

## Mauricio's Experience

### Bringing Out the Best In Every Moment

By Mauricio Zatarain, San Antonio, TX

I was born in Mexico City in a loving family. Brought up Catholic, I got used to going to church as a duty. I was always nicely dressed and paid more attention to the girls than the sermon. I was convinced that by just attending, I had Heaven guaranteed. I demanded God to grant me the happiness and wishes that I thought I was entitled to, but was not willing to change or move a finger for. I learned to accept that I was born a sinner but that God loved me just the same. Looking up to the sky (where I was taught he was), I asked away and wondered why my prayers were not answered. I never worried about the bad causes I was making, because all would be forgiven. I thought that sincerely apologizing to the priest on Sunday cleaned up my chart every week. I aspired to the luxuries that life had to offer no matter whom I had to step over, and made fun of everybody who was different than me. I lived 22 years of my life on an emotional roller coaster basing my happiness on circumstances, material things and attention from others.

Growing up, I developed my thirst for a quick-fix approach to happiness and looked endlessly for a magic potion in self-help books. Aspiring to be an actor and architect, I came to San Antonio,

Texas, in 1993 with my brother and parents. My father was going to open a trading business with my uncle while my brother and I finished studying.

Attending an acting class, I met Brant Miller, an actor, composer, singer and screenwriter. Not only did I admire his acting skills, but his high life-condition and charisma made him a very interesting individual. We became quick friends and visited each other to rehearse acting scenes.

*"I have been chanting for about two years, and the benefits and transformation I went through are just unbelievable."*



While practicing at his house, I noticed unusual religious paraphernalia like incense, candles, a bell, evergreen and a curious wooden box. Several months later, while talking about life, death and the reasons why we live, I found out I was a Buddhist in Catholic clothing. I agreed with all he said about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and I left that day with a smile on my face and a flyer with the phrase *Nam-myoho-*

*renge-kyo*. Although the idea of reciting a phrase I didn't understand sounded ridiculous, I trusted him and had faith he wouldn't let me do anything that would hurt me. I was desperate enough to try anything; I had no job, no money and poor relationships with my family. I said the words in the car all the way home wishing with all my might for them to be the secret to happiness.

He kept mailing me articles that I devoured, and I hounded him with questions that he gladly answered. He visited me all the time. One time after chanting together for 20 minutes, I got a call from a builder who wanted me to design houses for him. I started feeling happier and benefits started rolling in. I attended all the meetings and subscribed to the *World Tribune*.

Six months after my first meeting, I received the Gohonzon on March 16, 1998. I built my own altar and chanted in front of it as much as I could. I stopped listening to the radio in the car because it disrupted my daimoku. I went to all the district, youth and Spanish meetings. I also attended the YMD conference in June 1998, and went back a year later for the Spanish conference. I was fortunate to attend the youth cultural festival in Los Angeles last September, which made me cry so much and made me feel so proud to belong to such a wonderful organiza-

*("Experience..." continued on page D)*



## The Outcome of the Seattle Incident Trial

By Anthony White  
Pacific Northwest Region Youth Division Leader

On behalf of all of the members of the Pacific Northwest Region, I want to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to all of the members of the SGI-USA for our awesome victory in the Seattle Incident Trial!! This is a great victory for all of America and a very sweet one for the members of the Pacific Northwest Region.

Along with the rest of America, we have been chanting eight years for the truth of the Seattle Incident to be proven. Because the incident happened in Seattle in 1963, we felt especially responsible to create a victory that would shine in the history of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. This also gave us an event to rally around in support of the SGI.

While celebrating this great victory, we are in the midst of our introductory meetings commemorating March 16. When all is said and done, we will have had 83 meetings blanketing the Pacific Northwest states of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska. Many young people are expressing capabilities in dynamic ways at these activities and we are expecting over 1,000 youth members and 500 guests to attend.

President Ikeda said that the victory of the 21st century will be determined by the decisive victories of youth. We are determined to continue to work to create a model organization that shines with joy and captures the heart of our mentor President Ikeda. And we will create an even greater victory as we put the Goshu and President Ikeda's guidance into action! ♪

# Sharing Buddhism: Soka Spirit in Action

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. This is the second in a series; the first appeared in the Feb. 25 issue of "Seize the Day."

**Jeff:** When we introduce Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to our friends, they always want to know about the SGI organization. This is a great chance to introduce the true history of the Soka Gakkai to them — especially how first and second Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda opposed Japan's nationalism during World War II. They went to prison for not accepting the state religion, Shinto, and there Makiguchi died for his beliefs. I know that many young people will really admire this history.

**Boston:** I agree. I think explaining our stance toward Nichiren Shoshu early on in our introduction of the SGI-USA is extremely important in letting others know we stand against injustice. The other day I was in the gym with two youth. We talked about so many subjects. I knew someone would eventually bring up the subject of religion. About a minute later, one of the young people asked me what church I belonged to. I replied: "I'm a member of SGI-USA. I practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism." It seemed like all the questions that followed allowed me to naturally share the history of the Soka Gakkai. While discussing our Soka Spirit movement, one of the youth commented, saying, "That's revolutionary!" I was very encouraged.

**Jeff:** I can understand why some people might hesitate to tell others about this issue, thinking that our strong stance toward Nichiren Shoshu might turn some people off. But my own experience is that my friends felt much more positive about the SGI after they knew that we had stood up to the priesthood. They appreciated my honesty. In fact, when I share this Buddhism with others, my opening line nowadays is "I'm an excommunicated Buddhist."

**Wendy:** Introducing the "spirit" of Soka spirit to my peers happened for me once in a difficult experience I had in graduate school. While taking a Middle East history class, I saw students being treated disrespectfully. Even though all the students complained and suffered, no one did anything. One student went into severe depression about being ridiculed in class for something she said. At the end of the class, the professors asked if there were any improvements to be made. I made some honest suggestions, which took a lot of courage for me. Everyone else either remained silent or pretended their experience was overwhelmingly positive. I was motivated to speak up because I felt I had to take action as a disciple of President Ikeda. I remember a classmate approached me after class and praised me for my honesty. I shared with her the spirit of Buddhism to be on the side of justice. She said she could tell it was because of my faith that I had such integrity. She was a Muslim, and while she showed no interest in ever attending

an SGI meeting, she had been struck by Buddhist principles.

**Maggie:** For me, Soka spirit and the spirit of propagation are one and the same because they are both about courage. I have been introducing friends to this Buddhism since I was a young teenager. Most of them did not start practicing right away. In fact, most of them waited at least a year, if not several, before starting. I haven't introduced dozens

of people, but every person I introduced still practices strongly. I believe this is because my desire for them to practice always came from a sincere sense of compassion for each of their lives. Just as Wendy had to muster up courage to speak out for her classmates, it took a lot of courage for me to ask my friends if they would chant. I worried, especially when I was younger, that my friends would think I was trying to "convert" them, or simply that I was strange because I was not Christian or Jewish. I grew up in a part of San Francisco populated mostly by people of Asian descent, and it was odd to be the Buddhist "white girl." But what I learned was that if I wanted to share this Buddhism with a person because I was truly concerned with his or her happiness, then my intentions would rarely be misunderstood. I think this is how we must regard the members who have joined the temple. Whether we have the opportunity to speak directly to these members, or we are simply chanting for them, if we have this compassion, this concern for their happiness, they will eventually respond.

**Daisaku:** This morning I read from President Ikeda's series *From Today Onward*. He quoted Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who stated, "There is no happiness without courage nor virtue without struggle." During last year's November commemorative meetings, I was eating at a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant and had copies of *World Tribune*, *Faith Into Action* and *Living Buddhism* sprawled out on the table. A gentleman a few tables away asked me, out of the blue, if what I was reading was about Buddhism. I replied, "Yes," and asked him if he knew anything about Buddhism. He said he used to chant and introduce others to this practice with others. I shared that I practice the same Buddhism. I sensed that he really knew nothing about the SGI. I found out that he was introduced to the practice through a Nichiren Shoshu temple member. I invited him to a meeting and I am trying to maintain my connection with him.

**Maggie:** And the moral of the story: ALWAYS bring your *World Tribune* to KFC.

**Daisaku:** That's right, Maggie. You never know when you'll need it! The SGI is spreading a teaching based upon the empowerment of the individual to take responsibility for his or her own happiness without dependence on priests or an outside force. I also realized from that experience that I must study more and continue to develop the conviction that the philosophy the SGI upholds based upon Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the best thing out there. ♪



Jeff



Wendy



Maggie



Daisaku



Boston



# YOUTH *Study* APRIL

## Buddhism & Diversity

By Ken Saragosa, Philadelphia

“...the essential teachings explain actual *ichinen sanzen*, the principle that each entity is itself a manifestation of the Buddha, originally endowed with the three properties. In other words, each entity’s individuality is as unique as cherry, plum, peach or apricot [Jpn *o, bai, to, ri*] and, just as it is, manifests itself as the Buddha who inherently possesses the three enlightened properties.” [unofficial translation of “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 784)]

**D**iversity. Multiculturalism. Intercultural communication. These are all words used to describe the fact that in the United States there are people from many different racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Racial discrimination in many forms is a sad fact of our nation’s history.

Racism is the belief that one race is better than or superior to another. The history of racism in the United States resulted in slavery, in keeping people who weren’t European from voting or from becoming citizens, and in many different ways, denied education or employment to non-white people.

But nowadays, those old forms of racism are illegal. Today, in our schools and in many different public ways, we celebrate the many different histories and cultures that make up America. Nonetheless, there is still all too much misunderstanding, miscommunication, and even violence. Not all of it is because of racial or ethnic tensions, but sometimes, these differences keep people apart.

Is the only solution to pretend we aren’t different? To put away our cultural heritage in favor of a common “American” identity? Or should we instead become separate from one another, and only stick with people who share our background and our values?

We often hear about “diversity”; we hear that America is a “melting pot” or “salad bowl” of different people and different cultures. But how do we come together even though we are different?

When you think about it, what does diversity mean anyway? Of course it means that people are different. But race and culture and religion aren’t the only differences in the world. We also have different styles; we like different kinds of music; or have different talents and abilities. Some of us are good athletes. Some of us love music and want to perform. Some of us are private and prefer to spend time alone. Even among members of our own family, who share our racial or cultural background, we are different from one another.

The fact of our each being a unique and special person, different from anyone else, is important in Buddhism. As the quotation above says, we are as unique as “cherry, plum, peach or apricot.” But if we left it at that, we would all just be “unique” — isolated or alone. And if we said we had to come together, that — as many of you know — is easier said than done. What is the basis for our coming together?

In Buddhism, we often talk about “unity,” about transcending differences. This is an easy concept to grasp, but a difficult one to achieve. But according to Buddhism, we must build unity around a common ideal or a common goal. If a group of people all agree to make money by washing cars, it doesn’t matter if some of the people are men and some are women, some are black and some are Asian. As long as they have a common goal or common values, they can work together.

As the quotation says, “each entity” — which means each individual person — “is itself a manifestation of the Buddha, originally endowed with

the three properties.” In other words, though we are all different, we are all fundamentally Buddhas. The differences of age, gender, race, personal style, hair color, athletic ability, etc. — these are all part of our unique expression. But at our core, we are all Buddhas. Our Buddhahood might emerge through different talents or abilities, but we all possess it. All we have to do is make the effort to polish and develop our Buddha nature.

According to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, the idea of “transcending differences” isn’t shallow. It isn’t just saying “we should all just get along.” But without an awareness of what we fundamentally have in common, “unity” or “getting along” is just a nice ideal. Rather, when we realize the Buddhahood within our own lives, we recognize it in others. And based on this awareness, we can use our uniqueness — our many differences — to enrich and support one another as we all work together.

As Buddhists who develop an awareness of our own Buddha nature and the wisdom, compassion and courage that go with that, we can then become leaders in the world who can inspire others to find the true and deepest source of unity and communication.

### Passage for Discussion:

Here is an excerpt from *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, for you to read and discuss. For more information or further material to study, look at the entire “Golden Autumn” chapter, which describes President Ikeda’s first trip to Chicago and explores his views on racial discrimination in the United States.

Beyond distinctions of race and ethnicity, Shin’ichi thought, all human beings are equal. This was the spirit of America expressed in its Declaration of Independence. Nevertheless, the sense of superiority and fear many Americans felt toward African Americans would not permit genuine equality.

The question boiled down to how to change people’s hearts and minds. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin teaches the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings, deeming all people to be children of the Buddha and what the Lotus Sutra terms “treasure towers.” Shin’ichi realized it would be vital to establish in each person’s heart the profound view of the human being espoused by the Daishonin. There was no other solution to the problem of racial discrimination than realizing a human revolution in each individual. In other words, an inner reformation in the depths of people’s lives to transform the egoism that justifies the subjugation of others and replace it with a humanism that strives for coexistence among all people.

Shin’ichi keenly sensed how vitally important it would be to achieve *kosen-rufu* in America.

(*The New Human Revolution*, vol.1, pp. 150-151)

### Questions for Discussion:

1. If “all human beings are equal,” why are people treated differently?
2. Have you experienced prejudice?
3. Since there are obviously differences among people — including differences of physical ability or intelligence — then how can we say “all people are equal”?
4. Can you give an example in your own life where you prejudged someone based on some aspect (race, gender, age, dress, mannerisms) and then realized you were wrong?
5. Has your practice of Buddhism helped in any way? How is “human revolution” a solution to the problem of racial discrimination?

GET REAL!



By Bobbie Stemple, SGI-USA Junior High School Leader

President Ikeda writes in *Discussions on Youth* that "Friendship is the most beautiful, most powerful, and most valuable treasure in life. It is your true wealth. No matter how much status people may gain or how rich they may become, a life without friends is indeed sad and lonely. It also leads to an unbalanced, self-centered existence. There is nothing more wonderful or precious than the friendships of one's youth."

Since the Youth Grand Culture Festival last September, I really wanted to propagate this Buddhism. I was encouraged to chant so I could open up my life to those who are suffering. Then, naturally someone who was really searching for happiness would appear.

Recently, as I was thinking about what to write for "Get Real," I received a phone call from one of my high school friends. I was totally shocked because we had not talked in about eight years. We ended up talking for over two hours. He has been through many struggles and has been suffering since graduation. He has fought an addiction to drugs and alcohol, and at times he was so depressed he even attempted suicide.

I really understood his struggle since I, too, have experienced depression. I said to him that he could definitely be happy. When he asked me how, I told him about my own life and how much I have been able to challenge and overcome because of my faith and friends in the SGI. I told him that I am very confident about my future and I encouraged him that he has a wonderful future too.

Since that first conversation, we have continued to talk. I shared with him a portion of *Discussions on Youth*, "Your lives will be enriched and deepened in proportion to the pain and grief you suffer, the degree to which you struggle and the amount of daimoku that you chant. The hardships you face now will all serve to nourish your growth into leaders of the twenty-first century." Because he was encouraged by this, I told him that I would send *Discussions on Youth* to him.

It is no coincidence that my friend called me at the beginning of March while we were in full swing in preparation for our March 16th introductory meetings. Because I really want my friend to overcome his depression and become happy, I will continue to be his good friend and share with him everything that has helped me. There are so many young people suffering and struggling for a variety of reasons. I think it is so important to be good friends and help to bring hope to those around us. By caring about others in this way, I know I will grow into a better and more compassionate person.

("Experience..." continued from page A)

tion. My mom was so scared for me, though, because she thought I was praying to Chinese people!

I have been chanting for about two years, and the benefits and transformation I went through are just unbelievable. Once I made the determination to change, obstacles came my way; but thanks to my study, now I see them as the universe forcing me to become the man I am capable of being. I stopped complaining about my past or my circumstances and started facing my reality. I now know that who I am and what surrounds me are the results of the causes I have made in my past. There will be no prosperity out here if I don't change what's inside first.

I lived 26 years of my life with the understanding that God was up there and I was down here. I thought I was only required to be religious one day out of the week. Today, I'm a Buddhist 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Buddhism is about action and about being 100 percent in the moment. This practice has permeated all aspects of my life and given me the means to bring out the best of me in every moment; that side of me that has always been there but that I was unable to tap into. Now, I feel like Aladdin every time I chant and I rub the mirror of my life every morning and evening. Little by little I become the kind of person who attracts the

happiness that I want. I don't pray for good things to happen but for the courage to face everything that comes my way— finding the value, the medicine, the lesson. This time, I'm strong and ready to pay the price to be happy. I want to make every day count, plant a seed in everybody I meet and create value everywhere I go. I want to design spaces and act in movies that will encourage others. In *Learning from the Goshu*, President Ikeda states: "A great human revolution in the life of one person can change the destiny of humankind and our planet. It is Buddhism, the Lotus Sutra, that encourages and enables people to become aware of their great power, to draw it forth and use it. Buddhism gives people the means to develop themselves thoroughly and open their eyes to the limitless power inherent in their lives" (p.185).

In the year 2000, I will play the lead in an independent movie that Brant wrote. I have done over 16 commercials and voice-overs in the past two years and have a full-time job in an architectural firm. My relationship with my family has never been better. And even though they don't practice, they notice that I am a better son and a better brother. I am happy. I respect my life force enough to no longer waste it. I'm ready to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in my environment, in San Antonio...in the world.

E-NEWS

..... ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

Greetings, y'all. For anyone interested in automated delivery of Junior/Senior High School news sent to your own e-mail account, here's the chance! The National Jr/Sr High School leaders are putting together a monthly electronic newsletter. Inside you'll find excerpts of SGI President Ikeda's guidance, "whuzzups" from around the nation, short experiences, poems, rap lyrics and more. To subscribe send an e-mail to [listmanager@sgi-usa.org](mailto:listmanager@sgi-usa.org), subject heading can be blank. In the first line of the message write: "subscribe AmericanTeen".

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