



A CALL TO ACTION



James Herrmann,
SGI-USA Youth Leader

Sometimes, there are moments in history that define a generation. Moments that people look back to and read about in history books; moments that define the dignity of an age, when people were willing to give their whole lives for a greater cause—one that benefits the whole of humanity.

Young men and young women of SGI-USA, we are now living in such a moment. It is a moment of infinite potential and defined mission. It is a moment that will never come again.

This Nov. 18, we will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai, our “value creation society.” Seventy years ago, two men (presidents Makiguchi and Toda) dared to defy the trends of a society headed for war, death and unspeakable suffering. They lived in a military state, where it was considered more honorable to die in war for one’s country than to prevent war. It was a society that sacrificed the many in order to realize the ambitions of the few.

These two men created a movement that uplifted

the value of human life, exalted the mission of caring for others as the greatest human activity and elevated the ordinary citizen to the loftiest stature. They offered a practical means for attaining individual happiness and for achieving lasting reform in society. And... they went to prison for these beliefs.

How did we learn about these two men? How is it that we came to be a part of this value-creation society? The fact is these two men had a successor in young Daisaku Ikeda. This successor has realized every single thing that these two men lived for. His accomplishments actually exceed them.

But, if the successor has no successors, how can this movement continue? Who will continue this legacy for generations to come?

We stand at the dawn of the greatest year in Soka Gakkai history, 2001. As we look around in America today, who is enacting the mission of being successors? We have to ask ourselves this question. We have to decide, right here, right now, what we are living for! It is our historic mission to rise up and succeed our mentor. The men and women of our organization have given their lives so that we may do this. Nothing we could ever do will bring greater joy and happiness to them than this.

This is a call to action. It is now that we must set the tone for 2001—the “Year of Total Victory for the New

Century.”

First, young men and women of America, we must rise up and finish what we started in the year 2000—propagating the Law to the fullest extent of our abilities. Let’s embrace our fellow citizens across the country and share with them the practical means for attaining lasting happiness. Let’s overcome all our doubts, all our confusion and cowardice and boldly engage in shakubuku.

Second, let’s redouble our efforts to promote students to apply to Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo. In this citadel of humanistic education, our mentor is placing his greatest hopes and expectations. Let’s make sure every prospective student in America has the best chance to consider this historic opportunity. If we don’t inspire them, who will?

Finally, let’s begin preparations toward our zone youth culture festivals for 2001. Let’s sincerely chant and rack our brains to uncover the quintessential thing that we, as youthful successors, want to convey to SGI President Ikeda.

It is often said that the measure of a person’s greatness lies in those who succeed him. The same could be said of a generation. I never cease to be amazed and encouraged by all of you, the youth of SGI-USA. Now is the time for our generation, to seize the day. ♪

VOICES from the ZONE



Great Lakes Region Byakuren Meeting

By Miranda Bell, Mich.

The first Great Lakes Region Byakuren training course was held in West Olive, Mich., on July 16. Kirk Park Lodge, about one-quarter mile from Lake Michigan, was rented for the day. It was a beautiful day for our activity.

Byakuren leaders led a discussion with 11 young women from Michigan. One person explained the importance and responsibilities of Byakuren. One of the things we learned was that the origin of the name *Byakuren* came from

Nichiren Daishonin's disciple Byakuren Ajari Nikko Shonin. He is also known to us as Nikko Shonin, the disciple who served and protected Nichiren Daishonin while he was on Sado Island.

This is what the Byakuren do—serve and protect the members. Nikko Shonin was Nichiren Daishonin's faithful disciple throughout his whole life, just like the Byakuren are faithful disciples of SGI President Ikeda and protector of the members.

Based on our sincere practice of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, the mission of Byakuren is to selflessly protect and support the SGI members and friends and safeguard the activity centers as we awaken and nurture our eternal seeking spirit to become reliable women of courage, compassion, wisdom and joy (Byakuren Mission Statement).

By doing this, Byakuren members can do their own human revolution and create great benefits! ♪

Washington, DC Region

Young Women Hold General Meeting



By Mary Jenifer, Washington, D.C.

Sunflowers ruled the day as Washington, D.C. Region young women held their general meeting with the theme "Cultivate Sunflowers of Happiness for the Century of Peace." Some 160 participants entered the community center lobby filled with vases of fresh sunflowers. The theme of the meeting was taken from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda's words in "Thoughts On *The New Human Revolution*." He writes:

"World peace starts with the human revolution—the inner transformation—of the individual. A single large sunflower blossom contains the seeds from more than a thousand plants. Similarly when one brave warrior for peace stands up, his or her resolve spreads out in a thousand, ten thousand waves. Courage always stirs a response."

The day was filled with a variety of activities. "Newborn Friend" was performed by the D.C. Region Chorus; the Byakuren performed a hilarious skit with Wen-Shing Ho enacting a bad day at work—she got on the phone with skit-writer Karen Palmer's voice saying, "This is your Buddha nature speaking." The audience was able to show their appreciation for all the behind-the-scenes work of the Byakuren during their graduation and induction ceremony. Early activities ended with a Gosho lecture on "The One Essential Phrase" given by Region Young Women's Leader Chelsea Honderich.

The rest of the day was filled with workshops on a variety of subjects. The activity ended with the young women singing "I'll Be There for You," the theme from the TV show *Friends*. As the young women left, they were showered with even more sunflowers, given a book of quotations from *The Writings of Nichiren*

Daishonin, decorated with plastic blossoms and given packets of sunflower seeds as gifts from the Byakuren.

The success of the meeting can be attributed to a vigorous home visit campaign and the fact that the entire D.C. Region family was involved. The women's division members helped plan and greet, and provided refreshments and gifts. The young men and Southeast District's women planned and conducted introductory meetings throughout the day for members and their guests. A men's division crew volunteered for clean-up duty. The meeting was a starting point for growth and unity. Together, the young women in Washington, D.C. will cultivate the seeds planted in their hearts during the meeting as they wait for the sunflower seeds planted on the community center grounds to blossom in the spring. ♪

YOUTH *Study* DECEMBER 2000

Finding your Mission Living your Dreams

By the SGI-USA Youth Study Committee

Goethe writes, "The moment alone is decisive; Fixes the life of man, and his future destiny settles." "That time" is the moment you resolve from the depths of your heart: "Now I will stand up and fight!" From that instant your destiny changes. Your life develops. History begins. (Daisaku Ikeda, *Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 33)

INTRODUCTION

While working on this study page, we on the youth study committee talked about the strong connection between a person's happiness and life's mission. We recognized that a person's outward success was meaningless without a mission or an attempt to find a mission. From our collective experience we have learned that to live towards our mission or discovery of our mission is a way of creating happy lives. Yet to realize our mission can at times feel daunting and unattainable. Therefore we decided to begin a dialogue about "mission" with the youth of SGI-USA.

After reading our thoughts, please write your personal responses about how you view "mission." These responses can be emailed to seize@sgi-usa.org or mailed to: SGI-USA, Attn: Kim Herrmann, Seize the Day, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401. Our next *Seize the Day* study page will be a collection of these responses. Thank you!

Surisa Langbell, Bellmawr, N.J.

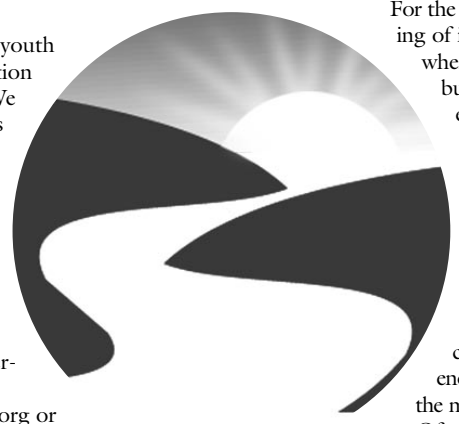
A person's mission is intimately connected to her dreams. When I stop and deliberately think about what my mission is, I first think about my dreams. In the past I knew what my dreams were, but when I inevitably encountered disappointments or a harsh reality, I would forget my vision or my dream. But when I began chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I could see my dreams again! My hold on my vision became stronger.

I began to understand that this dream was my mission. My dream wasn't just something private that might or might not actually come true. As I began to feel that it was my mission to pursue my dreams, it became more important and more worthwhile to take the action to make my dreams into reality. I developed strength and conviction to root my dream in reality. Each day my thoughts and words began to protect my dream and mission.

Recently two close friends told me they feel a lack of mission. I have chanted for them to discover their missions and I continue to think of how to encourage them. And I am learning that this is not an easy task. SGI President Ikeda's hard work has creatively and unceasingly encouraged millions of people to find their individual missions. His hard work encourages me to strengthen my belief in myself while remaining aware of my mission. His efforts also create a strong desire within me to find my own way of encouraging my friends.

As President Ikeda wrote in his new poem, "Soar—Into the Skies of Victory! Into the New Century!":

*I have embraced the source
of energy and power
to ponder deeply
the significance of my own life and death,*



*to review the days that have passed
while living fully into the future.
From now on I will no longer
be pushed and tossed by
the fickle winds,
for I can now look into the
precious depths of my own life.
(Songs for America, p. 18)*

Adam Gamble, Cape Cod, Mass.

I think the most challenging aspect of having a mission is simply knowing what one's mission is. What an awesome question!

For the past few years, I have run a small business, never thinking of it as my mission. Then, recently I went to the FNCC, where I determined to have a financial breakthrough in my business. What a shock it was to call home that very weekend and learn that an incredible world peace organization was inviting me to apply for what I thought was my "dream job." I chanted, threw myself into applying, and actually received the position!

The people were great, and the opportunities were wonderful. But after just a few weeks on the job, guess what? It just didn't feel right.

I chanted, sought guidance and ultimately challenged the question "What is my mission?" Finally, I concluded I should return to my little business. Surprisingly enough, this was where I felt in my heart that I could create the most value, for myself and even for world peace.

Of course, I sometimes doubt my decision, especially when things aren't going well. But, what I ultimately concluded is that I need to have faith in my Buddhist practice.

President Ikeda says, "Your future self does not exist in some far-off place; it exists in the heart and mind of your present self."

Likewise, Walt Whitman states, "There is no trade or employment but the young man following it may become a hero."

Let's face it, no matter where we are or what we are doing, that is our mission at that time. Being aware of this and having faith that we can be victorious, I think, are the keys. ♪

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?

Postal Mail:

SGI-USA
Attn: Kim Herrmann
Seize the Day
606 Wilshire Blvd.
PO Box 1427
Santa Monica, CA 90406-9907

Email:

seize@sgi-usa.org

Trailblazers!



by **Wendy DeSouza**
SGI-USA Student
Division Leader

Depending on One's Outlook

Makiguchi was known to have said, "Depending on one's outlook, even hell can be enjoyable." (*The New Human Revolution* Vol. 6 p. 27) These bold and confident words inspired me to change my suffering into joy as an exchange student.

In July 1998, I was given a two-month scholarship to study Persian in Iran. I was part of the first official exchange delegation composed of nine students to travel there since 1979.

Following the Iranian Revolution of 1979, formal relations between Iran and the United States was thwarted. Through this opportunity I wanted to build trust and contribute to the reopening of diplomatic ties. However, the moment we arrived in Iran I was faced with an impasse. On the first day of class we were told that the tuition amount had changed and were asked to pay hundreds of dollars more. Since I was the only one who could speak broken Persian, I had to negotiate with the language institute. Our group was then segregated by gender, and contact between us was difficult. The dormitory room where the women students stayed was being searched on a regular basis after we left for school. Rumors were spread that our phones were bugged, and even if it was not true, the overall climate of paranoia and suspicion was enough to make us feel isolated. It was also the first time in my life I had experienced what it was like to live under authoritarian rule.

Since it is illegal to practice Buddhism in Iran, I would chant secretly in my room with the curtains drawn. I prayed to fulfill my mission, and change my feeling of hopelessness. After two months, all eight of my colleagues left with a very negative view of Iran. I, too, hadn't been

able to see anything positive. Against my natural inclination to leave, I decided to stay until I could conquer this feeling.

For the next three months I prayed to understand a passage in *The New Human Revolution* where SGI President Ikeda encourages a woman living in Iran:

Rather than being attached to and constrained by idealistic standards that you've created, you should look hard at reality just as it is, then try to discover some positive or enjoyable aspects and turn them to good account. When you chant, you can see yourself and your environment exactly as they are. You can also bring forth a strong life force, gaining the strength you need not to be defeated by your weaknesses. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 6, p. 27)

I realized that I was trying to change my environment based on my narrow and pessimistic views. I then began to expand my life to see all aspects of Iranian society and found much beauty. I started having dialogue with a cornucopia of people- intellectuals who had been imprisoned, families of victims of the Iran-Iraq war, unemployed youth, secret service employees, opium smugglers, child laborers, movie actors, carpet weavers, bazaar merchants, politicians, mullahs, foreign businesspeople and one openly gay restaurant owner. In addition, the language institute I was studying at gave me a scholarship. My teachers praised me, saying I had "become Iranian." I was invited to return to Iran as an exchange scholar and I had numerous dialogues about President Ikeda's efforts for peace. In the end, what I found to be negative was overshadowed by my love for the Iranian people and Persian culture.

I feel I owe this victory as a student to President Ikeda, who states that in the place where we find suffering, we also find true freedom:

*There is no paradise;
it does not exist.
Therefore walk forward
into this world of suffering!
And there you will see
the reality of the dream,
of this eternally bright,
eternally joyful and serene,*

*this eternally noble dream.
(Songs for America, p. 30)*

Moreover, Nichiren Daishonin illustrates in his letter to Shijo Kingo that in the midst of pain and suffering we create a deep and lasting bond with our mentor:

"Over and over I recall the moment, unforgettable even now, when I was about to be beheaded and you accompanied me, holding the reins of my horse and weeping tears of grief. Nor could I ever forget it in any lifetime to come. If you should fall into hell for some grave offense, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you. For if you and I should fall into hell together, we would find Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra there" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 850). ♪



Wendy DeSouza, (second from left), in with Iraqi and North African friends.

POEM

Let Others Be

by Shadi Beccai,
Los Angeles

Millions of reasons
Why we should get along
Many things
That make us strong

Mothers can be inspirations to their little kid
But they have no control
Over the bad things he did

Prejudice and hate
Brings people an awful fate
Hate and anger
Sins times 3
Can't hate just let our good selves be?

No one can see a person
For what they really are
They have to judge and name them

Prejudice can leave a scare
Black or white from Asian to a mix
There's something society must fix

Make us human
Make us tame
But don't make us say
It's race that we blame

Different was he who went for the opposite
He gave them a try...so he deserved to die?

So different
Yet so the same
We have ourselves to blame
For the hate and hurt we see
So let others be