



EXPERIENCE:

Curt Young pursues his dream of living a contributive life.

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AUG. 24 — MEN'S DIVISION DAY — COMMEMORATED

10,000 Men Gather for August Meetings

By **RONNIE SMITH**

SGI-USA VICE MEN'S DIVISION LEADER

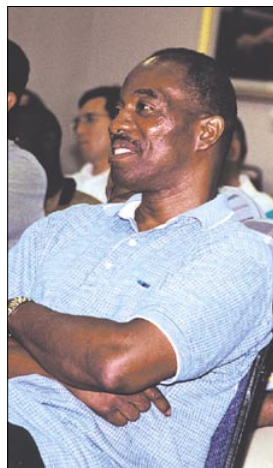
*From the living rooms of men's homes
To the FNCC, to the Pacific Rim, to the Caribbean Sea
Oh what a milestone we reached when 10,000 men gathered to seek
Our mentor's heart
The friendships we keep
Eternal bonds forever complete.*

Victory in Webster's Dictionary means "to win a battle or a struggle."

In August 1999, President Ikeda's message to the men's division stated: "A decisive battle to usher in the dawn of the 21st century has already begun. At last, our time has come. If we do not rise to the challenge now, then when? If we do not fight today, then when?"

This year, as we focused on our annual men's division meetings throughout the SGI-USA, we recalled his words and made a goal that 10,000 men nationwide would participate. Never before have we been able to gather 10,000 men, but we accomplished this great goal during August 2000 by gathering 10,625 men across the country. I believe that the gathering of these many men has clearly indicated to President Ikeda that we are responding to his call as we make this accomplishment at the dawn of the 21st century. During the meetings, we celebrated the 53rd anniversary of President Ikeda's joining the Soka Gakkai and we determined to be the cornerstones of the Soka Gakkai.

This activity enabled many of us — whether by doing home visits or helping to plan the meetings or by attending our respective men's meetings — to open up our lives and share our hearts. We shared with, encouraged and learned from one another. We deepened our relationships. We were able to



Atlanta member Ken Riley.

renew determinations to become more engaged in securing peace and happiness in our world through our Buddhist practice. A portion of President Ikeda's message to the men's division states: "I hope that all the members of the SGI-USA men's division are regarded as reliable by their fellow members, listening carefully to women's opinions, embracing everybody and taking full and final responsibility in everything." We will live up to this expectation.

Our tremendous victory could not have happened without the support of the youth division and the women's division. Matilda Buck, SGI-USA women's leader, sent the most heartfelt message to the men. Her message was representative of the entire women's division's hearts and the efforts they made to ensure our success. The efforts of the youth, who supported us by participating and working behind the scenes, were truly appreciated.

How sweet our victory felt! Even though this was a tremendous milestone, it is only the beginning of what we, the men's division, will accomplish in the future. **WT**

Photo by LUCY ESTEPHANOS



Southeastern Region men's members gather at the Atlanta Community Center, Aug. 20.

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MESSAGE TO SGI-USA MEN'S DIVISION COMMEMORATIVE MEETINGS

Expand the Circle of Trust and Friendship

'I, too, am a member of the men's division,' SGI President Ikeda writes to the men's division members, 'and I am personally determined to fight and forge on with an ever more youthful spirit.'

My sincerest congratulations for your wonderful SGI-USA men's division commemorative meetings! I want to express my heartfelt respect for your daily efforts.

Nichiren Daishonin states, "Be considerate of those who believe in Nichiren and the Lotus Sutra, no matter what they may have done in the past.... Always maintain friendly relations with them"

(*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 850). In the spirit of this passage, please continue to embrace, love and encourage your fellow members in the world of the SGI, a reflection of society. My hope is that you are always friendly to one another and continue cheerfully building a heartwarming, harmonious human society. The men's division is pivotal for unity. Only when the center is solid can people

harmonize with one another.

I hope that all the members of the SGI-USA men's division are regarded as reliable by their fellow members, listening carefully to women's opinions, embracing everybody and taking full and final responsibility in everything. It is my wish that you will, with strong faith, take courageous leadership in a manner that allows every member to express his or her full potential without reservation. As excellent citizens, please expand the circle of trust and friendship in your respective communities.

I, too, am a member of the men's division, and I am personally determined to fight and forge on with an ever more youthful spirit. Let's fight on bravely together. I seriously pray every day for your good health and long lives and the peace of your families. Please stay in good health forever.

Daisaku Ikeda
August 2000

THE LOTUS SUTRA

Back to the Basics

By JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The original Buddhist teachings, which come from the teacher Shakyamuni, are of two kinds. On the one hand are the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. On the other is the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni's highest teaching.

Why is it the highest teaching? Unlike the provisional teachings, this sutra says that all people can attain enlightenment. "The heart of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation that one may attain the supreme enlightenment in one's present form," Nichiren Daishonin explains in "Reply to Hakiri Saburo," "without altering one's status as an ordinary person" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 410).

As a young Buddhist scholar, the Daishonin, searching for the truth of Buddhism, thoroughly studied all forms of Buddhism and became convinced of the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra. He then introduced the practice of the Lotus Sutra—the chanting of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo (*Myoho-renge-kyo* being the title of the sutra as translated into Chinese)—so that everyone in

the world could experience the benefits of this teaching.

"Everything has its essential point, and the heart of the Lotus Sutra is its title, or the daimoku, of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo," the Daishonin clarifies in "The One Essential Phrase." "Truly, if you chant this in the morning and evening, you are correctly reading the entire Lotus Sutra. Chanting daimoku twice is the same as reading the entire sutra twice, one hundred daimoku equal one hundred readings of the sutra, and one thousand daimoku, one thousand readings of the sutra. Thus, if you ceaselessly chant daimoku, you will be continually reading the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 923).

To chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is to affirm the truth of the Lotus Sutra, which is the truth of our lives: Enlightenment is within each of us. Enlightenment is found in the here and now. Enlightenment is found by us—no one can find it for us.

The Daishonin says in "The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" that "Shakyamuni Buddha who attained enlightenment countless kalpas ago, the Lotus Sutra that leads all people to Buddhahood, and we ordinary human beings are in no way different or separate from one another" (WND, 216). The Lotus Sutra is the most accurate description of our lives anywhere. It is the core of Buddhism and at the core of our lives. **W**



SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima greets members at the Masonic Auditorium in San Francisco, Aug. 5.

San Francisco Leaders Meet With General Director

By RON BAIRD

SAN FRANCISCO BUREAU CHIEF

San Francisco Bay Area leaders welcomed SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima to the Masonic Auditorium Aug. 5. The focus of his message was SGI President Ikeda's recent poem to America, "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" Mr. Nagashima reported that during the July 18 headquarters leaders meeting in Japan, the SGI president spoke about America to a combined audience of 3 million, sharing his "unbelievable expectations" for America.

"This poem reflects President

Ikeda's heart, his mission and his determination," said Danny. "It also describes his state of life and how we must overcome our hardships for the sake of humanity's happiness. President Ikeda's reference to us as the 'Bodhisattvas of the Earth' means we will create a new era!"

He also spoke briefly about Harvard University, the oldest college in America, founded 364 years ago, which was intended to foster future leaders in the Puritan tradition. Likewise, President Ikeda is looking toward the distant future by establishing Soka University of America, as he expects young students to come together from the world over, to lead in the

worldwide propagation of Buddhism.

"Since I was in college, President Ikeda has been talking about May 3, 2001," Danny explained. "Now there are only 270 days left!" In looking toward next May, he explained the best way to prepare is to become truly happy individuals. "When you chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, you can experience joy as long as you are able to fuse with the Gohonzon," he said. "Then you can reach into the depths of the universe and reach out beyond your karma, and experience true freedom. When our lives become unlimited, that is the beginning of real freedom." **W**

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EXPERIENCE — RAYMOND E. FOTI, TARZANA, CALIF.

'I Treasure Every Moment'

After nearly flatlining four times on the operating table, Raymond Foti realizes that 'life is worth more than all the treasures in the universe.'

June 20, 1997, was a rather typical day. After performing a vigorous gongyo and an hour or so of chanting, I went to Torrance to meet an old friend for lunch. We enjoyed a wonderful meal and conversation, then I headed for home. As I said, the normalcy of the day was standard, but the consequences were totally different because I did not end my day with evening gongyo—I was involved in a near fatal car accident. I do not remember what happened after that, though my wife, Minako, has told me the details surrounding the accident.

As the story goes, I was pulling out of a supermarket at about 5 mph, and was broadsided by another car traveling 65 mph. My body was crushed and I suffered numerous injuries. My left leg was broken in three places; I broke eight ribs that punctured my left lung, causing my chest cavity to fill with blood; my spine was twisted; one shoulder was crushed and the other clavicle was separated; and my diaphragm was so jumbled around that my heart and diaphragm had exchanged places. It was an impossible situation.

I was rushed to the hospital to undergo several risky emergency operations, during which the doctors pronounced me near death four times because my left lung collapsed but my heart would not stop. I was put on a life-support system with a tracheal tube inserted in my throat to open my breathing. They sawed open my chest to repair my diaphragm that was torn in two places and my heart was repositioned back into its sac.

Throughout the ordeal, my wife chanted Nam-myoho-enge-kyo in my ear through a rolled up piece of paper, pleading: "Raymond you can handle this! You can take this karmic retribution!" As she did this, my heart, which was barely beating, began pounding, increas-

ing to 120–40 beats per minute, and my body began shaking even though I was heavily sedated.

The doctors kept telling my wife: "He's not going to make it. There's no way. He'll be dead within the hour." When I survived, they said it was a miracle; they thought it astounding that a man of age 62 would recover from such a horrible accident with such a tremendously long report of near fatal operations. People half my age rarely survive. I believe it was a miracle—a Buddhist miracle. I was protected. I woke up from the coma two weeks later, barely recognizing my wife. In total, I was in the ICU for three weeks, and had been in three different hospitals. The first one was for the operation, the second for recuperation and the third for rehabilitation.

While in the coma, I remember having what some would consider a near-death experience, which significantly altered my life. The best way I could describe it would be as if I entered these tunnels into a cold, hellish state, as described by Nichiren Daishonin as the "Avichi hell" (the hell of incessant suffering), with the imagery of huge, black dogs biting at me and people cloaked in black robes. I tried to yell, but I could only yell in my head. All that I could hear was my name and Nam-myoho-enge-kyo through this madness; it was all that I could hold onto. This happened four times.

Another time I saw a tunnel and I was with all these other people wearing gray robes, but I was the only person in "technicolor." While in the tunnel, I felt very good, but again there was no light at the end of it. I was ready to go down it. As I continued to walk, I remembered my wife, the SGI organization, a lot of friends, and I consciously decided to go back. That's when I woke up from the coma.

What I believe, as a result of this experience, is that my faith was being tested. I wasn't going



Photo by KATHY AMERMAN

to die because my mission wasn't over yet. I believe even in death we have a choice—everyone does.

The accident brought about a new phase—an awakening—that every day is a golden day to create memories. Otherwise you do not know—whether it's an earthquake, an auto crash, a stray bullet or the sky falling—what's going to change your entire perspective and put you into a different dimension that we as Buddhists call *ku*, or a state of latency commonly known as death. We never know when we are going to face death.

Of course, I had already practiced Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for 29 years at the time, and had contemplated the purpose of life and death many times. However, when you nearly flatline four times, you begin to see the wondrous aspect of life. Even though I know life is eternal, "life is the most precious of all treasures" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 955). It is so valuable that you have more respect for yourselves and others, if in fact you are studying *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and applying them to your life. Then no matter what happens, if you chant until the last moment—and I did—you will experience enlightenment and understand the profundity of life.

I treasure every moment, then, and even more so now be-

cause I have an extension on my life, something very few people get. A lot of my friends have passed away by various means over the 33 years of my Buddhist practice. This extension has made me kinder, more considerate of how I live.

As I mentioned, the doctors were astounded by my recovery, so it was an ample opportunity to introduce people to this Buddhism. As beat-up looking as I was in the hospital, I told every doctor, nurse, orderly or whoever swept the floor about the power of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. I contin-

ued to share this practice with people and it felt a thousand times more valuable to me because it wasn't so easy to do with a tracheal tube in my neck and half of a lung missing.

Chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo has given me this great confidence and power during the most adverse circumstances of my entire life. I had a sense of purpose, a sense of mission—to live and be part of the SGI's kosen-rufu movement. Sharing Buddhism with others gives me the greatest sense of satisfaction in my life.

After two months of being in the hospital, I was sent home well enough to have visitors and to continue my rehabilitation.

Today, I am totally physically rehabilitated—and my lung, by the way, is growing back, which is documented by my doctors and X-rays. Spiritually and psychically, my senses were amplified from going to *ku*. It opened my eye of wisdom.

I am a clinical hypnotherapist and the work I do for people seems to be far more effective. As the Daishonin says, it is "the voice that does the work of the Buddha." It is also the voice that does the work of the hypnotherapist. Before the accident, I treated people because they were my clients or patients, but now my true need and feeling to help people have changed. Now it is my heartfelt desire to help everybody that comes to me,

whether it is for a splinter or cancer. Also, though it's not the driving force, I have an understanding that life is eternal, and that the causes I am making now will reflect in my future lives, as well as this life. At the core of my life, I developed my humanity. I have strong confidence in this and my ability to help others with hypnosis. Just as SGI President Ikeda encourages us to treat our job as we would the Gohonzon, I believe whatever profession we're in we must give it our 100 percent.

A senior in faith, who visited me in the hospital, described the accident in terms of "deliberately choosing one's karma" as a means to prove the power of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Based on this Buddhist concept, I believe I created this accident as my commitment to prove the power of faith in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Fortunately, I survived to tell the story. Now I believe it's my responsibility to share the power of this practice with as many people as possible.

I can honestly say that I believe when Nichiren Daishonin said kosen-rufu will unfold in the future "as sure as an arrow aimed at the earth cannot miss the target" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 385). Before the accident, the idea of kosen-rufu or world peace was nothing more than a dream or a hope, now I can see it as a reality. This passage has always encouraged me to continue my Buddhist practice.

Since my life has been extended, it's my vehement determination to make every day count. If anyone comes to me for help, whether in society, the SGI organization or professionally, I'll give each person my very best because I care. I will support others. I don't think people have to go through necessarily what I did to learn this, you can learn it by paying attention to seniors in faith, particularly President Ikeda, and of course, Nichiren Daishonin.

I'm looking forward to having a stronger, healthier, happier life—with singing and dancing and romancing—until the age of 120. I believe that those who maintain this dynamic practice until the last moment of their lives can attain their life expectancy and all of their desired goals. **WT**

DISCUSSIONS ON YOUTH

LIFE AND DEATH ARE ONE

'Life and death are one with the universe,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'In the birth of a single life, the whole universe approves and cooperates. All of you have been sent here with the blessings and congratulations of the entire universe!'

SGI President Ikeda: We are finally approaching the countdown to the 21st century. This is your age. The future rests in your hands. I hope you will make the 21st century wonderful.

Please make it a century in which the life of each individual is cherished and respected to the utmost.

A century without discrimination, without bullying, war or murder.

A century in which no child cries with hunger, in which no mothers or children take their lives in despair.

A century without environmental destruction.

A century free of academic elitism, greed and materialism.

A century in which human rights are upheld as the most precious treasure.

A century of true democracy, in which the people hold corrupt political leaders to account.

A century in which the people exercise sound judgment and pay no heed to the mass media's lies.

I hope you will make it a century in which each of your precious dreams comes true and your unique individuality blossoms to the fullest.

To realize these goals, it is vital that each of you achieve victory, that each of you grow into people of philosophy and compassion, into people who possess both real ability and the sincerity to understand others' hearts.

Your victory will be the victory of the 21st century. You are our only hope.

A distorted understanding of death has deadlocked society.

Teruhiko Yumitani: We'll

do our best to create a century of life.

Ikeda: How we view life—the perspective we have on life, on death, on the human condition—is the basis for everything.

Japan today is in deep darkness. It has reached a deadlock, as has much of the rest of the world.

What is the root cause of this? It is a distorted understanding of the fundamental question of life and death. Society's leaders and the majority of people have avoided thinking about this most important of issues, brushing it aside in the single-minded pursuit of immediate desires.

As a result, we are now suffering the consequences of this negligence. The bottom line is this: If we do not turn our attention to the fundamental issue of life and death, no matter what superficial measures we may take, nothing will ever really change. It is like trying to treat an illness with pain relievers without addressing the cause. Though our symptoms may be eased temporarily, we are only deceiving our bodies, and we will not get better.

The British historian Dr. Arnold J. Toynbee held that the cause of the world's misfortune is that leaders in all fields fail to ponder the basic question of death.

Yoshiko Ueda: Which means they do not really understand the true value of life, either.

Young people should be the first to seriously consider life's big questions.

Ikeda: This is a major problem underlying environmental pollution as well. Look at the apathetic response to the terrible tragedy of industrial mercury poisoning, known as Minamata disease, in Minamata, Japan, in the 1950s and 1960s. Not the company responsible, nor the bureaucracy, nor the government responded with an attitude that indicated valuing people's lives as the highest priority. All they offered was a cold-hearted, bureaucratic response that put the interests of big business first.

The consumption of fish contaminated with mercury from industrial waste discharged by the company into Minamata Bay caused healthy people to experience numbness



Photo by KIRK CONDYLES

in their extremities and rendered them unable to coordinate voluntary muscular movements. It devastated their nervous systems, causing some to go into convulsions and die. Children were born deaf, blind and with speech impediments. Innocent people were forced into a living hell.

Yet it took 15 years from the time the first victims appeared until the Japanese government finally recognized the disease as pollution-related, in 1968. Why was immediate action not taken? Why were efforts not made to save these precious lives before wasting time coming up with all kinds of excuses and rationalizations?

Among the company officials, bureaucrats and government leaders, there were many who had graduated from Japan's so-called top universities. In fact, almost all of them had. But these people, who should have been Japan's best and brightest, lacked something crucial as human beings.

This is frightening. It points to a fundamental flaw in Japan's

educational system—an absence of a solid life philosophy and humanism.

Ueda: I completely agree.

Ikeda: You are all still young, and I am sure that most of you do not have a clear conception of death. That is only natural. But precisely because you are young, I want you to think seriously about such questions as: What is life? What happens when we die? Why are we born?

I want you to grow into adults who possess a firm philosophy of life and death. A philosopher has said that an awareness of death, our mortality, is what separates humankind from the rest of the animal kingdom.

Yumitani: One of our high school division members in Tokyo had a close encounter with death when he was a member of his school's track and field team. In December of his freshman year, he was practicing landings for the high jump when he fell and hit his head. He dislocated and fractured his

cervical vertebrae and was lucky that he did not die then and there. He went into surgery for six hours, and though it was a success, he could no longer move the body he had once taken for granted without others' help. He felt extremely sorry for himself.

Then, on Jan. 2, he received a poem from you, President Ikeda:

*Day after day I pray
For your health,
For you possess a profound mission.*

He was so moved by these words that the courage to challenge his physical condition welled up from the depths of his being. He chanted daimoku and put great efforts into his physiotherapy sessions. And he left the hospital on April 3. Today, he is back at school and even back on the track and field team.

He says: "I could have died, but I am fine now. I am so happy. My injury taught me anew the tremendous power of the Gohonzon. From this day on, as a high school division member, I intend to think carefully about my mission, which President Ikeda mentioned in the poem he sent me, and carry it out without fail!"

Everyone has a mission—that is why we are born.

Ikeda: How admirable!

Everyone has a mission. That is why we are born. That is why, no matter what happens, we must press on in life through all things.

The Japanese word for mission means to use one's life. For what purpose do we use our life? For what purpose have we been born in this world, sent from the universe? Why have we been dispatched here?

Buddhism views the universe as one giant living entity. If we compare it to a vast ocean, each individual life is like a wave on that ocean. When the wave rises from the ocean's surface, that is life. When it merges back into the ocean, that is death.

Life and death are one with the universe. In the birth of a single life, the whole universe approves and cooperates. All of you have been sent here with the blessings and congratulations of the entire universe!

PLEASE SEE YOUTH, 5

FROM YOUTH, 4

All life is equally precious. We cannot apply a hierarchy of value to life, making one living thing more worthy than another. Each life is unique and individual.

Every person's life is as valuable as the universe—it is one with the life of the universe and just as important. Nichiren Daishonin declares, "Life is the foremost of all treasures" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1125). He also states: "The Buddha says that life is something that cannot be purchased even for the price of an entire major world system" (WND, 983). "One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the major world system" (WND, 955).

That is why we must not take our lives. That is why we must not resort to violence, why we must not hurt or bully others. No one has the right to harm the precious treasure that is life.

Yumitani: One student writes that when he was a victim of bullying, he questioned why he had to be born into such a painful world—why he had been born at all.

Ikeda: Why have we been born? Youth is the time to search for the answer to this question. Youth is our "second birth." Our first is our physical birth, but it is during our youth that we are born as a person.

That is why it is such a difficult period in life, why we have to go through so much. It is a struggle, like the struggle of a chick trying to break out of its egg.

The crucial thing is never to give up. As you struggle to find your way, please pray, think, study, talk with your friends and give your all to taking care of what is important now. If you challenge yourself without throwing in the towel, then your mission—the one that only you can fulfill—will reveal itself without fail.

Ueda: Yes. If the chick gives up halfway, it will never break out of the egg.

Those defeated by their problems cannot grow as human beings.

Ikeda: I hope you will not let your problems and struggles defeat you. Those beaten by their problems experience no fresh growth or "rebirth" as human beings. They end up living by instinct alone, like animals. And that is spiritual death.

You all know Mr. Mikhail

Gorbachev, the former president of the Soviet Union, who is a friend of mine. Gorbachev is responsible for bringing an end to the Cold War. He is a hero who had the sense to say, "This foolishness cannot go on!" Wanting to find a way that would bring happiness to all humanity, he took a decisive step toward change.

As the supreme leader of the Soviet Union, he was virtually all-powerful in his home country. He could easily have lived in comfort in the citadel of power. But he chose a different path—a dangerous, risky path.

Attempts were made on his life, and he was betrayed and persecuted. But amid this, he refused to abandon his dream for a society that put people first.

When Gorbachev and his late wife, Raisa, visited our Kansai Soka Junior and Senior High School in November 1997, Mrs. Gorbachev addressed the students. "You will experience all kinds of hurts in life," she said. "Not all of them will heal. Nor can you always realize your dreams. But there is something that you can achieve. There is a dream that you can make a reality. Therefore, the person who triumphs in the end is the person who gets up after each fall and pushes onward. The ability to keep on fighting is a matter of the spirit. Death does not come to the person who is tired—it comes to the person who has stopped moving forward.

"You may think you are still young today, but before you know it, you will have reached maturity. That is life. Soon you will all have to take responsibility for your families, your nation and the entire planet.

"May your dreams come true! May wonderful things occur in your lives! May you all be happy!"

Ueda: What an encouraging message!

How incredible it is to be alive right now!

Ikeda: The Gorbachevs experienced trials and hardships beyond description. "But we have survived," they said. "We have lived and we have fought."

All of you are alive now—what an incredible thing that is! I hope you will not waste this wonderful treasure.

Speaking of Russia, I have talked to you before about how the great Russian writer Fyodor Dostoyevsky narrowly escaped being killed by a firing squad. While waiting for his

turn with the executioners, he thought about how he would spend his final moments. He knew that in five minutes he would be tied to a post and shot, thus disappearing from this world. He did not want to waste those five precious minutes—they were the last treasure he had. He had to use them carefully.

He divided his remaining time into three parts. The first two minutes he would spend saying farewell to his friends and loved ones. The next two minutes he would devote to thinking of himself for the last time. His final minute he would take one last look around.

At the same time, he decided that should he for some reason be spared, he would turn every minute into an age and never squander another second.

Yumitani: What an intense experience that must have been!

We should spend every minute of our lives valuably.

Ikeda: If you think about it, although we may not be destined to die five minutes from now, we are all, without exception, going to die at some point. We can count on it 100 percent. There is nothing surer than this.

Victor Hugo says, "We are all under sentence of death, but with a sort of indefinite reprieve." Ideally, we should live every minute of our lives valuably, as if it were the last moment of our lives. Those who live aimlessly are left with a sense of emptiness at the end of their lives, but those who live all-out, striving right to the end, will die peacefully.

Leonardo da Vinci says, "As a

well-spent day brings happy sleep, so life well used brings happy death." One aware that death could come at any time will live each day to the fullest. In a race, as well, it is the goal that makes us run with all our might.

Ueda: Facing the reality of death brings meaning to life.

Yumitani: I guess if we did not die, our lives would become aimless and empty—just like we do not study unless we know there is an exam!

Ikeda: That is true. A life without death might seem like a nice idea, but it would also mean that we would put everything off, thinking that even if we did not take care of things now, we could still do it in 10 or 20 years. In fact, we would probably never do anything at all. We would all become completely decadent and lazy.

Yumitani: I imagine that is what happens to people who spend their days living haphazardly, never giving serious thought to the reality of death.

Ikeda: In the face of death, such things as wealth, status, honors and academic qualifications mean nothing. At that moment, all is ultimately decided by your life, unadorned of all external trappings.

Are you fulfilled? Or is your life empty, weak and spiritless? That is why we need faith to forge and develop our lives.

Ueda: And we never know just when death will come. So we cannot afford to waste even a moment.

Ikeda: No, we cannot. I have adopted the daily creed of "Make today worth one week!" I have not yet lived a hundred years, but I have striven to create several hundred years of value.

Nothing makes you stronger than having a sense of mission.

Yumitani: If we live our lives earnestly and to the fullest each day, we will have no regrets.

Ikeda: It is about having a sense of mission. Nothing is stronger.

José Rizal, the hero of Philippine independence, gave his life for his mission. He was executed by a firing squad, but in a final letter, he wrote, "I do not regret what I have done, and if now I had to commence again I would do the same as I have done, because it was my duty."

Ueda: It would be wonderful if we could all end our lives feeling that if we had to do it all again, we would walk the same path.

Ikeda: To live that way requires a firm view of life and death.

What happens to us when we die? What happens to our life? Next time, let us look at the way Buddhism answers these questions.

Part one of a discussion on life and death among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Teruhiko Yumitani (young men's leader) and Yoshiko Ueda (young women's leader).

Photo by JONATHAN WILSON



MESSAGES TO THE SGI-USA MEN'S DIVISION COMMEMORATIVE MEETINGS

Discover Joy and Strength in Your Life

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

Thank you very much for attending this most significant meeting for the men's division throughout the world as we celebrate the 53rd anniversary of SGI President Ikeda joining the Soka Gakkai.

August is also the month when President Ikeda first met his mentor, Josei Toda, and formed a mutual and almost instant affinity with him based on his profound instincts that he had at last met a person in life whom he could fully trust.

In his well-known poem that he presented to Mr. Toda at his first meeting, President Ikeda said, "I spring up from the soil/To drive the darkness from my mind/To find a tall tree no storm can bend."

I believe now is the time, without any hesitation, for each of us to "spring up from the soil," to "emerge from the earth" and realize the profound mission we have. Through discovering, or rediscovering, the joy and strength in our lives, let's be ready to go forth with President Ikeda as he puts the final touches to the kosen-rufu move-



ment from the United States.

President Ikeda has said that men are the "golden pillars for kosen-rufu." As pillars, we should always protect and foster the other divisions. But President Ikeda did not just say, "be pillars" but rather "be golden pillars." *Golden* means to shine based on winning at work, developing a happy family and carrying out activities for kosen-rufu. *Golden* means to have a high life-condition based on having appreciation for the Gohonzon, for being part of the SGI family and for being able to practice together with our mentor.

Golden also means to have great pride that as men we are, as President Ikeda said in his essay to us, "the cornerstones of the Soka Gakkai... the last runners in the relay race of kosen-rufu, the runners who determine our victory or defeat." He goes on to say, "At last, our time has come."

I am praying that you will use the opportunity of these gatherings to renew your determination toward welcoming President Ikeda back home to the United States with a high life-condition based on victory in every facet of your life. Thank you very much. **WT**

To the Heroes of the SGI-USA

By **MATILDA BUCK**
SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER

Once upon a time, a man, not yet a hero but compelled by his sense of mission to save another, leapt astride his horse. Despite all risk to himself, he galloped off to battle the forces that would demean life, even destroy it. That's how he became a hero.

It's not a fairy tale — it happens every day, thanks to you, the heroes of the SGI-USA. To you, I offer my profound appreciation and deep respect.

I know for a fact that because of the men in my life, including my first group leader and especially my husband and my son, I am who I am today. They gave me the freedom to shine. They gave me the dream to stand up as a bodhisattva, reaching far beyond family and marriage.

That's why I say that the men of the SGI are the most revolutionary in supporting women. It is the strong man of a deeper kind of intelligence who not only lets others around him develop



their abilities, he paves the way. You men, you heroes, are the ballast that balances our organization and confirms the universality of this Buddhism. You give weight to our activities, courage to our dreams and you applaud our victories. Thank you for it all.

SGI President Ikeda said to the men of the

SGI: "My heroic friends! My noble comrades in the struggle for kosen-rufu! A decisive battle to usher in the dawn of the twenty-first century has already begun. At last, our time has come. If we do not rise to the challenge now, then when? If we do not fight today, then when?... The Daishonin writes, "Do not spend this life in vain and regret it for ten thousand years to come" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 970). Let us leap astride our white horses and gallop intrepidly across the great plains of our mission, holding high the banner of kosen-rufu."

On this 53rd anniversary of the day that President Ikeda joined the Soka Gakkai, I congratulate you. **WT**

THE 8TH MEN'S DIVISION CONFERENCE AT THE FNCC (AUG. 24-27)

A Gathering of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth

By **MICHAEL GOLDEN**
ALISO VIEJO, CALIF.

"The Bodhisattvas of the Earth / have emerged! / They have arisen!" writes Shin'ichi Yamamoto in his new poem, dedicated to "my sublime fellow SGI members in America," and I could not help but feel the profound reality of his words in the MD Conference this past week. One hundred and eighty men — from every corner of the U.S. and the Caribbean, from ages 39 to 74, from all kinds of ethnic and cultural backgrounds, from six months of practice in the SGI to well over 30 years — gathered together to refresh their faith and practice and to take the next step forward in fulfilling their unique and noble missions.

The program itself was outstanding, including a talk by Danny Nagashima on the mentor-disciple relationship, heartfelt experiences from

some of the national men's leaders, study and discussion of Soka Spirit and "Soar" in terms of our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, several extended opportunities to meet and discuss topics in small groups and really get to know and encourage one another, and a magnificent (well, some of it) talent show. But above all, for me, it was the amazing, courageous and wonderful members who inspired me and showed me something of the meaning of SGI President Ikeda's poem.

I'd like to share some of the highlights for me, but first, a small "commercial": I had been present at the opening of the FNCC in 1996, and I saw the kind of effort President Ikeda made to ensure that every aspect of the place, even the details of the facility itself, would be encouraging and refreshing to the precious members who would come there. I heard from everyone who

came back from a conference, regardless of the topic, how remarkable the experience was, but I myself had not been to a conference until now. Now, I, like several of the men who shared their determinations on our departure day, can say, "This was my first, but definitely not my last." Once again, with the united efforts of many members and the FNCC staff (thanks!), one portion of President Ikeda's vision has become a reality.

Some highlights:

- I met... a man who supported his wife and children while she won her bout with cancer; a man who had battled cancer himself; a man who suddenly lost a beloved grandchild; a man who struggled in business with his family; a man who fought and gathered 18 youth in his district where there had been only two; a man who fought to overcome a fierce drug addiction and now works to help others in his commu-

nity; a man with many children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and the spirit of a joyful and hope-filled youth making a fresh start... all unique, common people battling for kosen-rufu amidst the harsh realities of life.

- Danny Nagashima on the mentor-disciple relationship: In Buddhism, mentor and disciple are fundamentally equal and inseparable — we may have different roles, but we are not mere followers — because we take responsibility for achieving the same goal.

- I met... a man who overcame a seemingly unbridgeable gap in communication with a family member; a man who struggles to share himself openly with others; a man dedicated to rooting out racism in his workplace and community; a man who pledged to truly appreciate his wife....

- A group discussion on relationships, which, because of

the breadth of experiences and determinations expressed, really brought home the joy and the importance of challenging ourselves first in everything.

- I met... a man whose efforts in the Soka Spirit movement led to great growth in his district and professional opportunity; a man who fought to participate everywhere using a walker so that his victory was not having to be wheeled in a chair as at previous conferences; a group of men who danced a proud and beautiful dance of independence....

Space prevents my going on. I truly felt this was a magnificent gathering of Bodhisattvas of the Earth. It was with joy but no surprise that I learned two days after returning that we had accomplished our SGI-USA target of having more than 10,000 men active during the Commemorative General Meetings nationwide: The men's division of America have arisen! **WT**



Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI



Photo by BRANT MILLER

More than 400 members and guests, including SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima, meet at the Los Angeles Friendship Center Aug. 20, celebrating the theme 'Becoming a Victorious Man in the 21st Century.'

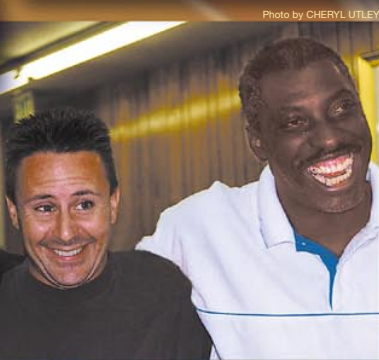


Photo by CHERYL UTILEY

(Above) More than 30 San Antonio Area men come together Aug. 13 at the San Antonio Community Center under the theme 'On the Path Toward Absolute Happiness,' conducting small group discussions and enjoying new and renewed friendships.



Photo by PETE PETERSON

(Left) Kansas City men enjoy the gathering at the Kansas City Community Center on Aug. 20.

Photo by LUCY ESTEPHANOS



The men of Pacific Chapter meet at the Santa Barbara Community Center, Aug. 26, studying SGI President Ikeda's new poem 'Soar, — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century.'

'Creating Personal Victories and Becoming Role Models in Society' is the theme of the Southeastern Region men's general meeting, bringing together more than 150 members and guests at the Atlanta Community Center on Aug. 20.



Photo by CHERYL UTILEY

Kansas City men gather at the Kansas City Community Center on Aug. 20 to discuss interracial, gender and age conflict, and SGI-USA's role in resolving these differences.



Photo by RICHARD TRIGG

Kentucky Area men gather at the McConnell Springs Nature Preserve outside Lexington, Ky., Aug. 26, centering on the theme 'A Celebration for Peace.'

EXPERIENCE — CURT YOUNG, LOS ANGELES

It's Never Too Late To Make Dreams Come True

Having challenged the 'negative feedback' he received as a child, Curt Young pursues his dream of living a valuable and contributive life.

As a child growing up in Chicago, I was plagued with the question of what is justice? I wondered why people couldn't get along better than they did in my home, in my neighborhood, in the world. I loved to read and I looked for answers to my questions in everything I picked up.

My father called me a "dreamer." He constantly told me that I was "a worthless, no good scoundrel," to use his exact words, who would "never amount to anything." Those words sunk deep into my life.

I wanted to become a lawyer when I grew up and fight for justice, but in fact, every action I took ensured that I would never accomplish anything meaningful in my life. I had failed since the third grade. In my senior year of high school, I was expelled for cutting classes; the teachers said I was incorrigible and couldn't be educated.

My father cried and told me that he knew this would happen. My mother, a teacher, was disgusted with me. I had no vision of a life outside of school and didn't know what to do or where to turn. I was so distraught that I seriously considered suicide. Having grown up Catholic, I went to a priest for help, but he was too busy to talk to me.

Next, I called my best friend. We hung out all night long and got drunk. The next morning I joined the Air Force. I was 18 years old.

I passed the High School Equivalency Test in the Air Force, so when I got out four years later, I moved to New York City (a place I consider my true home) and went to a community college. But that was in the '60s, and I was so distracted with the times that I gave up on school and my dreams and went to work.

By the time I was 30, I had worked as a laborer in the steel mills; swept floors in factories; loaded mail trucks at the post office; was a gate agent for the airlines; and a salesman for

Ebony magazine. An executive at an ad agency thought I might have a talent for writing. With his encouragement, I soon became an advertising copywriter. It was my first real success. I worked in the advertising business for the next 20 years. It was during those years, in 1976, that I became a Buddhist and joined the SGI-USA.

I practiced sincerely and did very well in my career, progressing to senior vice-president and creative director of an ad agency. In 1986, I left New York and after spending a year in Chicago, moved to Los Angeles, where I drove a cab before going to work for the Nissan Corporation as manager of media relations.

In 1992, I was laid off. This would be the real turning point in my life. First of all, I couldn't find another job. My wife and I got a divorce. I was living in an apartment in Santa Monica that wasn't mine. The new SUV I left Nissan with was stolen. I got another one, but it was soon repossessed. Finally, since I was living illegally in a rent-controlled apartment, I was told to move. I was given a month. I had no job or money, and I used a bike to get around L.A. I couldn't believe that I had practiced Buddhism for nearly 20 years and was actually facing homelessness on a bicycle. I appealed to a real estate agent but to no avail.

Finally it was down to a week. The only thing I could do was chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. On Monday of that week, I chanted the better part of the day. On Thursday, a friend called and said she was going out of town for a month and if I knew anyone who could look after her house. The next day, I



Photo by JEAN PRITCHARD

moved into her house. By the time she returned, a staff member at the *World Tribune* called and asked if I could work for them while the managing editor went to Boston to cover SGI President Ikeda's visit to Harvard. Another friend had an apartment for rent and he wanted me to have it. I earned just enough to move into that apartment.

While I was working at the *World Tribune*, I met my new wife. When I was chanting, I determined to take a life built on circumstances and rebuild it on prayer. Since getting kicked out of high school, I had gone where the wind blew me. If someone offered me a job, I'd take it. Not so much because it was the job I wanted, but because there it was in front of me. I had lived my life like that. Now I wanted to develop the courage to make a determination and stick with it until I had a result. I chanted to use whatever talent I might have for *kosen-rufu*. I finally was contracted as a writer for the *World Tribune*, but that's another experience for another day.

My wife and I dreamed of

living in France someday, a country we both love dearly. However, while she's spoken French fluently since her early teens, I couldn't say a word. So I decided to enroll in a French language course at Santa Monica College. I got my first "A" ever. I was so encouraged that I took another course in French, then one in history and political science and math. And before I knew it I was graduating from Santa Monica College—my first graduation since elementary school. I applied to UCLA and chanted to get accepted. But my prayer to the Gohonzon went something like

this: "With my background, there's no way I was going to be accepted at a top research university." The more I campaigned, the more I was filled with doubt. While waiting to find out, it occurred to me just how full of doubt my prayer was. So much so, there truly was no way I was going to get into UCLA. I immediately changed my determination and my prayer from doubt to a prayer of "Yes, I absolutely will be accepted."

A few days later, the thin letter of rejection showed up in my mailbox. But that didn't deter me one bit. I had determined that I was going to UCLA and that was that. I finished up some unfinished coursework from years before that was the culprit, and when my GPA was recalculated, I had a 3.78 out of a possible 4.0 and had in fact graduated from Santa Monica College with honors. The following quarter I was accepted for early admittance to UCLA.

Now all these years, a committee of voices had found a home in my life, internal voices that, at every opportunity, would remind me of my father's

words. Whenever I would set to a task, they would remind me, in no uncertain terms, that I had no ability whatsoever to do anything meaningful in this life—that I was a total failure.

Writing has always been excruciatingly painful. I'd have to fight through that with every writing assignment I ever had, whether as an advertising copywriter or for a script or an article for the *World Tribune* or *Living Buddhism*.

You can imagine that for most of my adult life, my self-esteem and confidence were about as low as possible. So it would always surprise me when people would tell me they liked something I wrote. Then the "committee" would say, "Yeah, you got away with it that time, but it'll never happen again."

But with my victory, I was able to tell my father and my internal committee that they were wrong! I truly was a valuable human being. The committee couldn't stand up to my prayer and my connection to my mentor, President Ikeda, who I think of as the conductor of this grand orchestra we call life. I am one of the musicians. So for me, it is crystal clear that my victory is a result of my having never, ever taken my eyes off the conductor, and playing with all my heart.

When President Ikeda spoke at Columbia University a few years back, he said, "The task of education must be fundamentally to ensure that knowledge serves to further the cause of human happiness and peace." That was my dream as a child. Thanks to him, my dream will come true this lifetime.

I finish UCLA in a few months. I am a history and political theory major with a minor in French literature and, yes, I am in an honor's program. In September, I will be in France, where I will spend the month researching my thesis. When I return, I will submit my application to two graduate schools: Columbia University and Harvard University. I'll be back after I earn my Ph.D. So you see, it really is never too late to make our dreams come true. **W**

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the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

'AT THE HELM'

VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 4, PARTS 41-42

As the chief priest of Heian-ji temple, Shinno Abe—who will later become the 67th high priest, Nikken—upsets the Kyoto members by indulging in expensive amusements.

In spite of their daily struggles to make ends meet, the members in Kyoto continued to make sincere offerings to Heian-ji temple, believing that kosen-rufu in the city would advance through the efforts of chief priest Shinno Abe [who would later become the 67th high priest, Nikken].

But no matter how many years went by, they saw not a single temple in the area convert to Nichiren Shoshu. Abe never made any attempt to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. What *did* he do then?

It was not long before Abe was seen indulging in expensive amusements, such as frequenting exclusive Japanese restaurants and hiring geisha for entertainment.

In Kyoto, it was not unusual for chief priests of the temples of established Buddhist schools to enjoy such high living. This was a glaring example of the corrupt, decadent state of Japan's Buddhist establishment.

But the Soka Gakkai members were certain that Nichiren Shoshu priests would not stoop to such conduct, and they confidently proclaimed this to people around them. They believed that, having inherited the legacy of Nikko Shonin, the Daishonin's true successor, these priests adhered to the tradition of being devout priests who "desire little and yet know satisfaction" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 747).

Of the diverse membership in Kyoto, some were employees at the city's most prestigious Japanese restaurants. The shock they felt on seeing Abe's dissolute ways was profound. He was the epitome of "an animal dressed in priestly robes" (WND, 760).

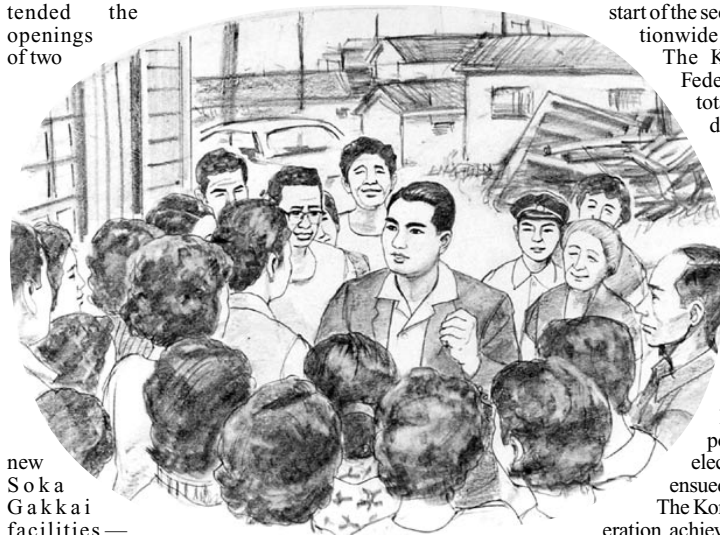
It came as such a betrayal to these members that some were dumbstruck, while others trembled with indignation and fought back bitter tears of disappointment. However, they kept what

they knew to themselves.

Given that the priesthood and laity were striving to advance in harmonious unity toward kosen-rufu, they felt it would be wrong to stir up controversy. They decided it best to just turn a blind eye to these activities.

Abe's true identity was not merely as "an animal dressed in priestly robes." He would ultimately reveal himself as the devil king of the sixth heaven, attempting to destroy the Soka Gakkai, a gathering of the children of the Buddha, and to bring about the ruin of the Daishonin's Buddhism itself.

Following the opening and Gohonzon-enshrinement ceremony for Heian-ji, Shin'ichi Yamamoto also attended the openings of two



new Soka Gakkai facilities—the Nishi-Yodogawa Community Center in Osaka and the Wakayama Community Center in neighboring Wakayama Prefecture—on April 6 and 7, respectively. Nishi-Yodogawa Ward and Wakayama City had both suffered great damage in the second Muroto Typhoon, which had struck the Kansai Region some 18 months earlier.

In the aftermath of the disaster, Shin'ichi promised to build two new community centers in these areas to encourage the members and give them a target to aim for as they set rebuilt their lives and communities. Shin'ichi took it as his personal responsibility to inspire, cheer and encourage those who were suffering.

Wherever he went here in Kansai, as he did everywhere, Shin'ichi went among his fellow members, among the people, to offer encouragement. In such action one finds the practice of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging and the way of the bodhisattva in the modern age.

April 17 was Election Day for Japan's 46 prefecture assemblies and the major municipal assemblies of Yokohama, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe. These made up the first round of nationwide local elections taking place that spring.

The Komei Political Federation fielded 95 candidates—57 in the prefectural elections and 38 in the five city elections. All the Komei candidates put up a



Illustration by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

would serve as negotiating bodies in each of the local assemblies where its members held office—and that all of its local assembly representatives would henceforth be collectively known as the Komei-kai.

A few days later, on April 20, came the official announcement of ward assembly elections in Tokyo and nationwide city assembly elections (excluding Yokohama, Nagoya, Kyoto, Osaka and Kobe), marking the start of the second phase of nationwide local elections.

The Komei Political Federation fielded a total of 740 candidates.

On the 23rd, nationwide town and village assembly elections were announced, and 157 Komei candidates also ran in these campaigns. A fierce struggle leading up to the polling day for both elections on the 30th ensued.

The Komei Political Federation achieved a resounding victory in these elections as well. With all 136 of its candidates in the Tokyo ward elections winning, the federation surpassed by 12 seats the Japan Socialist Party, which had long been the second largest party after the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. And in other local assembly elections across the county, an astonishing 97.8 percent of Komei candidates were elected. Adding the

winners in these elections to the already existing Komei incumbents, the Komei Political Federation now included a total of 1,079 local legislators.

Good government begins with local government that is closely linked to the community and is directly concerned with the lives of the people. Policies promoted in one local district could ultimately inspire new policies on the national level.

In reality, however, many local assemblies at the time were controlled by "town bosses" who had gone into politics simply to gain fame and personal advantages. There was little, if any, citizen participation. This state of affairs engendered a deepening sense of disappointment and distrust toward politics.

Consequently, Shin'ichi was overjoyed that there were now more than a thousand local Komei representatives. He was confident that with so many legislators seeking and working for the happiness and welfare of their local citizens, a new era in local government would surely dawn. He hoped that these representatives would go out among the people, listen to their opinions and personally involve themselves in their problems and concerns. And that they would also rack their brains to find ways to serve the people and wage a valiant struggle on their behalf.

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

A Journey of Self-Discovery

PERSPECTIVE

By DAVE BALDSCHUN
LA TUNA CANYON, CALIF.

Expectations—we can't avoid them. Whether we try to live up to them or not is up to us. One of the things we hear in the SGI is that we should reply to President Ikeda's expectations. As children, we strive to live up to our parents' expectations, to reply to their love for us. If we are lucky enough to have teachers who care, we strive to live up to their expectations. In becoming adults, we leave the realm of our parents' expectations. As the American poet and author Robert Bly says in *Iron John*, we search for a "second father" or "a second king."

Once we leave the realm of our parents' expectations, whose expectations do we live up to? Our own? Our friends? We tend to set our expectations just within the limits of our comfort zone and do not realize our own potential or genius. It is the mentor who sees the greatness in us that we don't see ourselves who spurs us beyond our self-prescribed boundaries. Bly says that through a mentor "a hint will come to us as to where our genius lies." A mentor helps us "rebuild the bridge to our own greatness or essence."

As Bly explains, living up to the expectations of a mentor is not about pleasing someone else or feeling burdened. It is about the process of self-discovery through the mentor-disciple relationship. President Ikeda, as a mentor and teacher, is encouraging us to realize our potential.

In early Europe, craft guilds were opportunities for youth to leave the realm of their parents and apprentice under master craftsmen—and become masters themselves as masons or carpenters. In the artists' studios, students would paint some of the less-important background scenes. Under the guidance of masters of various fields, youth developed their skills.

In *The Human Revolution*, the character Shin'ichi Yamamoto, representing a young President Ikeda, left the realm of his father's expectations and entered into that of his mentor in life, Josei Toda. As depicted in the book, Toda visits Shin'ichi's father one day and asks, "Will you entrust Shin'ichi to me?" After con-



templating Toda's character, and acknowledging Shin'ichi's feelings for Toda, his father consents. Toda exclaims: "How splendid! I, Toda, will be entirely responsible for Shin'ichi. Please set your mind to rest" (vol. 6, pp. 106-08).

Shin'ichi chose Toda as his mentor at their first encounter as depicted earlier in the book. It is important to note that the disciple chooses the mentor. A mentor does not recruit disciples or say, "Follow me." We must see the greatness in the mentor and decide for ourselves. Bly states: "We can each ask ourselves: Is there anyone we know or have heard of who possesses true greatness? If so, we should leave with him or her."

Early in my youth I faced a huge test in my relationship with President Ikeda. I loved him from the first and considered myself his disciple. But I was very young and had no clue about the obstacles that I would face in the future.

After a particularly severe setback in my life, I felt that I had failed as a disciple. Before I realized it, I was overcome with negativity. "I have failed him," I thought. And my heart broke. I had to think deeply about what he really meant to me. What is a disciple? What does a mentor think about a disciple?

I came to understand that I had a very shallow view of the mentor-disciple relationship. When I realized that President Ikeda's belief in me, his belief in my potential, was unconditional, I was able to pull myself out of the depths of that hell.

One reason I like the book *The Eternal City* is because the mentor-disciple relationship between Bruno and his mentor, David Rossi, is tested. Although he believed himself to be a strong disciple, Bruno is forced to wrestle with doubts over his relationship with his mentor.

In his case, we faced with doubts about the charac-

ter of his mentor. In my case, I was faced with doubts about my capacity as a disciple. Bruno was also forced to examine his relationship with his mentor on a deeper level. Malicious and false accusations about Rossi had come to Bruno's attention while he was in jail. He asked himself: "Really, what kind of man is he? What do I really know about him?" Through profound contemplation, he awoke to the true character of his mentor and dispelled his doubts. He came to understand what his heart already knew.

In my own examination of my relationship with President Ikeda, I realized that, by assuming that he would give up on me or be forever disappointed in me, I was discounting his capacity and compassion. He doesn't expect that we won't stumble at times, but he does expect that we will stand back up and carry on.

We can get focused myopically on what others think of us. "He doesn't believe in me," or "She doesn't like me," or "I wasn't appointed to this position because they are against me." But we are all comrades in faith, standing shoulder to shoulder, not front to back, following our mentor, President Ikeda, not one another.

Many years ago, I happened to be in Tokyo when a journalist was interviewing President Ikeda. This reporter was marveling at the extensive organizational powers of the Soka Gakkai. As he was asking President Ikeda how he had achieved this, the reporter started describing the typical organizational pyramid—all the members at the bottom and layer upon layer of leaders up to President Ikeda at the top. President Ikeda stopped him and said that is not how he views the Soka Gakkai.

He took out a pen and drew a straight line with a point in front of it like this:

He explained that the line represents all the members of the Soka Gakkai and the point is himself. There is no separation between President Ikeda and each member. He is no closer to top leaders of the organization than he is to the newest member. There is no one between our mentor and us. When we obsess on our organizational position or the opinions of others, we are viewing our-

selves in that mythical pyramid.

President Ikeda has said that he writes so much because one-to-one dialogue can only reach so many people. I believe that is why SGI-USA General Director Nagashima says that President Ikeda wrote the July 21 poem, "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century;" to each of us. President Ikeda doesn't write for a mass audience. I think he feels he is indeed writing to—touching—each of us. I heard the mentor-disciple relationship explained once as the mentor being like a transmitter and the disciples like receivers. President Ikeda is always transmitting. It is up to us to receive the message.

Several months ago I heard a young woman describe her struggle with the mentor-disciple relationship. She was devoted to her practice, to kosen-rufu and her members. She was acting as a person of the same mind as the mentor. But although she respected President Ikeda and thought he was "a great guy" as she put it, her heart was closed to him. And this troubled her. She was frustrated by the fact that she "just didn't get it." This was something she pondered through many prayers.

Then one night as she was standing alone out under the stars at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, she had an awakening, a realization. It was a matter of trust. It wasn't President Ikeda; it was her ability to open her heart to him. Her father had been a very respected professional, but behind closed doors he was an abuser feared by the family. She realized that this was the "wall" between herself and President Ikeda. All of her chanting and prayers had led her to see this and suddenly she "got it" and tears began to flow down her cheeks. Her receiver was turned on.

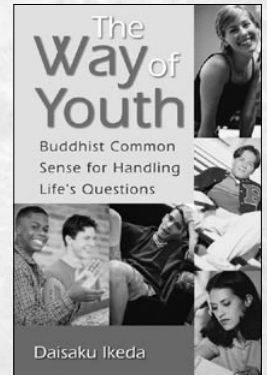
When a mentor touches our hearts, when we are confident that he truly cares for us, we are motivated to reply to his expectations.

How could you not want to reply to someone who says to you—as he once said to me: "Tell me what I can do for you. I will do anything for you," and mean it with all his heart. **W**

Perspectives printed here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the SGI-USA or the World Tribune.

The Way of Youth

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Daisaku Ikeda



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EXPERIENCE — ALAN WITTERT, SANTA MONICA, CALIF.

LIVING A MEANINGFUL EXISTENCE

Alan Wittert expresses his appreciation for being able to contribute to others' happiness.

As a man in my 50s, I cherish my appreciation for life and having other men of my generation to know and trust. I know it's no accident that we're sharing this time on earth together.

That our generation has a shared history means something: Vietnam, the civil rights movement, the drug culture, and so on. Individually, we've gone through a lot. So far, 25 years, since I've been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the worst stuff I've gone through has helped me develop the most appreciation.

I want to talk about loss for a minute. Nichiren Daishonin founded this Buddhism, and in 1280 he wrote a letter to someone whose family member died: "The cherry blossoms, once scattered, have again come into bloom, and the fruit, once fallen, has formed again on the trees. The spring breezes are unchanged, and the scenes of autumn are just as they were last year. How is it that, in this one matter alone, things should be so different from what they were, never to be the same again?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1043).

There are people I miss who, because I practice this Buddhism, I know I owe so much to. I miss them and feel like they're still there; I just can't see or touch them. But I can't just miss them; I have to do something with the appreciation I feel toward them.

We came from somewhere; we know our histories are grounded in our parents' generation.

Sometimes my wife, Elaine, tells me or my son, "It's not the end of the world." I tell her, "You don't know that." I was raised by people who grew up when the end of the world wasn't so far off. Their generation was shaped by horrific, globally violent events.

Our parents were the babies during the "War To End All Wars," when millions of young men were killed. And our parents were the kids, the children, when global economic depres-



Photo by ELAINE WITTERT

sion tormented many of their parents to suicide. And they were the young parents, many of them, just in time—for the next world war, when men killed tens of millions of women and children, and each other. Our parents' generation didn't talk about feelings. But inseparable from those events was their hunger, fear and despair. And that emotional fabric is what gave birth to and shaped (among other things) ... us.

That they lived during those times means something.

I say this as someone who's seen thousands of people derive tremendous happiness through this Buddhist practice—their living through those times meant that you and I could lead the best of lives. Even though my parents are dead, I don't believe that I can't still respond to them, communicate with them and influence them.

I read SGI President Ikeda's comment (he was another child of war): "There is no greater way to repay the debt of gratitude to your parents than through faith. Your faith guarantees that an infinite number of your ancestors and descendants will attain Buddhahood. Such is the wondrous power of the mystic law. How profound and important is your existence" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 188).

I felt that part of living a meaningful existence meant being in a profession where I could express my appreciation, and put to work my intuitions and desire to be able to communicate with anybody. (This desire came from my determination to communicate with my first wife, Ava, when her brain cancer made it impossible for her to speak or move.) So, at 46, I went back to school for five years to be a specialist in communicative disorders.

I work with, among others, kids who don't develop the way most of us do, and people who

decided not to talk because they've had speech scared out of them, and people who had strokes that tossed a wrench into the sounds and logic of their speech. A lot of people I work with have been labeled or pitied. They're laughed at, or naturally grieved over or said of by parents, "She's not the person I wanted her to be." Or maybe they're spoken about by friends or lovers who whisper: "He's not the person he used to be. He can't even make sense any more."

My mentor in this field has a motto: "Not being able to speak doesn't mean you have nothing to say."

You know how people will knock themselves on the head and say (in ValleySpeak), "HELLO-O. IS ANYBODY HOME?" meaning, is there a self somewhere in the person you're talking to? We've all been treated like we didn't have a self, like we're not home. It hurts and makes me angry.

Therefore, I decided to operate in my profession based on the hypothesis that I wasn't smart enough to tell who's home and who isn't. I decided, logical or not, everybody's home. And that makes me good at my job.

My profession is based on a medical, scientific, logical model; my Buddhist practice shows me how to open my heart to when it's time to replace logic with wisdom, and communicate in important ways.

In February, when my mom—who I love a lot—was dying, it looked like she'd lost her mind. Or maybe we all lost ours. Anyway, she kept saying, "I'm going to fall, I'm going to fall," and man, she meant it. Nothing anybody said could make her believe otherwise. Her nurse told her, "Tobey, you're not going to fall." She said, "Yes I am, I'm going to fall." My sister said, with infinite tenderness, "Momma, you're not going to fall; the rails of your bed are too high." Tobey firmly said, "Yes I am."

All this time I'd been quietly chanting for her. I said: "Mom, you're right. You are going to fall. That's why we have all these beautiful, fluffy pillows all over the place, so when you do, it's not going to hurt a bit." Tobey was happy. I was chanting for her and because of that, I could relieve her anxiety, like she used to do for me when I was a child (when she wasn't giving me more of it).

In any case, she wasn't demoted or gone; "going to fall" was her metaphor for dying. She died, and I still communicate with her.

One of my clients is a 78-year-old WWII veteran who had a stroke. The stroke didn't just hurt his ability to think; it also made his speech sounds come out garbled. The first time I saw him I got so angry at his condition that I made a commitment to help him. The second time I saw him, before I left I told him I'd come back soon. He motioned to his wife to bring him paper and pencil. This guy who was a math genius and brilliant violinist laboriously wrote with his non-paralyzed hand, "Q-I-C-K-L-Y," then smiled as he handed me the note. He did that because he could see I knew there was somebody home in there. The next time I came over he told me his first understandable sentence (he'd been practicing it with his wife). He said, "You are a *mensch*" (Yiddish for "a kind, real human being.")

Now, my informal research and clinical experience has shown that the people with the biggest communicative disability are—people who are dead.

That's a disability even a wheelchair ramp doesn't help. How can you communicate with them, repay debts of gratitude and contribute to their happiness?

We communicate with them in our prayers for their happiness, and our appreciation for them becomes the bridge for them to communicate with us. My life is continually refreshed as I let the absence of loved ones become the greatest and most terrible gift of all when—through my prayers—I allow that absence to teach me to be kind, and then demonstrate the courage to base my actions on that, in work, family and this organization.

Through my chanting— that absence, "...this one matter alone..." that makes things "...so different from what they were, never to be the same again"—fuels my growth.

From kindness and courage, I develop friendships and trust with other men, and understand that we do not have to fear each other. And that alongside those who came before us, we can create the greatest possible legacy with and for each other, and for generations to come. **WT**

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Illinois Area Men 'Save the Man in the Mirror'

By CHARLES ATKINS
CHICAGO CORRESPONDENT

Absolute victory was the goal. Prayer was the foundation. Action was the means. Filled with unwavering determination to prove the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, a dream came true for the men's division of Illinois Area. Hosting their general meeting on Aug. 19, they exceeded all their goals with more than 230 attending, including 55 guests.

The theme of the meeting, Save the Man in the Mirror, was like a battle cry over many months of planning, which concentrated on intense, sincere chanting, then visiting every locatable man in an area that spanned the entire Chicago suburban area all the way to the Wisconsin border, and down to southern Illinois. The results of these painstaking, behind-the-scenes efforts was proven by the brilliant inner transformation of all those involved, and by the conspicuous, overwhelming success of the meeting. Inspired

Holocaust survivors Lisa and Aaron Derman, who related their compelling stories of being confined to the ghettos in Poland during World War II. Everyone present was spellbound by their account of entire populations of Jews being massacred, including their own families. Mrs. Derman's detailed account of their heroic escape from the hands of Nazi executioners stilled the room. Mrs. Derman is the president of the Holocaust Memorial Foundation and Museum, in Skokie, Ill., the largest such organization of its kind in the world. Mrs. Derman and her husband's experiences were featured in an Emmy Award-winning documentary on the Holocaust. Her powerful words cut through all pretense, touching the heart of every person attending. Mrs. Derman was emphatic in her encouragement to create a world that would never allow such tragedies to occur again. Her wise and potent advice was simple: "Stand up. Do not be silent. Silence is evil."

The meeting also included

the presentation of awards for Illinois Area pioneers whose many struggles over the past 30 or more years had made the day's meeting possible. The women's division chorus sang an original composition titled "Heroes," which perfectly coincided with a congratulatory message from SGI-USA Women's



Aerial view of Chicago skyline.

Leader Matilda Buck that referred to the men's division as heroes of the SGI and of life.

Reggie Morris of Waukegan, Ill., poured out his soul to a rapt audience about his personal battle of confronting and overcoming a debilitating addiction that had broken up his family, destroyed his career and left him homeless. Through the encouragement of his SGI friends, Reggie renewed his practice in the SGI-USA and rediscovered his faith. Over the course of six years, he rebuilt his shattered life into one of supreme confidence, restoring his family, and now commanding an exempt-level position with pharmaceutical giant Abbott Laboratories.

A panel discussion was held and two men who had recently taken faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism gave spontaneous experiences. The first man was the husband of a Japanese

women's division member who had practiced in the SGI for many years. He had been neutral to her practice, preferring to rely on his own logic and abilities to deal with life's challenges. A problem appeared in his life that was beyond the powers of logic, will or ability. He was referred to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Inspired tremendously, he embraced the practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism and completely overcame his great problem. A college professor then spoke of his consistent involvement with the peace movement since the 1960s. Having been an integral part of many of the grassroots peace movements for more than 40 years, he proclaimed that there is no peace movement in the world to rival the greatness of the SGI.

To everyone's delight, a con-

gratulatory message was read from President of the Cook County Board of Commissioners John H. Stroger, Jr. His message praised the Illinois Area Men's Division for their "commitment to the values of peace, culture and education." His insightful words encouraged the participants: "Be proud of your growth and be mindful of the inseparable linkages that exist between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity within your community."

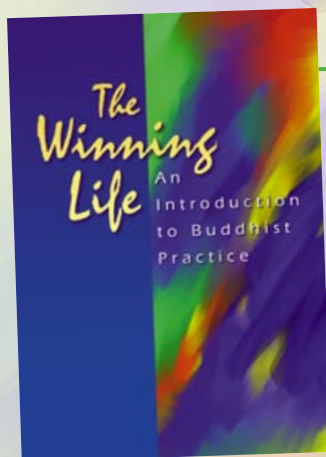
SGI-USA Vice General Director Darnell Pulphus closed the meeting by relating how the power of Buddhahood found in chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo relieves people of all suffering and conquers evil. The consensus of the participants was that the success of this meeting was not an end, but a beginning to even greater things to come. **WT**



Photo by RENE GEYSER

and powerfully motivated by the guidance of SGI President Ikeda, the men's division overcame countless impossible obstacles and extraordinary logistical challenges.

Attending the meeting were



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