

By Wendy DeSouza, SGI-USA Student Div. Leader,
and Steve Mortan, SGI-USA High School Div. Leader

It was the last SGI Training Course of the 20th century. Twenty-one youth representatives from around the country, including Puerto Rico, formed bonds with one another and with youth from around the world and deepened their bond with their mentor, SGI President Ikeda. Indeed the drama of obstacles leading up to the training course — health, financial, relationships, travel arrangement complications — was no less impacting on the character and resolve of each American youth.

President Ikeda's arrival message set the tone for the training course: "During your time in Japan, please earnestly study the Daishonin's Buddhism and the essence of the priesthood issue to your heart's content, while at the same time sharing your hopes and dreams for kosen-rufu with your fellow members from around the world, forging many wonderful, lifetime friendships."

For nine days, the youth devoured and digested guidance. It was a smorgasbord of faith-nourishment. The focal point of every activity was the mentor-disciple relationship. The American youth participated in activities which included large training meetings together with 250 other youth from 45 countries; a tour of the Soka University campus; the 49th Headquarters Leaders Meeting at Makiguchi Memorial Hall with President Ikeda; a Goshō lecture and Q-and-A session with Soka Gakkai Vice Study Department Leader Masaaki Morinaka; a meeting with Rev. Endo Ishida, who recently disassociated from Nichiren Shoshu; exchange meetings with members of the Kamakura region; group and individual guidance sessions; the 5th World Student Division Conference; and, finally, youth supported the greeting of President Ikeda's guest, the Israeli ambassador to Japan. In addition, many youth had interviews with the *Seikyo Shimbun* and other publications anxious to hear about youth activities in the United States.

During the course of this spiritual odyssey of self-reflection and realization, pearls of wisdom about the mentor-disciple relationship were shared. Mr. Morinaka shared that the Goshō inspires us to live true to the spirit of mentor and disciple. He also shared that Nichiren Daishonin never lowered the banner of kosen-rufu despite harsh persecution, and emphasized that what lay at the root of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution can be found in the following passage from "Letter From Sado": "When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teaching tries to destroy the correct teachings and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 302).

Youth from other countries shared their victories in the Soka Spirit movement. One outstanding report came from a Malaysian youth leader who reported that 23 youth who were practicing with the temple got involved in their youth culture festival. The chief Nichiren Shoshu priest visited these youth and tried to discourage their participation, saying that they would receive punishment for their partici-

SGI YOUTH TRAINING COURSE 2000



Boldly Advancing With the Spirit of Mentor and Disciple

pation in the festival. The youth did not listen to the priest, and from their amazing growth in faith, all of them joined the SGI after the festival. In addition, SGI-Malaysia invited 800 temple members to the festival, and after seeing the greatness of the SGI — many for the first time in person — more than 400 temple members disassociated from the temple.

SGI Young Men's Leader Tamotsu Sugiyama stated that there is no greater time than now to struggle together with our mentor. He offered three points for youth:

- 1) Be a pioneer, blazing new trails for kosen-rufu,
- 2) Protect the SGI; it is youth who must struggle against the adversaries of kosen-rufu, and
- 3) Win respect and trust in society by showing actual proof

At the 5th World Student Division conference, SGI Vice President Hiromasa Ikeda likened the participants of the meeting to athletes competing in the Olympics, now being held in Australia. He mentioned that the Olympic athletes may be forgotten in 10 or 20 years, however, the SGI youth's efforts for kosen-rufu will never be forgotten. In addition, he stated that whether this meeting is historic depends on the actions of the participants present at the meeting. SGI General Director Eiichi Wada also shared encouragement, and offered one single phrase for the student division to inherit from President Ikeda: "Wisdom equals kosen-rufu."

At the 49th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, President Ikeda shared the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the struggle for justice and human rights. At one point during the meeting, he asked the participants present if they knew how to sing the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" and invited them to stand up and sing it together. President Ikeda created such a warm and spontaneous atmosphere. He mentioned that SGI-USA was growing at an astonishing pace. He also said that throughout the SGI-USA, members were hold-

ing 40th anniversary celebrations commemorating the beginning of American kosen-rufu. At that moment, he invited SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima up to the podium. Danny called out to the youth of the SGI-USA to struggle together with President Ikeda and to create a great organization in America with his heart. The youth shouted back in unison, "Yes!" The expectation for America was incredible.

The training course participants took every opportunity to grow so that they could share President Ikeda's spirit with their members and friends at home. A pledge was created from the labor and passion of each American participant. This pledge affirmed the participants' resolve to support the "three Soka's" in their local areas: Soka Care, Soka Spirit and Soka University (SUA). A firm resolve to make next year's eight zone celebrations shine was also part of the pledge. In front of the SGI participants, representative SGI-USA youth also made a pledge to support SUA, and thanked the audience for their support in finding capable youth to send to the university from their respective countries. ♪

Soka Justice Group

President Ikeda named the following twenty-one youth training course participants Soka Justice Group.

Jason Berg
Dorney Burgdorf
Hau'oli Busby
Jaideep Chitkara
Myeong Chung
Bobby Debozi
Wendy DeSouza
Lydia Fort
James Herrmann
Yoshiya Ieda
David Ishii

Nobuko Kobayashi
Keli McHale
Steve Mortan
Bonnie Nash
Sonja Taylor
Wayne Thomas, Jr.
Jomo Thorne
Kazu Toda
Jose Luis Vargas
Sandy Wolf

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE SGI YOUTH TRAINING COURSE



BECOMING A GENUINE DISCIPLE

By *Yoshiya Ieda*, Detroit

It is my great fortune to have been able to attend the SGI youth training course this time. I am sure it will be one of the best memories of my life, and I am determined to make it so. Thanks to my mentor, SGI President Ikeda, and many of my great comrades, I was very encouraged, learned many important lessons and realized what was lacking in my faith.

Every moment during the training course was unforgettable. I am glad that I can share my experience with you through our youth paper. Since space is limited, however, I would like to write about what inspired me the most.

On Sept. 11, I had the fortune of welcoming the ambassador of Israel to Japan together with President Ikeda. That was the first opportunity to see my mentor's efforts directly with my own eyes. He is truly a fighter. He is, with all his might, creating friendships with each person in front of him. When President Ikeda said to the ambassador, "I am a Buddhist. Therefore, I will protect you!" I felt I saw the essence of Buddhism. I said to myself, "This is my mentor. This is his fight. This is how he has been advancing kosen-rufu." President Ikeda once said that kosen-rufu is the process of helping and encouraging one person. This was exactly what he was doing — connecting the world through friendship. President Ikeda then held the ambassador's arm, shook hands and gazed at his eyes. I could not suppress my tears. My heart was full of respect and appreciation for President Ikeda, and joy to have a mentor like him.

Now, I am determined to keep the pledges I made to my mentor, more strongly than ever. I will fulfill them no matter what may happen, and I believe I can become a genuine disciple. To be President Ikeda's true disciple — this is the goal of my life.

On the night before we left Japan, I got the following encouragement from one of President Ikeda's staff. I would like to share it with you because I found it very encouraging. He said, "It does not matter whether or not we are capable at this moment. The most important thing is whether or not we are determined and how we will fight from today. And this is what President Ikeda is counting on." ♪

DEVOTING ONESELF FOR THE HAPPINESS OF OTHERS

By *Jason Berg*, Bloomfield, N.J.

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the SGI Youth Training Course in Japan, which was attended by 250 young people from 45 countries. I was struck by the seriousness of these youth, the depth of their conviction and their love for SGI President Ikeda. At times, I felt totally overwhelmed by the magnitude of what we were engaged in. But I was constantly surrounded by young people who were truly seeking President Ikeda. Their fierce determination to fight side by side with our mentor inspired and pushed me to keep going.

As I am writing these words, I am still struggling to understand my experience in Japan. It is the picture in my mind's eye of these gallant comrades in faith that gives me strength.

To me, the main theme of the training course was mentor-disciple. In fact, it felt as if President Ikeda himself was determined to personally train each one of us in this regard. As soon as we arrived in Japan, we received a message from him. Throughout the trip, he sent messages to us and presented us with

many gifts!

I was deeply moved by President Ikeda's consideration and his determination to raise us to be his successors. In my heart, I resolved to reply in some way.

While we were in Japan, it was so clear how much President Ikeda is focusing on America. To be honest, the feeling I came away with is that the SGI-USA is like the favorite child of a doting father. We are receiving all the best training, being given all the best resources and being sent all the greatest encouragement. The question is, what are we going to do with all of this? Do we sit back and become spoiled, or do we gallantly stride forward?

One great example of what to do comes from the lives of John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. They grew up in a life of privilege and could have simply taken it easy and enjoyed themselves. Instead, they put everything they had into working for the people. Ultimately, they even gave their lives for the sake of the people.

It is with this spirit that I, too, am determined to advance. I am fully confident that the greatest happiness to be found in life is to devote oneself to the happiness of others based on the Mystic Law. I will give my life to helping prepare America to greet President Ikeda on May 3, 2001, and advance with our mentor toward worldwide kosen-rufu. ♪

I CHOSE THIS EXISTENCE

By *Lydia Fort*, New York

Every moment of every day, from the formal training sessions to those one-on-one encounters with new friends, presented me with an opportunity to transform and train my life. Needless to say, this experience has been a major turning point in my life.

Being in SGI President Ikeda's rhythm and environment had a profound effect on me. I felt the true power and glimpsed the awesome purpose of our SGI organization to transform the world by creating a new civilization built on a true humanistic philosophy. I learned the essence of how to

chant and study in order to connect my life to Nichiren Daishonin and President Ikeda.

Most importantly, I learned what a rare and wondrous thing it is to have been born at this time — I chose this existence. I chose to be born an African American woman and face sexism and racism. I chose to be born in New York City (how more *mappo* could you get?), in which to do shakubuku (the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism). I chose to be born at this time and in this country so that I could participate in the birth of the Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America, and fight in the Soka Spirit movement. I chose to be born now so that I could carry out my pledge to fulfill President Ikeda's vision for the 21st

century. What a splendid thing!

In that way, I learned what a precious treasure my life and all of our lives are. Never again will I lament my circumstances or doubt what I or anyone has to offer. All that I can do is fight against the negative tendencies of doubt and inertia in my life.

I met so many incredible young comrades in faith who inspired me tremendously. I feel so fortunate to have met them because I know that all over the world there are courageous bodhisattvas who, in conjunction with grappling with their own individual struggles, are all dedicated to fighting for world peace in their own unique ways. And that together, we will ensure that the impossible dream of world peace will become a reality! ♪

(See page D for more Impressions)

NEW LEADERSHIP FOR SOKA GROUP AND GAJOKAI



By SGI-USA YMD Leader Cory Taylor

At the Central Executive Conference on Sept. 22, Ken Nakagawa and Eric Freedman were appointed the new SGI-USA Soka Group and Gajokai Leaders.

I want to take this opportunity to introduce Ken Nakagawa and Eric Freedman to all of you. But before I do, I want to briefly pay tribute to their predecessors, David Eisenberg and Bobby Debozi.

Bobby Debozi's very name is synonymous with "fighting behind the scenes." He has quietly served the SGI-USA members as Gajokai leader with determination, guts, selflessness and dignity. He breathed new life into the Gajokai organization, and used himself to teach what it meant to lead by example. Bobby never asked for anything in return.

David Eisenberg brought new identity to the Soka Group. Embodying the spirit of "strict on the inside, warm on the outside," David fought relentlessly to serve the SGI-USA members with detailed plans, abundant daimoku and his own sweat. He revitalized the Soka Group organization. He was like a big brother — someone Soka Group members could always look up to.

The late 1990s were challenging years for the Soka Group and Gajokai in the SGI-USA. These were years of great transition, growth and development. Side by side with their comrades, Bobby and David led these

groups, upholding and revitalizing the spirit and principles for which they exist. They did this while never compromising their front-line responsibilities! They deserve our greatest respect and gratitude.

Now, we stand at the threshold of the 21st century. Leading the Soka Group and Gajokai into that century will be Ken Nakagawa and Eric Freedman, two of the most capable young men in the SGI-USA. Ken is the young men's leader for Brooklyn-Queens-Long Island Region (BQLI), while Eric is the young men's leader for L.A. Coastal Region. Both have actively participated in the Soka Group and Gajokai since their high school days. Both have distinguished themselves as exceptional leaders in service to the members from behind the scenes.

While uniting with Eric and Ken, it is important to remember that it is up to each of us, the members of the Soka Group and Gajokai, to become outstanding young people of character, responsibility, compassion and bold action.

In his poem "Soar — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" SGI President Ikeda writes, "Direct your steps on this grand and golden path, which others, inspired by your example, will also yearn to tread."

Members of the Gajokai and Soka Group — be confident in your mission! You are the treasure of the SGI-USA. We are entering the most important of times! Please do your very best!

I ask that all of you, members of the Soka Group and Gajokai of America, unite with Ken and Eric, and create model organizations for the 21st century. ♪

The Training Ground for Our Lives



Eric Freedman,
SGI-USA
Gajokai Leader

Gajokai has been, and continues to be, a training group for those who are serious about capturing SGI President Ikeda's heart, winning in daily life and developing a fighting spirit to absolutely never give up.

I sincerely hope that each young man will seize the opportunity to train themselves in the Gajokai and experience the life-changing effect this group has had on thousands of young men, including myself.

When I talk about "training" in the Gajokai, I am referring to the type of training that we take with us into our jobs, family and social circles. For example, Gajokai teaches responsible behavior such as being punctual. We all know the downside of tardiness at school or work.

Gajokai also teaches the importance of prayer. One of the greatest benefits I have derived from doing Gajokai has been for me to learn how to pray and care for others. From age 17, I was constantly being encouraged that before a Gajokai shift, I must chant for the success of the meeting and the safety and happiness of each and every member.

Society teaches us to compete with others and to look out for number one. But in the Gajokai, we learn to care for others; with prayer and effort, we are able to protect the members,

and ensure that they have a wonderful and safe experience at our SGI facilities. Where else but in SGI youth training groups can someone learn such a life-changing lesson?

SGI President Ikeda always praises those who fight behind the scenes, and consistently says that it is precisely because of the unseen efforts for the sake of the members that one can grow and develop one's character, becoming a great leader for the future. President Ikeda created the Gajokai as a training ground for young men to develop. In an address to the Gajokai members, he said: "Conviction, effort and perseverance are the basics of a leader's character. At the same time, these are the eternal guidelines for the Gajokai.... I want each of you to build your own castle of faith while purely solidifying the three mottos of conviction, effort and perseverance in your life" (*Gajokai Handbook*).

It is my absolute conviction that each and every Gajokai member who chooses to actively participate in this group will, without fail, develop into a world-class individual and achieve all of their goals and dreams. There is no doubt that anyone who decides to put aside their own concerns and learn how to care for others through this group will have absolutely no regrets! I would like to declare that the SGI-USA Gajokai will become a shining example for the entire world, and from its ranks will spawn future leaders in all endeavors. I am determined to do my very best to help each and every Gajokai member experience amazing results in their lives. Thank you! ♪

Protecting the SGI Through Soka Spirit and Shakubuku



Ken Nakagawa,
SGI-USA
Soka Group
Leader

Upon accepting responsibility as Soka Group leader for the United States, I stole a moment to reflect on my years of training in this group.

Ahh! I can smell it now: Standing alone in a stifling subway station reeking with urine, miles away from the activity; sweeping and cleaning an activity site in the freezing cold at the crack of dawn, hours before any members arrived. For some, this may seem a bit extreme. But to me and my fellow Soka Group comrades, this is our badge of honor.

SGI President Ikeda states: "To earnestly work for kosen-rufu behind the scenes, without being concerned whether others see or recognize your efforts — that is the tradition of the SGI. Those who work hard outside the spotlight are the true heroes" (*Conversations with Youth*, p. 120).

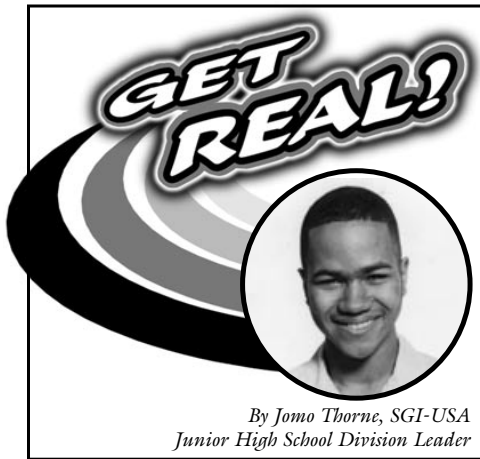
President Ikeda, more than anyone, fights behind the scenes for the members' happiness and security. That is why he recognizes and respects those who work behind the scenes. It is through my Soka Group training that I have developed a deeper appreciation and understanding of

SGI President Ikeda's heart and the mentor-disciple relationship.

How can we prepare for President Ikeda's arrival in America next year as Soka Group members? The mission of Soka Group is to protect the members and protect the SGI. This not only means ensuring the member's safety at meetings, but also protecting our organization against evil influences. In that sense, by supporting the Soka Spirit movement, we are also fulfilling our mission as Soka Group.

Shakubuku is also the mission of Soka Group. By selflessly helping someone to become happy — that is what Soka Group is all about. Doing shakubuku fortifies our state of life and strengthens the Buddha's forces against negative influences. I feel this is the best way to prepare ourselves for President Ikeda's arrival in America next year as Soka Group.

To my fellow comrades in the Soka Group, I say: "Are you ready to fight seriously together against injustice?" I personally pledge to all of you that I will fight even harder in this Soka Spirit movement, and I will introduce at least one person to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism by the time President Ikeda comes next year. I look forward to seeing all of you at the Florida Nature and Culture Center in November for the Support Groups' Conference. ♪



By Jomo Thorne, SGI-USA
Junior High School Division Leader

This month's Get Real was extended to include Jomo's impression from the recent SGI Youth Training Course.

"Charged with new energy, / the wings of life itself / carry us confident and composed / into a majestic future. / Embraced by winds / pure and vigorous, / we fly into a new era, / resolutely transcending / the borders and limitations / of old past life."

Daisaku Ikeda, "Soar — Into The Vast Skies of Freedom! Into The New Century!"

By now most of us have read or at least heard the buzz about SGI President Ikeda's new poem to the American members. My first experience with the poem occurred soon after it was translated into English, during a telephone conference when I heard it read out loud. I have to admit that I've never been really good about reading into the meaning of literature and poetry, and have always found being able to fully appreciate President Ikeda's poems a bit challenging. This year I've also been struggling with chronic fatigue syndrome, an illness that constantly robs me of physical energy. So you can imagine how hard it was for me to concentrate on the poem while it was being read (especially after a full week of SGI activities and long days at work). I missed the deeper significance of the poem, and I honestly didn't feel that excited about it.

A few days later the mother of one of the High School students in my region called to share her feelings about the poem with me. I was amazed by how much she had been able to get from the poem. Somehow the words that had been difficult for me to appreciate had left a deep impression on her life. I realized that the only difference between our two readings of the poem was that her seeking spirit towards President Ikeda (and the mentor-disciple relationship in general) is deep and fierce, and that at times mine is relatively shallow.

I was reminded of the importance of reflecting on the strength of my seeking spirit. In the Goshō, Nichiren Daishonin encourages his disciples to seek out the Gohonzon as someone who's thirsty wants water, or a person longs for his/her lover. When we stop seeking out President Ikeda's guidance, the Goshō, or our fellow member's wisdom and insight, we stop wanting to grow as human beings, and we stop seeking out the Buddha inside ourselves. President Ikeda says that leaders in the SGI need to have the spirit to always learn from the members that they are supporting. In Buddhism, a mentor is simply someone who has mastered the process of developing and maintaining a life-long seeking spirit.

I also saw that the essence of the mentor-disciple

DEVELOPING THE HEART OF A LION KING

By **Bonnie Nash**, Denver

In the fall of 1997, I was one of the youth selected to go on the youth training course in Japan. Although I tried my best, I wasn't able to attend because of financial reasons. I was disappointed then, but in retrospect, I could see that I was not ready to go. Had I gone, I would not have gotten out of the training course what I did this time.

For a long time, I practiced to have good circumstances without realizing it. I thought my practice was strong and considered myself a disciple of SGI President Ikeda's. However, I would be shaken when faced by obstacles. I did not realize until recently that this made me a cowardly person.

Because of my attitude to avoid difficult circumstances, President Ikeda could not count on me, and therefore, I was not truly his disciple.

It was when I attended the young women's conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center this past June that I became aware of this underlying attitude in my life. Before I decided to go, my life was pretty good, I was engaged to a wonderful person and had recently graduated from college. My life was ahead of me. However when I decided to attend the FNCC conference, something happened that turned my life upside down. When I came back from the FNCC is when I recognized this tendency in myself.

When I heard of the opportunity to go to Japan I decided to challenge this aspect in my life. Also there were many youth in our Region who were struggling. I wanted to attend to conquer my fear and to help the youth be victorious in their lives. I encountered many obstacles including those I encountered in 1997, but I did not retreat.

relationship is about helping both individuals dream of possibilities that still don't exist. The disciple's earnestness and capability gives the mentor hope about the future. And the mentor, through his/her example and encouraging words, inspires the disciple to dream incredible dreams. I sensed that the mother of that High School student was excited about the poem because it gave her hope about the undiscovered possibilities of her life.

President Ikeda often talks about the fond memories he has of the years he spent at "Toda University," and of the dreams that arose from observing his mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josie Toda in action. In one of his recent essays President Ikeda describes the casual encounter that gave birth to Soka University. He recounts how 50 years ago President Toda said to him: "Daisaku, let's found a Soka University. It would be wonderful if we could realize this while I am still alive and well, but it may not be possible. If that should be the case, Daisaku, then I leave it to you" (Sept. 1 *World Tribune*, p. 3). This encounter occurred while President Toda's business was in turmoil. Yet Toda's words inspired his disciple to dream beyond their shared struggles.

The more I read the poem now, the more I see how much President Ikeda is really speaking to me through his words. Among other things, I believe that President Ikeda is asking me to dream of a Jomo that dwarfs the

When I finally arrived in Japan I could hardly believe I was there. To be honest, many things happened that I still need to digest, but one thing that sticks out in my mind is a lecture that was given on "Letter from Sado." Nichiren Daishonin states: "When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching

and do away with a man of wisdom, those with a heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 302).

It was through this training course and President Ikeda's guidance I realized I had to advance with the heart of a lion king and not simply seek out good or comfortable circum-

stances. Like a lion king in the jungle, I should never fear what lies ahead. Instead, I should pounce on any obstacle that may arise and be proud to fight alongside my mentor toward a lofty goal of leading everyone to a life with a heart of a lion king. I know that President Ikeda is counting on me, and on the rest of us, to develop this kind of heart.

When I returned, I realized it was a training course for my life and the real training began when I got home. President Ikeda has said that the most respect-worthy of all are those that fight for the Law.

I still am grappling with what it means to fuse one's life with one's mentor. However, I am confident in that my life and the lives of those who fight alongside President Ikeda will experience boundless fortune beyond what one may accumulate if one only seeks good circumstances. I am determined to develop and help others develop this heart of a lion so that President Ikeda can count on us to lead the way to worldwide kosen-ruffi. ♪



Youth participants taking time off for some sightseeing.

Jomo that I've been up until now. He is asking me to look past my present limitations and become an even brighter, more courageous, capable and happier man than I've ever envisioned in my wildest dreams.

Between now and May 3, 2001, we need to muster the determination to face all our limitations and move beyond them. By calling forth our creativity and imagination we can envision and actualize selves we thought would never emerge. The key is for us to continue to seek-out our mentor and to try to understand the real meaning of his words and actions. ♪

MATERIAL request

SEND IN YOUR STUFF

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

Poems, Articles, Pictures, Stories, Commentaries, Pulitzer Prize insight ... whatever you got, get it to us.

HOW?

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