

What Soka Spirit Means to Us

A dialogue on Soka Spirit with Vice YMD Leader Jeff Farr, Student Division leaders Wendy DeSouza and Daisaku Leslie, and vice leaders Maggie Eisenberg and Boston Snowden.



Jeff

Jeff Farr: Many people ask me what they can do in the Soka Spirit movement. There are lots of members, especially youth division members, who want to do more. But they don't know any temple members they can talk to, or everyone in their district already understands the issue. Some people who have talked to me have been really frustrated, feeling there's nothing they can add to the movement. Have you struggled with this? How have you found a way to participate?



Maggie

Maggie Eisenberg: I believe that this is one of the most challenging aspects of the Soka Spirit movement. Honestly, it was very hard for me to have a deep feeling for something that appeared to have no direct or tangible impact on my life. The first thing that really changed my personal feeling was realizing how strongly SGI President Ikeda feels about triumphing over the destructive force of High Priest Nikken Abe and his followers. I decided to chant to understand President Ikeda's heart on this matter. In my 18 years of practice, I have learned to trust President Ikeda in a way quite similar to the way I trust my mother. Though in the past I may not have understood why she was so strict

with me about certain things, I have learned to take the time to try to understand where she is coming from. So my prayer to understand President Ikeda's heart was very effective in changing my feeling about this issue.

Though I still did not know what exact action to take, I finally wanted to take action.

Wendy DeSouza: I relate to Maggie's point about connecting Soka Spirit to our own lives. I personally don't think it's necessary to know any temple members to take action and create value. When I started chanting about Soka Spirit, I began to draw connections to my daily life. I realized, for instance, how I lacked compassion for other people. That was a difficult realization, but I am so appreciative that I was able to see that in my life. For me, facing my fears, developing compassion and being self-reliant are the positive actions I have taken to respond to the type of "fire and brimstone" or fear-driven mentality that's coming out of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood. I believe that human revolution itself is a way to take action in this Soka Spirit movement.

Boston Snowden: I agree with you. I think that self-reliance and confidence are what the priesthood wants to take away from their members. The priesthood wants the members to serve them. They want



Wendy

to drain their members' pockets. Millions of members contributed to the building of one of the most phenomenal works of architecture known to humankind, the Grand Main Temple (Sho-Hondo). High Priest Nikken displayed his selfish behavior by tearing down this monument. This might be obvious to some, and others may not agree — but society has to realize the truth. Common people throughout the world have been enslaved, learning to believe that they are powerless. I have made a determination to stand up against injustice anywhere and everywhere — this is my Soka Spirit effort.

Maggie: A while back, I was at a meeting in Southern California at which several leaders were passionately imploring everyone to DO SOMETHING, to TAKE ACTION to overcome this conflict with the temple. I started to feel frustrated, even a bit immobilized by the fact that I didn't know any concrete action to take. Finally, one member stood up and said something that struck me. It had occurred to him that, though many people may not know anyone who is at all affiliated with the temple, it is likely that most — if not all of us — know someone who has left the SGI, even if not to go to the temple. And many of these people left with hard feelings. He said that he had decided to start chanting for one of these people, as there were several with

whom he had personal connections. This way, his prayer would be heartfelt. I think that this is the epitome of Soka Spirit.

Daisaku Leslie: I like to think of Soka Spirit in broad terms. There are plenty of opportunities for us to personalize this issue. But most important is realizing that the practice of Buddhism entails the struggle between our Buddha nature and devilish functions, both of which, manifest from our own lives. As I practice I have begun to see more clearly my weak points and work to overcome them. For many years, I have been battling with a deep-seated lack of confidence in myself. But when I determined to fight against this tendency, this lack of respect for my own Buddha nature, things began to change. It is a daily struggle but I can say that I am gaining more and more confidence. I feel the key to my winning every day will be to put into practice President Ikeda's recent guidance.



Daisaku

Jeff: Our Soka Spirit effort and our propagation effort are really the same, aren't they? They're like the two sides of a coin. The ultimate intent of both is to plant this Buddhism more deeply in America.

Wendy: That's a really important point. Introducing others to this practice is the ultimate act of compassion and deals the strongest blow to injustice. Connecting Soka Spirit to our own human revolution, and making efforts to propagate Buddhism are a winning combination. ♪



Boston

NATIONAL YOUTH TELECONFERENCE

In January of this year, James Herrmann, SGI-USA youth division leader; Renu Jiandani, SGI-USA YWD leader; Cory Taylor, SGI-USA YMD leader; and Daisaku Leslie and Wendy DeSouza, SGI-USA student division leaders, traveled to Japan where they met with SGI President Ikeda and other leaders.

On Jan. 23, youth across the country gathered at local community and culture centers to attend a national teleconference where they shared their impressions from the trip. The following are key points from the teleconference.

Wendy DeSouza shared that she gained a deeper understanding of how to create UNITY in Buddhism. "The key to creating unity," she reported, "is the mentor-disciple relationship. Nothing should interfere with this direct connection. We should always be asking ourselves, 'what would President Ikeda do?' Unity isn't just a horizontal connection between friends and comrades; it is also a vertical connection between the mentor and the disciple."

Daisaku Leslie relayed an exchange he had with President Ikeda. Daisaku had expressed to President Ikeda his concern for youth in their 20s who suffer from psychological problems by asking, "How can we instill hope in these youth?" Daisaku shared what he felt he learned from President Ikeda by saying: "While politicians, teachers and parents should be responsible for resolving these problems, fundamentally the only way to resolve this problem is SHAKUBUKU. Let's expose youth to good books. Let's care for them. Let's bring them to discussion meetings." Daisaku went on to share what he said he learned about prayer: "There is not a night on Earth that isn't followed by the dawn. Morning always comes. When we are in the 'night' of our own struggles, we should pray with absolute confidence that the 'dawn' is coming. Believing in the 'dawn' is itself faith."

Cory Taylor shared that two things had become clear to him on this trip; the era of America has arrived, and that President Ikeda has placed his greatest trust in the youth. "I feel President Ikeda is urging all of us to advance so that each one of us can say, 'I have done my best,'" Cory said. "President Ikeda asked us how it was that the allies had been able to secure

victory on the beaches of Normandy (D-day) in WWII," he continued. "What I learned was this: The average age of the Nazi soldier on the front lines was 45 years old. In contrast, the average age of the Allied soldier was 25. The allied soldiers, together with their leaders on the front lines, shared a singular determination: We have to win! It was then that I realized that President Ikeda wants us all to have the same spirit." Cory went on to share that President Ikeda impressed upon him the importance of focusing on youth in their 20s. "If we cherish them," he added, "no doubt, we will have victory in the 21st century." Cory concluded by saying that our March 16 introductory meetings are the "D-day" effort of the new century.



(L-r) James Herrmann, Renu Jiandani and Cory Taylor.

Renu Jiandani shared her impressions of what she learned by saying: "The YWD must help each other. If the YWD are united and strong, then they can create a foundation for the kosen-rufu movement and unite all of the members. This is what I feel President Ikeda is telling us."

Renu added that President Ikeda wrote a poem to the YWD for the new year, tentatively translated as *The YWD are the ones who will be creating the Century of Happiness*. "I truly felt that President Ikeda has a great expectation for the YWD all over the world," she said, "especially for America to be the center. It is our greatest fortune and mission to be able to be YWD at this time and work for kosen-rufu along side our mentor. This time will be our greatest treasure. Our very first victory will be the March 16 introductory meetings. As young women, this is our opportunity to begin creating this Century of Happiness by praying for and truly encouraging even one person to understand the greatness of this philosophy."

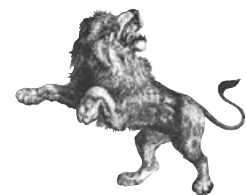
James Herrmann relayed an exchange he had with President Ikeda where he reported to the SGI leader about the victorious youth who participated in the Grand Youth Culture Festival. After thanking President Ikeda for creating the opportunity to have this event, James shared with him the many struggles the youth were facing, (drugs, depression, family problems, etc.), and that they were able to win over themselves. Continuing, James reported to President Ikeda that the youth of the United States will be holding introductory meetings for March 16 — initiating a natural shakubuku movement across America. James conveyed that President Ikeda

was very happy to hear this report and that he mentioned that he will be praying for our success. In addition, he felt that President Ikeda was urging us to pray that no youth stop practicing. Continuing, James shared what he learned about human revolution: "It isn't complicated. Let's say you don't read often. But you decide you're going to read a book and share what you learned with another person. That is human revolution. The accumulation of daily efforts to improve oneself is human revolution."

Regarding March 16, James relayed that our nationwide goal for attendance is 11,000 members and 5,000 guests. He said: "Shakubuku should be fun. Let's create a joyful atmosphere. At the same time, shakubuku begins with a determination. Our SGI-USA theme 'The Power of One' is based on how we can make others happy. We need to make a strong determination to do this. For good or for bad, we can never underestimate the power of one. For instance, one person can commit great evil, like Hitler. He killed millions. But in contrast, one person, if he or she is determined to do good, can help thousands or even millions of people." James concluded by saying that victory can only be achieved through arduous, all-out efforts...not by pretending to work hard. "Let's conduct ourselves in a way best suited for America. Let's be joyful and unrestrained." ♪

KEY POINTS:

- 1) The key to creating unity is the mentor-and-disciple relationship.
- 2) While in the "night" of your struggles, pray with absolute confidence that the "dawn" is coming.
- 3) Advance so that you can say, "I have done my best!"
- 4) Wage your struggle with the determination "I have to win!"
- 5) Create a century of happiness.
- 6) Our daily efforts to improve ourselves is human revolution.
- 7) Shakubuku begins with a determination.
- 8) Let's be joyful and unrestrained.





Heidi's Experience

...at the SGI-USA Florida Nature and Culture Center (FNCC)

SEIZE ^{the} DAY February 25, 2000

Heidi Bergman, New York

As soon as I heard about the first FNCC Soka Spirit conference, I wanted to go. I love the FNCC. And I believe in the importance of the Soka Spirit movement.

Now, I have to say I was not expecting it to be loads of fun. I actually thought it would be a pretty heavy experience. I even wondered if I would fall asleep during a long lecture on the history of the priesthood (heavy subjects make me sleepy). Plus, I don't have direct contact with any temple members. I wanted to be involved. But I needed to know how. That's what I went to FNCC to find out.

And I did find out. First, let me say that I did not fall asleep during anyone's lecture. And I am so glad because that would have been pretty embarrassing. It was actually like being at a University of Buddhism (but without the exams!). The topics we studied were wide ranging and applied to my life. I learned a lot while I was there. I heard different people's perspectives from around the country. There were people who came from as far as Hawaii.

One story that really made an impact on me was the experience of a man who does massage

therapy. One of his clients is a female judge. Over a period of several years he has educated her about Buddhism, including the difference between the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu. One day this judge was speaking to a friend of hers and mentioned Buddhism to her. It turned out that the judge's friend is a temple member. The temple member proceeded to speak badly of the SGI and say that we were practicing Buddhism incorrectly. But the judge knew better. She was not swayed because she had a relationship with an

better. And I have to say I've found that being able to do shakubuku starts with daimoku.

Another point I was reminded of at the conference is the importance of study. To be unswayed by the wolf in sheep's clothing, one cannot be naive. In other words, to refute erroneous teachings, we need to know the difference between Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and what the temple is preaching. We never know when the opportunity will arise.

After the lectures, we broke into small discussion groups. We shared our experiences, our views, and we encouraged one another.

By the end of the discussion, I looked around the table and thought to myself, "This is what kosen-rufu is like." It was incredible. And then I understood why we can all feel President Ikeda's spirit at FNCC. His spirit is kosen-rufu. And I was

reminded that we are all on this planet together. I have an opportunity to make a difference.

We who practice Buddhism are all leaders, regardless of position. I am determined to protect Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, starting with daimoku, study and shakubuku. This includes supporting and protecting the SGI. And that involves taking responsibility to ensure that the SGI continues to evolve as a humanistic organization devoted to leading all people to happiness. ♪



SGI member and he had already explained the difference to her. Since the judge had all the facts, she made a sound judgment (so to speak).

What that says to me is that even if we don't know a temple member, we can still contribute by doing shakubuku (propagation). And I say from experience that nothing elevates my life-condition faster than encouraging someone to practice. Even if I feel miserable, when I summon up the courage to tell someone about Buddhism, my life immediately begins to expand and I feel

THE GRAND YOUTH PEACE AND CULTURE FESTIVAL: EMERGING BODHISATTVAS OF THE EARTH

POEM BY ORPHEUS RICHARDS (AGE 20),
NEW YORK



*Illuminated by the torch of leadership clasped in each hand
the eyes of the youth glowed with passion,
burned with the fierce heat of determination,
and danced jubilantly with the flicker of hope*

The warmth of their lives permeated my being and embraced my soul.

*We joined as one,
vowing to uphold the teachings of our mentor.
In harmony we chanted the words of the universe,
united we accepted the responsibility of kosen-rufu*

*In concert we rose,
knowing that in each of us lay the future,
that in every heart pulsed the life's blood of the twenty-first century,
that our human revolution would change the destiny of humankind*

*Our wisdom will be the foundation,
Our strength will be the stone,
A new world will be constructed with our daimoku as its anthem*

*Sensei's efforts will be perpetuated through us,
the youth,
no matter the ordeal or the hardship,
sansho shima is powerless to prevent the emergence of the millennium
our emergence,
from the earth,
as Bodhisattvas*

MATERIAL REQUEST

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Excerpts from...

The Human Revolution

by Ho Goku

volume XII

Ho Goku is the pen name of SGI President Ikeda. The following two excerpts are from the "Successors" chapter, in which second president Josei Toda attends the historic March 16, 1958, meeting with 6,000 Japanese youth.

The more Toda spoke, the more power infused his words.

"From the standpoint of the Mystic Law, everyone is equal. And for individuals and the nation to achieve prosperity and happiness, there is no other way but to make the True Law our foundation. To achieve this, it is our mission to accomplish kosen-rufu!"

"Today, I want to bequeath this mission to you young people. I entrust the future to all of you. I'm counting on you — counting on you to accomplish kosen-rufu!"

It was a call that issued from the depths of Toda's life, striking the hearts of the 6,000 youth like a bolt of lightning and leaving them profoundly moved. For a moment, a hushed, solemn stillness pervaded. Then, their emotion gave way to a powerful surge of determination that erupted the next moment into a storm of tumultuous applause. Rising skyward, a snowcapped Mount Fuji seemed to embrace these youth who burned with passion and resolve for kosen-rufu.

[Later, after the meeting and the banquet....]

Toda now sensed that everything was complete. He felt all of his remaining energy drain from his body, but it was a good feeling — a fulfilled sense of exhaustion. He sank down into the armchair atop the litter. Jutting from behind a grove of cedars, cloaked in a mantle of snow, he could see the serene and perfect summit of Mount Fuji. He was reminded of the lyrics of the "Song of Comrades," which he had composed:

I do not begrudge my life,
But where are the young flagbearers?
Can you not see Fuji's summit?
Rally now, quickly, in growing numbers!

Now, the youth he spoke of in these lyrics had gathered around him in large numbers, standing up bravely to hold aloft the banner of the Mystic Law. In his mind, Toda recalled the image of his mentor, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who died in prison. He clearly remembered how he, Toda, had been the only disciple Makiguchi could really count on to carry the movement in the future. Thirteen years had now passed since he had stood up alone amid the burned-out ruins of a defeated Japan, seething with rage at his beloved mentor's death. And now these young people he had nurtured under his wing had gallantly embarked on their own long march toward kosen-rufu.

Toda addressed Makiguchi in his heart:

"Sensei! I have inherited your will and secured the lasting foundation for kosen-rufu; I have now entrusted the entire future to my own beloved disciples. Your will continues to pulse with fresh and vibrant energy in their veins. The day is not far off when the flame of kosen-rufu will spread throughout Asia and to the entire world." ♪

Justice

A Word Worth a Thousand Pictures

A perspective on youth in the movie *The Hurricane*

by Shan Serafin, Seize the Day Co-Editor



In 1966, boxing legend Rubin "Hurricane" Carter was accused, tried and sentenced for murders he did not commit. Thirty-four years later, at the recent Golden Globe Awards, Denzel Washington wins Best Actor for portraying Rubin in the film *The Hurricane*, and, in accepting the award, brings Rubin on stage and says to the audience, "This man is love."

Rubin's life story serves as an intriguing standard for evaluating our own battles with injustice and, in particular, our current united struggle against enemies of peace. For in the "Hurricane" history, we see the decisive impact of youth, who, impassioned by the need for justice, stand up where others have fallen and catalyze victory.

During the early years of his lifelong prison sentence, Rubin's plight caught the attention of thousands of people. Many celebrities — Muhammed Ali, Bob Dylan and others — joined what became a campaign for justice. Yet, despite the surge of public support, no progress was made in the court system. Rubin's sentence stayed, and the tide of enthusiasm and protests ebbed. People lost zeal for Rubin's case.

Then, in 1980, a nearly illiterate 16-year-old, Lesra Martin, bought and read Rubin's autobiography. Actually, he devoured it. Lesra was so inspired by Rubin's story that he initiated a friendship with Rubin, first as pen pals, then face to face as comrades. The two of them shared a profound kinship. Rubin found in Lesra a revitalized energy and Lesra found in Rubin a source of wisdom and pride and, fatefully, inspiration.

Lesra would in turn inspire three of his guardians to take up the fight for justice in Rubin's case. They moved from Canada to New Jersey and launched a new campaign. After a decade long moratorium, Rubin's lawyers were met by this posse of Canadians. In one of the film's pivotal scenes, the lawyer tells the young supporters that many people have come and gone in this fight — students and celebrities — but no one stood beyond the first few rounds. Why? Because this is a gradual and unglamorous struggle. And this struggle needs someone to see it all the way to the finish.

Especially for those of us who toil hard for kosen-rufu, these lines the lawyer-character delivers resonate with truth. At times our activities are unglamorous. Certain campaigns can

be mundane or even — let's face it — torturous, but the point is not to luxuriate in a warm and fuzzy struggle. The point is that victory requires fighters who are unflagged by the grueling nature of the fight.

Thanks to the energy of Lesra and his guardians, Rubin's case saw a new judge and — get this — a new court, a Federal one. The legal loopholes still foreshadowed a defeat, but Rubin was convinced that under the eye of humanity, the facts of the case, the truth, would shine forth. Indeed, they did. In 1985, Rubin's case was deemed "racist" and he was freed.

Of all the people who allied themselves with Rubin's campaign, the youth would ultimately be

the ones to send the battle to its victory. They trudged forward, undaunted by the adversaries who oozed up, who made shameless attempts to cuss them off the course of virtuous action. In a scene late in the film, the key perpetrator of corruption sets himself right in Lesra's face and barks empty threats. It was laughable. In fact, at a superficial glance, the scene, which in real life never happened, comes

across as bad filmmaking. Here's this outrageously dumb villain! But with deeper thought, the scene can be quite insightful. In reality, opponents of justice nearing defeat will make exactly such irrational moves.

Consider the case of the chief priest in Argentina. The local youth division firmly resolved to abolish the hidden evils of the Nikken sect. The priest subsequently exposed himself in a critical blunder. He publicly labeled Mother Theresa a "devil." Of all people to insult! Such action is tough to fathom. This caused such a public outcry that the priest was forced to leave the country. In the battle between corruption and justice, authoritarians will inevitably make bad decisions and truth will shine forth.

This March is a significant month to fight for justice. All over the nation, introductory youth meetings will be held to commemorate March 16. And on March 21, a verdict will be given for the Seattle Incident trial, a case about false accusations by authorities against a relatively powerless individual and the search for truth. Our efforts to propagate Buddhism will serve as concrete steps toward creating happiness and precluding the spread of falsehood. As youth stand up, the defeat of injustice will follow! ♪

