

October 2, 1960

"Shin'ichi Yamamoto was 32 years old. With a passionate resolve for peace burning in his heart, he set out on a world-wide journey."
(The New Human Revolution, Vol. 1)



CENTRAL ZONE

OCTOBER 2000



40th Anniversary Celebrations Based on the Theme of Championing Human Rights

Chicago, October 1960.

"...let's stand together, as champions of the cause of human liberation."



By Sandy Wolfe, Chicago

Since our peace work is rooted in our respective communities, a greater emphasis is being placed on the local areas' anniversary activities. Most Central Zone districts held discussion meetings based on human rights-related topics at their neighborhood meetings during the month of September. Discussion meeting participants came away from these dialogues with a heightened awareness of the positive impact their daily practice and behavior have on their family, neighborhood, country and world.

This theme was carried through to the World Peace Prayer Meetings

and other events in October. For example, Indiana Area hosted a world peace festival, Southern Ohio Area sponsored an open house, and Michigan/Detroit Areas sponsored a weeklong series of activities highlighted by the Victory Over Violence Concert at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Meanwhile, Kentucky Area hosted the Faith Enrichment Program, inviting human rights activists within the local community. Furthermore, in November, Northern Ohio Area will take part in a community event to prevent violence, while Wisconsin Area will hold a VOV exhibit at the Milwaukee County Court House for a week. All of these events are drawing hundreds of guests and giving

members a unique opportunity to express their limitless creativity and create further ties to their communities.

The victories achieved through these exciting local events will build momentum toward the culminating Nov. 4 zone celebration in Chicago, which will be a most exuberant gathering of diverse people. Through music, dance, spoken word performance and multimedia presentations, the contributions of President Ikeda and of SGI-USA members to human rights movements over the past 40 years will be expressed. Our hope is that the audience will come away with a greater understanding of SGI-USA's rightful place in the global struggle for justice and equality.

We are also happy to announce that "Dialogue With Nature," the traveling exhibition of President Ikeda's nature photography, will be available for viewing before and after the zone event at the Chicago Culture Center.

Based on the power of prayer and our mentor's dream for worldwide kosen-rufu, the Central Zone is determined to develop the next generation of Midwest peace workers. Our "Championing Human Rights" event will become another benchmark, similar in significance to 1960 and 1980, in the growth and development of the Central Zone SGI-USA members. ♪

Timeline

1960: Based on the power of prayer and his mentor's dream of worldwide kosen-rufu, a young Soka Gakkai President Ikeda meets with Midwest SGI-USA members in Chicago. These pioneering men and women have been sinking roots deep in the central United States ever since.

1980: Chicago members unite and thoroughly prepare to welcome SGI President Ikeda back to the windy city, commemorating the 20th anniversary of his initial visit. SGI President Ikeda arrives in Chicago in October and attends the dramatically moving and heartwarming culture festival, "Capture the Spirit," held in the Medinah Temple.

2000: On Saturday, Nov. 4, in Chicago's 4,300-seat Arie Crown Theater, Central Zone members and their family, friends and colleagues will gather to celebrate the 40th anniversary of SGI-USA's achievements in conducting grassroots peace work throughout the world. "Championing Human Rights" expresses our decades-long dedication, as a Buddhist association and as individuals, to eradicating human suffering based on the practice and teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. ♪

VOICES from the ZONE



By **Osamu Kaneko,**
Central Zone
Youth Leader

Making the Impossible Possible

In Nichiren Daishonin's letter "Many in Body, One in Mind" he states:

If the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve their goals, whereas if one in body but different in mind, they can achieve nothing remarkable. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 618)

After this passage, Nichiren Daishonin quotes an episode of King Wu of Chou leading 800 men who defeated king Chou of Yin with 700,000 soldiers. He refers to the prime reason for victory as nothing but "perfect unity."

Have you ever imagined what kind of battle and strategy King Wu employed to win over enemies with almost 100 times more soldiers than his army? Whenever I read this passage, I am so encouraged and hopeful just thinking about the amazing power and result we can create if and when we truly unite. At the same time, I cannot

help but wonder what kind of organization, as well as what type of leaders and people, we would need to have in order to make the impossible possible (just like King Wu and his soldiers).

I often recall a men's leader with whom I practiced in Canada. Although he was just an ordinary man, he gained the respect and trust of all the members and created an organization that was bound together by friendship. He visited every single member and continued to encourage them by sharing SGI President Ikeda's guidance. He would often share his love toward President Ikeda and his dream to someday welcome President Ikeda to his area for the sake of the members and the community.

Finally, after 20 years of sincere chanting, President Ikeda visited his area. No one ever thought that he would visit a city with such a small membership. But I feel that it was that men's leader who made the impossible possible. I clearly remember the feeling and atmosphere of total unity with the members and the joy that was derived from it — all of us working together toward welcoming President Ikeda.

In his speech at this past July's Headquarters Leaders meeting, President Ikeda said: "It is beautiful when people can get along and work well together. Buddhism is a doctrine of cooperation and harmony. This spirit of friendship is articulated as many in body but one in mind and is the SGI's foremost treasure." Also in the same speech, he mentioned: "What is it that distinguishes a successful organization? Leaders who take committed action, who make unstinting, all-out efforts, who lead the way in visiting individual members at home to offer words of encouragement and guidance. This is what makes for a successful organization" (Sept. 1 *World Tribune*, p. 9).

This coming November, the Central Zone will host a 40th Anniversary event in Chicago. This will be our steppingstone toward May 3, 2001, and the SGI Family Youth Festival in our zone. Based on this guidance, youth in the Central Zone are totally determined to create incredible harmony and joy in our organization, together with the men's and women's division, to welcome President Ikeda back to the Midwest! ♪

VOV Camp Held in Denver

By Gary Russell, Denver



For one fun-filled weekend on Aug. 19-20, the Jr. High and High School members of the Rocky Mountain Region gathered at Pickle Gulch for a camping experience. The theme of this activity focused on the Victory Over Violence project.

After dinner and dialogue, discussion groups explored various topics related to violence, such as ways of dealing with anger in a constructive way. One youth talked about how he took all his anger to the Gohonzon and chanted about it. Other discussions led to sports and entertainment media, and how they sometimes have a tendency to glorify violence. Suggestions to counter this problem included encouraging parents to discuss openly with their children what they see and hear so that the children can understand the difference between reality and fiction, right and wrong.

Of course, amid all this heavy discussion, there was also plenty of time for food and fun, from hiking to playing ball to swapping "Blair Witch" jokes.

On the second day, the participants read and discussed SGI President Ikeda's recent poem, "Soar — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" The consensus of this discussion was that this poem was President Ikeda's expectation of the members of the SGI-USA, especially the youth, to be victors in life who are unshackled by the past or by baseless criticism. Unrestrained by these things, the youth can then soar, fulfilling President Ikeda's vision and becoming leaders of the global peace movement. ♪



YOUTH *Study* OCTOBER 2000

FRIENDSHIP, COMPASSION & *Working for Change*

The following is the conclusion of a dialogue on the subject of friendship by three members of the SGI-USA Youth Study Committee: George Ross from the San Francisco Bay Area; Adam Gamble, who lives in Cape Cod, Mass.; and John Smith from the New Orleans area. Part one of this discussion can be found in the Sept. 18 "Seize the Day" youth study page.

Responsibility for the prevalence of violence in our world today falls on society's leaders — on adults, including politicians, educators and people in the mass media. But nothing will change by simply criticizing them. It is up to you, the youth, to stand up with the determination to create a different society from now on. The important thing is that you begin to take nonviolent action, starting in your immediate environment.

What do you do, for instance, when you see a friend heading down the wrong path? If you really care about that friend, then you should stand by them. I hope you will be a good friend who not only listens attentively to what your friends have to say, but who can come out and tell them when needed: "What you're doing is wrong," or "Don't throw away your life." In the Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin cites the famous words: "If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 28).

Adam Gamble:

As you may know, the SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century recently published a book titled *Buddhist Peacework*. This book includes essays by 18 Buddhist leaders from different sects from around the world, including SGI President Ikeda, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. The book presents different ways that Buddhist groups are working to improve their societies through taking concrete action in their respective communities.

I recently spoke with a professor who actually used this book in a university course on Buddhism. She said that some of her students were so inspired by this book that they started taking action to improve society themselves. She also added that for her, a key point is that Buddhism recognizes the interconnectedness of all things. I think that once we start to recognize just how deeply connected we are with others, even strangers, it becomes easy to feel compassion for them.

In *Buddhist Peacework*, President Ikeda writes, "The practice of Buddhism is based on compassion." He adds that "in Buddhism, compassion signifies the sublime endeavor to share the suffering of another from the stance of our common humanity and to create an expanding network of genuine friendship."

Before I started chanting, I would probably tell you that I understood these ideas. But the truth is that my understanding was only superficial and intellectual at best. Fortunately, my Buddhist practice has helped me to start to grasp these ideas with my heart. Seeing my fellow SGI members open their hearts to one another and to their friends and families has been so important to me.

George Ross:

Yes, I agree. It is amazing to see how courageous it is to open our lives and take the chance to have trust in another person.

I have studied the history of the Soka Gakkai in *The Human Revolution*, and in President Ikeda's essays reflecting on his experiences. While the meaningful bond of mentor and disciple is at the heart of our history, there have also been many occasions when people abused the organization, took advantage of other members or betrayed the trust placed in them.

I think often of how President Ikeda must have felt when he was betrayed by friends he had known for so many years. Despite this, he continues to encourage us to form bonds of friendships that will last lifetime after lifetime. Despite knowing the darkest qualities in human nature, he is not bitter, cynical or disheartened. Instead, President Ikeda continues to seek out friendship and dialogue. He has remained steadfast in his resolve to support and encourage peaceful dialogue among the youth of many countries throughout the world.

Sometimes I think of how impatient I have been with some of my friends and leaders when it seemed they were not willing to agree with me. But through the examples of many people in the SGI and the human revolution I have done in my activities to support our members, I have learned the importance of maintaining clear goals and expectations for myself. I have learned the importance of not only having good friends, but also being a good friend to others. ♪



QUESTIONS ^{for discussion}

1. What does it mean to say that people's lives are connected? Do you believe this?
2. What do you think Nichiren Daishonin means when he writes, "If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy?"
3. Is peer pressure a strong influence in your life? In the lives of others around you?
4. Are there examples in your life of how people influenced others in a positive direction? Are there examples where one person, or a small group of people, made a positive difference in your school, community or family?



Trailblazers!



by **Saori Yada,**
San Francisco #2
Region Student
Division Leader

Having Balance in My Life

Members of San Francisco were busy planning for our Oct. 7 event commemorating SGI President Ikeda's 40th anniversary of worldwide kosen-rufu. Indeed, such celebrations keep us busy and on top of our daily struggles. We spend so much time planning the meeting and yet it is over in a day without us even noticing.

It's a good sign if you have a sense of accomplishment, but oftentimes we wonder, "Is there something missing?" When things don't go just as we would have liked, we get upset. We may be mad about things such as guests not showing up, or hold a grudge against someone, saying to ourselves "So-and-so didn't do the job right," etc. Once we're trapped in this mindset, we're easily caught up in the routine of activities and lose sight of their real purpose. Why do we spend so much energy and time on SGI activities, anyway? Here are my own thoughts on how to create meaningful, value-creating activities.

Northwestern Zone Leader Richard Yoshimachi once explained: "We celebrate special days in the SGI in order to refresh our faith and practice. It's the time for us to make new determinations, overcome struggles and change our karma. If we forget to grow through these activities, we're missing the important point of our practice."

His comment really hit me as I had been struggling to find a balance between my school studies and SGI activities throughout my college life. I also doubted my ability to fulfill my mission as a student division leader. Then I started to think and chant about the purpose of my practice.

Mystically, one day, I received the testing permit for the CBEST (California Basic Educational Skills Test). I must admit that this was my third time taking the test. The last time I took it, I failed it only by three points. The next test was scheduled for Oct. 7, which was the very day of our celebration.

I knew that this is exactly the wisdom I gained from chanting to the Gohonzon. I understood that this is my opportunity to really learn how to balance my studies and SGI activities. So, what I decided to do is to make my studies a priority rather than taking a part in the planning committees. I believe that if I spend the same amount of energy and time on the CBEST as I do for SGI activities, then I'm sure that I'll successfully pass the test, and I can also report to President Ikeda that I finally have won.

However, not taking part in SGI activities is not the solution, either. I decided to support the Oct. 7 event in my own way. I promoted the meeting to non-active members and especially students.

In short, Buddhism equals daily life. If I'm miserable and unsuccessful with what I do, whether it's SGI activities or not, I'd be completely missing the point and purpose of my faith. Unless I can say that I'm putting 100 percent effort in both my daily life and SGI activities, I cannot win over my weaknesses nor accomplish any goals, no matter what I do. Determination first! Daimoku first! My studies first! ♪



Friends of SGI – The Soka Spirit

By Jennifer Dowdy, Houston, Texas

*Good friends of SGI —
Our brothers and sisters across the nation
uniting together as a family
as a whole
creating lifelong friendships
touching the lives among us here, there — nationwide
striving to become a better person
cherished memories kept close to heart...always
sharing each other's dreams and struggles
hopes and achievements
as we follow the guidance from President Ikeda —
we will chant for unity and happiness of others
as it was intended to be
taking a step closer to victory
building a closer, stronger, tighter bond
we, as the youth of today and tomorrow
Are the future and hope of the world
for the friendships we have created these past few years —
will be cherished —
today, tomorrow, and forever...
We will meet again soon in the near future.*



To discover knowledge

By La-Tasha Payne, Annapolis, Md.

*I know a lot just not enough —
No one does. That's why there are people
In the world pondering solutions to problems
Not realizing some things are to be left alone —
So while they're wasting a lifetime on one problem
They could be out there discovering things every day
Because they don't know you don't have to be the
Inventor to discover knowledge.*

MATERIAL request

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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.

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