

World TRIBUNE

**SGL'S Theme for 2000:
RAISING THE
CURTAIN ON THE
21ST CENTURY—
THE YEAR OF
YOUTH**

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SGI President Ikeda's New Year's Poem

Sowing the Seeds of Peace in the Community and the World

*New Year's Day, 2000—
The door of the new century has opened!
In this momentous year we celebrate
The 25th anniversary of the SGI's founding
And the 40th anniversary of worldwide kosen-rufu.
The curtain has risen on the start
Of a deeply significant history
For the future of humanity and kosen-rufu!*

*My noble friends who have emerged from the earth,
Who with me have scaled
The precipitous peak of the 20th century
To usher in this brilliant dawn,
Let us embark once more—
Aiming for the distant peaks of the third millennium,
Advancing our movement of hope
In harmonious unity!*

*The old century was an interplay of darkness and light
Created by science, industry, military might and national strength.
The worship of these powers was also a form of culture.
It is known as the "culture of war"—
The name given to that which bred the seeds
Of countless tragedies.*

*A transformation from the pursuit of economic profit above all;
Respect for human rights and freedom;
Rejection of war and violence;
Moving from patriarchy to an age of women;
Casting off selfishness—
Herein lies the "culture of peace."*

*We can clearly hear the deep far-reaching reverberations
That indicate the world is moving
From a culture of war to a culture of peace.
The pure melody of the rushing stream
Of the Century of Life.*

*Beyond the ever more pervasive information age we live in,
The giant form of an ecological age is visible.
"All things are interconnected"—
This is an underlying principle of ecological thought
And also the insight of Buddhism.*

*All life on this blue planet of water—
No, the entire universe itself—is a single living entity.
Even the most microscopic being is an important part of the whole.
The world is in need of a deeply religious spirit.*

*Even the macroscopic ideal of peace
Is actualized only when it connects with the life of
each individual.
Peace is not found in some distant place;
It lies close at hand, in the vibrant sense of fulfillment felt
By each person taking earnest action
For the welfare of their community, society and fellow citizens.*

*By a mystic coincidence,
The United Nations has designated this year
As the International Year for the Culture of Peace,
And next year as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.*

*Let us recall that appointed gathering in Guam,
That pledge made 25 years ago,
On the start of our SGI movement!
I called on those present:
“I hope you will dedicate your whole lives
To sowing the seeds of the Mystic Law
For the sake of peace throughout the entire world.
I shall do the same thing.”*

*Let us now, with renewed commitment,
Plant in people’s hearts the seeds of trust and friendship,
The seeds of philosophy and happiness,
The seeds of peace!
In our immediate environments,
Let us spread gardens of peace,
Green and full of flowers,
With deep prayer and patience!*

*In the global solidarity of such “people’s power”
Lies the future, lies hope, lies a way forward.*

*The morning skies of the new millennium
Are dyed with the rays of the rising sun
That illuminate the centuries ahead.
Together let us advance afresh!
Toward that brilliant dawn,
Toward a future of unsurpassed wisdom and creativity
For humankind!*



Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda

New Year’s Day, 2000

To my beloved fellow members in 128 countries
and territories around the world:
I pray for your good health.
I pray for your happiness.
I pray that your life’s noble mission
Will bring your glory and triumph.
With my deepest respect and affection.

Palms pressed together in reverence,

Daisaku Ikeda
World Poet Laureate

SGI-USA GENERAL DIRECTOR DANNY NAGASHIMA — NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

Together Let's Build an Ideal SGI-USA

Happy New Year, and Happy New Millennium to all the readers of the *World Tribune* and the members of SGI-USA!

It has been 10 years since SGI President Ikeda charted a new course for us in 1990. I believe we have come a long way, and we appreciate all the pioneers' efforts especially those of Mr. George M. Williams and Mr. Fred Zaitso.

In the past decade, we have seen steady expansion of our membership amid a successful geographic reorganization and a number of new centers have been established throughout the country, including the Florida Nature and Culture Center, where members are able to refresh their faith. In addition, construction of the Soka University, Aliso Viejo, campus began and is scheduled to open in May 2001.

We have also made progress in the Soka Spirit movement as we protect the truth of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings; a grass-roots study of the Lotus Sutra has begun with members learning from President Ikeda's "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" series. We can also take pride in the fact that SGI-USA has participated in numerous interfaith conferences, including the third Parliament of the World's Religions held recently in Cape Town, South Africa; and finally, several Buddhist scholars have



Danny Nagashima

acknowledged our contributions to society and the world because of the hopeful and humanistic spirit of our organization. Congratulations on all these accomplishments!

I want to share my vision for our organization toward the year 2000 and beyond. In the next 10 years, I believe we can challenge ourselves to fulfill our mission toward taking the leadership of worldwide kosen-rufu with our mentor's heart. The following are my goals:

First, I am determined to create an American SGI organization of outstanding teamwork and great heart.

Second, I want this to be an organization where we treasure our own families and all people.

Third, I determine that we will protect our precious SGI members and not let them be deceived by Nikken and the priest-

hood. I am also determined to enable temple members to see how beautiful our organization is, and how wonderful President Ikeda is.

Fourth, I am resolved to create an organization where the leadership continuously self-reflects as we continue to ponder how best to realize President Ikeda's vision for the individual happiness of our members and American kosen-rufu.

To accomplish these goals, I believe we need to advance steadily and patiently with the understanding that we are building the foundation for the next millennium based on what we learned from both the victories and mistakes in our past.

In the early days of our young organization, we tended to be impatient. In our sometimes over-zealous desire to expand, the organization's growth was at times emphasized over that of the individual.

For those who feel they were hurt by that process, I sincerely apologize. If you ever feel there is authoritarian and abusive behavior in the organization, let's address the problem through dialogue with everyone involved; let's have the courage to bring up our concerns immediately and in a respectful way.

At any rate, all of us who make up this great organization of SGI-USA, whose eternal purpose is each individual's absolute happiness, must resolve

to self-reflect as we advance to ensure those mistakes of the past won't be repeated.

I believe that as long as we sincerely continue to fulfill our mission for kosen-rufu, all our efforts and experiences will become a source of good fortune.

The strength of the SGI-USA depends on the strength and success of the daily lives of our members. We want to be an organization of people who are first and foremost successful in their families, careers, schooling and personal growth. With this type of foundation, our precious organization will be strong and grow steadily. I believe that we have such capable people today and will develop even more in the future.

It is my determination to build an organization where leaders truly serve the members. On Feb. 12, 1990, President Ikeda said: "A true leader is someone who protects his members, praising them and being tolerant toward them. In contrast, leaders who exploit their positions in the organization, rebuking people and acting in a high-handed manner, not only cause the Buddha's children to suffer, but make causes for their own suffering in the future as well."

Let's work together once again to build a new SGI-USA. Sharing the same heart as our mentor, President Ikeda, I would like to work together with each member of SGI-USA for Amer-

ican kosen-rufu and create the kind of organization that each person can truly feel proud of.

President Ikeda loves America and we love President Ikeda, so let's create an America where President Ikeda's love for us and our love for him become one.

Since mutual trust is the basis for our success, let's launch together toward our shared cause in the spirit of the following passage by Nichiren Daishonin: "All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Here in lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation. When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 217).

Toward May 3, 2001, I will continue to seek our mentor's heart. I will do my best to serve the members. Through actions like personal shakubuku, publications promotion and visiting our precious members' homes, while being a good husband and father at home, I will try to show how, based on the power of unity, we can create a great SGI-USA.

Once again, Happy New Year! **wt**

SGI-USA MEN'S LEADER TARIQ HASAN — NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

With the Heart of a Lion

Photo by MICHAEL ANTON

Iwould like to extend my best wishes and a very Happy New Year and a very Happy New Century to all SGI-USA members. I believe we have arrived at one of those rare moments that is filled with both historical significance, given the many key anniversaries of kosen-rufu events being celebrated this year, and great potential for a turning point in the life of each member.

In his landmark poem to the men's division written on March 26, 1999, President Ikeda says:

*My friends in the men's division,
It is vital that you win in society
And in the workplace,
That you form bonds of trust and*



Tariq Hasan

*Friendship with many others,
That you be a citadel that provides a
Happy haven for your family,
And that, with vigorous good health,
You triumph in the arduous struggles of*

Daily life!

To win in every area of life — society, workplace and family — is a great challenge. But I believe we can accomplish it once we approach it with the determination that since my mentor has the heart of a lion, I must also have the heart of a lion. As the newly appointed SGI-USA Men's Division leader, I am determined to be the first to practice this guidance.

Since the theme for this year is "Raising the Curtain on the 21st Century — The Year of Youth," I would like to ask the men's division to also reach out to the youth division and help raise our successors. In his guidance given to SGI-USA on Feb. 17, 1990, President Ikeda said: "To actively promote young people of outstanding ability to

positions of responsibility and allow them to give free rein to their potential accords with the spirit of Buddhism. It is also the spirit of the SGI, and it ought to be the spirit of each member-organization."

Uniting with our new general director, Danny Nagashima and new women's leader, Matilda Buck, I am ready to challenge this year "with earnestness and sincerity, with courtesy and daring," as President Ikeda has recently asked us to do. With a great prayer for each member's good health and prosperity, I am looking forward to meeting many of you this year.

Once again, a very Happy New Year! **wt**

Note: There will be no Jan. 7 issue. The next issue we will publish is dated Jan. 14. Happy Holidays to all!

Page 1 photos by Martin Cohen, Lisa Hollis, Gregory Nakasuji and Jean Pritchard.



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SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER MATILDA BUCK — NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

Happy New Year, Century and Millennium!

I hope all of you are anticipating a great year 2000. In his recent message to us in America, SGI President Ikeda asked us to "exercise bold, confident leadership and to do so with earnestness and sincerity, with courtesy and daring." I love this combination of daring and earnestness. The dynamic of daring, supported by earnestness, is very powerful.



Matilda Buck

In his "New Year's Goshō," Nichiren Daishonin says, "The graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees." In winter the barren tree with its withered bark doesn't look like it's going to produce anything. But deep within the tree, with daring and earnestness, it continues to survive the winter snows with the desire to spring forth with beautiful blossoms. We are reminded of the great potential each of us has.

We are all leaders, even if we do not take responsibility in our organization, we are leaders of our own lives! As Buddhists who each day polish our humanity and support others, we are leaders in society. I hope this year we can practice with true earnestness and daring leadership. We should dare to rekindle our dreams, dare to

dream of our own happiness and society's happiness. With earnest prayer and effort we can make these desires a reality. Our women's activities for the coming year will focus on the power of one woman who can seize this dynamic and make a difference.

Women's Activity Guidelines for 2000

The women's theme in support of "Raising the Curtain on the 21st Century — The Year of Youth" is the "Power of One Woman To Make a Differ-

ence." When one woman can stand with unshakable faith she can transform her family, workplace and even the nation and the world. But standing up doesn't mean standing alone. As President Ikeda's message says, "I hope you will join them and, with the spirit of unity... 'many in body, one in mind' — advance to create in America a model for the entire world." Without teamwork we cannot make such a transformation. Young people will be attracted and nurtured by a harmonious, team-oriented environment.

❖ February Women's Commemorative Meetings

Feb. 27, 2000, will be our 10th anniversary commemorating in 1990 the "Clear Mirror" meeting held at SUA. We recommend meetings at the district or group levels to ensure dialogue for all; each locale should feel free to discuss and decide what size meeting is most appropriate. We want to invite our friends, family and particularly our neighbors in our community. SGI publications will reprint President Ikeda's "clear mirror" guidance as a resource for the meeting.

❖ Women's Conferences at FNCC, February and August

Women's conferences are scheduled at FNCC on Feb. 10-13 focused for group leaders and up. The August conferences will be held on the 10-13 and is open to any women. The upcoming February conference will feature seminars and dialogue on: The Power of One Woman To Make a Difference; Value-creating Soka Spirit; Creating a Winning Environment; Compassionate Action — Reawakening Our Mission for Propagation, the Ultimate Human Revolution.

❖ Sophia Group

President Ikeda founded the Sophia Group in 1990 so that women could gather for study and polish their intellect. By studying *The New Human Revolution* together, hundreds of women continue to deepen their understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the Soka Gakkai spirit.

❖ Women's Planning Board

Women's planning boards coordinate and facilitate women's activities for a region and region leaders. The establishment of a committee is op-

tional. Generally, the committee members are district and up leaders and serve for two years. However, any level leader may be considered. Together with the Sophia Group, this committee also provides opportunities to raise future leaders.

❖ Mothers Group

This group was established for mothers of children 5 years or younger. This is a support group where new mothers can share faith experiences in raising young children and maintaining their Buddhism practice during this challenging time. Activities vary across the country from small group "mommy and me" to guidance meetings with seniors, or educational seminars. In some places fathers also participate.

❖ Boys and Girls Group

This is a shared responsibility with other divisions. The Boys and Girls Group was created for elementary school students so that they develop friendship with boys and girls who practice Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. Through this activity they deepen their understanding of Buddhism and apply it to their daily and school lives. **W**

SGI-USA YOUTH LEADERS — NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE

2000: The Year of Youth — 'Let's WIN!'

Happy New Year to you and your family! Thank you so much for all of your tremendous efforts and golden memories created in 1999. Together we are making a new departure!

SGI President Ikeda recently said: "It is always the courage and solidarity of youth that opens a new world, a new age. When youth lose their sense of adventure, their spirit grows old, and their lives become little more than a living death. At this time that will never come again, I call out to you: "My beloved youth! Boldly leave behind an immortal history!" (Dec. 10, 1999 *World Tribune*, p. 5).

For what purpose is President Ikeda asking us to be bold? Undoubtedly, rooted in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, it is to care for our fellow human beings, stand up against injustice and rid the world of misery.

President Ikeda says: "The true purpose of religion is to enhance education and culture, and to enable society to prosper

in a more peaceful way. This will be the golden rule of the 21st century. I, therefore, reaffirm that making sincere, steady efforts to spread understanding, friendship and trust in our local communities to expand person-to-person links and heart-to-heart bonds constitute kosen-rufu" (Ibid., p.5).

Nichiren Daishonin waged a lone struggle for human happiness in a society insensitive to the common people. All three SGI presidents have waged an identical struggle. We are also practicing and waging our struggle for the sake of happiness of ourselves, our friends, our family and society. This is the POWER OF ONE.

This March 16, we will wage our struggle to open the new century, to create a phenomenal new wave of propagation. The introductory meetings to be held in March are our chance, our first opportunity in the new century, to create an immortal history. This immortal history really boils down to one single thing: a



Photo by KIMBERLY HERRMANN

(L-r) Youth division leader James Herrmann, young women's leader Renu Jiandani and young men's leader Cory Taylor.

human being becoming happy.

The youth of America proved in 1999 that when we unite nothing is impossible. Together, we created history throughout the year. The substance of our victories was our friendships. Seeking our mentor together, in the

year 2000, let's take the next step to bring in this new century by making these March 16 meetings joyful, meaningful and bustling with many new guests.

As for the three of us, we will challenge ourselves to care for others, and we are convinced

that each and every member's effort to propagate this Buddhism in America will manifest throughout our lives in the form of lasting happiness.

Let's be courageous, let's be daring, and most of all, let's win in the new year. **W**

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S DEC. 9 SPEECH—PART 1

Let's Win in Everything in 2000!

'I congratulate you all on the imminent start of the year 2000,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'Please wage a decisive struggle and be victorious in all your endeavors!'

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 40th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting and the 10th Saitama Prefecture General Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Dec. 9.

To my fellow members around Japan and the world, thank you for all your tireless efforts this year! The Brass Band just gave us a magnificent performance. One of the tunes they played was "Katiusha," a famous Russian folk song. Composed in 1939, it sings of the true love of a young woman waiting for the return of her sweetheart, a soldier serving in the border defense at the beginning of World War II. The girl's name is Katiusha, a popular, well-loved Russian name. Matvei Blanter, the renowned Russian composer of folk songs, wrote the music.

My sincere thanks to the Brass Band!

We shouldn't settle for mediocrity.

The Roman philosopher Cicero declares, "A home without written works is like a person without a soul." I have been fond of this saying since my youth and have cited it often. Always having good books on hand at home, I feel, is far more important than having a television or a personal computer.

Dr. Rustan Rakhmanaliev, chair of the World Committee on Awarding the Chingiz Aitmatov Gold Medal and Prize, is a leading authority on written works. Of late, there has been a grave decline in print culture—specifically in literature and good books—not only in Japan but also around the world. Despite this prevailing trend, Dr. Rakhmanaliev and his wife Natalia Musina, the Committee's Information and Analysis Department director, have been involved in publishing. More than 220,000 copies of their published works have been printed to date. They are outstanding guardians of print culture and champions of creativity.

Kyrgyzstan's beautiful capital of Bishkek is home to a magnificent library named after the esteemed Kyrgyz writer Chingiz Aitmatov. Many young people gather at the library and



SGI President Ikeda encourages Baseball Hall of Fame inductee Orlando Cepeda and his wife, Mirian, both SGI-USA members, Dec. 9, at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, Japan.

study enthusiastically. They also enjoy spectacular views of the snowcapped peaks of the Tien Shan Mountain range in the distance.

When he visited the Soka University campus, the first place Dr. Rakhmanaliev wanted to visit was its libraries. His focus shows how astute he is.

There is a quiet, picturesque tree-lined avenue leading from the front of the Aitmatov Library in Bishkek. It is named after a young poet who died a martyr: Kasym Tynystanov. He was a champion of culture, who fearlessly spoke out for truth, who unflinchingly fought and died for justice during Stalin's dictatorship. I want all of you to be courageous champions, too. Champions of humanity! Champions of kosen-rufu!

What is the purpose of your life and faith, if, as a youth, you simply lead humdrum, uneventful lives and die without ever having achieved anything worthwhile? You shouldn't settle for mediocrity.

Tynystanov studied in Dr. Rakhmanaliev's homeland, Uzbekistan. Later he was arrested and imprisoned on false charges. Proclaiming that future generations would, without fail, uncover the truth of his innocence, the young poet courageously went to his death. He was executed by a firing squad in 1938, at age 37.

The world over, great leaders

and reformers are fighting for what they believe in, ready to lay down their lives. I have also fought with this resolve.

This is the fundamental spirit of the Soka Gakkai. This is the spirit of the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda.

This is the spirit that lies at the core of my being. What I fear is this rigorous spirit of selfless dedication gradually fading or clouding among our members.

Tynystanov wrote the following lines in "O, Youth!":

*Youth, rise up!
Youth, ponder deeply!
Do not spend your time in vain;
Open your eyes,
Advance surefootedly
Toward the future,
Grit your teeth and march forward,
Show a path for the suffering people
To whom no one has yet extended a hand,
Bring forth wisdom,
And with a bright smile and buoyant spirits,
Let joy shine forth from your hearts.*

What an inspiring poem! Since my youth, I have cherished and recited many poems in my heart. In my younger days, I sometimes recited poems to

my friends at night school.

President Toda often said: "The impassioned calls of youth are what galvanize other youth." "Youth attract other youth."

Today, youth division representatives from around Japan are gathered here. I congratulate you all on the imminent start of the year 2000, which we celebrate with the theme "Raising the Curtain on the 21st Century—The Year of Youth." Please wage a decisive struggle and be victorious in all your endeavors! This is the true spirit of youth.

To prevail over setbacks is the hallmark of a genuine Buddhist.

My esteemed Dr. Rakhmanaliev, Madame Musina and Committee Secretary Abdimutalibzhan Amankulov: It is with great pride and joy that I accept this immensely significant Chingiz Aitmatov Gold Medal, which you have conferred on me today. I humbly accept it as a symbol of the golden triumph that will adorn the lives of all my beloved fellow SGI members—without a single exception—throughout eternity.

Gold has profound meaning in Buddhism. Gold cannot be destroyed by fire nor washed away or broken down by water. Similarly, a person who embraces a philosophy of genuine substance can lead a golden life that nothing can dent or destroy, regardless of the hardships and obsta-

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

The Soka Gakkai Spirit

From This Speech:

The world over, great leaders and reformers are fighting for what they believe in, ready to lay down their lives. I have also fought with this resolve. This is the fundamental spirit of the Soka Gakkai. This is the spirit of the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda. This is the spirit that lies at the core of my being. What I fear is this rigorous spirit of selfless dedication gradually fading or clouding among our members.

- 1) SGI President Ikeda says that "the world over, great leaders and reformers are fighting for what they believe in...." Who are some examples of this that come to mind?
- 2) President Ikeda is defining the Soka Gakkai spirit here. Why do you think it's important to him to convey this spirit to us of fighting for what we believe in, even at the cost of our lives?
- 3) How did the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents live with this spirit?
- 4) How has President Ikeda lived with this spirit?
- 5) Why do you think President Ikeda fears "this rigorous spirit of selfless dedication gradually fading or clouding among our members"?

Photos courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS



SGI President Ikeda meets with President Rustan Rakhmanaliev of the World Committee on Awarding the Chingiz Aitmatov Gold Medal and Prize and his wife, Natalia Musina, the committee's Information and Analysis Department director, Dec. 9.

cles encountered along the way. This is what Buddhism teaches.

Lead a golden life! This is the ultimate purpose of Buddhism and of life.

Congratulations to the hard-working Saitama members on the holding of your triumphant general meeting! My deep appreciation and congratulations, too, to my dear fellow members from Yamanashi and Wakayama, and also to the stalwart members from Fujinomiya [where the head temple is located], who have all traveled long distances to be here today. In addition, I sincerely welcome the group of Thai members, who are in Japan to participate in a training course, and all the other SGI members visiting from a total of 12 countries.

I hope that, as SGI leaders, you will always show the greatest consideration when greeting fellow members: shaking their hands, offering encouragement and reaching out to embrace them with warm, pleasant words.

I express my appreciation again to our uncrowned heroes, the *Seikyo Shimbun* newspaper deliverers — representatives of whom are here today — for their unceasing devotion. Thank you very, very much.

Delivering newspapers is hard, unglamorous work. Many might consider it the most undesirable job around. But it is thanks to the sincere members who take on this onerous task that we can receive and read the *Seikyo Shimbun* each day. You, our uncrowned heroes, are infinitely noble and precious. Please be on guard against accidents, and take good care of your health.

Morning is a refreshing, ex-

Please wage a decisive struggle and be victorious in all your endeavors! This is the true spirit of youth.

hilarating time; the air is clean. Please advance on the path of your mission with pride and good cheer, confident that making the rounds of your neighborhood or community is a wonderful way to keep fit and healthy.

And last but not least, I welcome with all my heart Baseball Hall of Fame inductee Orlando Cepeda, his wife, Mirian, and his close friend Tony Dorsey, an SGI district leader in San Francisco. Mr. Cepeda finally realized his dream of making it into the Hall of Fame. He has won!

A life in which one fails to triumph over difficulty is a sad thing. To prevail over problems and setbacks is the hallmark of a genuine Buddhist. It is the essence of life. People throughout Japan and the world heartily applaud Mr. Cepeda's victory.

I want to share the words of an ancient philosopher of Central Asia that have been passed down for a thousand years: "Forge close ties with pure-hearted people. Shun base-hearted people, lest you become tainted with their baseness."

The Lotus Sutra also exhorts us, "Thrust aside evil friends and associate with good com-

panions" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 78). This is the fundamental path to happiness in life.

Dr. Rakhmanaliev has been an insatiable reader since his youth, devouring countless edifying books on all manner of subjects, from all eras and cultures. He doesn't have time to read books or magazines published by the gutter press.

Dr. Rakhmanaliev has also made a point of going out to meet first-class people in all realms of society and learning from them with a sincere, humble seeking spirit. This spirit is truly admirable. In stark contrast, unfortunately, many Japanese lose their humility and quickly grow arrogant.

I understand that Dr. Rakhmanaliev's father taught him this spirit to humbly learn from first-class people. His father told him: "If you want to become a scholar, then go to a successful scholar and ask him how to become one." He taught his son to seek advice and guidance from people who were actually active in a given field, and that he should listen with his own ears and look with his own eyes.

This resonates with Mr. Makiguchi's advice: "Never judge something you don't know anything about."

(To be continued in the Jan. 14 issue)

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S DEC. 17 ENCOURAGEMENT

Keep Learning and Improving Yourselves

The evening of Dec. 17, SGI President Ikeda attended a conference with representative leaders from Hong Kong and Tokyo No. 2 Joint Territory at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji. The SGI leader made the following points:

- Only to the extent that the leaders show concern and consideration for their fellow members will our organization develop. Growth is seen in those places where leaders wholeheartedly praise their comrades in faith. While waging an all-out struggle against evil, leaders must laud and rigorously protect the members who are dedicated to *kosen-rufu*.

- Depending on the leaders' attitudes, words and actions, the members in their organizations can either be inspired to advance joyfully toward happiness or be caused great distress and suffering. I hope, therefore, that you will be sincere leaders, who humbly keep learning and improving yourselves. **WT**



The Chingiz Aitmatov Gold Medal.

Notice from the Subscriptions Department

The Subscriptions Department has a new fulfillment house to handle the payment processing, renewal of subscriptions and generating mailing labels. For the past few years, these functions were handled by different companies. With the new fulfillment house, there should be fewer errors, more accountability, better customer service as well as the publications being delivered in a timely manner.

Although the changes are internal and do not affect the readers directly, the most visible difference will be the renewal and order forms. Each publication will have its own renewal and order form and payment needs to be made accordingly. However, at this time, the fulfillment house will accept the current order forms, excluding the three years' subscriptions, which the SGI-USA does not offer anymore. We hope having a new fulfillment house will enable us to extend improved customer services overall.



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'New Year's Gosho': Purifying Our Lives

Photo by JACK ALDRICH

The pure lotus flower blooms out of the muddy pond, the fragrant sandalwood grows from the soil, the graceful cherry blossoms come forth from trees, the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei was born of a woman of low station, and the moon rises from behind the mountains to shed light on them. Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect. — The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 1137

This is an excerpt from a letter Nichiren Daishonin wrote to Lord Omosu's wife to thank her for a New Year's gift. The letter is dated Jan. 5, but the year is not known. What is clear is the Daishonin's conviction in the infinite potential that human life contains, regardless of the circumstances.

By **JEFF KRIGER**
SGI-USA VICE STUDY DEPARTMENT LEADER

In this famous passage from the "New Year's Gosho," Nichiren Daishonin uses poetic imagery to demonstrate how the wonderful and sublime state of life known as Buddhahood arises from within the lives of ordinary people.

He does this through the examples of the lotus, the sandalwood, cherry blossoms and the beautiful Yang Kuei-fei.

Like the lotus blossom, the life condition of Buddhahood is pure and pristine; like the sandalwood, it is replete with the fragrance of benefit. It emerges from an ordinary person, who, like the soil or the muddy pond, is neither particularly special nor pure. The beautiful cherry blossom emerging from the rough wood of the cherry tree and the lovely Yang Kuei-fei (who was the concubine of an emperor) being born of a commoner illustrate the same analogy. (Actually, another explanation has it that, rather than being of low social station, Yang Kuei-fei's mother was a woman of rather ordinary appearance—in either case, the point is the same).

The example of the moon rising from behind the mountains goes a step deeper. Not only does the moon rise up from behind the mountains, it then illuminates them. A mountain that was obscured in darkness beau-

tifully reflects the light of a full moon that rose from behind it; in a similar manner, we ordinary human beings are illuminated by the world of Buddhahood that arises from within our lives. This is the very meaning of the word *enlightened*. When the pure potential for enlightenment that lays dormant within our hearts, like the moon behind a mountain, emerges, every aspect of our lives—our appearance, our behavior, our speech—begins to take on the beautiful hue of enlightenment. We become truly attractive, respectable human beings in the deepest sense.

The Daishonin makes this idea concrete beginning with the next phrase, "Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect."

This indicates the function of karma, which means action—specifically the three categories of action described as thought, word and deed. Actions of thought include our will and emotions. Actions of word (literally, actions of the mouth) mean our speech or how we communicate with others. Actions of deed refer to our conduct or behavior. These actions constitute causes that invite either negative effects (misfortune) or positive effects (becoming worthy of respect).

The Daishonin's statement that "misfortune comes from one's mouth" stems from the many examples in history of personal or social tragedy brought about by careless speech.

Buddhism places emphasis on the human heart and mind. Nevertheless, a casual or careless comment that may have no ill intention behind it can lead to hurt feelings and mistrust. And mistrust is a first step toward misfortune.

On the other hand, even words that are carefully chosen will fall short if they are not backed up by sincerity—that is, if what is in our heart is at odds with what we are saying.



Half Dome (at right) at Yosemite National Park in California.

When our heart is truly pure—when we consistently bring forth the Buddhahood in our hearts—our words and actions naturally express joy, hope and confidence. And when we chant and pray sincerely for another person to be happy, to live long and to prosper, and take action toward that end, we will gain that person's trust. In addition, our pure

desire for the happiness of others and for kosen-rufu—the happiness of humankind—imbues our lives with great fortune and happiness.

In "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," SGI President Ikeda comments: "When we exert ourselves for kosen-rufu in thought, word and deed, then everything without fail turns into great benefit. However, if we simply act

like we are working for kosen-rufu, but harbor negativity in our hearts, our good fortune will be frittered away."

A strong and sincere prayer for kosen-rufu—a prayer to share the benefit of our Buddhist practice with others—constitutes a truly pure heart. Actions that come from this pure heart will surely make us "worthy of respect." **WT**

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Danielle, in a sunflower field just outside of Boulder, Colo.

EXPERIENCE — DANIELLE FATH, BOULDER, COLO.

Nam-myoho-renge-kyo: A Universal Language

Danielle Fath is embraced by the SGI family in Chile as she faces the challenges of living and studying in a foreign country.

Upon my arrival in Santiago, Chile, in July 1998, it seemed as if all the Spanish I had been studying for the past six years had escaped my mind. All of the chaos and confusion of this enormous city enveloped me. I felt like I had made a big mistake in deciding to spend my junior year of college abroad in Chile.

I moved in with a Chilean host family three weeks into my stay and was overjoyed to discover that I was to live in a very small room separated from the main house. At this point, I lacked the ability to tell my host family that I was a Buddhist and conducted a daily practice. Having a room to myself meant that I could chant with relative freedom, not disturbing the other members of my household.

Just after I settled my belongings in my new Chilean home, I looked in the phone book for SGI Chile's phone number and address. The name of the street where SGI Chile's community center is located is Hernando Magdalenes, all the way across town. It would be about a two-hour bus ride from my house. Still I was ready and willing to trek across the city a few times each week so that I could practice with SGI Chile members.

I gathered the courage to call SGI Chile (phones can be very intimidating when you are in a foreign country and do not speak the local language very well). A lady with a very kind voice answered the phone, but on hearing that I was an SGI-USA member, she told me I needed a letter from my host area before I could come and visit their culture center. I was outraged. I couldn't understand why there were restrictions, because I had always thought that Buddhism was open to all people. I sent an e-mail to my good friend Sarah expressing my outrage at the circumstances but asked her to have SGI Denver send a letter to Chile confirming my membership. For the time being, I practiced in my small room, looking out my one window at some laundry lines and a lemon tree.

During these first two months of my stay in Chile, it was quite challenging for me to meet people and immerse myself in Chilean culture. I found myself feeling very alone and intimidated by this situation.

In September, I went to Uruguay to visit some good friends of my family for two weeks. It was such a relief to be in a more comfortable environment where I was familiar with societal rules and regulations. These two weeks were especially invigorating because I was able to take hourlong walks along a never-ending beach, and I chanted on its long, narrow docks facing the tranquil river waters of Rio de la Plata. Through my chanting here, I came to many important realizations; the most important

being my own small, closed attitude toward SGI Chile. I had been outraged because they were restrictive about who they let enter their community center, but I had failed to understand that a fundamental aspect of the SGI is to adapt to local culture and customs in every country where people practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I then realized that it made sense that SGI Chile doesn't just open its doors to everyone. In a conservative and Catholic society, Buddhism is not always well accepted. Realizing my own shortsightedness, I was determined to become involved with SGI Chile.

The day after I returned from Uruguay, I called the SGI Chile center to explain that I was still waiting for the letter to arrive from my host institution. To my extreme joy, Señor Imai informed me that the letter had already arrived and that I could attend a meeting on Friday. I asked Señor Imai if he could tell me how to reach the culture center since it was far from where I was living. To my surprise, there turned out to be two streets called Calle Hernando Magdalenes, one several hours away from my house, the other a five-minute bus ride away.

I couldn't believe it. The SGI center was in my neighborhood and I had been so close yet not participating for two full months! This was the first of many benefits that I received in Chile.

Friday finally came and I arrived at a small quaint brick building surrounded by a black iron gate. I was let in by a youth about my age and led to a small

room where about 25 people had just started to recite evening gongyo. The pronunciation was a little different than what I was used to but I could follow along well enough. When daimoku began, tears of happiness came to my eyes. It was the most beautiful sound that I had heard thus far in Chile. I had really missed practicing with other people.

After the meeting, a small woman with huge, sparkling eyes approached me. "Hello, my name is Maite," she said in English. She further explained: "I lived in Berkeley, California, for a year and that is where I was introduced to this Buddhism." I replied with amazement that I had grown up in the Bay Area of California.

I immediately felt a strong connection with Maite, and as we exchanged phone numbers I asked if I could come and chant at her house to her Gohonzon, since mine was not enshrined in my host family's house.

She seemed surprised. "How did you know that I have a Gohonzon?" she asked. I didn't know. I had just assumed so. She explained to me that in Chile, it is a lot more difficult to receive a Gohonzon than in the United States. One must practice for many years and have studied a great deal before being granted a Gohonzon. Often people practice for around five years before receiving a Gohonzon. She then explained how she had just received her Gohonzon last June in Berkeley. We discovered that we had received our Gohonzon within four days of each other. She was my gift from the Go-

honzon and I was hers.

The relationship that blossomed between Maite and me was more than I could have ever wished for. We chanted and studied Buddhism together. She helped me immensely with my Spanish. And best of all, in long after-meal conversations, she would openly discuss with me aspects of Chilean culture that other people, such as my host family, were unwilling to discuss.

In addition to my friendship with Maite, interacting with all SGI Chile members was a tremendous benefit. In an extremely class-segregated society, I was initially confined to only meeting people from the middle-upper class. I encountered more diversity and people of all economic social backgrounds in the culture center than anywhere else in Santiago. I received the opportunity to interact with and learn from people whom I would never have had the chance to meet without SGI.

My time in Chile turned out to be a period of exponential personal growth and learning. I can separate my experience "Before SGI," and "After SGI." Chanting with people in different cultures is so tremendously powerful because it is truly a way of communication and understanding that transcends culture and language barriers. All SGI members are so fortunate because we have an international family where we are welcomed in every country to which we may go. For myself, combining my voice with the voices of others was the most powerful evidence of the feasibility of kosen-rufu. **WT**

EXPERIENCE — ARTHUR CONGDON, PHILADELPHIA

My Biggest Internal Struggle

I was 17 when a friend introduced me to Buddhism. One thing that impressed me was that he was a pretty average guy, but I could see that he was also someone who based his life on deep principles that he put into action. I wasn't involved in any religion at the time, and I wasn't planning on joining one. I had ideals, but there was no way that I knew of to actualize them in my own life. Then, when I heard about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I realized that its principles closely matched mine. So, strange as chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo seemed at the time, if it would enable me to translate these principles into something concrete and meaningful in my life, it was worth checking out.

After chanting for a few weeks, I started to feel more confident about myself, and my ideals didn't seem so theoretical anymore. I felt like I could set realistic goals and actually achieve them. And with time and persistent Buddhist practice, I saw concrete results.

Just when I started to see the change in my life from chanting, I heard about gongyo, and I was slightly taken aback. I'm visually impaired and physically unable to hold a book, so I couldn't just read it like everyone else. The prospect of memorizing parts of the Lotus Sutra that weren't even in English was a big commitment. But having heard many times that "Buddhism is reason," I figured that there must be something to gongyo if SGI members do it twice a day. So I decided to go

for it, memorizing one line per day. After going at this pace for a year, I got impatient, so one weekend in the spring of 1997 I determined to memorize the rest of the last eight pages of part B.

Learning gongyo has given me good practice in applying myself to study. I'm a third-year physics major at Temple University in Philadelphia. Because I'm quadriplegic, I need to hire people to do the physical tasks of reading and writing, and by my second year the material was becoming so technical that I needed readers who had a background in physics.

I had help once a week from a friend who is a physicist, but I needed more time than that. At that point my mother, who started practicing Buddhism at the same time I did, reminded me of the line in *The New Human Revolution* in which Shin'ichi Yamamoto encourages a member by saying, "You have the Gohonzon, haven't you?" I got the point, and started chanting with the determination to find the right help before I got too far behind.

Around that time, my mother got a call from an old friend who mentioned in passing that she'd run into Jeff, a former high school classmate who had a degree in physics from Cornell. He was now working at a local mall. That same night, my mom went there and asked around until she found Jeff at a calendar stand in the middle of the mall. Jeff, who lives barely three minutes down the road from me, has been working with me for a year.

He's enabled me to keep up with my studies. At the same time, we've become good friends. I know that it was my determination and sincere chanting for this goal that gave me the wisdom to recognize and take advantage of the opportunity to study with Jeff.

I gradually began to recognize how my circumstances were improving through my Buddhist practice. But I knew that the only way I could become truly happy was to make a fundamental change from within. My sister, Gwyn, who overcame severe depression through her own efforts and Buddhist practice, truly inspired me and proved that anyone can overcome whatever negative karma they have, no matter how immutable it seems or how long it's been there.

My biggest internal struggle, for as long as I can remember, has been anger that would flare up whenever an unexpected or difficult situation would arise. Once, I screamed curses for 10 minutes because I burned my tongue on hot tea. I vowed to overcome my volatility many times, but I never seemed to make headway. I didn't pay enough attention to T'ien-t'ai's statement "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils will emerge... you should be neither frightened nor influenced by them" ("Letter to the Brothers," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 501).

Rather than moving on and making a fresh determination, I would make things even worse by loudly berating myself in front of my friends and family for having gotten angry. I would yell incessant strings of apologies interspersed with colorful language. Obviously, this really wasn't the best way to overcome anger. I became more bitter and frustrated than ever. Every time I blew up, my mom and Gwyn would politely suggest that I might try chanting. At first, this



Photos by JONATHAN WILSON

Arthur with his sister, Gwyneth, at Temple University in Philadelphia, where both are students.

only fueled my outbursts. But I would eventually grumble my way to the Gohonzon. I know I've steadily improved, but I haven't totally defeated my anger yet. I am determined that now is the time to fully break through my anger. For the first time, I have complete confidence in my ability to do so.

I know that I have not struggled alone, though, and I want

to express my sincere appreciation to all the SGI members who have encouraged me through their own lives. I'd like to end with a line from a rap written by two Philadelphia young men who are members: "The moment you're defeated is the time to win!" With this kind of spirit, I know I won't be swayed by any setback and can advance toward my dreams. **WT**



Arthur, a third-year physics student, hires others to read and write for him.

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EXPERIENCE—GWYNETH CONGDON, PHILADELPHIA

Winning Over Hopelessness

I had not decided to practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I would probably not be alive now to share my experience.

Until I finally had complete victory over it this past summer, I lived with severe depression, which began in my early childhood.

I have always been very sensitive. Growing up in a dangerous housing project in Philadelphia proved too much for me. Every time I witnessed some act of disrespect, some violation of human dignity, ranging from people yelling at each other to hearing gunshots, my feelings would be badly hurt. I was a 3-year-old child steadily filling with rage at the world for being in such a cruel place to live.

I knew from how much my family loved me that there is always good in the world, that people are as capable of love as they are of hate. But seeing the frequency with which people chose hate over love only made this realization more painful. Even as I grew physically, I was emotionally and spiritually suffocating in my own rage and despair. By the time I started school, I had given up looking for hope.

I went to Catholic school because I am visually impaired and St. Lucy's offered visual support services as well as the opportunity for its students to be mainstreamed in regular classes at another Catholic school across the street. I learned to compensate for my visual impairment there, but the religious indoctrination I received set my hopelessness in concrete. I learned that especially because I wasn't Catholic, I wasn't good enough, I wasn't smart enough, and doggone it, God didn't like me. I already felt doomed. And now I learned that a major world religion agreed with me on that point.

I was still angry. So much needed to be done to make the world a better place, and I felt obliged, as a human being, to make a positive contribution. But I felt utterly powerless, completely unable to make a dent in the huge, miserable system that I was trapped in. My anger eventually became directed inward, and I started to hate myself for my powerlessness.

I had always entertained thoughts of suicide, but I didn't think I was even capable of that. By the time I was 14, my despair was out of control and I had reached a breaking point. I wanted to die, but I would feel guilty because I would cause my family so much pain if I did. So instead I asked to be hospitalized to prevent my own suicide.

This was the start of an arduous process that was harder than anything I had ever done before. One of the more difficult things about depression is that it is silent and invisible. In order to defeat it, I would have to admit to everyone I loved what a horrible, hopeless, furious person I was.

Every time I sat on the hard little couch during therapy, I was forced to poke and prod at the things that hurt the most. But I knew I had to do it. I knew that the only reason I was alive was that I had some responsibility that I had to fulfill before I died. In some vague way, it was "to help humanity." But I still needed the hope to believe that I could do something.

Two years after I consciously began to wage guerrilla warfare against depression, I was introduced to a philosophy of unrestrained hope and optimism. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin was an exact confirmation of what I thought the world should be like, but it was much deeper and more important—it was practical. I wasn't really down with the idea of chanting, but I figured I'd sit through that (like I used to sit through church) and just take the useful philosophy. I'd treat it like a Buddhist buffet.

As soon as I heard about Buddhism, I wholeheartedly applied its principles to my life. How could I just pass by a philosophy with a fundamental belief in the infinity of human potential for happiness and creativity? Still, I only chanted to be polite.

It took me a long time to really embrace chanting. If living by Buddhist ethics was working so well, what was the point of repeating Nam-myoho-rence-kyo over and over? Sure, the meaning was significant. But couldn't I just embrace the philosophy without having to chant the words?

Two years after I decided to practice Buddhism, I went off to college but I ended up hating the school I chose. I lived in a dorm and the commute home was two-and-a-half hours, so I was pretty much on my own. But, boy, was I miserable.

One afternoon I was feeling especially unpleasant and I had exhausted all other options. I was too upset to study, listen to music, talk to anyone, or even read the back of a cereal box. So I shouted "Nam-myoho-rence-kyo!" and it was so cathartic and wonderful that I tried it again. Then I felt silly standing there in my dorm room, alone, shouting, so I sat down and chanted for a whole minute. No miracles happened, but I did feel a bit better. I was starting to generate ideas about how to solve some of my problems.

I started chanting consistently. At first, I would chant on the way to the bus stop to slow the bus down if I were late. Then I tried chanting for things like being calm during an especially grueling exam. I was getting results. In fact, it worked so well that I couldn't think of a good reason not to chant.

As I steadily became a happier person through practicing this Buddhism and taking responsibility for my own life, I resolved to learn gongyo. At that time, which was about a year ago, gongyo was roughly a once-a-week occurrence because it took me so long to get through it that I was never motivated to do it.

My brother, Art, really pulled through for me, though. I had transferred to Temple University, and he would arrange his schedule so that we could do morning gongyo together in an obscure computer lab in the physics building. He always went out of his way to do gongyo with me, and he let me do it as slowly as I needed to. I sincerely appreciate his creative support and encouragement.

Now, I am proud to say that I have a fully self-motivated practice. By living my life by Buddhist principles, I am taking concrete actions every day to become a stronger, happier person, and by so doing I hope to encourage other people to do the same. I can say with complete sincerity that I am a truly happy person. I have won



Gwyneth, with her guide dog, Intrigue, on the campus of Temple University.

over hopelessness, one of the most potent poisons in life. I overcame depression through my own efforts, and I have lim-

itless confidence in the imminent success of everyone who seeks to create happiness and peace in their lives. **WT**

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EXPERIENCE — MAKONNEN ZERFU, LOS ANGELES

Prevailing Over Our Destiny

Photo by MARTIN COHEN

Nichiren Daishonin writes, "You must quickly reform the tenets that you hold in your heart and embrace the one true vehicle, the single good [doctrine of the Lotus Sutra]" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 25). In other words, the treasure of the heart is the most important one. Thus, in order to win, we must first triumph in our hearts. If we lose in our hearts, then failure is inevitable.

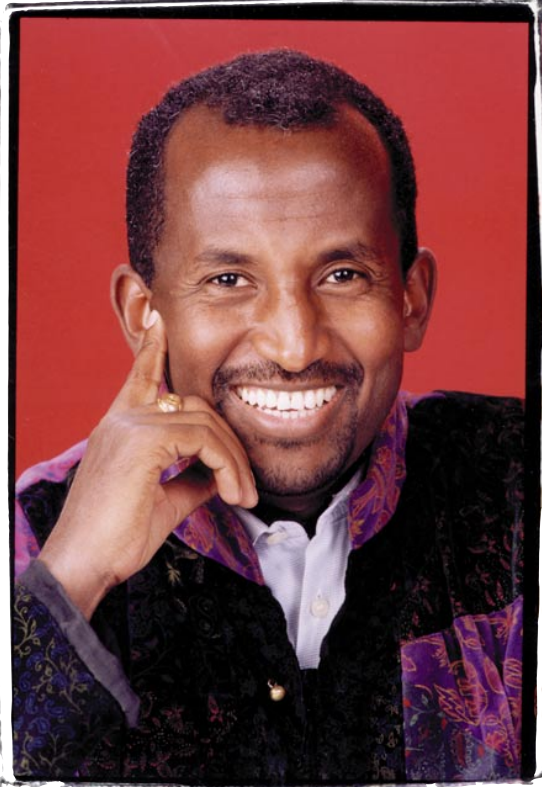
The beliefs we cherish deep in our hearts play a more profound role in our lives than our intellect. It is important to change those beliefs that prompt us to be pessimistic and negative; to annihilate them on the deepest level.

Originally from Ethiopia, I came alone to the United States in December 1987. A year later, I was grieving because I found out that my younger sister died in a car accident on her way home. Her body was taken to my parents on Christmas Day. She was 22 years old.

The following year, my brother who was 16 also died of an unknown illness in just one day. I could not understand why all this happened and started drinking three or four times a week. I was depressed constantly. I did not enjoy going to work; it was an obligation. I did not know the purpose of life, nor did I have any goals. My future seemed totally bleak. At this time I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It was January 1990.

Since then, in addition to having stopped drinking, I have received so many benefits that it would be impossible to enumerate them. However, I would like to share the deepest impact of this practice that is changing me in a fundamental way. I generally thought of myself as an optimist. Of course I have a good reason: I have set out to achieve the things I want to. I have achieved, if not all, at least several of them.

Recently, however, while I was chanting I discovered something very profound about myself, which I have overlooked for years. I started realizing that I am not truly an optimist. I am only optimistic whenever I perceive that things are relatively possible. In other words, I was selectively optimistic. As I chanted more deeply, I realized that I have been harboring these feelings: "I will lose," "I will not succeed," "Somehow things are not going to work out," "I will not be able to find the things I am looking



Determining never to limit himself, Makonnen Zerfu wrote his own declaration of independence.

for." Without me realizing it, I was agonizing in anxiety. I was unconsciously distressed.

I remembered things that I was saying to myself silently without ever knowing it. Things like: "It's too difficult," "It takes too long," "It's too late," "I'm too old," "It's too far," "It requires a lot of money," "It's too much work," "There are people better than me, why do they want me?" "This is all I am capable of doing," "I'm too tired," "I'm too sick," "There isn't a good partner for me out there," "I can't," "It's impossible," etc. These thoughts actually became my credo or statement of faith.

I realized that I had to fight the inherent pessimism of my beliefs. One day after I chanted, I saw a woman on television advising single women who felt that there aren't men out there for them. She said something very profound: "If you are looking for someone with the expectation that you will not find him, then you won't." This is consistent with Buddhism. If we are operating with the expectation that this will not work out, then consistent with our beliefs, we will fail. It is not like something good happens to us re-

gardless of our negative beliefs. There is no miracle or chance in Buddhism. I realized that the right attitude and belief must precede one's results or benefits—that benefits are projections of positive attitude along with taking action.

If we want to see happiness in front of the mirror, then we must smile. So I began to reform my beliefs, to fight my disposition to pessimism. Pessimism doesn't always manifest in a big way. It is all the little things we do. For example, a few weeks ago I was looking for a specific book on the Renaissance and I caught myself saying, "I don't think I will find it." It is these kinds of deep-seated premonitions and misgivings that prevent us from ever achieving anything great.

On another occasion, I was reading a book on American history. I came across the Declaration of Independence. On July 4, 1776, in order to free themselves from the tyranny and domination of British rule, the 13 colonies declared their independence, even though independence did not come immediately.

The Declaration of Independence is the tenet of this nation. It is because of this document that

America has become one of the strongest and most vital nations in the world. Before a new, free and dynamic nation could be built, the old beliefs of injustice, inequality and tyranny had to be replaced by a new belief in freedom. The Declaration of Independence is that conviction and resolve for freedom and emancipation.

This gave me insight into my own life. In order to advance and grow, I have to overthrow my old beliefs and also articulate my own declaration. So I wrote my own declaration: "I pledge to quickly reform my disposition to pessimism that daunts and distresses me and to allow optimism to be deeply rooted in my heart." I made a determination to never limit myself as to what I can do and never say "I can't."

At the beginning of 1999, I determined to finish my graduate studies in educational administration. Little did I know that five of my classes were scheduled in San Diego; I tried to look for other options but to no avail. The idea of commuting from Los Angeles to San Diego seemed inconceivable; it's a two-hour drive. Everyone I talked with agreed with me that it would be extremely stressful and exhausting since I am also teaching math at a high school. I thought that if I drove to San Diego twice a week after teaching from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., I would pass out or be extremely tired. My pessimism seemed valid.

But as soon as I chanted, I felt that I had to challenge myself. Right there, I pledged to dedicate each mile of my trip to the many times I sabotaged myself, to the many times I made excuses to avoid challenges, to the many times I retreated fearing I would lose. The first day I drove to attend class, I returned around midnight. To my surprise, the next morning I woke up feeling unbelievably strong. From that day on, I look forward to making the drive.

Finally, I have completed all five classes with four A's and one B. I will graduate this month. When I realized that I finished my classes, I felt sad because I still have sweet memories of my struggles. I realized that it is only through hardship that I can build strength and unless I challenge myself, I will never know how strong and indefatigable I am.

When we grow up, what we acquire from our environment, i.e., our parents and society, is part of our external self. Unfortunately, we become so attached

to this false self that we believe that we are what we are told or what we think we are; as if all the things we inherit from our environment is our essential nature. However, Buddhism teaches that there is what we call the inner self or true self—a self that is undying, unconditioned and untainted by circumstances. Nichiren Daishonin says: "If when wide awake we examine our true nature, we will find no beginning that requires our being born and no end that requires our dying. What we will find is the essence of life, which can neither be burned by apocalyptic flames, nor worn away by flood, nor cut down by sword, nor pierced by arrow" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 563).

For the past four years, I have been trying to bring my younger brother, Minassie, to the United States from Ethiopia. All these years I have been agonizing over this issue because deep inside I believed that it was impossible. You see, it is my mind that measures and evaluates how and why this is not possible and very eloquently persuades me into relinquishing hope. That's why it is futile to rely on intellect because intellect can be easily overruled by the unconscious influences. The famous psychologist Carl Jung stated that, "Consciousness succumbs all too easily to unconscious influences."

Six months ago, I genuinely chanted to change my attitude. Instead of wasting my time distressing over whether I would succeed or not, I single-mindedly made the causes to reunite with my brother. As a result, in November 1999, my brother was granted a visa.

I inherited a lot of my pessimism from my mother. But I know that I didn't come into this world just to replicate my parents. If that were true, then life would be meaningless. I realize that I am here to change my karma and to create a new life. All of my profound benefits were possible because of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. I am deeply grateful to be able, once and for all eternity, to eradicate my deep-rooted karma.

I would like to conclude with this short poem I wrote titled "The Bell of Greatness": *When the bell of greatness wakes you / destiny puts its heavy grip / rendering you unable to rise to the call. / Nevertheless, greatness lies in changing one's destiny / in overcoming the deep currents of your disposition / that spins you in the cycle of stalemate. / Assaulting pessimism each day / quickly reform / the beliefs in your heart, the credo, / the axioms of your faith. / The resounding decree is: hope! hope! always triumphant!* **W**

EXPERIENCE — VINESSA SHAW, LOS ANGELES

‘Eyes Wide Open’

Correspondent Denise Snaer spoke with Vinessa Shaw, a 23-year-old actress who was born into this practice. Vinessa has made broad strides in her young life, staring down reality unflinchingly, if dramatically. Although well known for her role in the movie *Eyes Wide Shut*, she recently played the lead in projects such as *The Weight of Water* with Sean Penn, and the NBC mini-series airing in May 2000, called *The '70s*.

WT: You have an active practice, and your career is booming right now. To what do you attribute this fortune?

Vinessa: I was born into a Buddhist family. At an early age, I decided to learn gongyo as a personal challenge. But my real practice started when I was 12.

WT: What was the carrot?

Vinessa: I had this miserable thing in my life where I'd get sick just before an important event, for example, my ballet performances. It was very disappointing. One time, I had the opportunity to be in my aunt's wedding. Just before the wedding, I got sick with strep throat. The doctor said it would be impossible for me to recover in time. Impossible is a trigger word for my mom. She overcame a life-threatening condition and went on to a successful career as an actress. She sat me down and we chanted 45 minutes of vigorous daimoku. My fever broke and two days later I walked down the aisle as a bridesmaid. I had actual proof for myself.

WT: When did you choose acting and why?

Vinessa: When I was about 12, my sister and I asked our mother if we could be actresses. At first, she said no. We could act once we could drive ourselves to auditions. She spoke with us about the reality of life as young actresses, possibly having to miss important events like my graduation or a best friend's birthday party. Most of all, we had to get a good education first. Then she became our manager.

WT: You must have had many ups and downs.

Vinessa: As SGI President Ikeda says, a Buddha is a person who refuses to succumb. I kept challenging my illness which still pursued me whenever I had an audition. I saw the illness as my inner devil and decided to do battle. I chanted for hours just to connect with the Mystic Law. The minute doubt comes between me and the Gohonzon, I lose my way.

Photo by MARTIN COHEN



Vinessa says when she participated in her district and youth meetings, her life-condition soared.

WT: The punch from our initial excitement for the goal dissipates with doubt.

Vinessa: Exactly. We forget how great we really are. Our work and activities are a tangible way to experience the benefits of the Law. But the minute I chant desperately, my results are hazy and painful.

WT: Growing up in a Buddhist family while attending a public school, could you see the difference between you and your peers?

Vinessa: At 12, you don't want to be different. You want to fit in. To be cool. I told some friends, but when others called and heard my parents in the background belting out gongyo, I'd say, "Oh that's nothing—some kind of new music." But I always found a way to do gongyo. Even at sleepovers. My friends had me chant in the bathroom, so that their parents couldn't hear.

WT: It's phenomenal that you have maintained this strong and consistent practice.

Vinessa: Well, that's just it. It's that "if you are frightened, you will not attain enlightenment" thing that Nichiren Dai-shonin writes about in the *Gosho*. When I was in college in New York, I hated it and missed my family. I thought I would die of sadness. Not suicide, but strong, palpable anguish. Mom called and told me to use the Gohonzon. She wanted me to draw on my Buddha nature. Dad called sur-

reptitiously and often, caring and hoping his guidance would sink in. One day, I couldn't take the pain any longer. Even though it was 2:00 a.m., I asked a fellow student, an SGI member from Turkey, to chant with me. We chanted so vigorously that we woke up all the other girls. Not cool, but sometimes you have to scream your pain out.

WT: I'm familiar with the "Rebel Yell" ... so what happened next?

Vinessa: Once I sat in front of the Gohonzon, I couldn't stop chanting. I chanted for hours. Once I calmed down, the knots in my stomach disappeared and I seemed to hear a voice say I would be in a great place by the end of the year.

WT: And then?

Vinessa: The sadness was gone. I persevered and felt light. At the end of that year, I was back home and transferred to a college that suited me perfectly.

WT: President Ikeda always keeps the youth close to his heart. I respect you for your tenacity to live this practice. It's one thing to pay lip service to this fortune, but don't you think we must treat our mentor's words as verbs?

Vinessa: That's true. Every word of guidance is a "doing" word, filled with courage.

WT: And the willingness to step into the dark with confidence and come out on top.

Vinessa: I remember my struggle with school and the

times when my sister and I did our homework in the car on the way to auditions. Nothing was wasted. I especially loved Sociology, which helps me experience other cultures with compassion. I was a bit confused about this practice for oneself and others. But when I attended my district and youth meetings, my life-condition soared!

WT: What if you're in a position where you can't do gongyo?

Vinessa: That happens. I didn't function well at first. But once I dropped the feelings of guilt and superstition, I am fine because I know in my heart that I am doing my best. Some people believe that if they do not have a certain thing, they will never be happy. I like to look at my life often, to see what pattern I am repeating, and to change it. I also ask myself when I am chanting, is my ego in the way, or am I chanting from a good place? I'm still looking at the difference between chanting for a goal, or simply to manifest my Buddhahood. If I feel I am chanting from a "wanting" or "beggar's" place, I try to see that immediately. It takes a while, sometimes, but we are who we are. I aim to trust my prayer in any situation.

WT: You just appeared in a controversial movie with Tom Cruise, Nicole Kidman and especially, the great director Stanley Kubrick. How did you

get that role in *Eyes Wide Shut*?

Vinessa: That's the other benefit from chanting at school. Once I got back to Los Angeles, things just seemed to happen naturally. I was chanting to use my talent, moving in the best direction for my life. I wanted to touch people's hearts and create something rewarding. I chanted as much as possible on the set. Although everyone has the same goal, our egos get in the way. It can be a tumultuous time. I chanted every day for everyone to feel joy, protection and success in our particular area. We have to unite our ideas. In other words, world peace. Stanley Kubrick was wonderful. I got to know him well during those two months. We were all sad when he died. I was also surprised by Tom Cruise's courtesy, appreciation and warmth toward the whole crew.

WT: Did you tell him about your practice?

Vinessa: Yes! He said: "Wow, you're a Buddhist! That's great." He admired the fact that I'm a Buddhist. He's a Scientist, but seemed intrigued that someone my age was living a profoundly spiritual life.

WT: To kick off this Year of Youth, what are your plans?

Vinessa: I think it is very important to live your practice. Become as educated and aware as possible. Our practice is essential to ground and stabilize ourselves. We see on television the most horrible images of reality—the bombings at various schools, as well as other atrocities. When I chant, I try to make my *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* resound throughout the world. Do you know what I mean?

I would also share with my fellow youth division that we should use the publications as our lifeline. We are in President Ikeda's heart and the *World Tribune* is him talking to us "up front and very personal."

It's great being able to design your future, how you want to live. We forget how important youth are, how fortunate we are to do our human revolution. We see the new century as our building ground, while society cringes from it.

I have something to read for you from the June 24, 1999, *World Tribune*: "If we let our minds master us, our faith will be destroyed. There are far too many who give themselves up to fame and status. We get taken in by desire for money, maintaining a good reputation, and lose sight of our fundamental path. Faith is what enables us to become the master of our minds and open up the future with the determination that everything begins from now. In the moment." **WT**

EXPERIENCE — JORGE SILVERIO, BURBANK, CALIF.

Spreading Hope and Joy in Cuba

When I started practicing Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism 27 years ago, I had a lot of problems. I had gotten married three months earlier, was not happy with my wife, and we had many debts. I had not finished high school yet and was making minimum wage. I was very insecure and had no plans for the future.

Gradually after practicing, getting involved with young men's activities and studying SGI President Ikeda's guidance, I began to feel a joy and confidence within me that I had never felt before. I stopped criticizing and blaming others for my problems. I started taking responsibility and setting goals for my life. Eventually I became a chiropractor, opened my own office, bought a house and developed a happy family.

However, throughout the years, my practice has had its ups and downs. During the early '80s, due to many "valid reasons," I began to participate less and less in activities and gradually lost my passion for the practice, to the point that I stopped for about three years. One day about three or four years ago, my wife, Valerie, tricked me into going to a New Year's Eve meeting. While there, I heard an experience that really touched me and I decided to practice again.

However, it was a very selfish practice. I was missing an essential ingredient — practicing for others. I had no desire to get involved in SGI activities, or to help others. I kept seeking to regain the feeling that I remembered having at the very beginning of my practice. I continued to talk to leaders, read President Ikeda's guidance and chanted consistently about this situation.



Jorge Silverio, with his mother, Aida, at his home in Burbank, Calif.

About three years ago, I went to a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center and experienced the feeling I was seeking. Unfortunately, it didn't last long.

In 1998, I went to another FNCC conference, in Spanish, and this time made a determination to start practicing for others. It has been a consistent challenge. Interestingly enough, the more I practice for others, the more I feel that happy feeling returning. I finally realized that you can't get the full benefit of this practice without helping others.

In January of 1998, my father passed away. Needless to say, my 75-year-old mother, Aida, was very depressed and sad after losing her partner of 50 years. She lives in Miami, Fla., and last April she came to visit me for a few weeks. I encouraged her to chant and took her to many SGI activities held in Spanish to motivate her to practice. She started practicing and even took the entrance exam and passed it.

When she returned to Miami, she made contact with the members there and to my amazement, continued her practice, going to activities as often as four times a week. In June, she went to Cuba, where we lived until I was 12, to visit family. She took an extra set of beads and a sutra book, as she was determined to get her sister to practice. Her plan was to tell her to chant at the same time in the morning and evening as she did, and this way they would be together, at least in spirit.

To her surprise, not only did my aunt start to practice, but 25 members of the family started as well. She called me from Cuba very excited, telling me the news and asking me to send her 25 Gohonzon. Of course I told her that first they had to learn gongyo and get connected to the SGI. At this point, I had no idea that there was an organization in Cuba. I found out there is a chapter in Cuba with the majority of members practicing in La Habana (Havana).

My mother and my aunt began to chant for me to go to Cuba and help teach these family members how to practice. In October, just two months ago, my mother and I went to Cuba. I am amazed at how they kept practicing since June with no experienced members to help them. All they had were a few sutra books and beads, a slow gongyo tape and another tape I had made for them about how to do gongyo. I had also sent a few books and articles in Spanish that they had shared with one another.

I couldn't believe their sincerity. They had decided on their



A group photo after a discussion meeting in October 1999, in Havana, Cuba.

own to meet once a week to study and practice gongyo. Some of them could do gongyo perfectly. A few of the 9- to 14-year-old kids knew the first page of the gongyo book by heart. They were sharing the practice with other family members, friends and neighbors.

Our family is spread out over three different areas of Cuba. In Guanabo, which is 45 minutes from Havana, there were five families, as well as neighbors practicing since June. By the time we left, there were about 15.

Twice a day, the whole time we were in Cuba, we would do slow gongyo and daimoku. The whole family would join in, and they would invite friends and neighbors. They would discuss the practice with anyone who would listen. These gatherings would turn into meetings with people relating experiences and asking questions about the practice, numbering 10 to 20 people.

In Camaguey, about a 10-hour drive from Havana, we had 35 people at one of these meetings. Before we left, they decided since the group had grown to 40 members, they would meet once a week at two or three different locations, and then come together once a month.

And let me tell you some of the benefits they are receiving. As soon as we arrived in Cuba, we went to visit an uncle and his wife. We told her about the practice, gave her a sutra book and beads with instructions on how to practice, and left. Two weeks later before we left, she told my mother that she had been chanting about not having to have breast surgery to re-

move some suspicious lumps in her breast. When she went to see the doctor for a check-up, her cysts had completely disappeared. Others mentioned feeling more relaxed, energetic, optimistic and less worried about their problems.

We attended two SGI meetings in Havana. One of these meetings was held in an apartment that was so packed that people were standing by the door because they couldn't fit in the room. People shared experiences and later two children sang "We Are the World" with Gakkai words.

The situation in Cuba today is, needless to say, very depressing. People make very little money. The highest monthly salary is about \$20. We have found that the people are living in such desperate circumstances that they are very open to something like Buddhism, which gives them hope for a better, more fulfilling life.

The members there need literature, sutra books, beads, etc. Their growth is happening so fast that they will soon run out of supplies.

This experience has made me realize the important role and impact that any one of us can have toward kosen-rufu. No one, not even my mother, would have thought that out of her desire to introduce her sister to Buddhism, so many new people would start practicing, in Cuba of all places.

I have made a determination to not give up on the members in Cuba, to do everything in my power to support their development and to continue to develop my faith and practice, not only for myself, but for others as well. **W**



Vintage cars are prevalent in Cuba's cities.

EXPERIENCE — MALINA MOORE, SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

Making Friends in South Africa

Where to begin?! It's hard to articulate my 16-day experience (Nov. 27–Dec. 11, 1999) in Cape Town, South Africa, because I feel it changed my life on so many levels. It allowed me to deepen my faith and conviction in being an SGI member and caused me to explore my self identity — as a Buddhist, a woman, a black person. And best of all, it gave me the opportunity to make great friends with whom I feel I'll be able to share a lifetime of experiences.

When I found out that I was to accompany SGI-USA's "Treasuring the Future: Children's Rights and Realities" exhibit to Cape Town for the Parliament of the World's Religions, I really had no idea what to expect. On the day of our arrival, SGI-USA Vice General Director Gary Murie and I were greeted by 90-degree sunny weather with intermittent hot winds rushing down from glorious Table Mountain. We were immediately in awe of Cape Town's intense natural beauty.

Our main purpose was to set up the exhibit at the Cape Town Civic Center. People from throughout the city walk through the Center from the central train station to pay car registrations, city taxes, etc. Therefore, not only the 7,000 registered participants for the Parliament of the World's Religions could experience the exhibit, but the local people could as well. All day, we talked with the many people

passing by, looking at the Children's Rights exhibit. I was struck by their genuine interest and concern and reflected on my own experience in the United States where the issue of children's rights (and especially the U.N.'s Convention on the Rights of the Child especially) is often misunderstood.

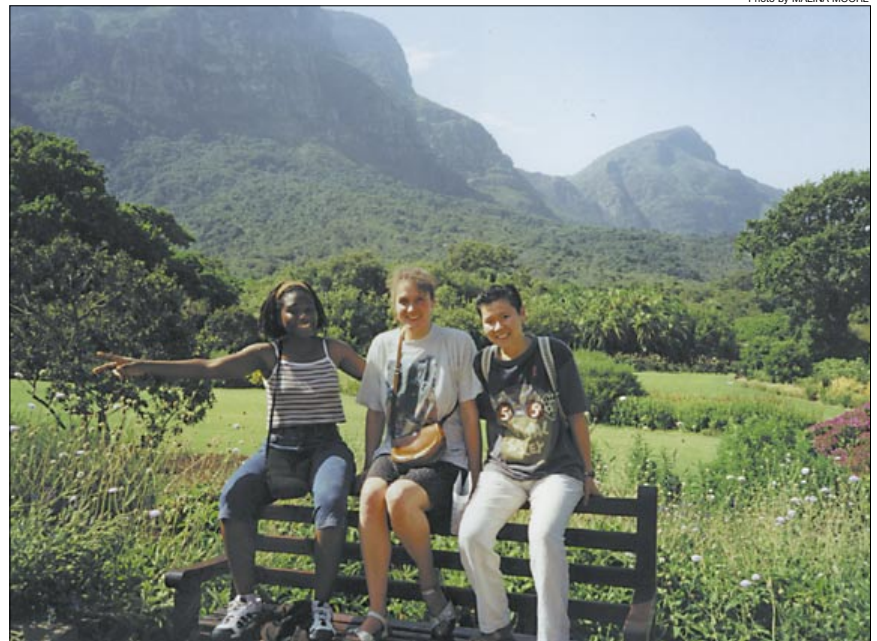
My secondary responsibility was to serve on a panel to present the exhibit and the Youth Peace Conference's Victory Over Violence project to the Parliament. Serving on this panel and hearing the other presentations, I gained a renewed sense of pride and conviction in the SGI as a religious organization that truly takes action for the sake of the people. While most of the religious representatives agreed that religion plays an important role in shaping positive societies, I found that the SGI really stood out in terms of its consistent efforts on a grassroots level.

My most treasured memory, however, is the time I was able to spend with the incredible SGI members in Cape Town. We spent almost every day with them. From chanting desperate daimoku together to get the exhibit through customs to being driven from venue to venue to attending their World Peace prayer meeting, I developed a closeness and sense of familiarity that will always be in my heart. I was able to dialogue openly and honestly.

When I asked one Cape Town member what he felt was different in post-apartheid South Africa, he explained that under apartheid, the system's opponents had a common focus in fighting injustice and there was an overall sense of hope and optimism. He said that of course many other factors are involved, but now the focus has sort of dissipated and that sense of optimism is somewhat diminished. A non-SGI Parliament



Malina outside Cape Town Civic Center, with Table Mountain in the background.



(L-r) Annette, Megan and Bonnie, young women of the SGI, at Kirstenbosch Gardens outside Cape Town, South Africa.



A view of Cape Town from atop the city's landmark, Table Mountain.

participant commented that it would be the SGI members who would be the hope and propel the sense of optimism for South Africa in the future. I totally agree. In fact, if I can articulate

anything about my experience in South Africa, it's that I came away with the infectious spirit of the SGI Cape Town members and I am filled with joy and hope for the future. **WT**



At SGI-USA's children's rights exhibit in Cape Town: (l-r) Gary Murie, Malina Moore, Anthony George (SGI South Africa young men's leader), Khosi Kubeka, Annette Lungu, Janine Du Preez and Megan Goodwin.

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MESSAGE TO THE 5TH GRADUATING CLASS OF SUA, CALABASAS

Cross the Raging Sea

'A life lived in pursuit of a grand ideal can be likened to a passage across a raging sea; the days of peace and quiet may be few indeed,' President Ikeda tells the SUA graduates. 'Whether you lead an ordinary or an extraordinary life hinges entirely on your ability to take life's difficulties and setbacks as a springboard for new advancement and growth.'



Photos by GREGORY NAKASUJI

The fifth graduating class of SUA, Calabasas, Calif., with members of the sixth class, Dec. 14.

To my beloved friends, the members of the fifth graduating class, the Class of 1999, who have set out on the hope-filled venture of the next phase of your lives, bathed in the rays of dawn of the third millennium. First let me offer my heartfelt congratulations for this brilliant achievement, which crowns your diligent study and research efforts.

I am fully aware that, given your abilities, you had the choice to study at virtually any graduate school you wished and could have, had you so desired, gone to any of the many long-established, renowned institutions of higher learning in the world. And yet, you chose to study here, at Soka University of America, Calabasas, still in its infancy, and to join in the work of creating a new, magnificent tradition here. As founder, I offer you my deepest respect, appreciation and gratitude. Each of your names will shine eternally in the history of Soka University of America.

I also express my sincere thanks to Mary Norton of the University of Delaware and all our distinguished guests, many of whom have traveled great distances, despite their many other commitments, to be here today.

At the same time, I wish to thank, from the bottom of my heart, the faculty members, who have cared for and encouraged the graduates, putting body and soul into the work of fostering their learning and personal development.

Finally, I wish to share my sense of profound joy with all the family members and friends of the graduates who have joined us on this occasion.

As you set out on the journey of life, I encourage each of the graduates to commit yourself to the bold adventure of creating a new era of education. I was delighted to learn that all the members of this year's graduating class will be taking the first steps of their new lives as educators.

This year marks the 55th anniversary of the passing of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the father of Soka education, who died a martyr to the cause of peace. I can only imagine how pleased he would be today, and the hope and affection with which he would view the sight of our graduates.

As you know, Mrs. Norton's husband, the late Dr. David Norton, was a renowned philosopher who also taught at the University of Delaware. We shall always be indebted to him for his invaluable support and contributions through which the publication in English of Mr. Makiguchi's *System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* was realized.

What first sparked Dr. Norton's interest in Soka education? On one occasion, he stated that he felt it contained philosophical elements that could resist and ultimately transform the unhealthy trends we see everywhere in the world.

In the kind of age in which we live — an era of profound and sometimes violent transition —

it is children and youth who are most exposed and vulnerable to these unhealthy trends. The responsibility for this lies entirely with adults and adult society.

For this reason, we must challenge head-on the fundamental pathology that undermines and destroys human happiness. And we must do so by upholding a philosophy rooted in commitment to the inviolable dignity and sanctity of life.

Mr. Makiguchi described this spirit thus: "A genuine educator, in order to respond to the society's expectations, must never be contented with mere passive goodness but must be a person of commitment, capable of taking courageous, active steps for good."

The year 2000 has been declared by the United Nations the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Nothing is more vital to the construction of a culture of peace than education, which, rooted in a robust humanism, can bring forth the positive qualities inherent in all people, thus allowing us to overcome and transform the barbaric realities that surround us.

Dr. David Norton was dedicated throughout his entire life to the grand spiritual adventure of creating a new era of education — an era in which all people, without exception, can fully realize and fulfill their natural, innate aspiration to learn, grow and develop their capaci-

ties. Mrs. Norton was his inseparable comrade in that adventure. She has inherited and since his death continued to carry out this adventure.

Education is the sacred, eternal endeavor of defending humanity. It involves supporting people's efforts to grow, guiding and enabling them in that process, and fostering their development. The life of one who lives as an educator is eternal and undying.

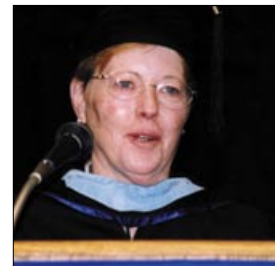
Dr. Norton believed that education, more than anything, is the work of offering models and exemplars. I fully agree with this view, and, since the days of my youth, have always sought to study, learn and act with intentness and sincerity.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, standard-bearer of the American Renaissance, said of the importance of action: "Without it thought can never ripen into truth." I know that, besides through our own examples, it is impossible to win the trust of the young, who can see through all ruses.

A life lived in pursuit of a grand ideal can be likened to a passage across a raging sea; the days of peace and quiet may be few indeed. Hardships, large and small, are an inevitable part of the long process of living.

Whether you lead an ordinary or an extraordinary life hinges entirely on your ability to take life's difficulties and setbacks as a springboard for new advancement and growth.

Nobel Prize-winning novelist Pearl Buck, who raised a severely disabled daughter, offered these



Mary Norton of the University of Delaware speaks at the graduation.

words of encouragement to mothers sharing the same struggle: "Not out of fullness has the human soul always reached its highest but often out of deprivation."

I close by encouraging each of you to learn from the example of Dr. and Mrs. Norton, to be people of intellect and action who continue with confidence, cheer and vitality to create the "value of good" in human society. It was with tears of gratitude and appreciation that I learned Dr. Norton wore with pride to the last moments of his life, the Soka University faculty pin he received as an honorary doctor of the university.

I will continue always to pray for the happiness, good health, success, glory and victory of you, my dear friends, more precious to me than my life.

To the eternal prosperity of the Class of 1999!

December 14, 1999
Daisaku Ikeda
Founder