not?



GET REAL!



"Living With Passion"

By Jomo Thorne, SGI-USA Junior High School Leader

"I triumphed. I achieved things that no one can rival — in every place that I worked for kosen-rufu. I hope all of you will do the same. I don't care what it is, but do something. Achieve something that will make others express their admiration." (SGI President Ikeda, Nov. 26, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 4)

Back in September, I happened to catch a TV special on adolescence and was struck by a few things: (1) according to the program, the area of the brain that is closely associated with creativity is more active in one's adolescence than in one's adulthood; (2) teens have more energy than adults—their blood cells are more efficient at transporting oxygen throughout the body; (3) many of the world's great artists and scientists experienced intense periods of creativity in their teens, and were often able to create works of lasting value by the time they reached adulthood.

After hearing this, I was both excited and a bit discouraged. I was excited because this program served to remind me of the good fortune I have in being able to work with the SGI-USA Jr. High/High School members at a period in their lives when they're full of creativity and energy, and are most capable of envisioning a new future. But I was also a little discouraged to learn that perhaps I'm past my creative peak.

Question: Can one retain the energy and creativity of one's adolescence throughout the rest of one's life?

I turned to SGI President Ikeda's guidance. In discussing the life of Nichiren Daishonin, he pointed out that at age 16 the Daishonin awoke to the great wish of leading all people to happiness (he determined to become the wisest man in Japan so as to be able to do this). This great dream led him to study tirelessly, and by the time he was 32 he was able to teach others how to chant daimoku and change suffering into joy. Even more amazing, the Daishonin kept the dreams and hopes of his teens alive throughout his tumultuous life, right up to the time of his death at 61. I felt like President Ikeda's guidance was an answer to my question. YES! With faith one can retain the energy and creativity of one's adolescence.

It seems to me that the key to living energetic and creative lives is to find something that we are passionate about. President Ikeda writes: "A life without passion is empty. Those who lack the passion to accomplish something, living their days by sheer force of habit, are not fully alive. Their hearts are dead. Passion is the proof that we are alive." In the realm of learning, for example, it's clear that young people excel in their studies only when their passion for learning has been awakened. Study after study demonstrates that a student's performance in school varies according to the way in which material he/she is tested on is presented. Those who are visual learners, for instance, will not do well when they are taught in a way that calls for learning by hearing.

We are all geniuses waiting to be discovered. By moving our lives in the direction of our hidden passions, chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is what helps us unlock our immense potential. ♪

LET'S MEET OUR NEW LEADERSHIP STUDENT DIVISION

In subsequent issues we'll find out more about Daisaku's and Wendy's visions for the student division. Seize the Day wanted to first get to know them as people. Here are two intimations by our national student division leaders.

By Daisaku Leslie



Growing up I was always being left out of games. This made me feel like I was always behind. So I tried very hard to keep up, to be a part of something. This sometimes led me down the path of destruction. At a very young age, I got involved with the wrong crowd and started consuming drugs and alcohol. However, one day some YMD came over to my house and encouraged me to get involved with the practice and activities. The spirit that I really liked and

seemed to hit home for me was the never-give-up/win-no-matter-what spirit. This spirit always kept me going.

When I embarked on my journey to accomplish the dream of attending Soka University, I had to seriously put this spirit into practice.

After failing twice to enter Soka, I determined to try again. This began my spiritual battle. In the end I was accepted to the graduate school and earned a master's degree in sociology.

Now I feel that it's time to put the never-give-up/win-no-matter-what spirit to practice again. This time however I feel I am facing the toughest foe ever—myself. I will win over myself and once again experience the joy of human revolution. ♪

By Wendy DeSouza



A few nights ago, I was going through some boxes left over from "the move."

After shuffling through a hodge-podge of packrat items—my old sticker collection from junior high, a Bill and Hillary Clinton paper doll book, and a gold-gilded Koran from Egypt—I stumbled across a booklet I had kept from elementary school. Classmates of mine each had contributed to this booklet by drawing a crayon picture and writing a short bio about me. Some comments were:

"Wendy does not stay in her seat very long."

"I like Wendy. She has one sister and two moms. I think that that is funny."

I won't mention the reputation I had in the kick-ball arena.

What struck me most was what I said about myself. At the end of my self-portrait, I wrote, "I like myself."

I couldn't believe I said something so bold! It's almost shocking that something I felt quite naturally when I was 8 later became a frivolous idea as a teenager. The idea of making something of myself one day—let alone finishing college—was remote. My difficult yet glorious transformation from sleep depression to joyful engagement in the academic world was possible only because of my Buddhist practice and the SGI. This human revolution was excruciating. It still is!

But now I can see no better way to become happy. ♪

BYAKUREN

By Stacey Humphries



Stacey Humphries, SGI-USA Byakuren Chief

HELLO! Happy New Year! I have been practicing for 13 years. During my Byakuren experience of five years, I had the opportunity to be the assistant Byakuren chief when President Ikeda visited Los Angeles in 1996.

Immediately after I accepted this responsibility, many challenges came up. My apartment was robbed; I totaled my car; I was hospitalized with a kidney infection; my horse died and I hated my job. Needless to say, I was at rock bottom!

It was then, on July 3, 1996, that I went to Mrs.

Hachiya, SGI vice women's leader, because I knew I had to challenge myself during this crucial time. She said: "Congratulations. Now that you've hit bottom, you have no place to go but up." She told me not to quit my job, but to become indispensable for kosen-rufu. "Now is the time to build spiritual and financial freedom so that you can do kosen-rufu on behalf of President Ikeda. NOW is the time to stand up." She also said that it was very significant that President Ikeda was in America on Mentor/Disciple Day.

After reflecting, chanting and participating in the activities surrounding President Ikeda's visit with my whole heart, I created a new path for myself. This experience was a turning point in my life and over the next few months, my situation dramatically changed. But what I really was left with was the

impression of my mentor sharing his Buddhism through his compassionate behavior. Now it is our turn to develop and do the same toward others.

After reading President Ikeda's New Year's message, I sincerely feel like he is talking directly to the Byakuren and giving us a vision on how to create this Century of Life. He writes: "With heads held high and with light and cheerful strides, let's move together along the grand path of peace and culture.... It is my hope that we can fight resolutely side by side in this life and win, cheerfully and bravely moving ever forward so that we may each achieve a great personal victory."

This is the Year of Youth—I am determined that as Byakuren we'll be the example in every endeavor. The Byakuren Group is an integral part of the young women's division. My personal determination is to work



Emi Hamada, SGI-USA Vice Byakuren Chief

together with all the Byakuren and YWD members to prepare for May 3, 2001, by ensuring that each of our activities is a total success (beginning with the March 16 introductory meetings sponsored by the youth). This will be our first big opportunity to develop ourselves further and will set the tone for the whole year. It's the perfect equation of practicing for ourselves and practicing for others! How fortunate I feel to be working with such a capable group of young women. ♪