

# World TRIBUNE

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**Michael Choi** shows his parents the validity of Buddhism in his life.

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## SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JUNE 29 SPEECH — PART 1

# ADVANCING ON THE PATH OF SOKA

**'What is this path on which we are advancing?'**  
SGI President Ikeda asks. **'It is the path of Soka — a path that will flourish forever.'**

**Disciples give their mentor's words meaning.**

Tomorrow, June 30, is the anniversary of the Soka Gakkai student division's founding. I offer my humblest congratulations to all our student division members — the leaders of the 21st century — including everyone who has graduated from the division's ranks over the years. You are all so important because the Soka Gakkai's future rests in your hands.

At the inaugural meeting of the student division back in 1957, Mr. Toda said, "I want half of you to become company directors and the other half to earn doctorates." He had the highest hopes that each student division

*(Our joys of strife and derring-do to the last!)*

Both Buddhism and life are struggles to the very end. In another poem, Whitman extols:

*We are powerful and tremendous in ourselves,  
We are executives in ourselves,  
we are sufficient in the variety of ourselves.*

To fear nothing and depend on no one — this resonates with the Soka Gakkai's creed.

Part 1 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 47th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall, in Hachioji, June 29.

Let me begin by sharing the words of the great American poet Walt Whitman in *Leaves of Grass*:

*But we'll make race a-time  
upon the seas — a battle-contest  
yet! bear lively there!*



Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

SGI President Ikeda speaks at the 47th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, June 29.

member would become a leader of the next generation.

I took this utterance of Mr. Toda completely to heart, and I vowed to encourage and foster capable young people. I vowed to work to produce an infinite number of doctors in all fields

of learning. I prayed fervently to accomplish this and threw myself wholeheartedly into the challenge.

While there were foolish leaders who didn't really listen

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## Working Toward a 'Culture of Peace' in Washington, D.C.

By ADENIKE ADELEKE, CONSTANCE HUNTSMAN, ROBIN MEADER AND LINDA WRIGHT  
WASHINGTON, D.C., CORRESPONDENTS

"Imagine a spirited conversation that results in a new, shared understanding, that creates something that never existed before." With these words Ronnie Smith, SGI-USA vice general director, opened the daylong seminar "Constructing a Nonviolent Community: The Power of One Person to Build a Culture of Peace."

Meeting at the "Linus Pauling and the Twentieth Century" exhibition in the National Museum of Health and Medicine (a division of the Armed Forces Institute of Pathology), the seminar brought together representatives from many organizations promoting peace and nonviolence. Drawing on pro-

fessional and personal experience, panelists from six of these groups explored ways to create a peaceful society in the spirit of Linus Pauling. Dr. Pauling used his stature as a scientist to promote the banning of atmospheric nuclear testing and saw his efforts culminate in a limited nuclear test ban treaty.

Leanne Nurse, moderator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency editor and domestic violence survivor, started the seminar with concepts from SGI President Ikeda's 2000 U.N. Peace Proposal.

Panelist Barbara Wien of the U.S. Institute of Peace candidly acknowledged her privilege as an upper middle-class white woman, sparking a heart-to-heart conversation about the violence — passive

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Photo by ROB HENDRY

Cockeysville, Md., Middle School Chamber Orchestra charms seminar participants during lunch with their concertos.

# Bodhisattvas of the Earth

## Back to the Basics

By JEFF FARR  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Congratulations! You are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, according to Nichiren Daishonin. He says in "The True Aspect of All Phenomena" that "there should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 385). In other words, your efforts to practice and share this Buddhism as best you can are what qualify you to be a Bodhisattva of the Earth.

Where does this name come from, though? Bodhisattvas of the Earth are what the ordinary

people who appear in the "Emerging from the Earth" chapter of the Lotus Sutra—those who promise to widely propagate the Law—are called.

The Daishonin's Buddhism is distinguished by how it completely entrusts ordinary people with the protection and perpetuation of its teachings. The Daishonin says in "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" that he has been "trying to awaken all the people of Japan to faith in the Lotus Sutra, so they too can share the heritage and attain Buddhahood" (WND, 217). Never does the Daishonin emphasize priests or other religious authorities being the real inheritors of the mission to spread Buddhism. We, the common people, are always in charge.

In "Questions and Answers about Embracing the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin makes it clear that "just as all the different kinds of plants and trees come forth from the earth, so all the various teachings of the Buddha are spread by persons" (WND, 61). The future of

# Nichiren Shoshu Priest From Overseas Bureau Leaves the Priesthood

By JEFF FARR  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

An administrator in the Nichiren Shoshu Overseas Bureau, Endo Ishida, 47, seceded from the priesthood on July 18. Since 1997, Mr. Ishida, who served in various posts within the priesthood, had been working closely with Overseas Bureau Chief Kotoku Obayashi on the development of Nichiren Shoshu's international movement.

In his formal notice of secession to High Priest Nikken Abe, Mr. Ishida writes: "The corrupt, decadent priesthood at Taisei-ji has deviated much too far

Buddhism, then, is all up to us.

We each have a great mission, one that we should never forget. SGI President Ikeda says in this issue that "to open the path of kosen-rufu without begrudging one's life—this is the spirit of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, of courageous champions of faith. Let us of the SGI boldly open a



Endo Ishida

from the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin and his successor, Nikko Shonin. Within the priesthood, I sense not one iota of the spirit to accomplish kosen-rufu. I have no doubt that any priest who still has even a little seeking spirit left must share this feeling.

path that will endure a thousand and 10,000 years, just as the Daishonin instructs. Together let us build a magnificent highway along which our noble movement for kosen-rufu can advance even more dynamically!" (see p. 9).

Praying for our friends, talking about Buddhist philosophy

Wishing to express my sentiment in this regard, I realized that if I stayed inside the priesthood, there would be no way to fulfill my role as a priest. I am convinced that my mission is to dedicate myself, even in some small way, to the reformation of the priesthood. Therefore, I proclaim my intention to secede from Nichiren Shoshu."

Mr. Ishida, the first priest to secede from Nichiren Shoshu this year, joined the priesthood as a child in 1964. He served as the chief priest of two branch temples in Japan and as a lecturer and assistant professor in the Fuji Seminary, which trains student priests. **WT**

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and active—engendered by race and class prejudice. "The system is unfair," she said. "The Quakers are right: we have to tell the truth to power. We can't avoid conflict, but we can redirect it."

Speaking as a father, SGI-USA member Bob Tansey said parents give children three treasures: the treasure of the storehouse—like a convertible for graduation; the treasure of the body—good health; and the treasure of the heart—how to form human relationships. When living in Asia, Mr. Tansey observed that Asia and the West see human relationships differently.

Representing the Western perspective by a circle half black and half white, he traced the idea that life comprises "black-white" dualities to René Descartes ("I think, therefore I am"). Such thinking creates "us-them" conflicts and today, he humorously observed, referring to "road rage," Descartes' maxim is more likely rendered, "I think...and I'm right!" Representing the Eastern perspective by a yin-yang circle, he noted that human

relationships are seen in this paradigm as interdependent. Such thinking emphasizes people's deeply shared common bonds.

Dr. Jonathan Stillerman of the Men's Rape Prevention Project vividly illustrated this idea. He acknowledged that he cannot counsel rapists if he regards himself as superior to them. Asked if men rape because they feel isolated, he responded that "when we isolate ourselves from our own feelings, it becomes easy to harm someone else."

Panelist John Stonebraker, a teenage SGI-USA member and actor in the "City of Peace" theater project, revealed the "secret" to conflict resolution:

- 1) Examine the relationship. Define it and see its implications.
- 2) Begin at the end. Examine your goals and work toward them.
- 3) Ask questions that seek change. Don't just ask for answers.
- 4) Listen.

The conversation turned to social engagement, and Douglas Calvin of the Youth Leadership Support Network, said that a student dedicated to a particular social issue, who joins

with like-minded students from other schools, can start a powerful coalition and, even though young, make a difference.

When a participant suggested that pursuing peace by talking with lots of people is "like planting seeds," Dr. Paul Kingery of George Washington University's Hamilton Fish National Institute on School and Community Violence, explained that working for peace calls for "multiple sustained interventions with the same person." Citing personal experience as a foster parent, he stressed the importance of taking a lasting interest in others.

Ella McCall-Haygan, of Pathways to Freedom at the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development, counseled, "Go where the people are, even though you might get thrown out." One high school student, she shared, disturbed that her classmates split into ethnic groups at lunch, decided to sit with each group in turn, until she was accepted by every group. "It all depends on you," Ms. McCall-Haygan concluded.

To an audience member despairing over the difficulty of creating a culture of peace,



Panelist John Stonebraker (center) talks with other youth at the 'Culture of Peace' seminar.

panelist Tina Smith, mother, peace activist and SGI-USA member, related this story: A man sees thousands of starfish stranded on the beach and starts throwing them back into the ocean one by one. Observing this, a child says: "You're not making any difference. You can never throw all those starfish back." The man responds, tossing one more starfish into the water, "I made a difference to

that one." In other words, follow your passion, and you will make a difference.

Seminar chair Constance Huntsman urged, "Through the *World Tribune* and in our relationships at home and in the community, our conversations will further the goals of this conference. Let's continue on our journey, embracing many creative ideas to construct a culture of peace!" **WT**

Photo by ROB HENDRY

EXPERIENCE — MICHAEL CHOI, RIVERSIDE, CALIF.

# Approaching Difficulties With Courage

**In spite of his parents' opposition, Michael Choi gains the courage to continue practicing Buddhism.**

When I heard the phrase *Nam-myoho-renge-kyo* from my brother, Ted, I thought perhaps he had gone insane. But he encouraged me to practice by telling me I could chant for anything I wanted. The very first thing I chanted for was to beat a Nintendo game. When I did, I felt I had done the impossible, and that maybe there was something to this chanting. That's how I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism nearly seven years ago. Though I chanted, it was only when I wanted something.

I was attending the University of California at San Diego in 1995. My coursework was challenging, and I wasn't getting along with my roommates. I began feeling lonely. I worried about my future and I didn't know which major to choose in school. My parents were pressuring me to become a physician — I wasn't sure that was right for me. Soon, I began chanting daily.

At the same time, my brother and I faced a huge obstacle — my mother was strongly against our practice. For three years, we had managed to keep our practice a secret. But when my mother found out, she became so angry that she drove one-and-a-half hours to my college campus from Riverside, took my car keys and left. When she got back home, she kicked Ted out of the house. We continued practicing despite my mother's opposition.

In 1997, I was given responsibility in the student division in San Diego. I began to make friends within the SGI-USA organization, attending weekly meetings, studying, doing home visitations and learning more about this practice.

I slowly learned how to approach my difficulties with courage. I learned how important it is for my own development to help others and to be compassionate.

Naturally, more obstacles emerged as I grew stronger in faith. I was diagnosed with a condition known as Graves'

disease, a hereditary disorder having to do with dysfunction of the thyroid gland. Though there is no cure for this disease, it can be controlled with medication, which I would have to take every day for the rest of my life.

Despite my parents' opposition and my fear of what they would do if they found out, I mustered up the courage to receive the Gohonzon. Two days later, my physician informed me that I could stop taking the medication and that the disease had apparently subsided.

I received a bonus at work that allowed me to attend the Student Division Conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center in August 1998. The trip revitalized me and I felt certain that this would be the beginning of something great as far as my faith and practice were concerned. However, two days after my return from Florida, I simply lost the motivation to chant. As days went by and my practice came to a standstill, my life-condition began to slump downward. Before I knew it, the Graves' disease symptoms returned, and the doctor confirmed the relapse, indicating that perhaps there was too much stress in my life.

The downward spiral of my life-condition continued until I hit rock bottom. I began to resent SGI activities for making me push myself too hard. My anger became uncontrollable. I was yelling all the time, throwing things and destroying my family members' belongings. I even threatened family members with a knife. One day, while pointing a knife at my brother, I injured myself. A neighbor heard the commotion and called 911. I was taken to a psychiatric hospital and detained for five days.

I returned home and received radiation treatment for my Graves' disease. My thyroid gland was killed off and I was to be on thyroid medication for the rest of my life. My temper wasn't cured, though. I still broke things and often had to be restrained by my father. During this time, I was secluded in my home. I dropped out of school; I had no job and nothing to do. Still I did not return to my Buddhist practice.

Every day was a battle against feelings of depression and anxiety. I began drinking before going to bed. I toyed with



Michael Choi (left) was introduced to Buddhism by his brother Ted.

the idea of suicide, running razor blades along my wrists. I was put on new medications. I became emotionless. I stopped talking to anyone. And if I skipped my medication, my depression and anxiety returned.

One day, I couldn't take it anymore and decided to participate in SGI activities again. My brother was elated. After my first hour of chanting, I immediately noticed a difference in my life-condition. I became happy and full of energy. I started laughing and smiling more, even singing to myself. Most important, this showed at home, where my temper became virtually nonexistent. My psychologist and psychiatrist were immediately impressed by this sudden change in me.

In January 1999, I re-enrolled in a community college and I started to kick some serious butt in school. I pulled off A's in everything. This is when I knew the undeniable power of this practice. The joy and feeling of family with fellow SGI members returned.

I know my experiences occurred for a reason. Most certainly they have brought me closer to an understanding of the power of Buddhist practice. I am so thankful to my brother for chanting for me throughout my whole ordeal. I know I couldn't have won without his support.

In April of this year, after a

very serious car accident involving my parents, my mother told my brother that he could enshrine the Gohonzon in my parents' house where we live. She told Ted that she felt protected because of our Buddhist practice. Through challenging ourselves to help our parents see the power of our practice, my brother and I have grown so much and I feel my mother has seen that change in us. We always tried to encourage our parents through our words, but now we understand that our actions speak so much louder. Your parents know whether or

not you're happy. We appreciate their support so much.

As far as the future is concerned, I just graduated from La Sierra University and will be working toward a master's degree in anatomy at Loma Linda University. My determination is to never neglect my mission in the SGI and to help those who are suffering. Two phrases from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* ring out to me: "When great evil occurs, great good follows" (p. 1119) and "If one believes in the Lotus Sutra, poison will change into medicine" (p. 952). **WT**

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# Those Who Have Suffered Deserve Happiness

## A Record of My Life by Daisaku Ikeda

**‘Those who have suffered the most deserve to become the happiest,’ SGI President Ikeda writes of the Okinawan people. ‘I firmly believe it is the duty of a Buddhist leader to spare no effort in making this a reality.’**

Since turning 60 in 1988, I have exerted myself with ever-increasing resolve to forge a great path of Buddhism throughout the world, taking not a moment's rest.

In January 1988, I embarked on a 20-day trip to Hong Kong, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore. When I returned to Japan in February, I made a stop in Okinawa. That was my first visit there in five years.

Okinawa, known traditionally as Ryukyu, was the only part of Japan to experience ground combat during the Pacific War. Its mountains and rivers were reshaped by the incessant shelling and artillery fire dubbed by the locals the “storm of steel.” One can never forget the cruel history of domination endured by the people of Okinawa.

Those who have suffered the most deserve to become the happiest—I firmly believe it is the duty of a Buddhist leader to spare no effort in making this a reality. Though I carry this thought at the forefront of my mind whenever I visit Okinawa, I inevitably find that the islands emanate a sun-like brilliance that dispels misery and sorrow. Brilliance is everywhere—in the people and the natural surroundings—and it purifies the heart.

Okinawa is a land of cultural generosity and tolerance. It possesses a motherly warmth that embraces all.

During the 15th century, a system was established whereby the ruler of the Ryukyu Kingdom would secure the kingdom's independence by sending tribute missions to the court of the Chinese emperor, receiving in return

Chinese investiture missions that would legitimize each royal successor. An expression often used at the time for these delegations was “Welcoming our benefactor.” This phrase, which says, “We welcome you with deep respect and appreciation,” seems to really capture the spirit of Okinawa.

The people of the Ryukyu entertained the Chinese delegates not with a display of their military might but with the power of culture—of music, song and dance. These guests from China were received in the Northern Pavilion of Shuri Castle, which is located to the left as you face the castle's main building. The entire structure has been beautifully restored. [Shuri Castle is on the outskirts of Naha, the capital of Okinawa Prefecture.]

The alcoves in the homes of kingdom officials were adorned, not with swords as was usual in Japan at that time, but with *sanshin*, a stringed musical instrument unique to Okinawa. The Ryukyu Kingdom was indeed a land of culture.

The phrase “Welcoming our benefactor” later came to be used widely among the Okinawans to convey the spirit with which one greets visitors. It is this kind of rich tradition that has nourished Okinawan culture and has lived on as an integral part of the Okinawan way.

It is truly a society of people who treat others with utmost respect. This must be the origin of the indescribable warmth felt by visitors to the islands and the reason why Okinawans are undisputedly recognized as being good-natured and kind.

A common saying in Okinawa is “*Chimugurusan*,” which literally means the heart is pained. Far from being a statement of condescension or pity, it reflects a spirit of sympathy to share the suffering of another person. Okinawan society abounds with such compassion.

There is also the expression “*Moashibi*.” Broken down into elements, *mo* indicates grassy plain. (Incidentally, the *mo* of Manzano—a place near the SGI Training Center in Okinawa—is made up of the same Chinese character used in *moashibi*. *Manzamo* means literally grassy plain where 10,000 people sit.) *Ashibi*, on the other hand, indicates recreation or play. A grassy plain has no boundaries or fences. Everyone is welcome. And they are free to sing and dance to their



SGI President Ikeda drums with an Okinawan member in 1992 after the First SGI Asia General Meeting.

heart's content.

Play, here, does not imply the momentary pursuit of self-indulgence, which tends to occur at the expense of all else. Rather, it points to the inherent desire of the Okinawans to bring joy to others. They are aware that one enjoys oneself to the extent that one does so—a spirit that resonates with the Lotus Sutra's assertion that “living beings enjoy themselves at ease” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 230). And Nichiren Daishonin says: “Joy means delight shared by oneself and others.... When both oneself and others have wisdom and compassion, this is called joy” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 761).

### The heart of Okinawa is open wide to the outside world.

Traditionally, the Okinawans referred to their land as *Uchina* (inner or home) and themselves as *Uchinanchu*, whereas they called the rest of Japan *Yamato* and its people *Yamatonchu*. They distinguished themselves in this way not to discriminate against others but to inspire themselves to work for the happiness of as many others as possible.

Okinawa does not uphold the narrow-minded ethnocentrism that first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was indicating when he denounced Japan for its intolerance of the unfamiliar. It does not possess the mentality of an island country; it is a land whose spirit is as vast as the ocean that surrounds it and whose heart is open wide to the outside world.

The ability of the Okinawans to adapt to the foreign circumstances they encountered in the places to which they emigrated, their tenacity when faced with hardship and their willingness to help one another—all of these qualities seem to derive from the fiber of Okinawan society itself.

While enjoying the various cultures they met in their new homes across the globe, these Okinawans—these *Uchinanchu* of the world—also succeeded in maintaining the virtues of their own culture. Knowing that great value derives from cultural diversity, they highly treasured their heritage.

Wherever they went, the Okinawans carried on the traditional songs and dances of their ancestors, including the *kachashi*. Like the samba of Brazil, the *kachashi* is music and dance that instantly brings people together. It is performed on any occasion, creating circles of joy that transcend nationality and ethnicity.

In South America and the other regions around the world to which they emigrated, the Okinawans took care not only of each other in difficult times but also reached out to the locals. Singing the songs of their homeland while plucking away at the *sanshin*, they would give themselves wholeheartedly to encouraging anyone who was suffering.

Hand in hand, foreigner and local stood up and sang together. Even if they couldn't communicate with words, the sincerity of these *Uchinanchu* spoke vol-

umes. Rather than attempting to force their culture on others, they strove to use their culture to contribute to humankind.

Okinawans do not discard their cultural traditions but use them to help others. The desire to achieve happiness for themselves and others is a unique characteristic of the *Uchinanchu*. And it is what, I believe, has enabled them to adapt to life in their new environs without forgetting their roots.

One-fourth of the citizens of Okinawa Prefecture lost their lives during the World War II. People housed in shelters after the war collected shards of Okinawan pottery salvaged from the rubble and charred scraps of *bingata*-dyed fabric and displayed them in dilapidated sheds inside the barracks. Day after day, throngs of people came to view the items, searching desperately for some sense of cultural identity that would enable them to go on living. At the same time, they sought to rekindle their spirit to contribute to the world.

When I think of Okinawan cuisine, what comes to mind is the famous dish *chanpuru*, a stir-fry that mixes various local ingredients with a noodle, tofu or goya (bitter melon) base. By combining many distinct local flavors into one fine dish, it has the taste of good home cooking.

Okinawan culture, just like the island's traditional cuisine, contains the influence of many other cultures, including those of mainland Japan, China,

Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

Korea, North and Latin America, and Europe. Each of these harmonizes perfectly with the local ethos. The spirit conveyed here, the spirit of *chanpuru*, derives from the Okinawans' desire to welcome others with open arms and to share their joys and sorrows. Their zest for life shines like a brilliant early summer sun.

#### Faith is the realm of the heart.

I have a treasured photo that has grown yellow with age. It is a scene captured during my second visit to Peru, in March 1974. Amid our busy itinerary encouraging members, my wife and I attended a joint marriage ceremony for two couples at the community center in Peru.

One of the couples was a former young men's group leader from Okinawa, who had come to Peru a year earlier and was working for a foods company, and the Peru young women's leader. The other couple was the head of the community center office and a young women's vice headquarters leader. They were all first-, second- or third-generation immigrants from Okinawa. During my stay in Lima, the Peruvian capital, the four of them worked tirelessly to make sure all the events went smoothly.

I have many unforgettable memories from that visit a quarter-century ago.

One day, under a scorching sun with temperatures in the upper 80s, we took a commemorative photo with 2,000 members. I gave each of them something to drink and encouraged them with all my heart. The heat caused me to perspire, and probably the cold beverage was too much for me. That, combined with the exhaustion of keeping up the strenuous pace of activities, took its toll, and during the latter part of our stay, I became feverish and fell ill. With a look of concern, Victor Kensei Kishimoto, the general director of Peru, who also hailed proudly from Okinawa, strongly urged me to change my schedule so that I could recover.

Declining his entreaties, I went on to visit the University of San Marcos, the oldest university in South America, where I had a discussion on education with university president Juan de Dios Guevara Romero and others. Afterward, when he and his wife learned of my condition, they went to the trouble of calling on me at my lodgings. I understand that Dr. Guevara is still hale and hearty at more than 90 years of age. The memory of his sin-

cerity has stayed with me to this day.

There was also a young girl, who had just become a member, who came to visit me with her mother. She told me that although she didn't have much, she wanted to present me with an Inca doll, which she clutched in her lovely little hands. It was a small, simple doll made of lead.

I immediately presented her with a book of mine that I dedicated with the words "I pray you will become a queen of happiness."

Faith is the realm of the heart. Sincerity must be replied to with sincerity.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda often said: "Leaders must dedicate themselves to serving the members. Despite their poverty and the fact that they are ridiculed and laughed at, these sincere members use what little money they have on transportation and go out to spread Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. Leaders must treasure such people, "showing [them] the same respect [they] would a Buddha" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 324). If the Soka Gakkai has caring leaders who are thoroughly devoted to the members, it will grow boundlessly, and kosen-rufu will advance."

Returning to the photograph I mentioned earlier, while I was in Peru I received a message from the two couples explaining that they had planned to hold their weddings after my visit, but that it would make them ever so happy if I could attend the ceremony while I was there. It was an earnest plea. My wife and I gladly participated in the event, which was held in conjunction with the opening of the community center. We wanted to celebrate the union of these young people who would shoulder the future of Peru.

After a commemorative recitation of gongyo to mark the opening of the center, I offered prayers for the good fortune of both couples as they began their new lives. General Director Kishimoto and his wife served as the go-betweens for both couples. I was responsible for the ceremonial exchange of cups of sake that is a wedding tradition in Japan. The wedding cake was shaped like swan, which is supposed to bring happiness. My wife and I wholeheartedly prayed for the growth of these youth.

Impressive strides had been made in the movement to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism in Peru. In fact, during my trip, a culture festival was held as an official event of the

city of Lima, with the mayor in attendance. I was also presented with a key to the city of Lima as a special honorary citizen in a ceremony held at City Hall. I had done my utmost to stick to my original schedule—for the future of Peru, in hopes of paving the way for the members there carry out their activities freely.

The culture festival was held amid all this. As long as I live, I will never forget the wonderful show the members put on that day, particularly the moving performance of the famous Andean song "Flight of the Condor."

While we were there, my wife noticed that General Director Kishimoto was always wearing the same suit. The noble spirit of Mr. Kishimoto and his wife to get by on the bare minimum, so that they could give everything to the advancement of kosen-rufu, was painfully clear. I therefore took the opportunity of a casual stroll with Mr. Kishimoto and some others through the upscale shopping district Miraflores to make him the present of a suit.

#### The spirit to spread Buddhism is our greatest pride.

Twenty-five years after that visit, in April 1999, a delegation from Peru's prestigious Federico Villarreal National University came to Japan to confer an honorary doctorate upon me. Accompanying the group was SGI of Peru General Director Carlos Shima and Senior Vice General Director Alberto Sueyoshi.

Mr. Sueyoshi was one of the new grooms at the wedding I had attended all those years



SGI President Ikeda poses with Peruvian children on his 1974 visit.

ago. He was the youth from Okinawa who had only come to Peru the year prior to my visit. His bride, Angelica Sueyoshi, who at the time was Peru's YWD leader, is now the SGI of Peru women's leader. As for the other couple, Van Kanashiro, who had been the head of the community center office, is today a vice general director. His wife, Kikuko Kanashiro, is a women's vice chapter leader.

All I did was participate in their weddings, but the four youth then took the opportunity to make fresh determinations to exert themselves even harder toward achieving their personal development and that of the organization. As a result, they are all now central figures in Peru working closely with General Director Shima.

Also, the young girl whom I encouraged to become a queen of happiness became a schoolteacher and is now happily married. Her husband is also a teacher; they are both active in the world of education. And I understand that they are both chapter leaders. Nothing makes me happier than to hear of such wonderful

developments among the membership.

Mr. Sueyoshi has been working at the Japanese Embassy in Peru for 21 years, since 1978. When a group of armed terrorists occupied the Japanese ambassador's residence in 1996, he was held hostage for six days. I prayed for his safety, as did fellow members throughout Peru. After it was all over, Mr. Sueyoshi vowed to make even greater efforts for the prosperity of Peruvian society.

General Director Kishimoto died in 1981. I will never forget that on his deathbed, he said with a look of great satisfaction, "Besides my blood and bones, I have been sustained solely by my desire for the happiness of the people of Peru."

Mr. Kishimoto's determination vividly conveys the profound spirit and inner strength of the Okinawan people to resolutely advance along the path one has chosen to the very end. The noble spirit to dedicate our lives to working for others and advancing the spread of Buddhism is our greatest pride.



Chicago



Columbus, Ohio



San Francisco



Photos taken in San Francisco by Diana Elrod and Nancy Burns; in Houston by Leslie Golden and Dalton Diehart; in Chicago by Vern Hester; in Ohio by Denise Railla; in Seattle by Regina Hook; in New York by Kirk Condyles.

**San Francisco**

For the third year, 150 SGI-USA members participated in the San Francisco Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Pride Celebration. This year's theme was "It's About Freedom." Seen by an estimated 750,000 people, the parade was televised in its entirety on a local station.

All weekend long (June 24–25), members answered questions and passed out materials on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism at an information booth. Guests were invited to an introductory event on July 9, and about 100 people signed up to be on a mailing list.

As in previous years, heart-to-heart dialogue with current temple and non-practicing members was the highlight of the weekend. New friendships were forged, and old ones were rekindled. The Pride Celebration weekend was indeed a chance for many to renew their commitment to community-wide kosen-rufu.

—DIANA ELROD

**Houston**

For the first time ever, more than 50 SGI-USA members from Houston, Dallas and Austin participated in Houston's Pride Parade on June 24 at 9 p.m. The parade, which has been taking place since 1975, drew more than 100,000 people this year and is the second largest parade in the city. Participants included other religious organizations, businesses, banks, political figures such as Houston mayor Lee Brown and city leaders and supporting organizations such as P-FLAG (parents and friends of lesbians and gays).

Our message was that everyone has the Buddha nature, that we celebrate diversity and that everyone is unique and precious in their own wonderful ways.

—JAVIER P. BERRIOS

**Columbus, Ohio**

Eighteen members and friends marched June 24 under the banners "SGI-USA Buddhists for

Human Rights" and "Enlightenment As We Are" in Columbus Pride 2000. Hearts were opened, old divisions disappeared, friendships were rekindled, greater understanding was gained, new friendships were formed and years of struggle, dialogue and prayer melted into the harmony of a common goal: to bring our Buddhist values and the understanding of Buddhism to the greater community.

The members have been meeting since May 1997 to encourage one another in faith and to help bring back members who left the organization and as a way of introducing new people to the richness of Buddhist practice and the power of the Gohonzon.

—LINDA THORNBURG

**Chicago**

In the midst of an estimated 300,000 onlookers, the Midwest's Central Zone, which includes the regions Chicago #1, Chicago #2 and Great Lakes, took part in its first Pride Parade.

# PRIDE CELEBRATION PARADES 'IT'S ABOUT F

Under a banner that said "SGI-USA: Buddhism, Happiness and Pride," more than 90 marchers from Chicago, Michigan, Minnesota and Indiana danced to the lively and nonstop drums of the Women's Division Drummers.

Onlookers eagerly reached for bookmarks that were passed along the parade route that explained our organization and its purpose.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima sent his congratulations in response to a request for a message: "I commend each of you for your efforts to support the community and make

our organization known throughout society.

"SGI President Ikeda has written: 'Buddhism teaches that all living beings are noble and worthy of respect. In that sense, human rights have been at the very core of Buddhist philosophy from the beginning.... There is no discrimination in the vast, boundless compassion of Buddhism. There are no restrictions or exceptions.'

"Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism celebrates the dignity and value of each human life. It is a teaching that cherishes vibrant and beautiful contributions each person can make for a better society. I

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Seattle

Houston

Philadelphia

Chicago

Boston

Columbus, Ohio

New York

# ES T FREEDOM'

ugh- am so happy that through your participation, you can share this wonderful conviction with people.  
 "America is a nation which contains diverse people, cultures, traditions and lifestyles. It is the conviction of the SGI that this diversity and vitality is a source of hope for humanity in the new millennium. That is why our organization is a celebration of human life."  
 "Today, share with society our great conviction. Through your smiles and bright, cheerful life-conditions, show many people how great the SGI is, and how great is the philosophy of peace and humanism we embrace."  
 —BARBARA MCBEE

**Boston**  
 I had a great time marching in Boston's 30th annual Pride Parade with the New England contingent, in spite of the 90-degree weather because I had my hat, my bottle of water and my determination to support fellow SGI members.  
 Last year was my first time marching. I was uncomfortable about being seen in the parade, thinking that people would presume I was gay. I wondered, at first, if that really was the issue. Then I realized the discomfort was about not wanting to be identified with people who continue to endure ridicule, exclusion or worse. What if someone mistreats me because I'm with

"them"? I was afraid. Instinctively, I didn't feel safe, yet my determination to support our members became greater than my fear.  
 My point is that gay pride is about trumpeting human equality on all levels: freedom, happiness and dignity to which we all have a right simply because we are human beings.  
 —ROBIN TISH

**Seattle**  
 Forty SGI-USA members marched in Seattle's Freedom Day Parade on June 25. It was truly joyous to be so graciously welcomed by the crowds. For five hours after the march, we had 25 members staffing our booth, which was one of the busiest during the event, where we passed out materials on Nichiren Daisshonin's Buddhism and invitations to an introductory meeting.  
 Our introductory meeting on July 9 was a great success, with 15 guests and 47 members participating. People were encouraged by the great experiences and perfor-

mances, and many guests signed up to come to future meetings.  
 —REGINA HOOK

**Philadelphia**  
 Philadelphia members marched in the Pride Day 2000 Celebration Parade on June 11 despite the extreme temperatures that neared 100 degrees. Approximately 40 members supported the SGI information table set up at the end of the parade route, remaining at the event all day and distributing information that included *The Winning Life* book.  
 As a follow-up to the event, an introductory meeting was held at the Philadelphia Community Center on June 24 with about 30 participants, including seven guests.  
 —JEANNETTE A. DAMIANI

**New York**  
 New York members participated for the first time in the Heritage of Pride Parade on June 25, carrying a spectacular red, blue and yellow banner that said "SGI-USA, Buddhists for Peace, Culture and Education." They were

cheered along the four-mile parade route by a warm and enthusiastic crowd.  
 Lucretia Evans and her daughter Tiffany, who marched together, said: "This was a historical event for New York, so we had to be present and participate. We have learned that to do wrong and to do nothing is one and the same thing. We had to participate in introducing SGI-USA and the Gohonzon to our community." Garfield Moore, a member and spectator, pointed out that "this is a very significant step for New York. It is a positive and bold statement in favor of the diversity of the organization." Doris Leddy, a mother and participant, said: "I feel that I am making history. I am so proud of being a part of the SGI and a part of the parade." Blane Mosley, a member and participant, said: "Seeing the support of the community and having the members come together to accomplish such a great event reinforces my faith that I am in the right place to grow."  
 —VANDA JAMISON, JAMES BRODEUR AND RAY PETTY

EXPERIENCE — HELEN SCOFFIN, UNITED KINGDOM

# The Power of Prayer

**Chanting for specific goals brought Helen Scoffin rewards greater than she'd ever imagined.**

Looking back over almost 15 years of Buddhist practice, I can see that my life has taken directions I could not have imagined. The main battle of my practice has been conquering fear, self-doubt and self-dislike. This manifested in many different ways, so it often appeared that I was tackling other, more concrete problems.

At 17, I was diagnosed as having acromegaly, a form of gigantism caused by a tumor of the pituitary gland. Although the tumor was removed, I was left with a hormone imbalance that affects my fertility and puts strain on my heart. Excess levels of growth hormone meant that my hands, feet and jaw were liable to keep growing, and I had no menstrual periods. I was also considered to be at high risk of suffering diabetes and cancer. Acromegaly can be the cause of a "general reduction in lifespan," to quote the reassurances of my doctors.

I became a bit of a medical curiosity, and the focus of my Buddhist practice was very much about fighting with doctors for control over my body, fighting to like myself and my appearance, and fighting to define myself as feminine when my body and the medical profession were defining me as abnormal and dysfunctional.

The first thing I ever chanted for was to start my periods without medical help. I remember setting a particular target date that coincided with a Buddhist activity I was involved in. Nothing happened on that day but what I gained out of the activity, and the chanting I had done toward it, was a sense of my own worth as a human being and as a woman, which was not dependent on my ability to have children. Two weeks later, I finally began menstruating — at the age of 20.

This was the first time I realized that chanting for specific goals often brings rewards greater than you had imagined. The lessons we learn on the way to achieving our goals are the

important thing.

As the years went by, I realized that my self-doubt was affecting my ability to find work I could fully enjoy. I had fears around fitting into systems and bureaucracy, and general belated adolescent fears about not fitting in at all. My medical condition further emphasized my difference and I was always frightened to tell employers of my health record.

For more than a decade, I swung in and out of low paid temporary work, not realizing my potential and feeling unappreciated. Despite this, and criticisms from others that I "could be doing better," I continued chanting to give my best in every situation, to create value no matter what. The turning point came in 1989, when I seriously began chanting to find my mission (which simply means "how to use one's life"). The results of some blood tests indicated that my pituitary tumor had started growing again. My doctor told me I would have to have a course of radiotherapy. I was devastated.

I had just started to set up in business as a freelance copywriter. It seemed that every time I tried to get my life together, my health would step in and take over. Once more I felt out of control. However, my health problems once again encouraged me to maintain a strong Buddhist practice. This was eventually to set me on a completely different career path.

I was admitted to a cancer hospital where I was to witness a death on the ward every week. Initially, it was a battle to maintain my practice as we were not allowed to draw the curtains around our beds unless a doctor was present. Eventually, I was given a special dispensation to do this in order to do gongyo. This was the perfect place to understand the eternity of life. It became important for me to honor the living, as well as the dying. So I and two other patients put a lot of energy into making the ward as positive a place to be as possible. We demanded improvements in the food, and me and a guy on the next ward used to sneak out to the local supermarket to get good food and treats for the other patients.

A visit from two dancers who came to perform for us opened

my eyes. It was incredible how just watching them perform changed everyone's mood and gave us all a fresh determination to go on. For me, it demonstrated the importance of motivation and the need for a full life if one is to overcome an illness or disability. This inspired me to become an occupational therapist and as soon as I made a full recovery, I set about trying to find relevant work experience.

After leaving hospital, I was able to benefit from a convalescence at the European Buddhist Center at Trets in France. The day after my return, I was interviewed for and got a job as a part-time occupational therapy helper. My varied work experience and numerous battles with my health had finally paid off. This job enabled me to get the experience I required to go on and train. As part of my studies, I looked at the role of occupational therapy in cancer care. I was able to return to my cancer hospital to interview the new occupational therapist (there wasn't one when I was there). I discovered that not only had the food improved, but also that a faith healer had joined the team to cater for broader spiritual needs. I like to think that in some small way all my chanting behind the curtains paid off!

Once I qualified, I went to work on an acute psychiatric unit in Somerset where I was required to set up and run the occupational therapy service single-handedly. Starting the job coincided with ending a long-term relationship which, rather like my life up until that point, had been going nowhere for too long. The support I received from both Buddhist and non-Buddhist friends in the face of these rather daunting circumstances helped me to stop putting on an act and admit vulnerability. I learned to recognize my strengths and found the courage to move on without regrets. After passing my driving test at the sixth attempt, I gave up my job and moved to Florida.

There, I obtained work as a pediatric therapist. Despite covering five schools in a 40-mile radius, with a caseload of 70 children, I determined to see each child for half-an-hour every day. Against all the odds, I won. I know this was due to assiduous and regular Buddhist practice and nothing else. But it



Helen Scoffin discovers herself and the 'freedom to take risks.'

was not all work and no play. I did things I'd only ever dreamed of: I went down the Mississippi in a paddle-steamer, drove around New Orleans in a horse and carriage, zoomed through the Everglades on an airboat with a Mikasukee Indian and, best of all, drove across the American Deep South through the Smoky Mountains on my own. This was the girl who took a decade to pass her driving test, had never flown on a plane alone and had never been travelling because she couldn't find the right traveling companion.

By losing everything that I'd thought my life was based on — my home, my relationship — I suddenly had the freedom to take risks and discover who I truly was. Two years of being single taught me to stand alone, like myself and embrace a wider variety of people. It was only when I realized I enjoyed being single that I met my present partner.

My life has now done a 360-degree turn. I live in the Yorkshire Pennines with someone who respects me and wants to be with me. My medical condition has been more thoroughly researched over the years, and I

have attended a conference where I met many others with the same condition. There are many ways to heal a life but this practice is the one that has worked for me. I've proved to myself the truth of these words written by Nichiren Daishonin: "A woman who takes this efficacious medicine will be surrounded and protected by these four great bodhisattvas at all times. When she rises to her feet, so too will the bodhisattvas, and when she walks along the road, they will also do the same. She and they will be as inseparable as a body and its shadow, as fish and water, as a voice and its echo, or as the moon and its light.... How reassuring, how encouraging! Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 415).

*Courtesy of UK Express*

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FROM SPEECH, I

to Mr. Toda's words or who forgot them, I took his each and every word very, very seriously. If the disciples do not carry out their mentor's words, they render them empty and meaningless. Then, they are only masquerading as disciples.

As the Buddhist doctrine of a single life-moment encompassing 3,000 realms teaches, our fundamental attitude or inner resolve can transform anything.

Thus, it all comes down to whether we have the spirit to deeply make the vision and intent of our mentor our own—no matter how casually the mentor's words may have been shared. It all comes down to keeping them shining brightly in our hearts like diamonds and polishing them constantly, as we endeavor to make them a reality. This is the solemn path of mentor and disciple.

**Soka education is becoming recognized by educators the world over.**

I founded the Soka junior and senior high schools. [The Tokyo school opened in 1968 and the Kansai school in 1973.] When they were established, the schools had no reputation or track record, and some people ridiculed them.

But over the years, they have produced a steady stream of doctors in the widest variety of fields: doctors of medicine, of engineering, of science, of agriculture, of pharmacology, of dentistry, of economics, of political science, of law, of literature, of linguistics and of peace studies. Some 106 graduates of the Soka junior and senior high schools have attained doctorates. Eighty-nine of them are

from the Tokyo school, and the remaining 17 are from the newer Kansai school. The schools are sure to produce many more doctoral degree holders in the future.

These schools have achieved such wonderful results in an amazingly short time. Behind this is the promise I made to my mentor as his disciple to realize his vision. The mentor-disciple relationship must not be taken lightly.

The richly humanistic education at the Soka schools, which is focused on nurturing students' unique strengths, is becoming recognized by educators the world over, many of whom have visited our schools in Tokyo and Kansai.

The other day, I received a report from the leaders of SGI-Venezuela. According to them, Venezuelan Minister of Education, Culture and Sports Hector A. Navarro Diaz said that, as part of the ministry's short-term study tours abroad for high school students this year, he wishes to have a student friendship delegation visit the Soka junior and senior high schools and meet with their students.

Dr. Navarro and his wife, Caribay Urbina de Navarro, visited the Soka schools last year. In his recent meeting with the SGI-Venezuela representatives, Dr. Navarro fondly recalled his warm meeting with our students, which made him eager to expose young Venezuelans to the value-creating education of the Soka schools.

*President Ikeda met with Dr. Navarro in July 1999 in Tokyo, at which time the minister presented him with the Order of Andrés Bello, Venezuela's highest cultural award, given to in-*

*dividuals who have made remarkable contributions to peace, culture and education.*

**Let us establish SUA as a world center of learning.**

Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo is now accepting applications for the freshman class entering in August 2001. [The campus will be officially opened on May 3, 2001.]

The university has received a tremendous response from students already attending top U.S. universities as well as talented high school students who have already been accepted by other fine colleges. Applications for study at SUA next year have begun to pour into the admissions office. I am grateful to SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima for his strong support of the university.

It gives me great pleasure to announce that the White House Millennium Council has recently designated a trail circling the Aliso Viejo campus as a Community Millennium Trail. Congratulations! As part of the celebrations of the year 2000, walks and trails around the United States are being officially recognized, and the SUA trail is the first to be designated in Orange County.

The university's Millennium Trail is exactly a mile long. Passing over gently rolling hills, the trail offers a wonderful view of the surrounding countryside and towns. On June 3, a celebration was held to commemorate the trail's official recognition as a Community Millennium Trail with

SUA receiving a certificate and message signed by First Lady Hillary Clinton.

In addition, a local TV station has introduced SUA to its viewers on a number of separate occasions, a reflection of the community's high expectations for the university. One of the reports says, "Rising from the hills of Aliso Viejo..., the construction site of Soka University is quite impressive and, when completed, promises to be one of the most beautiful campuses in California."

The United States will be a focus of the new century, and I want to establish a fine educational institution, a world center of learning, there. This is my wish and my determination as the university's founder.

**The Buddha is 'the one who opens the way.'**

A path, a way. I recently composed a poem for the Kansai Soka Junior and Senior High School titled "The Katano Path." [The school is located in the city of Katano.]

What is this path on which we are advancing? It is the path of education dedicated to fostering people of rich humanity and wisdom. It is the path of friendship, the path of comrades, committed to reaching out and bringing people together. And it is the path of philosophy where people strive to help one another develop and grow. It is the path of Soka—a path that will flourish forever.

Our Buddhist practice, too, constitutes the path or way leading to the attainment of

Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra describes the Buddha as "the one who opens up the way" (see *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 98). We are opening the way to happiness, to peace and to kosen-rufu. The more we open these paths, the more we expand our state of life, the more we increase our good fortune and the more we increase our benefit. That is why it is so important that we don't let ourselves be defeated.

To open the path of kosen-rufu without begrudging one's life—this is the spirit of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, of courageous champions of faith. Let us of the SGI boldly open a path that will endure a thousand and 10,000 years, just as the Daishonin instructs. Together let us build a magnificent highway along which our noble movement for kosen-rufu can advance even more dynamically!

There is a saying in Korea, a nation to which Japan owes a great cultural debt, that "the mighty last less than a decade." That is, high-handed, authoritarian leaders, no matter how exalted a position they may hold, never prosper for more than a decade. They are destined to fall. These are indeed words of wisdom. All the glories of worldly power are ultimately doomed to fade into oblivion. Those who run roughshod over others come to a pitiful end.

What is it, in contrast, that never fades or dies? It is strong faith. It is the Mystic Law.

*To be continued in the Aug. 11 issue*

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TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

**Opening Up the Way**

From This Speech:

Our Buddhist practice constitutes the path or way leading to the attainment of Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra describes the Buddha as "the one who opens up the way" (see *The Lotus Sutra*, p. 98). We are opening the way to happiness, to peace and to kosen-rufu. The more we open these paths, the more we expand our state of life, the more we increase our good fortune and the more we increase our benefit. That is why it is so important that we don't let ourselves be defeated.

- 1) What is the Buddhahood that we are seeking through Buddhist practice? How would you explain Buddhahood to a friend who is not familiar with this Buddhism?
- 2) Why do you think that the Lotus Sutra describes the Buddha as "the one who opens up the way"?
- 3) What is good fortune? What good fortune do you feel you have in your life now? What do you see as benefit in your life right now?

# What Aug. 24 Means to Me

## SIGNIFICANT DATES

ON MILESTONES IN THE HISTORY OF THE DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM AND THE SGI

By **TARIQ HASAN**  
SGI-USA MEN'S LEADER



Recently, I was reading one of my favorite books by SGI President Ikeda, *My Recollections*. The book is a collection of essays about his parents, his childhood, his teenage years leading up to his meeting Josei Toda, his early days of faith and many other interesting autobiographical stories not found in other English writings. In addition to the very moving essays about his days as a teenager working in an iron factory while fighting tuberculosis, the ones that deeply touched me chronicled the evolution of his disillusionment with the war — from initial disappointment that his father would not let him enlist, to anger and desperation when his family was bombed out of his aunt's house and forced to live in a shack. It was a time, as he describes, when people intensely felt both spiritual desolation and material deprivation.

He describes his emerging antiwar attitude in the following passage: "War's ruthlessness had hit our family like a tidal wave, smashing everything. I had unawares started questioning the meaninglessness of war. Why fight this war anyhow? The tragedy of war had touched me incisively, and I began to find fault with it from that moment on" (pp. 38–39).

In spite of his disillusionment, the fundamental optimism in young Daisaku Ikeda's heart was desperately seeking to find a way to break through the despair that was so common at that time. He writes: "As long as we could remember, my generation had been steeped in a nationalism which regarded the Emperor as absolute, but now we realized that everything we had valued was valueless. Still, we burned with more than enough courage to think we could start afresh from scratch" (p. 52).

It was at this time that a friend from his grade school days stopped by and invited him to a meeting about "life philosophy." On Aug. 14, 1947, he attended his first meeting on Nichiren Daishonin's Bud-

dism. He describes the scene: "It was after eight as we walked down the gloomy road without a single streetlight. When we arrived and went into the house we found about 20 people gathered. My attention was especially attracted by a man in his forties who talked with a somewhat husky but carefree voice. His broad forehead stood out and his eyes sparkled behind thick lenses. The atmosphere in the group tingled with a strange vigor. As we listened to his unrestrained and frank talk, even weary minds were stimulated. He had the power to make our thoughts radiate! This individual was Josei Toda, the man who determined the course of my life and became my mentor" (pp. 52–53).

At that meeting, Mr. Toda responded to young Daisaku's questions. The point that really struck me here is his reaction: "I thought, this is it — what he's saying is true! I figured, here's a man I can put my faith in. Despite the feeling that I couldn't trust anything, due perhaps to the fact that everything had changed so drastically in my life, I still had the urge to search for something to believe in" (p. 54). And, on Aug. 24, 10 days later, he received the Gohonzon.

Of course, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches us to follow the Law and not the person. This means that we should practice exactly as taught by Nichiren Daishonin. It also necessitates a mentor in life who can show us how to put into practice what the Law teaches and to bring it from the realm of theory and philosophy into enabling us to create actual value and breakthroughs in our own lives.

Examples of great mentors are all around us. In sports, we have seen again and again how coaches have transformed a team of the same players from losers into winners because they've

helped them believe in themselves. The reason the players could believe in themselves is because they trusted that the coaches knew how to win and that if they could learn from them, they too could win.

Young Daisaku's decision to make Mr. Toda his mentor — to feel that this was a person he could trust and his lifelong dedication to accomplishing every dream that Mr. Toda ever mentioned to him — is the great lesson I learned from his initial meeting. I remember President Ikeda once saying that because he had Mr. Toda deep in his life, he could never lose. I'm sure that most of us, when we encountered Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism — and especially as we began to read President Ikeda's guidance — felt "this philosophy makes so much sense" and "President Ikeda's clear application of the Goshu to our society is so illuminating and encouraging."

But I believe we cannot stop at that. Even more importantly, each of us has to become a great role model in society. I'm convinced more than ever that in spite of the great economic

boom in our country, even more people are searching for a philosophy they can trust — one that will help them feel like they are living the best possible life, the most meaningful life.

I'm filled with excitement and anticipation to learn that SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima just received a new, expansive poem from President Ikeda. While the translation is still underway, I understand it expresses President Ikeda's joy on our recent progress and his hopeful expectation for our brilliant future. How fortunate we are in the United States to welcome Aug. 24, 2000, with such a precious treasure from our mentor's heart.

Through our own human revolution, we have to become individuals who can help people experience the incredible joy of living each one of us is creating. This is perhaps best characterized by the following words from President Ikeda's poem to the men's division last year: "Be big-hearted! Be deep-hearted! Be warm-hearted! Be strong-hearted! There you will find the banner of victory of Buddhist practice." **WT**



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# the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

Illustrations by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

## 'AT THE HELM'

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*'Politicians who fail to battle injustice and neglect to defend the people's interests are only exploiting them, using them as a stepping stone to get elected,' Shin'ichi Yamamoto says. 'Such politicians have already succumbed to the dark side of power.'*

The dismissal of Ishimatsu Yoshida's third petition for a retrial cruelly dashed his hopes. [He had been unjustly convicted of a murder that he did not commit.]

Soon World War II ended, and Japanese society saw tremendous changes. However, Yoshida's determination to prove his innocence didn't change.

After his release from prison on parole, he married and took up residence in his wife's hometown in Tochigi Prefecture. There, he proclaimed his innocence to every person he met.

His efforts finally bore fruit in 1952, when some 600 local citizens signed a petition calling on the District Legal Affairs Bureau of the Ministry of Justice to investigate Yoshida's case. Eventually, a meeting was arranged between Yoshida and one of his accusers at the Tokyo Legal Affairs Bureau.

And in 1957, he petitioned a fourth time for a retrial. But this petition, too, was rejected.

Yoshida decided to make a direct appeal to the Minister of Justice and went to the ministry offices in Tokyo. The security guards ordered him to leave the premises, but he refused, clinging to the carpet and crying out

his innocence.

His undaunted efforts to clear his name widened his circle of supporters and gained him the assistance of the Human Rights Protection Committee of the Japan Federation of Bar Associations. In November 1960, he submitted his fifth petition to the Nagoya High Court, and the decision for a new trial was handed down in April 1961. However, the Nagoya High Public Prosecutor's Office filed an objection, and in 1962, the High Court turned around and rescinded its decision.

This prompted Yoshida to file a special complaint with the Supreme Court, which overturned the Nagoya High Court's decision. Yoshida's retrial was finally set to begin.

The first session took place in December 1962. On Jan. 31, 1963, the prosecution made its closing argument and once again demanded life imprisonment for Yoshida. But when the judge handed down his decision on Feb. 28, Yoshida was at long last exonerated.

By then, almost 50 years had passed since his arrest. He was 83.

After announcing his decision, the presiding judge said



Ishimatsu Yoshida celebrates his exoneration after a 50-year court battle.

with deep feeling: "This court owes the defendant—no, let us call him Mr. Yoshida with all due respect—a profound apology for the travesty of justice that our predecessors in the legal system perpetrated against him.

"Mr. Yoshida, for half a century you have continued to proclaim your innocence, enduring all manner of attack and persecution along the way. While expressing my utmost respect for your noble attitude throughout your long crusade—and for your matchless, invincible spiritual strength and vigor, which are truly deserving of praise and admiration—I wish you all the best for your remaining years."

It was extraordinary for a judge to make such an apology in court. But how could anyone ever compensate Yoshida for the pain and suffering of five decades spent trying to prove his innocence?

Shin'ichi Yamamoto applauded the exoneration of Ishimatsu Yoshida, who came to be known in Japan as "The Count of Monte Cristo of the Showa Era." Shin'ichi himself had been falsely accused of a crime and imprisoned, though only for a brief time, and had fought a protracted four-and-a-half-year legal battle to prove his inno-

cence. This gave him a keen understanding of Yoshida's pain, sadness and anger.

The indomitable commitment of Yoshida, who fought to the very last to clear his name, shines with eternal brilliance. His example teaches us that human rights cannot be protected without a fight.

Shin'ichi was overjoyed that Yoshida's innocence had finally been established. But he was also deeply troubled realizing that there must be many other Ishimatsu Yoshidas out there who, falsely accused of crimes they did not commit, had been disgraced, ostracized, imprisoned or had even lost their lives. And while Yoshida was falsely convicted due to the gross errors of people in the judicial system, there was no doubt that countless innocent people were set up by the authorities in an attempt to discredit them and suppress their activities.

Shin'ichi spoke forcefully at the Nagoya Komei-kai meeting: "I, too, was overjoyed when I heard the announcement of Ishimatsu Yoshida's innocence. At the same time, I was horrified to think of how many people are plunged into misery and suffering by oppressive authorities.

"State authority should be used to protect the people. That's what governments are for. But state authority tends to

have an inherently demonic aspect that seeks to control people, make them subservient and even violate their human rights.

"I hope that the Komei-kai members will always keep a sharp eye on the authorities and, should the authorities reveal a devilish aspect, have the courage to fight with their lives for the happiness of the people and human rights. Politicians who fail to battle injustice and neglect to defend the people's interests are only exploiting them, using them as a stepping stone to get elected. Such politicians have already succumbed to the dark side of power.

"I hope that all Komei-kai members will bravely engage themselves in the struggle to protect human rights."

The Nagoya meeting brimmed with an enthusiastic spirit to clean up and reform the political world. When it was over, Shin'ichi continued long into the night to ponder the insidious nature of authority. He had a feeling that as the Komei-kai gained the support of more and more people throughout Japan, the established political parties would begin putting pressure on the Soka Gakkai, its main supporting body.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1963.



# Spirited Study in Northern Calif.

Photos by SUSAN TABLETON

By **GEORGE LEAMAN**  
MONTEREY, CALIF., CORRESPONDENT

The 2nd SGI-USA Northern California Study Conference was held in San Ramon, Calif., July 15-16. A total of 280 members participated from 72 cities in Northern California, as well as San Diego and Santa Monica. There were four sessions per day with a choice of five topics per session, and all topics were offered on both days. Twenty different topics were presented including: "How Does the Buddha Behave?" "Love, Relationships and the Gohonzon," "Sharing Buddhism in Modern America," "How to Derive Maximum Benefit from Our Practice", and "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo — A Doctrine of Personal Responsibility." There were a total of 18 presenters, including SGI-USA Study Department Leader Eugene Hirahara and Vice General Director Richard Yoshimachi.

There was a genuine atmosphere of openness and equality during the sessions, leading to a natural flow of questions, answers and dialogue. Everyone felt free to voice their opinions and share experiences. Fundamental principles of Buddhism were addressed in fresh, creative, down-to-earth ways, giving everyone inspiration in their Buddhist practice.

In SGI President Ikeda's message to the participants, he states: "Please study and carry out an honest and spirited dialogue while making today's conference a truly joyful and significant one. When we embrace and honestly believe in the words of Nichiren Daishonin, there will be a wellspring of ultimate joy, confidence and appreciation within our own lives."

At the end of the conference, everyone was asked if plans for the third study conference should begin. The response was an enthusiastic "Yes!" **WT**



Grassy courtyards at the Pacific Gas and Electric Learning Center in San Ramon, Calif., provide a relaxed setting for people to discuss workshop topics.



New friendships are created at the Northern California Study Conference.



An open and often humorous dialogue among the participants shows the spirit of the conference.



Conference participants continue to talk long after each workshop ends.



Sacramento Region Men's Leader Geoff Rohde's presentation on 'What Is Faith? — Why It's Important and How to Strengthen It,' draws questions after the workshop.