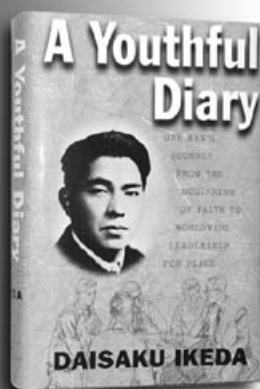


Reflections on *A Youthful Diary*



SGI-USA National Junior High/High School leaders Nobuko Kobayashi, Steve Mortan, Shan Serafin and Jomo Thorne shared with *Seize the Day* their impressions of the book *A Youthful Diary* (a compilation of journal entries Daisaku Ikeda made during his youth).

Seize the Day: Nobuko, what is one passage that inspires you?

Nobuko Kobayashi: In particular, an excerpt from page 47 reads:
Saturday, September 9. Cloudy.

My physical condition is extremely bad. If I ruin my health, I cannot achieve anything. Must be careful.

Slept profoundly, as though I'd slept for a year.

Chanting daimoku is the only way to break through deadlocks, whether of the body or the mind.

I believe in my eventual victory. Daimoku will be its driving force.

I am young. I will advance. Straight ahead, on the road I must follow.

I am young. I will fulfill what the heavens have ordained.

I am young. I will muster my courage, convinced that all struggles under my teacher's guidance will lead to the good.

I am young. I must keep my spirits up, whether I win or lose, even during painful or lonely times.

Seize: So, Nobuko, a.k.a. Big Heart, why this passage?

Nobuko: At the time I read this, I was struggling with my own weak physical condition. Knowing that President Ikeda was going through extreme physical ailments, I was impressed with his courage. He encouraged me because he was encouraging himself.

Seize: Thank you. Yo, Steve, whuzzuuuuup!

Steve Mortan: You know, "whuzzuuuuup" is getting kinda old. Anyway, here is what inspires me. From page 485:

Tuesday, March 8. Cloudy then clear.

Stayed at the headquarters all day long.

Gave guidance to my juniors throughout the evening. Continually praying for the youth division to produce even one more capable person — my continuing prayer.

People, capable, people, young capable people.

This alone determines the Gakkai's future.

Must expand my life and give my all to guide them.

Seize: Big Steve, why do you feel this passage is, as you've said, awesome?

Steve: You can really feel how President Ikeda is truly depending on the youth. He emphasizes praying to produce even *one more* youth — not even a whole bunch, but just for one capable person. I agree with him that it's the youth, particularly the junior high/high school members who will determine SGI's future.

Seize: Shan. Talk to us. You don't have a particular quotation?

Shan Serafin: No, not a particular one. The thing about *Youthful Diary* is that you can delve in anyplace anywhere in the book, and read an entry and, wham, you get a slice of youth. That's what I find appealing. It's youth in its raw form. I read these passages in which President Ikeda is so hard on himself — critiquing his own actions and his drive — and I feel like, yup, youth is all about that. I stop feeling disappointed about my own current problem. I realize this is the time for me to grow, to stretch, to fail, to curse, to sweat — you know, to create a life. My suffering now becomes par for the course. Let's say I was forced to pick a new one-word title for this book. It would be *Struggle!* No, no, wait; it would be *Advance!* No, no, *Forge Ahead!*

Seize: That's two words. Learn to count.

Shan: It's two but not two, my friend. *Forge Ahead!* Yeah, *Youthful Diary* forever inspires me to forge ahead.

Seize: Mr. Thorne. How's life?

Jomo Thorne: Life is good. I'm inspired by an excerpt from page 52.

Wednesday, October 4. Rain.

Self-awakening is most important. Those governed by circumstance, with no self-awakening, will be overwhelmed by life's storms. Can we not say that self-awakening is the basis of ideology?

In society we find those who win and those who lose. Fortune and misfortune cannot be calculated. Even a person of self-awakening, even if temporarily defeated, can go on to build a future vaster, broader, deeper and greater than that of a person who originally won. As long as we are not defeated fundamentally, we should continue to advance step by step, confident in our eventual victory.

Those who have tasted defeat can truly appreciate the joy of victory. Arrogance in victory and sorrow in defeat are both ultimately comic. What are we striving for and how great is our self-awakening? These are what matter.

Jomo: It's easy for us to live our lives without questioning the assumptions we hold about our potential to change. Arrogance isn't just about looking down on others. It also means being convinced that one's limited perception of one's self and others is correct. This passage reminds me to continually question the limited perception we have of our ability. I'm encouraged by the tireless seeking spirit President Ikeda displays in this passage; and, by seeking spirit, I mean seeking one's hidden potential.

Seize: Thank you all for your comments. ♪



Nobuko



Steve



Shan



Jomo

Sika Spirit



**By Tamie Frasier,
New Jersey**

I am 25 years old and have recently graduated from law school. Although I was born into this practice, I am always reluctant to call myself a “fortune baby,”

because growing up in a Judeo-Christian society, I often felt embarrassed about my Eastern-based religious beliefs, and felt more intolerance than fortune with regard to practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

My legacy (which stems from my grandmother, Sarah Jordan, converting to Buddhism in 1968) is something, however, that I have learned to appreciate as the heart of my spiritual foundation. And in retrospect, my spiritual growth can be divided into three stages: being born into Buddhism, where a basic foundation was laid (which I jokingly refer to as *the era of forced fortune*); going to college, where I truly began to practice for myself; and going to law school, where I took leadership responsibilities and am now learning how to practice for others.

Growing up in a large family of practicing Buddhists was paradoxical, in that, I did not always like to do gongyo and activities, but I always found comfort in knowing that my problems could be overcome through chanting. Yet, this bitter-sweet dynamic drastically tilted toward the bitter side when my grandmother, whom everyone in both my family, as well as the SGI in Washington, D.C., warmly referred to as “Mama Lou,” died the summer before my senior year of high school.

My grandmother had successfully fought against an illness called scleroderma for many years, however, when she was nearing the end of her existence, as I knew her, I poured my life into chanting for her not to die. My grandmother and I were so close that when visiting her in the intensive care unit, I could literally feel when her life-condition was strong and when it was growing weaker. I can remember chanting with all of my heart, placing all the faith that I had into her survival.

Thus, when Mama Lou died, I was devastated. I could not understand how so much of my chanting could not save her, or even why someone who had dedicated her whole life to

this Buddhism had to suffer. Consequently, I felt betrayed by the Gohonzon and rebelled by discontinuing my practice. While I would

I began to understand that the Gohonzon – which Nichiren Daishonin inscribed for the happiness for all humanity – is not a magic wand, but rather a symbolic manifestation of his own and each individual’s potential for Buddhahood....

still chant when my parents called me for gongyo, I refused to have complete faith in the Gohonzon. For me, that would be rendering myself vulnerable to something that had hurt me much too badly to forgive.

My first year of college was one filled with experiences that taught me many things about myself...

The following summer, I left early for school, and began my life as a college student at Hampton University in Hampton, Va. I did not take the Gohonzon, and actually viewed leaving for college as a way to escape having to do gongyo and participate in Buddhist activities.

My first year of college was one filled with experiences that taught me many things about myself mainly, that I liked to party, especially on my parent’s dime. My friends and I were notorious on the campus of Hampton University (and maybe even the surrounding city). We took full advantage of the newfound freedom of living away from home, not having to go to class and discovering the many substances that could alter one’s mind. Because of our “free-spiritedness,” many of my friend’s grades began to drop drastically. My grades, however, did not suffer to the same degree.

My sophomore year, I decided that I had hit rock bottom when my grades finally began to catch up with my actions, and after having a very emotional argument with my mother, I realized that I was in no way honoring my grandmother’s memory, or my parent’s sacrifices by acting out in such destructive ways. At that moment, I decided to take the Gohonzon back to school with me, and slowly but surely began practicing, not because my parents told me to, but because I was seeing what chanting was doing for my life.

As a result, two months after I took the Gohonzon to school with me, I was awarded an internship to work with the Foreign Service

in Zimbabwe, Africa, a dream that I had had most of my life.

By the time I graduated from college, my grade point average had gone from a 2.5 as a sophomore, to a 3.8 as a graduating senior. I also began reading the Goshō (*The Writings of*



Nichiren Daishonin), the *World Tribune* and *Living Buddhism*, as well as going to meetings; and through such activities, I began to understand that the Gohonzon—which Nichiren Daishonin inscribed for the happiness for all humanity—is not a magic wand, but rather a symbolic manifestation of his own and each individual’s potential for Buddhahood, which is only as effective as the energy put into activating such a life-condition.

The summer of 1997, I moved to New Jersey for law school and, unlike college, immediately began to practice and participate in activities. It was not long before I found myself deeply connected to the members’ lives and caring for each one as if he or she were close relatives, as I had done in Hampton.

It was at this time that the temple issue became a topic that I could no longer ignore. Initially, I resented the fact that the SGI continuously discussed the temple issue. To me, it was difficult enough to explain Buddhism to guests, let alone trying to discuss the division that had occurred between the priesthood and the laity. I felt that it was judgmental to denounce those who chose to go with the priest—after all, we were all chanting, and

There were three events that changed my view of the SGI's concern with the priesthood.

These events helped me to realize just how crucial our mission is, as members of the SGI, to propagate and correctly practice the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

The first event occurred my first year of law school. I was catching the subway in one of the busiest train stations in New York when I heard a man frantically asking passersby if they had heard of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I first was in shock, thinking, "I can't believe the SGI has begun to do 'street *shakubuku*' again!" That's how oblivious I was to the temple members' existence. But as I approached him, he handed me a pamphlet that explained about Buddhist temple meetings then being held in Queens.

For the first time I was forced to face the effects of the temple, and my heart sank. In contrast to the "stand against injustice" personality I thought I had, I wanted to run away. Yet I forced myself to speak. I asked the man how long he had been practicing, and he



told me he had been practicing for 20 years. I then said to him, "So you remember when the SGI wholeheartedly supported the temple and we practiced together?" and he looked at me as though he'd seen a ghost. Before I

I believe in my heart that we each have a role to play in ending the injustice that the priesthood continues to commit; and as a member of the student division, I take great comfort in knowing that it is our legacy as students to study and understand the purpose of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

could continue, he hopped on the train and was gone in a flash. It seemed so surreal, but it was realistic enough for me to see that the glow that is usually so apparent in the faces of those who practice this Buddhism was no longer in his face; remnants of distortion and dependency stood in its place. I finally understood the need to talk about the injustice of the priests' manipulation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

The next incident occurred a year later while I was at home in Maryland during

summer break. There was a huge movement to protest the destruction of the Sho-Hondo (Grand Main Temple) and I was asked to give an experience about my grandmother's contributions to its construction.

Although my comfort in giving experiences compelled me to agree immediately, it was not until I talked to my mother and was told how my grandmother sacrificed to contribute financially that I became angry at what the temple was doing. It finally dawned on me: My grandmother was only one of thousands, perhaps millions, who "went without" so that the Dai-Gohonzon could rest in a place that was representative of all those who embraced it.

"Look at what they have to do to stop me!"

There was a part of me that mourned for the pioneers' efforts. I did not know how to overcome that feeling of despair, until one day when I spoke with a women's member just before I had to give my experience. She shared with me a similar experience she had when working on a sculpture. She told me how she had to create a sculpture paying homage to a defiant, enslaved pregnant woman. This woman had been lynched and her baby taken from her womb. She explained how she was overwhelmed by this horrendous act, but knew it was important to have the right life-condition during its creation because that would ultimately set the tone for how it was received.

She continued by saying that she chanted not to feel depressed while sculpting this woman, and that through digging deep within her own life, she realized that this woman

was not a victim, but rather a martyr. Instead of dying as an enslaved pregnant woman, she died as a courageous warrior, who to the very end screamed with her life, "Look at what they have to do to stop me!"

I then realized that my grandmother, and the many other pioneer members, did not lose by the destruction of the Sho-Hondo. Rather, their spirit and courage live in our refusal to bow down to the injustice of the priesthood. Thus, from the destruction of the Sho-Hondo we can hear the shout from the

pioneers to the priesthood, "Look at what you have to do, and you still can't stop us!"

Finally, my understanding of the importance of the temple issue was solidified at a meeting I attended at the New York Culture Center this past year. Many leaders were gathered on a panel to give guidance. At this meeting, someone asked a question that I had often wondered, "Why must we always discuss the temple issue?" One of the leaders very slowly leaned close to the microphone and said with a quiet, yet firm voice, "What I am about to say may sound strict, but if you do not understand the urgency of the temple issue and the need to clarify the injustice that the priesthood is committing against this Buddhism, then you do not understand the concept of practicing for others." Just as simple as he had made that statement, it finally clicked for me.

While I had begun to understand the injustice of the temple through encountering the temple member in the subway and giving the experience about the Sho-Hondo, only at that moment did I finally understand the broader picture. This Buddhism is twofold: practicing for oneself; and practicing for others. I now understand that we cannot sit idly watching temple members practice Buddhism in such a distorted way and not do something to stand against injustice. I realized this is not being judgmental; this is being compassionate and doing whatever you can to keep them from slandering their lives.

So my fight against injustice continues every day, especially as the New Jersey Region student division leader. I believe in my heart that we each have a role to play in ending the injustice that the priesthood continues to commit. As a member of the student division, I take great comfort in knowing that it is our legacy as students to study and understand the purpose of the Daishonin's Buddhism. In doing so, we can become true soldiers for kosen-rufu.

I would like to end by expressing my deepest appreciation to SGI President Ikeda for spreading this Buddhism throughout the world. I recently wrote him for the first time, explaining my family's history with this practice, and also explaining that I never really understood the mentor-disciple relationship. He responded by simply saying that he was chanting for my grandmother. I was so touched because he was able to say exactly what I needed to hear to reconcile the difficulties I have had with my grandmother's passing. I sincerely believe there is nothing more sacred that I can do in honor of her memory than fighting for kosen-rufu alongside President Ikeda, our



By *Bobbie Stemple, SGI-USA Jr. High School Leader*

I love the TV show *The Practice* on Sunday nights. I always watch it and if I'm at an SGI activity, I tape it. I never miss it. But in September my television died, meaning no *The Practice*. Because of this, I decided to renew my three-year-old determination to finish reading all 12 volumes of *The Human Revolution* by Ho Goku (the pen-name of SGI President Ikeda). Volume 10 opens with Shin'ichi Yamamoto (the character representing President Ikeda in the novel) in Osaka on Jan. 4, 1956. President Toda had entrusted him to lead what seemed to be an impossible campaign. He was just 28 years old at the time, but his determination was absolutely firm that they would be victorious. He had only seven short months to accomplish their goal and achieve an unfathomable result.

President Ikeda writes: "When Shin'ichi heard what President Toda expected of him in the forthcoming Kansai campaign, he responded to his mentor's call without a moment's hesitation. However, even at that moment he was all too painfully aware of the wide gap which lay between reality and the goal.

"At first Shin'ichi sank into despair. Although he told no one, he was in constant torment, day in and day out, with the baffling problem of how to unfold the campaign. In the midst of his painful search for a solution he was about to scream out in agony, when one after another, like rising clouds, passages of the Goshō appeared in his mind. These passages sharply pointed out to him how to turn the impossible into the possible. They told him that the key to victory did not necessarily lie in numerical strength but in the indestructible unity of even a few people, and clearly revealed that the power of faith was unlimited. Shin'ichi now thoroughly realized that the only thing he could count on were the Gohonzon and the Goshō" (December 1977 *Seikyo Times*, p. 15).

Every morning while President Ikeda was in Osaka, he would start the day by doing gongyo with the local leaders. At that time he would encourage them with a Goshō study pertaining to what struggle they were going through. He did not talk to them about the election, because this campaign was not about politics. He knew that the best way to achieve the goal was for each and every member to be happy, to have joy of faith.

When people are happy, they want to share their joy with others. Therefore, he encouraged

RELATIONSHIPS — BEING OPEN MINDED

By *E-Chern Mark, Hacienda Heights, Calif.*



The body and mind are one, although not always in constant agreement. I am sure we have all gone through times when our heart feels one way but our mind sings another tune. My struggle with this is ongoing, but through it I have begun to ask who I really am and what is important in life.

I have always prided myself in my ability to be open-minded to all sides of an issue and in all facets of life. Little did I know that I would cross paths with a fellow whose life I have begun to care for. Because he is Christian and I am Buddhist, it was inevitable dissensions over certain ideas would occur. Amidst our different views, we have decided that our relationship can succeed if we are willing to be open-minded to each other's practice. Such a noble thought, right? Easier said than done.

Sitting through the Bible study proved to be harder than the thought of attending it. Their prayers, beliefs and values were so vastly different from mine, I suddenly felt so alone in the room. As I sat and absorbed the verses and explanations with clenched teeth, it dawned on me that such gatherings are similar to our own district or Goshō meetings that serve to enlighten and refocus us to take action for happiness. What right then do I have to judge so callously without even opening up my heart and mind to where the other side is coming from? Shamed at my arrogance, I gradually inched out of my shell and found myself really listening and questioning both sides of beliefs.

We walk in a world where differences exist and it

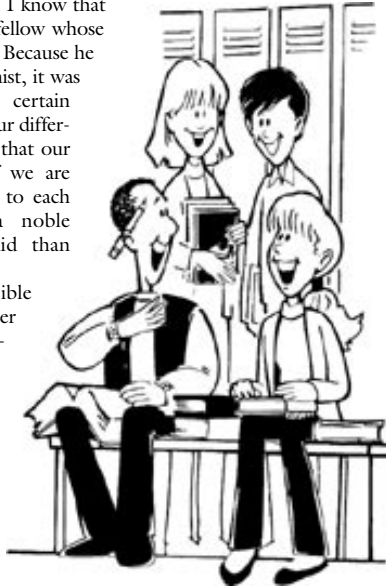
is up to us to decide whether we will use them to enrich our knowledge or to immerse ourselves forever in our own cocoon of beliefs. I feel that it is true when

SGI President Ikeda stated that "listening with an open mind to opinions and ideas of others is not an easy task." He added that "the ability to do so depends on one's state of life or one's depth of experience. What matters most is that we pay close attention to what others have to say." There may be no better way to grow emotionally, intellectually and spiritually than to engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas while respecting one another's views.

Remaining ensconced in our comfort zones and associating only with those of the same culture, beliefs, values and ideas may initially bring about a feeling of happiness due to the shared understanding and acceptance, but in the long run will prove damaging to the self when we find our minds and hearts growing smaller or stagnating.

It is important to continue our activities and constantly have a seeking spirit through ongoing heart-to-heart dialogue. The SGI-USA, which values diversity, is a great launching pad for each of us to cultivate tolerance and respect for our friends, family, members and nonmembers.

It is surprising but true that just by the simple act of opening up our ears, our minds and our hearts, our entire lives will gradually expand right before us. ♪



the leaders to visit each member and encourage them. Because of these efforts, many members became happy and were inspired to introduce many other people to the practice. They were able to accomplish something seemingly impossible, becoming completely successful in what is known as the Osaka Campaign.

As I read this, I was also inspired. Our SGI organization is so precious. We are working toward peace and the happiness of people. It's easy to forget why we have small activities like our district general meetings this month and large meetings like our 40th-anniversary celebrations. Each of these activities is a step closer toward world peace. Through this process it is also important that we challenge our own dreams. This is one of the best ways to welcome President Ikeda back to America. If we have the same resolve as our mentor, President Ikeda, we will definitely achieve all our goals and celebrate a great victory toward May 3, 2001. ♪

MATERIAL request

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

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