



**EXPERIENCE:**

**Dodie Cogswell triumphs over her drug and alcohol addiction.**

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**SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S AUG. 11 SPEECH**

## RISE UP WITH ABSOLUTE DETERMINATION

**'The members in the Soka Gakkai's pioneering days rose up with a spirit of absolute determination to triumph and to carry out kosen-rufu in their communities,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'If you have that determination, capable people will appear and join you in realizing that goal.'**

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at a conference attended by visiting representatives of SGI-Italy, held at the Nagano Training Center in Karuizawa, Nagano Prefecture, Japan, Aug. 11.*

shown tremendous growth and development. This is truly the dawn of Europe.

Congratulations on your plans to build a magnificent new culture center in Milan. The center, I understand, will be equipped with a library, audiovisual facilities and a multipurpose hall that will be open for use by the general public. I hope to visit the new center someday.

SGI-Italy is making powerful progress. One of its goals, as we approach the 21st century, is to increase the attendance of its discussion meetings nationwide to 30,000 people. This is a wonderful undertaking.

Also, later this year, some 18,000 men's and women's division members will participate in joint divisional commemo-

**M**y dear friends from Italy! Welcome! Thank you all for coming such a long way and in such hot weather! To commemorate your visit, I dedicate this poem to you:

*How dazzling  
The smiles  
Of our Italian comrades!*

Next year will mark the 40th anniversary of the kosen-rufu movement in Italy. SGI-Italy, a model for all of Europe, has



SGI President Ikeda and his wife, Kaneko, with members in Italy, 1992.

orative general meetings around Italy. In addition, there are plans next year for 16,000 Italian youth division members to gather together on March 16 to celebrate Kosen-rufu Day.

A number of publications to commemorate the 40th anniversary of Italian kosen-rufu are also slated. [Scheduled for publication, for example, are Italian translations of *The New Human Revolution*, *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, *A New Humanism*, and *A Glorious 70-Year History of the Soka Gakkai*.]

In addition, SGI-Italy has been organizing and sponsoring lectures and exhibitions on the themes of peace, education and human rights, in conjunction with national and local government bodies, UNESCO and other nongovernmental organizations.

I have also had the honor of receiving awards from many different regions of Italy. My wife and I often mention to each other that these honors are proud tes-

timony to your dedicated efforts, and that they have actually been bestowed upon you.

As Nichiren Daishonin says, "All the various teachings of the Buddha are spread by persons" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 61). You are earnestly pioneering the way for the spread of the Daishonin's teachings.

I have not the slightest doubt that your noble names will live on forever in the annals of the kosen-rufu movement in Europe and the entire world. Your achievements will shine with undying brilliance throughout the 10,000 years and more of the Latter Day of the Law. The benefit and honors you are accumulating are immeasurable.

**We have each chosen to be born on Earth to fulfill our mission.**

According to astronomers, the solar system is hurtling toward the constellation Hercules at a speed of 12 miles a second. The universe, as vast and infi-

nite as it is, has a strict order. The law that governs the universe and all life is the Mystic Law.

There are billions of planets like Earth in the universe. Among all those planets, we have chosen to be born here. And it is here that we are now spreading the Mystic Law. "Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku" (WND, 385), says the Daishonin. As these words underscore, we each have a profound mission.

I hope you will all work together in unity and friendship. We must widely propagate the Mystic Law. If we do, we will create a world that "remains safe and tranquil" and "where living beings enjoy themselves at ease" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 230).

And when we have accomplished that, we will move on to some other land or planet in the universe and carry out kosen-rufu there. Such is the grand

**CEC News: See speeches, pages 10-11**

Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI



The 49th Central Executive Conference was held Sept. 22-24 at the SGI Plaza in Santa Monica, Calif., with a teleconference on Sept. 24 for area and region leaders. Representative leaders from the eight zones nationwide attended.

# The Oneness of Life and Its Environment

Back to the Basics

By CRAIG DEROUSSE  
LOS ANGELES CORRESPONDENT

What do you call everything from your skin inward? Probably your "self." What do you call everything from your skin outward? Probably your "environment." People generally perceive the world in this way, divided into two realms — self and environment.

In Japanese, Buddhism calls the self *shoho* and the environment *eho*. Contracted, they make *esho*, or a living entity and its environment. Buddhism further teaches that these two realms are actually one, or as the Chinese text *funi* indicates, two but not two. Thus, we have the term *esho funi*, the oneness of life and its environment. Simply put, this doctrine emphasizes that living beings and their environments are interrelated and inseparable. It further teaches that we have the power to influence and reform our environments through inner change.

As Nichiren Daishonin says: "If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4).

A close-to-home example of this, literally, is that of a bedroom. Imagine a bedroom — any bedroom. What does it look like? Perhaps the bed is messy, and various things are strewn about the floor. Or, perhaps it is amazingly organized. Perhaps neither. Perhaps it is an almost empty, barren room. Whatever the case, a bedroom is in many ways a reflection of its inhabitant, and vice versa. Although they appear to be separate entities, the room and its inhabitant are mutually dependent. After all, the inhabitant affects

the room's condition, and the room's condition — whether luxurious or dirty, too cold, too hot or just right — affects the inhabitant's condition.

In the same way, our greater surroundings, such as work, school, family and our natural environment, comprise the "rooms" of our lives. On a global scale, the world itself can be seen as the "room" of humanity. From the perspective of the oneness of life and its environment, we can improve any of these "rooms" by first improving ourselves. **WT**

## Southeastern Region Golden Stage Group Meets

By DONNA THOMAS-TEALER  
ATLANTA CORRESPONDENT

On Sept. 13, 29 members and one guest arrived at the Atlanta Community Center from parts of Georgia, Tennessee and Alabama to participate in their first Golden Stage Group meeting. Smiles and introductions filled the rooms as the afternoon began with all sharing in a delicious lunch prepared by several of the members.

Opening the dialogue, SGI President Ikeda's September 1996 message to the Many Treasures Group was shared. In it he expressed his utmost respect for these members and vowed to never forget his seniors in faith who, because of their courageous efforts in laying the foundation for *kosen-rufu*, are more than qualified to receive the Buddha's praise.

In attendance was SGI-USA Senior Vice General Director Sheila Edwards, who led the group down memory lane, recalling earlier struggles to propagate Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the United States. This brought laughter and knowing nods.

Mrs. Edwards good naturedly told them that although some have now retired from their jobs in society, there is no retirement within the *kosen-rufu* movement. She added: "You're not getting older, you're getting better! There is so much to do!"

During a question-and-answer period, the members were encouraged to take care of



# Q & A

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# WITH

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# SUA

A L I S O V I E J O C A M P U S

*Send in your own questions, and we'll share the answers!*

**Question:**

I am already in college, and I want to apply to SUA. Can I transfer credits? Do I still have to take the SAT or ACT test?

**Answer:**

Students with previous college credits are encouraged to apply to SUA, but all students entering in fall 2001 will be

coming in as freshmen — because that is the only class SUA will have its first year!

Students who have already completed 60 college credits or who have graduated from a community college or four-year university will have the option to omit the SAT or ACT test. But students should evaluate this option carefully, because strong SAT or ACT scores can be a favorable factor in

the application process.

**Question:**

I am a native speaker of English from outside the United States. Do I still have to take TOEFL? Do I have to take the SAT?

**Answer:**

Native speakers of English do not need to take TOEFL if they have graduated from a high school where English is the first language of instruction.

It is recommended, but not required, that all international students take the SAT.

*If you have questions of any kind about SUA, please send them to SUA at either admission@soka.edu or info@soka.edu. We will use this World Tribune column to share our answer with others who might have the same questions.*



Members of the Southeastern Region Golden Stage Group meet for the first time at the Atlanta Community Center, Sept. 13.

## Subscribe to the Justice Chronicle

The Justice Chronicle is a free, weekly e-mailer for *World Tribune* subscribers about the Soka Spirit movement. Its purpose is to support SGI-USA's ongoing education campaign about this subject in the timeliest fashion possible.

The Justice Chronicle will feature the latest Soka Spirit movement news, SGI President Ikeda's recent guidance about it and study articles explaining the difference between Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and what the temple is teaching.

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EXPERIENCE — DODIE COGSWELL, SEATTLE

# Changing Karma Into Mission

## Challenging Addictions

**Dodie Cogswell overcomes her addiction to drugs and alcohol, and becomes a chemical dependency professional.**

In 1972, I was at a party in Seattle when a young woman who appeared to be in high spirits shared Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with me. I thought her high spirits were caused by the same things I used to get my spirits up, which could be anything from amphetamine, cocaine, alcohol, marijuana, LSD, mescaline, MDA or whatever was available at the time.

An alcoholic, well-meaning mother, who couldn't help the emotional madness she went through as a result of her drinking, raised me. Like so many others, I did not develop a healthy self-identity. What I did learn was my survival depended on taking care of mother. My job was to be her confidante and listen to all of her problems, to encourage her and smooth things out for her in any way I could, and agree with whatever she was talking about. I cleaned the house, cooked and in general did whatever she wanted me to do. I never got to know I had a right to have a self of my very own. For parents who are addicted, their primary relationships are with the chemicals; there is no real heart-to-heart connection with the children.

My first addiction was food, which plumped me up. Mom started me on amphetamine to lose weight. I was 12. I started drinking the same year. Depression had filled my core for many years and I discovered that chemicals worked well to relieve pain — at least while I was high.

This first relationship with my mother set a lifelong pattern in which I would do whatever I could to please another to feel a sense of security. I was also sexually abused at age 7 by a neighbor, which left me ashamed, scared and literally silenced me. For these reasons, I unconsciously clung to one per-

son, then another in my quest for a feeling of safety and love. I thought love meant doing what someone wanted me to do and then they'd be nice, they wouldn't rape me or beat me. This didn't work. Rape and beatings became a recurring nightmare; I ran away from myself with alcohol,

drugs and sex — one relationship after another. I had no idea how I was slandering my own life by acting in ways that devalued me.

I lived out this madness for many years. I became more deeply entrenched in my addictive behaviors and suicidal thoughts were my daily companions. My marriage ended and my four children had been taken from me and placed in foster homes. My heart was broken and I felt so ashamed that living was pure torture. I lived on disability and could barely function. My self-hatred was so deep I could not stand living in my own skin.

I finally reached out for help and went to therapy. The psychiatrists gave me all kinds of labels: clinical depression, thought disorder, manic-depressive. They also gave me one drug after another — antidepressants of all varieties as well as lithium — which did nothing but make me feel worse.

It was around this time that I met a man on the street corner downtown who told me that if I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I could have anything I wanted. Well, I thought this "come on" was unique. I gave him credit for that but was so paranoid I didn't trust anyone or anything. I took the card. One night while going crazy with fear at being alone, unable to sleep, I got out the card and said the chant over and over. I had no clue why saying words I couldn't understand could bring a calm, good feeling out of me, but they did and I went to sleep. That was my first benefit and the beginning of my practice.

I can't say I immediately rushed to a meeting. But I kept running into Buddhists who kept inviting me. One day a year later, I was approached by a



Photo by DIXON HAMBY

woman who asked me if I'd like to come, and I assured her I'd meet her the next day. Something about her felt so kind and assuring. I met her and attended my first discussion meeting. I joined on the spot and began learning gongyo. Thus I began my human revolution.

When I received the Gohonzon in 1973, I was encouraged to chant for what I thought seemed impossible. I chanted to get my children back and to stop being crazy. It didn't even occur to me to chant to stop using drugs — they were so much a part of who I thought I was. I loved reciting the sutra, and study opened my mind to worlds of possibilities for growth and healing. SGI President Ikeda's words poured into my heart like water into a desert, reviving me. *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and the Buddhist views of life and the universe showed me a way to put my life in rhythm and gave me hope that I had a mission for kosen-rufu. All my sufferings weren't for nothing. I now had the tools to change my life-condition and prove the power of the Mystic Law by overcoming all my problems.

I had to come to terms with my mental illness and my drug addiction. This didn't happen overnight. I spent many long nights chanting daimoku through my tears. I missed my children so much that all I could do was throw myself into activities for world peace. I noticed that I got a natural high from my practice and I began to chant to get off drugs.

As obstacles arose, I'd get scared and I chanted for drugs, looking for the escape from my fears. I roller-coastered this

way, but all the while my wisdom, courage and compassion were getting stronger. I became more aware of my fears and self-doubt, and as I studied the Daishonin's writings I began to view these things in a different light. The devilish function in my life had dominated me ever since I could remember. I chanted to bring out the power of my Buddha nature. I felt like the war going on inside me was one side of my nature against the other; I was tired of the negativity being in my driver's seat.

I took on more responsibility in the organization. My life was a flurry of discussion meetings and propagation campaigns. I slowly began to have more contact with my daughters. Their father called and told me he was taking the girls out of the foster home. The foster brother had molested two of them. I furiously chanted to cleanse our lives of sexual abuse karma. The good thing was that now I could see my three oldest girls again. We were tearfully reunited. My youngest daughter, who was adopted, eventually found me and we all experienced the joy of becoming a family for the first time. Today I am blessed with 14 grandchildren and one great-grandson. The deep scars of the past separation only serve to make us appreciate being together more.

Twenty-six years later, I am beaming with the actual proof of the power of awakening the Gohonzon within me. What I know now is that the Gohonzon is a perfect mirror of the natural universe. By fusing with it on a daily basis, I have been able to bring forth my truest, deepest natural self. The three ways of faith, practice and study have enabled me to fill up that empty place inside that drugs use to fill — I have been clean from drugs and alcohol for 16 years. I am no longer a slave to my weaker, negative nature. I made a choice to put nothing between the Gohonzon and me and this was a turning point. I chose to chant to bring out my true self and determined to make any cause or take any action necessary to accomplish this goal. I want to be who I really am and do what I am here in this life to do to prove the power of the Mystic Law.

Under the sway of drugs, alcohol, compulsive behaviors or any philosophy that tells you the power is above you and out of your reach, all you can do is

suffer the loss of your true self. Uncertainty and emptiness are the feelings of self-LESS-ness and drive one to reach for chemicals or addictive sex or food or workaholicism to numb out the pain and give a feeling of safety and security. The truth is, no chemical will ever lead us to ourselves. In fact, it only pushes you farther away. We can never discover the absolute happiness of bringing out the power of one's very own unique Buddha nature from one's very own gut by hiding behind chemicals. Chemicals can only give temporary, relative happiness and do nothing to change one's karma. The only thing powerful enough to break this cycle is the Mystic Law and consistent practice to the Gohonzon.

I am so happy to be alive and living for my mission. I became a chemical dependency professional and worked with teenagers for several years. Now I am working as a counselor with adults at the Asian Counseling and Referral Service. I work with all different races of people, and my natural ability to do this is a strength I've developed over the years as an SGI-USA member. I am also working toward my B.A. in human transformation at Antioch University. I'll be graduating next March. I have come a long way from the scared little girl who hid away from life. I no longer run away from anything — I run toward it.

My whole life has changed as a result of my practice and my determinations to learn how to live true to my self.

Society looks down on addicts, alcoholics and the mentally ill as though they are throw-away people who can't contribute to the world. To me, we are sensitive and empathic, and with the power of the universe within, we can heal ourselves and show splendid actual proof of victory. **WT**

## For the Spanish-Language Pages

*Please forward all articles for and questions about the Spanish Pages to:*

[wtspanish@sgi-usa.org](mailto:wtspanish@sgi-usa.org)

# Addressing A.A. and Buddhist Practice

Several years ago, we published a letter in this newspaper's sister publication, *Living Buddhism*, from an SGI-USA member in Milwaukee, Wisc., asking us to write about the Twelve-Step\* recovery program used in such groups as Alcoholics Anonymous. We asked other SGI-USA members with experience in these programs to write us. The following article is a result of the response from those members to whom we are grateful. It is hoped that this article stimulates valuable dialogue on the topic. In keeping with the tradition of the program, we have kept individual comments anonymous. The book *Alcoholics Anonymous* (which has sold over 20 million copies) states: "We of Alcoholics Anonymous believe that the principle of anonymity has an immense spiritual significance. It reminds us that we are to place principles before personalities; that we are actually to practice a genuine humility."

By DAVE BALDSCHUN

ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR,  
LIVING BUDDHISM MAGAZINE

No words can tell of the loneliness and despair I found in that bitter morass of self-pity. Quicksand stretched around me in all directions. I had met my match. I had been overwhelmed. Alcohol was my master." — Bill W., founder of Alcoholics Anonymous

Among treatments for addiction, the Twelve-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous is one of the oldest and most successful and one that many practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism have used. However, there is a strong emphasis on belief in the Judeo-Christian concept of God or "higher power." Steps two and three of the twelve-step program ask those seeking help to "believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity" and that they make the "decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood Him." So how have SGI-USA members experienced the A.A. program and how do they interpret "God as we understood Him?"

The practice of Buddhism in no way precludes one from seeking therapy, counseling or any treatment that has value to the individual in need even if the program emphasizes another philosophy. As long as that teaching is essentially humanistic, there should be no conflict.

In his message to the Sixth International Conference of the Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies Aug. 5, SGI President Ikeda states: "Both Buddhism and Christianity teach regard for human life and indeed all forms of life in the belief that life is born from that which is 'sacred.' In Buddhism, the dignity of human life derives from the existence

of cosmic life within, which is cradle to and essence of the individual self. And since the dynamics of cosmic life play out in all living beings, Buddhism teaches reverence for all life forms. In Christianity, human life's dignity derives from its creation in the image of God. Adoration for the divine in all its forms of expression is then the genesis of love and respect toward all living beings, the products of his creation."

## Forces that protect human life

The twelve-step program, as well as any medical or psychological treatment, functions in accord with the concept of Buddhists gods — those forces that aid and protect human life. It is up to individuals to determine for themselves whether to use these programs.

The twelve-step program used first in Alcoholics Anonymous and later in other groups was developed in the mid-1930s in Akron, Ohio, by the founders of A.A., Bill W. and Doctor Bob. Both were chronic, heavy drinkers whose careers, families and lives were threatened by their abuse of alcohol. Bill W., a successful stockbroker, explains in the book *Alcoholics Anonymous* that no doctor or hospital treatment could return control back to him. It wasn't until he was awakened to two truths that are the foundation of A.A. philosophy that he was able to stop drinking once and for all. First, although not a very religious man, he came to realize that without a spiritual basis for his life, he was lost. He came to believe that an alcoholic is unable to stop drinking on the basis of self-knowledge alone.

And secondly, he realized that alcoholics could best help other alcoholics. Dr. Bob says in the A.A. book: "Of far more importance was the fact that he

(Bill W.) was the first living human with whom I had ever talked, who knew what he was talking about in regard to alcoholism from actual experience. In other words, he talked my language." The trauma of their common affliction formed a bond that enabled them to reach out and help each other.

The twelve steps to recovery founded by the A.A. society have been adapted by other organizations to treat those suffering from drug abuse, overeating and gambling disorders as well as the families of alcoholics.

From the SGI-USA members who responded to our request, two issues emerged most often. The first issue was that of a higher power defined within the parameters of a Judeo-Christian culture. And secondly was whether they could practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the twelve-step program simultaneously.

A.A. goes to great lengths to point out that one's understanding of God is not limited to the Judeo-Christian definition. Their book devotes "Chapter Four" to agnostics and atheists. But the arguments presented there could be taken as a kind of backdoor entrance to faith in the "...existence of a Creative Intelligence, a Spirit of the Universe underlying the totality of things..." In the September issue of *Living Buddhism*, in "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," Soka Gakkai Study Department Vice Chief Takanori Endo states: "In the Judeo-Christian tradition God created people 'in his image, according to his likeness' (*Genesis* 1.26). If God is viewed as the 'cosmic life,' then there might be some point of commonality with the Daishonin's Buddhism."

## No one way works for everyone

Writing on the twelve-step

program in the November/December 1990 issue of *Ms. Magazine*, Charlotte Davis Kasl observes, "Yet no one way works for everyone. The steps were formulated by a white, middle-class male in the 1930s; not surprisingly, they work to break down an over-inflated ego, and put reliance on an all-powerful male God. But most women suffer from the lack of a healthy, aware ego, and need to strengthen their sense of self by affirming their own inner wisdom.... I believe that spiritual power is neither higher nor lower but all pervasive. I would replace the passivity implied...that something external will magically restore us to sanity — with 'affirmative action.'" She writes of an awakening to the healing wisdom within.

Since the 1970s, several self-help programs have emerged as an alternative to A.A. Women for Sobriety was founded in 1975 by Jean Kirkpatrick. In *Newsweek*, July 8, 1991, she explains that where the A.A. "philosophy is to turn over our will and our lives," WFS advocates "taking charge."

The founder of Rational Recovery, Jack Trimpey says that A.A.'s notion of powerlessness is another irrational idea. "It perpetuates the addictive cycle. It says, 'I have no choice.'"

In 1986, James Christopher founded Secular Organizations for Sobriety (SOS). In the July/August issue of *Health*, he says: "Our group focuses on self-empowerment.... We're not anti-religious, but we believe that religion and sobriety are separate issues."

The majority of SGI members who responded to our request for their experience with A.A. found that replacing the Christian concept of God with that of one's inner Buddha nature or Nam-myoho-renge-kyo worked for them. This universal

law exists within the cosmic life and is strengthened within each individual by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the object of devotion, the Gohonzon.

In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we don't rely on the object of devotion as a power outside ourselves. The Gohonzon is an external cause to stir our internal Buddha nature. We are, in effect, relying on our true selves. The power to change our lives comes from within us. In his letter "On the Treasure Tower," Nichiren Daishonin says to his disciple Abutsu-bo, "Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower [Gohonzon] itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself. (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 299).

One reader from Texas said: "It is common for alcoholics not to recognize the destructiveness of our drinking, and to blame our suffering on everything and everyone else in our environment. Even the few daimoku [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] I was able to chant in my scattered state of mind were sufficiently powerful to make me perceive the true cause of my misery for the first time...."

"In A.A. I learned that my will power and knowledge about alcoholism were not enough to keep me sober for long. They said I had to find a power greater than myself to keep me sober. For me, that power is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the strengthening of my Buddha nature...."

## Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra

Another member from Massachusetts wrote: "A.A. does not claim that you have to believe in God — only a higher power. For that 'higher power' I substitute Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... It is an alcoholic tendency to plot and scheme and try to do things all on one's own. It would be much better to forget about the precious ego and employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra.... For an alcoholic, there is no enlightenment without sobriety. Alcohol thrusts the alcoholic into the lowest portion of the lower worlds.... Once sober, SGI is a vehicle for enlightenment."

And a reader from Mexico stated: "In my first years of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I was counseling recovering alcoholics and addicts. My husband also suffers from the disease of alcoholism. I recommended the twelve-step program to all my clients. Later I began attending for Al-Anon (a similar program for relatives of alcoholics) for my own benefit.



A predisposition to alcohol or drug addiction, to cancer or frequent colds is the result of our karma. From the viewpoint of the Buddhist concept of the nine consciousnesses, this vulnerability to exhibit addictive behavior arises from the eighth level of consciousness where our accumulated causes are stored.

"In the beginning of my practice ten-and-a-half years ago, I too questioned the strong emphasis of the Christian male-God concept that the organization uses throughout its program. As I grew in my practice of Buddhism, I came to realize that the great benefits of the program far outweighed the personal religious contradiction. So, rather than throw the baby out with the bath water, I took what was useful to me from the program...."

Some people overcome their alcohol or substance abuse without a twelve-step program or outgrow the program, and others find value in continuing.

A Los Angeles member said: "I went to one A.A. meeting and hated it. First, they told me I had an incurable disease that would be with me for the rest of my life. And, that I would have to keep coming back to them to remain sober. As far as I was concerned, I had an addiction and I could become un-addicted. That meeting did scare me to the point of really bearing down in my Buddhist practice and I have regained control of my life. Alcohol abuse is no longer a factor in my life."

An Ohio member wrote: "I myself was intensely involved with twelve-step programs for five years before encountering this Buddhism in 1986.... I also would attend both activities. However, as I continued to practice and study, I realized more and more the immense profundity and unexcelled results of this Buddhist practice in comparison.

"I have a great appreciation for how twelve-step programs have helped many people, and I've always admired their sense of warm support and fellowship. It's often said that a twelve-step program can work when all other attempts have failed. Still, I remember hearing

that of those who are introduced to these programs, it's only a small percentage who stay on the path of continually 'recovering.' My belief is that it works best of the programs people know of so far.

"As always, actual proof is the most persuasive.... The anxious emptiness I used to fill with food, or alcohol or people has been replaced by a deep sense of mission so that I'm no longer struggling just to live through 'one day at a time.' My supposedly mundane activities even of eating and drinking have become purposeful, each action an important cause toward the highest possible dream of kosen-rufu."

Another Southern California member said: "I feel no conflict in being a member of a twelve-step group and also a Buddhist — in fact, I feel that they complement each other beautifully, and both enhance my life greatly with their truth and wisdom."

A predisposition to alcohol or drug addiction, to cancer or frequent colds is the result of our karma. From the viewpoint of the Buddhist concept of the nine consciousnesses, this vulnerability to exhibit addictive behavior arises from the eighth level of consciousness where our accumulated causes are stored. The first five levels of consciousness are associated with the five senses, forming our awareness of the outside world through sight, sound, touch, taste and smell. The sixth consciousness, our conscious mind, integrates that information into a single picture. The seventh consciousness is our unconscious mind and the origin of our self-awareness. This is where we deal with abstract concepts that are beyond the information provided through the senses.

The eighth consciousness is called the *alaya* consciousness. *Alaya* means repository. This is

where all our actions or causes throughout many lifetimes are stored as our karma. When there is a corresponding external or environmental cause present, these internal causes exert their influence on the seven lower levels of consciousness.

Impulses that emanate from the depth of the eighth level are hard to control. We may temporarily curtail our desire for alcohol, drugs or food, but as long as the seed for addictive behavior planted so deeply in our lives continues unabated, that potential is always present.

#### Fixed karma can be changed

But the Daishonin declares that even the most difficult or fixed karma can be changed through faith in the Gohonzon. In his letter "On Prolonging One's Life Span" to the lay nun Toki, he writes, "It is as natural for a woman to change her fixed karma by practicing the Lotus Sutra as it is for rice to ripen in the fall or chrysanthemums to bloom in winter" (WND, 954-55).

Our karma accumulates in the *alaya* consciousness through the law of cause and effect. And it is through the very same law that we can change our karma. Our most profound and ultimate level of consciousness is the ninth or *amala*. *Amala* means "pure or undefiled by the actions of lifetime after lifetime." This is the part of our being where the fundamental law of the universe, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, exists. This is our connection to the pure, universal life force in all of us — our original Buddha nature. By strengthening the power of our Buddha nature, we can overcome the negative karma stored in the eighth level of consciousness. The key is that the power to transform our lives exists within us, not in some external higher power.

We, for example, know the physical qualities of a glass of wine through our five senses. Our conscious mind (the sixth level) identifies it as in fact, a glass of wine — based on its color, odor, taste, etc. From our seventh level, we determine whether we like or dislike it. And from the eighth level of consciousness emerges our susceptibility to behave in a destructive or addictive manner when confronted with this external cause. The urges originating in the eighth level influence the other seven levels. So even if we "know better," we find ourselves unable to control our behavior except within the boundaries contained in our

karma storehouse.

The cause of invoking the law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is so awesome that we can change our karma. President Ikeda explains: "The concept of karma was not developed in order to persuade us to resign ourselves to hopeless suffering. If we understand the notion of karma correctly, we automatically come to recognize that we are responsible for whatever problems we might face in life and that we, ourselves, must strive to overcome those problems. This recognition enables us to establish true independence. In the case of karmic disease, then, we can act to eradicate the negative karma that is causing the illness, and by so doing, we can cause the illness to disappear" (*Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death: Buddhism in the Contemporary World*, pp. 78-79).

When we realize our own responsibility for life's problems and take action to eradicate the causes of those problems, we can achieve true independence as a human being. Buddhism views illness as an opportunity to attain a higher state of life. This is what Nichiren Daishonin means when he states, "Illness awakens a great seeking spirit" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1480).

Buddhism teaches us the concept of "earthly desires are enlightenment" (see "Back to the Basics," June 23 *World Tribune*, p. 2). Through our faith in the Gohonzon, our thirst for drink becomes our thirst for enlightenment. In "Reply to Kyo'o," the Daishonin states: "Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (WND, 412) **WT**

\*The Twelve Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous:

- (1) We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable. (2) Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. (3) Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God, as we understood Him. (4) Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. (5) Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. (6) Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. (7) Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. (8) Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. (9) Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. (10) Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. (11) Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as we understood Him, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out. (12) Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

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EXPERIENCE — JOHN MISIEWICH, SAN CLEMENTE, CALIF.

# Living With Dignity

## Challenging Addictions

**John Misiewich achieves a life of sobriety and becomes a registered nurse.**

I was born in Hammond, Ind., into an environment where alcoholism was the norm. My father was alcoholic, and died from alcoholic cirrhosis. From the stories I heard, I suspect my grandfathers, as well as numerous uncles, were also alcoholic. One memory I have as a kid my father drinking with a favorite uncle in the kitchen — one moment he was standing up, the next he was unconscious on the floor. So drinking was not that unfamiliar for me, in fact it was something I aspired to. That's what I saw my role models doing and that's what I wanted to do as well.

My mother died when I was 12 from a long and painful bout with cancer. This certainly caused me (as well as my brother and father) a great deal of pain. Coming from the family I did, I had very poor coping skills from the beginning, and my father had been out of control for a long time. He went from bad to worse, drunk every day and abusive. He used to throw me out of the house in the middle of winter and pass out, not letting me back in. Finally, when I was about 15, he threw me out and I never returned. I stayed with my aunt and grandmother.

When I started drinking at about age 14, it was just magic for me. My emotional pain vanished and I was gone. When I say gone, I mean taken into my own alcoholism. I never believed it could happen to me. In a short time, I went from being a fairly nice kid with good grades to out of control and failing in school. I spent the next 17 years constructing my version of the life-condition of Hell.

Dropping out of high school, I joined the Navy and eventually made a mess of that. After that I stayed in California and just pretty much drank, used drugs, lost jobs, got arrested on a regular basis and became a



you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 279). I realized there would be no "and he lived happily ever after" if I kept living this way. I prayed, like so many others, that "I did not know what to do, but I could not live this way any more, and I would do whatever it took to change, no mat-

ter what!"

general nuisance. There were periods of homelessness and hopelessness. I became unemployed; the last job I lost was from a self-serve gas station. To survive, I would often go into the dumpsters of supermarkets. My own death could not be far off, I believed, as a few of my contemporaries had already died from the kinds of things I was doing.

During this period when I was about 29, I encountered the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. I started chanting and getting some benefits. I began to study and comprehend some of the basic concepts. I received my Gohonzon and practiced as best I could. Then one night as I was headed for this local dumpster, a bag lady in front of me, out of the blue it occurred to me, something was wrong with this picture. What was wrong was that I was in it!

At 29, was this the best I could do? All in a rush, I understood that what had led me here were my own decisions. I could no longer blame my upbringing, my parents or my bad luck. Some of those things were true, but I was an adult now and I was responsible for my life. Although I did not quite understand what my problem was, I knew the answer was in me, not outside.

Through my Buddhist practice, I started to understand that I was creating my own misery. "If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if

A couple of weeks later my aunt and uncle put me into detox. I did not even know what a detox was. I was still pretty crazy. I only remember a few things; one was this counselor who said that of the people there, only about three or four would remain sober one year from then. I made a determination that I would be one of them.

When I got out, I started going to twelve-step meetings recommended by my counselor. The way I saw it, if you want to get sober, you need to hang out with people that have done it — that's what I got from twelve-step meetings. I was so brain damaged I could hardly read. It took about three months of sobriety before I fully understood what the problem was. It was my thinking — I had a skewed view of reality. I did know this, though: If I drank again I would use drugs, and if I used drugs I would surely die.

I focused my Buddhist practice on my recovery. I established daily morning prayer as a part of my life. I believe I experienced great benefit during the process. No records are kept, but I imagine only about 10 percent of the people who come into recovery stay sober.

I was sober for about four months when someone asked me if I would like to drive a van for a recovery hospital to take patients to twelve-step meetings twice a week. I said sure, but maybe I should see if the Department of Motor Vehicles would give me my driver's li-

cense back first. Well, they did, so I took the offer. I realized that this was a benefit, this was helping me stay sober; at least I was too busy and tired to drink.

Since I could not find anything better than minimum wage jobs, I returned to school, thinking of SGI President Ikeda's guidance to focus on a humanistic education. I wanted to help people and that was my determination and prayer. I continued chanting and again got involved with my district activities. Then, like with anything else in life you want to accomplish, I had to not only make the effort but sustain it over an extended period of time. I earned an associate's degree in human services.

After a time, and more struggle, I finally got a position in a local psychiatric hospital — a tough job, but I got some great experience. I learned how to deal with some very difficult people and experienced many tremendous benefits. I could have been hurt so many times, but somehow at the last minute, someone would show up or the patient would calm down or the situation would change. I worked with some very talented therapists. One in particular took the time to help me grow professionally, and become skilled at leading groups and group process. During this time, a nurse there asked me if I would start a recovery home using one of her properties. I agreed and started a little recovery home in Capistrano Beach where I lived and received free board in exchange for my services. In addition, I made the determination to get an RN license.

I had saved some money from managing the recovery home, which I used for school, starting in January 1998. After my first semester, I realized how little I knew about the hospital environment and actual working conditions. After getting my Certified Nurse's Assistant (CNA) license, I began working as an aid on a critical care floor at a local hospital. It was very difficult work, but a great learning opportunity.

I had so many obstacles in school, I am amazed I came out okay. I graduated in December 1999 from nursing school, and even passed the state boards.

But my life is just like an adventure movie sometimes. It's like Indiana Jones — just when

you think he is safe, something else happens. Same with me. This time it was the Department of Justice. When applying for my nursing license, I had to be forthright about my past arrests. The Board of Registered Nursing was not satisfied with my admission of the past; they wanted documentation. I had to prove I was guilty of the things I told them about. The Department of Justice ran a background check on me that took five months. When the rest of my classmates were already working, there was old John, still working as an aid. I was pretty low, there was no way I could do anything about the process I was caught in. When I tried, I just ran into a brick wall. I was just about to give up — even I have a breaking point — when my license came through.

Throughout this experience, I have been talking about how I did this or I did that. I must not forget to mention that I had the help of many wonderful people all along the way. Certainly as I look at it now, it was the positive functions of the universe manifesting in my life. I have a wonderful A.A. sponsor, who is a living example of integrity and has always been there for me. There are many people in the SGI-USA who have been just as important. In my district, they accepted me when my own family had disowned me. There have been members encouraging me all along the way. I now understand that no one exists in a vacuum, how all life is interdependent — we all are dependent on one another.

Currently, I am employed full time at the same hospital where I worked as an aid — a tremendously encouraging thing for many of the staff there. I recently completed my probationary period. I now know why there are not more men in nursing — it's just too hard — 12-hour shifts, all on your feet. You must be focused the whole time. If you let your attention wander even for a moment, you are running even faster to try and catch up.

Then there is the spiritual or emotional aspect of what I am doing. I have already seen and done some things I cannot even believe. Nursing is all about people, life and death and human dignity.

My life is still like an Indiana Jones picture sometimes, but the movie is not over. I get the chance to write the script every day, and for me it starts with morning prayers and my original determination to help people — not bad for a guy who was waiting in line for a spot at the dumpster. **WT**

EXPERIENCE — CAROL ANN WEST, DENVER

# Free at Last

## Challenging Addictions

**Carol Ann West liberates herself from a 30-year addiction to alcohol and drugs based on her Buddhist practice and A.A.**

I would like to share some of my experience regarding my lifelong struggle with drugs and alcohol. Today I am making a living as a private chef, caterer and cooking instructor, practicing my culinary craft as freely as I wish. I enjoy warm and loving relationships with my family, friends and fellow SGI members. This is a direct result of my renewed dedication to my faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. One of the ways I have achieved this renewal is by maintaining sobriety from alcohol and all mind-altering drugs. The peace and serenity have been hard-fought and hard-won.

On Halloween night 1966, my mother packed me, age 12, and my four younger siblings into our 1964 Ford station wagon and moved us to Golden, Colo., a small town on the outskirts of Denver. We were once again fleeing from the alcoholic and abusive environment we had endured with my father in California. We followed my new stepdad to his home in Golden, where we were to begin what we thought was a new life. Our hopes were short-lived, however, with the quick discovery of my stepdad's own alcohol and drug addiction and abusive behavior toward my mother.

This was the beginning of an oftentimes troubling youth, characterized by pain, anger, terror and rebellion. We moved many times throughout my teens, each time believing that our situation would be bettered, only to realize one more time the futility of changing "scenes and faces" but not the karmic pattern.

It was during my teens that I began my own abuse of alcohol and drugs. Also during this time I was first introduced to Buddhism. I was 15, and even though I liked chanting, I did-

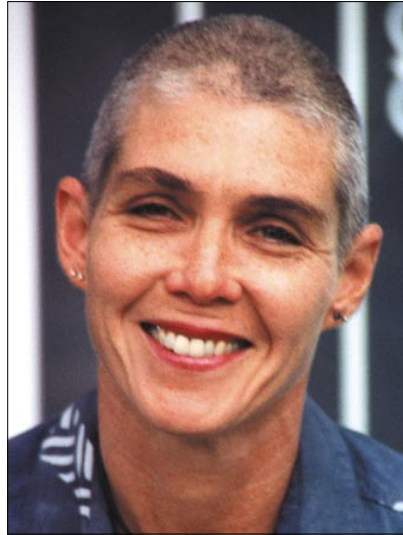


Photo by PETER NELLHAUS

n't take faith right away. It was a couple of years later when I was again told about Buddhism that I decided to try. I practiced my firmly established drug and alcohol habit and the Daishonin's Buddhism concurrently for the next 25 years. In some sense, I abdicated my responsibility, praying in a way that somehow magically my addiction would just end. My attitude is what stopped me. Much of my struggle to do my human revolution consisted of an internal battle between manifesting my highest self and simultaneously seeking to destroy that self.

During the early years of my practice, many young women's leaders showed me so much love and care despite my frequent lashing out and confrontational, negative behavior. At activities even though they saw me drunk, stoned or hung over, they encouraged me to "stick with the practice, no matter what!" It is to those women, and many more since, that I owe a tremendous debt of gratitude. I believe I would not be here now if it were not for their seemingly never-ending compassion and strength.

In May 1997, a week-long trip to Mexico included consumption of massive amounts of alcohol and marijuana, an arrest for theft and a near-arrest for assault. I was almost jailed and prevented from leaving the country. After chanting desperately, however, I returned home safe but shaken. Finally, on

June 17, 1997, I determined that I had drunk my last beer and smoked my last weed.

On June 18, I attended what was to be the first of many A.A. meetings. I cannot emphasize enough the benefits membership in this organization has afforded me. I must say, I did not attend that first meeting with any desire to gain deep knowledge of the A.A. Twelve-Step program. My only inten-

tion was to find a way to live a clean and sober life. At that point, I had given up any resistance that I may have previously had to the idea that I may have to say the G-word—God—or that I may have to hear discussion of God. If someone had told me I would have to speak in tongues, I would have done it—anything to achieve sobriety. I had "bottomed-out," as we say in A.A. It was time for a big change.

In A.A., I found many comrades with amazingly similar stories and experiences. I knew from the first meeting that I had found a home among my fellow alcoholics and drug addicts. I had a deep, instinctive awareness that I was in the right place at the right time, and my longtime faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism had brought me there. The basis of recovery in A.A. is the development of a spiritual foundation and I felt fortunate to have mine already in place.

With this knowledge and an ever-deepening faith in my own Buddhist practice, I proceeded to learn about the twelve steps of the A.A. program. The principles outlined in these steps have become for me a tremendous blueprint for living. I have said many times in A.A. meetings that the combination of the twelve steps and the practice of Buddhism is like rocket fuel for my life. I have also come to a deeper understanding of the concept of "higher power" and God.

I am finding true freedom by opening my heart and mind

through my faith to the hearts and minds of others. I have found myself able to listen openly and lovingly to descriptions by others of what God means to them. I have heard many people describe their relationship with their higher power in a way that parallels my relationship to the Mystic Law. It has been a journey of indescribable joy, pleasure and revelation.

Arun Gandhi, grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, says: "It is not enough to respect individual human beings. We must also respect different cultures, different ways of life and different belief systems. The danger lies in our becoming competitive, in believing that ours is the only way and the best way and attempting to impose our way on others. To assume that our way is the best is to say that we 'possess' the truth. When we accept that others could also be right, then we join others in an honest search for truth. When we come to understand religion properly, we reach an understanding of spirituality, that is an acceptance of and respect for different ways of worship."

Dr. David Chappell, Buddhist scholar and author of an article in the June 1999 *Living Buddhism* titled "The Global Significance of the Lotus Sutra," states: "Today, however, the Lotus Sutra belongs not just to Nichiren Buddhism, nor even to Mahayana Buddhism, but to the world."

I feel that many people believe similarly to what we in the SGI believe—the universal law of cause and effect. As an example, I quote Bill Wilson, the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous in 1935. Regarding his first encounter with the concept of God, he writes in the A.A. Big Book: "I could go for such conceptions as Creative Intelligence, Universal Mind or Spirit of Nature but I resisted the thought of a Czar of the Heavens, however loving his sway might be. My friend suggested what then seemed a novel idea. He said, 'Why don't you choose your own conception of God?' That statement hit me hard. It was only a matter of being willing to believe in a power greater than myself. Nothing more was required of me to make my beginning." This resonated with me from the first time I heard it.

My own understanding of a "power greater than myself" is rooted in my belief in the fundamental law of life, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. My "higher power," or greater self, is the power I reveal through my practice of Buddhism. The Daishonin himself says: "Never seek this Gohonzon outside yourself. The

Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 832).

SGI President Ikeda clearly illuminates the concept of universal prayer: "As far as we know, only human beings pray. And we have done so from ancient times. We have prayed to the sun, to fire, to the mountains. Our species has long pressed its hands together in prayer to Nature, asking it for safety and happiness. Pressing one's hands together in prayer is one of the most noble human acts" (12/10/98, *World Tribune*, p. 9). I feel that this 'human act' is 'most noble' regardless of the form it takes.

The journey has been incredible and wondrous at best and terrifying and difficult at worst. I believe that the brutal facts that lay at the "primordial" bottom of my addictions were co-dependency, anger, resentment and fear of absolute happiness. I believe that the currently trendy term *co-dependency* succinctly describes the state of seeking our happiness outside ourselves, be that with drugs, alcohol, people, rage, work, exercise or any number of facets of human life which we can experience.

In his book, *Addiction and Grace*, Dr. Gerald May says: "Addiction attaches desire, bonds and enslaves the energy of desire to certain specific behaviors, things or people. These objects of attachment then become preoccupations and obsessions, they come to rule our lives." So it was for me with drugs and alcohol.

These past three years of continuous abstinence from drugs and alcohol have been the longest period of total sobriety that I have experienced since my teens, some 30 years ago. The freedom of spirit and clarity of mind that I have gained are immeasurable. My deepest prayer is to continue the recovery work and share what I am learning with others. My life has been propelled, through challenging my disease of alcoholism, onto the exciting path of a greater spirituality. Finding this path through my practice of Buddhism has been the key for me to establish lasting freedom from drug and alcohol addiction. I am determined to continue to fight with all of my might for the achievement of world peace, utilizing all of my life experiences. I have an inestimable gratitude for all of my fellow members of the SGI, to President Daisaku Ikeda and to the many men and women who have guided me throughout the years. **WT**

## FROM SPEECH, I

mission we possess.

### Buddhism is dedicated to building an eternal realm of friendship.

The famous Roman philosopher Seneca says, "Nothing delights the mind so much as fond and loyal friendship." There is no greater joy than friendship, and there is nothing more beautiful. Buddhism is dedicated to building an eternal realm of friendship.

I hope that SGI-Italy, with its characteristic good cheer and warm camaraderie, will strive even harder to spread its exemplary network of friendship and trust in society.

The modern Japanese thinker Kanzo Uchimura had a high opinion of the cheerful spirit of the Italian people. He said that the Japanese, like the Italians, essentially have an optimistic outlook toward life. And he suggested that they should give full play to that optimism and contribute to making the world a better place.

I am reminded of an Italian thinker in the 19th century who was instrumental in paving the way to Italy's independence and unification. His name was Giuseppe Mazzini.

At the time, Italy was ruled by foreign powers. Tyranny

reigned, and freedom of assembly and association was suppressed. The people also suffered at the hands of a corrupt, decadent and autocratic clergy.

It was against this backdrop that the young Mazzini rose up to champion the cause of independence for his homeland. Even when he was thrown into prison by the authorities, he fought on fearlessly.

Efforts to achieve independence by the existing leaders had failed. Their movement had stalled. What went wrong? Analyzing the situation with his sharp mind, the young Mazzini sought the reasons for that failure so that he could rectify them and ensure future success.

He reached several conclusions. One failing, he discerned, was that the leadership of the revolutionary movement had grown old and lost their passion for change. Another flaw was pinning all their hopes on support from foreign military powers and their weak determination to change history through their own efforts. But the most important failing of all, he concluded, was that the movement had become divorced from the ranks of ordinary Italian people.

In other words, the movement's leaders had become arrogant and lost touch with the people. Only when the people

awoke and rose up would they gain independence for their nation. Mazzini decided to rouse the people with youth's passion and burning sense of justice.

In 1831, when he was 26, he established a patriotic movement named Young Italy for young men and women. He called out, "Place the young at the head of the insurgent masses; you do not know what strength is latent in those young bands, what magic influence the voice of the young has on the crowd." This is the formula for historic change, East and West, past and present.

The growth of our Italian youth division is also astonishing. And the achievements of graduates of the division are remarkable as well.

### Leaders should set an example throughout their lives of tireless devotion.

Mazzini called on the youth to go out among the people and engage in dialogue. "Awaken a sense of mission in the hearts of your fellow youth!" was his cry.

He urged: "Climb to the top of the hill, and sit at the farmer's table, visit the craftsman's workplace. These are the ones you have ignored up to now. Talk to them of their proper liberty, of their ancient traditions and glory, and of their great commercial power of ages gone by, theirs no longer. Speak to them of the many forms of oppression brought to bear upon them that they have not recognized, that no one has yet enlightened them to."

Many young people responded to Mazzini's plea. They came forward courageously to work for the future of their country. The youth visited house after house, person after person, moving among the people and earnestly discussing their situation with them. They sent copies of their organization's journal, which carried their call for independence, from village to village, town to town, to every corner of the land. For us, this would correspond to promoting the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper, the *Seikyo Shimbun*, or the publications of each SGI organization.

Through the efforts of these youth, an alliance of pro-independence supporters was born in every class and profession, reaching tens of thousands in number. One Italian youth leader at the time declared: "When you feel like staying at home, you must go out! When you feel like remaining quiet, you must talk!"

In other words, if they were to succeed in their struggle, each of them had to take action, each had

go out and talk to others about their cause. Buddhism also teaches that our actions demonstrate our faith, and that our voice does the Buddha's work.

If the authorities discovered the young people working for independence, they would of course be apprehended and imprisoned, exiled or sentenced to death. In fact, there were those who were harshly persecuted and even executed, laying down their lives for their cause.

But they regarded the hardships they encountered in striving to realize their lofty ideals as their greatest pride and joy. And their fighting spirit only burned brighter in the face of oppression.

For his activities, Mazzini was accused of crimes by the authorities on many occasions. He was treated as a criminal, tried in absentia and condemned to death. But he remained unperturbed, because he knew the way to inspire the people. And that was for leaders themselves to set an example throughout their lives of tireless devotion, sparing no effort for the sake of their fellow citizens and their ideals, never being defeated by adversity nor discouraged by others' indifference.

The actions of the youth who joined Mazzini in his struggle became a great source of education and inspiration for the common people, and they have been praised as having the most powerful influence on the eventual unification of Italy. Many of Italy's future leaders came from the ranks of these brave young people.

### All our sufferings and earthly desires are fuel for our enlightenment.

In August 53 years ago, I became a disciple of Josei Toda. Soon after joining the Soka Gakkai, I read the Daishonin's writing "On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings." There is one passage, which says: "Once you become a disciple or lay supporter of the votary who practices the true Lotus Sutra in accord with the Buddha's teachings, you are bound to face the three types of enemies. Therefore, from the very day you listen to [and take faith in] this sutra, you should be fully prepared to face the great persecutions of the three types of enemies that are certain to be more horrible now after the Buddha's passing" (WND, 391).

*The three powerful enemies are the three types of people who persecute those who propagate the Lotus Sutra after the Buddha's passing, as described in the "Encouraging Devotion"*

*chapter of the Lotus Sutra. They are: 1) lay people ignorant of Buddhism who denounce the votaries of the Lotus Sutra and attack them with swords or staves; 2) arrogant and cunning priests who slander the votaries; and 3) priests respected by the general public who, fearing the loss of fame or profit, induce the secular authorities to persecute the sutra's votaries.*

As a true disciple who made Mr. Toda's heart my own, I prayed fervently: "Please let me alone bear the brunt of any persecutions. Please allow me to protect my mentor, Mr. Toda, and all the Soka Gakkai members." My prayer was fused with a deep pledge to do that at all costs.

Over the last 53 years, I have prayed and striven always to fulfill that pledge. My greatest personal pride is that, while fighting fiercely against the three types of enemies predicted by the sutra and the Daishonin's writings, I have opened the way for kosen-rufu in 163 countries, without a single person losing his or her life at the hand of persecution by the authorities.

When the Daishonin was about to be executed at Tatsunokuchi, he exclaimed, "What greater joy could there be!" (WND, 767). And when he was exiled to Sado, he declared, "Because I view things this way, I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile" (WND, 386). In life and in the struggle to achieve kosen-rufu, all our sufferings and earthly desires are fuel for our enlightenment. The tougher the challenges we face, the greater will be the joy and benefit—the higher the life-condition—we will ultimately savor.

I hope that as leaders, therefore, you will resolve: "I will work hardest and challenge myself the most!" I hope that you will vow to yourselves, "I am going to have the best time!" and live your lives cheerfully and confidently.

People with this resolve are invincible, unbeatable. One person of passionate commitment is stronger than a force of untold numbers.

The outcome of a struggle is decided by the leaders' determination, by their sense of responsibility. The members in the Soka Gakkai's pioneering days rose up with a spirit of absolute determination to triumph and to carry out kosen-rufu in their communities. If you have that determination, capable people will appear and join you in realizing that goal. Your resolve will also be communicated to the Buddhas and bod-

## TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

### Facing Problems With Joy

From This Speech:

When Nichiren Daishonin was about to be executed at Tatsunokuchi, he exclaimed, "What greater joy could there be!" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 767). And when he was exiled to Sado, he declared, "Because I view things this way, I feel immeasurable delight even though I am now an exile" (WND, 386). In life and in the struggle to achieve kosen-rufu, all our sufferings and earthly desires are fuel for our enlightenment. The tougher the challenges we face, the greater will be the joy and benefit—the higher the life-condition—we will ultimately savor.

- 1) Why did Nichiren Daishonin think that being executed would be a joy? How can we apply his spirit to our own struggles?
- 2) Was the Daishonin executed? What actually happened?
- 3) How do you think that your pains and desires contribute to your Buddhist practice? When you look back at serious problems that you have overcome, do you feel appreciation for them?
- 4) What struggles are you facing right now? Do you think that they help you practice Buddhism more strongly?
- 5) SGI President Ikeda talks about the high life-condition we can reach through tackling tough challenges. What is a high life-condition?

# the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

## 'AT THE HELM'

VOLUME 7, CHAPTER 4, PART 45

**Facing the painful dissolution of the Soka Gakkai organization in Taiwan, Chapter Leader Zhu Qianxun remembers Shin'ichi Yamamoto's guidance: 'No matter what happens, no matter how hard things become, for the well-being of the people of Taiwan, I hope you will not allow the flame of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to be extinguished. True victory will be apparent 30 or 40 years down the line.'**

**S**outheast Asia General Chapter Leader Kazumasa Morikawa relayed Shin'ichi Yamamoto's message to Zhu Qianxun by telephone.

The evening of April 9, local district leaders gathered at Zhu's home and, under the supervision of a senior officer of the foreign affairs section of the Taipei police department, a meeting was held to announce the disbanding of the Soka Gakkai organization in Taiwan. Reporters from a number of Taiwan newspapers also turned up to cover the story.

As Zhu surveyed the members in the room, his heart ached. From now on, they would not be allowed to assemble like this under one roof. He was also angry and disappointed with himself for failing to win the authorities over. He

felt that he had let his fellow members down.

Powerful emotions surged inside him, but Zhu controlled himself. Making an effort to remain calm, he began speaking in a quiet voice: "Today, April 9, the Soka Gakkai's Taipei Chapter has been ordered to disband by the government, having failed to gain official approval as a registered civic organization. I hereby announce our dissolution.

"We are consequently no longer permitted to hold meetings or conduct any activities as an organization...." Zhu could not continue. His voice choked, his eyes filled with tears, and he trembled with emotion.

The room was silent.

Just then, Zhu vividly recalled what President Yamamoto had said to him some two months

earlier, at Taipei's Sungshan Airport on Jan. 27, during a stopover on Shin'ichi's return journey to Japan: "No matter what happens, no matter how hard things become, for the well-being of the people of Taiwan, I hope you will not allow the flame of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to be extinguished. True victory will be apparent 30 or 40 years down the line. You will definitely triumph in the end."

Shin'ichi's encouragement now struck Zhu like a bolt of lightning. Biting his lip and wiping the tears from his eyes with his fist, he went on with a resolute tone: "Our chapter is disbanding, but Taiwan's constitution guarantees us the freedom of religion. Each of us can still practice our faith without interference from anyone.

"The way to happiness has not been closed to us. As long as we

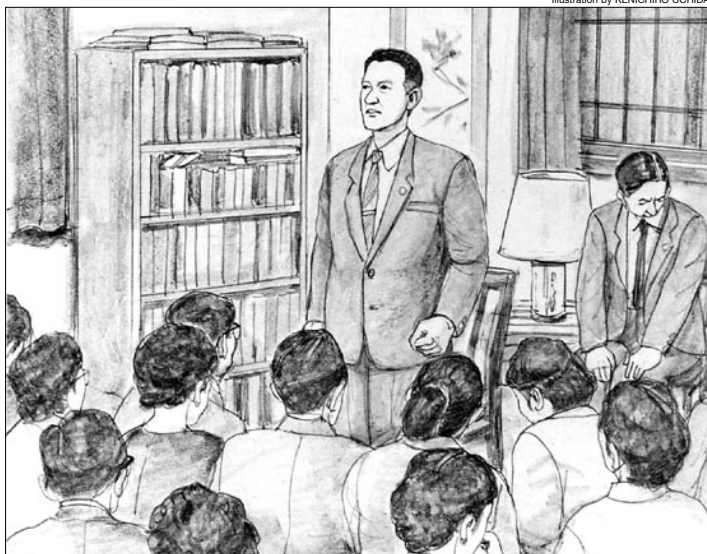


Illustration by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

have faith, winter will absolutely turn to spring."

This was all he could say under the police present.

The following day, April 10, in addition to announcing the dissolution of the Soka Gakkai's Taipei Chapter, newspapers throughout Taiwan carried articles and photographs of the final meeting. The articles ran under such headlines as "Disbanding of Illegal 'Nichiren Sect' Announced Yesterday." This was the first

that many of the members had heard of the disbanding, and it came as a terrible shock.

Meetings were held in each district from April 11–14 to notify all the members of the situation and finalize the dissolution. For the members, no meeting was ever sadder or bitterer.

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

hisattvas throughout the universe, and they will respond to your dedication.

In other words, resolute prayer is the key. Just as the fields burst into flower when spring comes, all of your efforts, too, when the time comes, will blossom without fail.

**Because our efforts entail difficulties, they come back to us as rock-solid benefit.**

Mazzini says, "In laboring according to true principles for our Country we are laboring for Humanity." Buddhism comprises the highest truth. All of you, as SGI members basing yourselves on that truth, are contributing in your respective countries and regions to the welfare of humanity as good citizens of your communities and conscientious citizens of the world.

Mazzini also urges, "To im-

prove yourselves and others — this must be the first aim and the supreme hope of every reform, of every social change." The great thinkers of our world all share a similar awareness of the need for inner transformation — of what we refer to as human revolution — and a movement to realize that goal. The Italian thinker Dr. Aurelio Peccei, cofounder of the think tank Club of Rome, also shared this view.

Mazzini further declares, "The watchword of the future faith is *association*, fraternal co-operation toward a common aim." In the 20th century, unfortunately, a fascist alliance between Japan and Italy plunged the world deeper into the tragedy of war and brought terrible suffering to the people of many nations. But in the 21st century, it is my hope that Japan and Italy

will form an alliance of humanism that brings happiness, peace and prosperity to all peoples.

The renowned 14th-century Italian poet Petrarch writes:

*My lords, take note of how time flies on earth as well as how our life is fleeing, and how Death is at our backs.*

*.....  
[May that] all the time you spend in giving others pain, to some more worthy act of hand or intellect, to some beautiful praise, to worthy dedication be converted:  
thus here on earth is joy, and open is the pathway to the heavens.*

How should we use our time on earth? The most important

question we face is that of life and death.

In our SGI activities, we study and put into practice the philosophy that teaches us the answer to this fundamental question, we dedicate our lives to a path that seeks peace for all humanity and we advance in harmony and friendship with our neighbors and friends all around the world.

All activities that are related to *kosen-rufu*, through the principle of a single life-moment containing 3,000 realms, can positively impact our lives, our societies and our countries, moving them in the direction of happiness.

Giving personal guidance to fellow members, introducing others to the Daishonin's Buddhism, promoting our publications — these kinds of activities may seem the most time-consuming and difficult.

But precisely for that reason, the effort we put into them comes back to us in direct proportion in the form of great, rock-solid benefit.

At a crucial moment, the heavenly deities, the protective forces of the universe, will protect us. We will savor immeasurable joy in both life and death. We will lead unsurpassed lives — lives of infinite meaning and significance.

Let me close with some more words by Seneca: "He [the wise man] himself is always in action, and is greatest in performance at the very time when fortune has blocked his way." I hope you will all become sages of life, making your way wisely, in good health, full of vitality and enthusiasm, achieving fresh growth and development that will astonish all.

*Grazie!* (Thank you!) **WT**

## SPEECHES GIVEN AT THE CEC TELECONFERENCE

## Thank You For All Your Hard Work

The following speeches on pp. 10–11 were given during a nationwide teleconference held Sept. 24 in Los Angeles for leaders of the area level and above.

By **DANNY NAGASHIMA**  
SGI-USA GENERAL DIRECTOR

**H**ello, everybody! Thank you for all of your hard work this year!

I was with members of the youth division in Japan recently, along with Dean Lawrence Carter of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta. Before the trip, Dean Carter had been very excited about seeing SGI President Ikeda. He told us that 30 years ago, when a reporter asked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. who is the greatest Christian in the 20th century, Dr. King responded, "Mahatma Gandhi." Dean Carter said that if he were asked that same question today, he would reply without hesitation that the world's greatest Christian is "A Buddhist—Daisaku Ikeda."

He explained that he could say this because he feels that President Ikeda, through his actions, is doing the most to put the humane ideals of Christianity into practice.

While attending the Sept. 7 Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall, Dean Carter introduced a portrait of President and Mrs. Ikeda that is going to be unveiled next April at the Chapel. He also inducted President Ikeda into Morehouse College's Martin Luther King Jr. International Collegium of Scholars. In the beginning of his



speech, which he delivered at the meeting, Dean Carter mentioned how happy he was to meet with Dr. Ikeda, whom he now considers his spiritual mentor.

The next day, President Ikeda opened the Soka International Women's Center, a most beautiful, palatial structure, and expressed his tremendous respect and appreciation for women at a dinner he hosted that evening for women's division leaders. He told me: "Please convey my heartfelt regards to each and every one of your members. America is a land of friendship, so please continue to deepen and strengthen your mutual bonds of friendship. SGI-USA should not be tied to formality. Have the courage to be yourself. Be natural, be yourselves. If you base everything on daimoku, you will do well in all your endeavors. Now is the era of the 'inverted pyramid.' The top should support the base. In other words, leaders should serve the members."

Through his encouragement, I learned all the more deeply how important it is for us as

leaders to always think and care about the members. How many people can we visit and share our hearts with toward the upcoming Nov. 18 commemorative meetings? Let's encourage others by sharing our hearts with them. Recently, President Ikeda presented all of us with the poem "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" I know everyone is reading and studying this amazing poem. In it, he writes about his hopes and expectations for Soka University of America:

*Toward the civilization  
of the twenty-first century;  
for the sake of the young lead-  
ers and scholars;  
for the sake of the  
peace, prosperity and joy  
that come from humanistic  
education!*

—Aug. 11 *World Tribune*, p. 8

President Ikeda has been saying that his final task is education. He is focusing all of his energies on America, centering on SUA. I know that many of our youth are hoping to attend, and many others are supporting this institution through their prayers.

There is no doubt that this university is the treasure of the SGI-USA. Its success will grow out of the rich soil all of us have cultivated through our painstaking efforts.

So next month, in the SGI-USA, we will all have the opportunity to contribute to the SGI-USA Soka University Scholarship Fund, which will support the education of SUA students. This is one more way that each of us can support this

wonderful institution and feel the pride of doing so.

As you know, this year is the 40th anniversary of our SGI movement in America—of President Ikeda's first visit to the United States. It also marks the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai. It is therefore an opportunity to show our deep appreciation for the efforts of the three presidents, of our mothers and fathers, of our seniors in faith—for the pioneers who dedicated their lives to building our organization. Without them, we would not be here today.

So please, let's never forget our sincere appreciation for the pioneers. When we unite with the pioneers, we will create an unshakable, great organization.

This weekend, the members of the CEC together studied the Daishonin's writing "The Hero of the World." One passage reads: "Buddhism primarily concerns itself with victory or defeat, while secular authority is based on the principle of reward and punishment. For this reason, a Buddha is looked up to as the Hero of the World, while a king is called the one who rules at his will" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 835). President Ikeda stresses this point over and over again. Fundamentally, it means that life is a battle, and that we practice Buddhism to transform any negative situation in our lives into a positive one. Concretely, this means that whatever circumstances we face, we can show proof of growth and progress.

What determination have you made toward next year? I know

many of you made personal goals at the beginning of this year. And as we approach the end of the year, I'm sure some of you forgot your determination, some of you have already accomplished your goals, and others are facing difficulties you never imagined. Remember, though, that Buddhism is about proving the validity of our practice through our own efforts. This means overcoming your difficulties and accomplishing your dreams.

At the same time, many of you set targets for propagation, publications promotion and meeting participation. I really want to thank you for the efforts and remarkable results you have shown thus far. At the same time, if you have not accomplished what you set out to, now is the moment to pray to the Gohonzon and determine to try one more time.

This weekend at the CEC, we reaffirmed our commitment to care for the members. The happiness of each member is the reason that our organization exists. The point of this quarter's goal of meeting participation is to enable each member to become happy. We are not chasing a number. Rather, we are determined to reach out to 100 percent of our membership based on our deep compassion and conviction.

Finally, there have been many concerns regarding the function of the zones and their role. We had discussions with the zone leaders, and we will clarify this further by the end of the year. In this way, we will begin the New Year fully prepared for great advancement.

Thank you very much! **W**

## SGI Family Youth Culture Festivals To Be Held

By **JAMES HERRMANN**  
SGI-USA YOUTH DIVISION LEADER

**T**his fall marks the 40th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's historic visit to the United States. During these past 40 years, he has come to the United States nearly 30 times. Throughout these four decades, the pioneer members have struggled to make a truly American, truly global Buddhist movement based on President Ikeda's guidance. We are commemorating this anniversary with a series of brilliant festivals and celebrations in every



region of the United States.

I'm hearing from many of you

how hard you've been working, and I want to thank you for your efforts. These culture festivals are going to be great events.

All over the United States, there are so many new faces and new youth joining. We are seeing the emergence of a passionate and talented generation of young people—youth in their teens and early 20s—dedicated to improving the world. I can honestly say that this is a generation unlike any we've ever seen before, with truly amazing creativity and commitment.

In my opinion, these youth are emerging because of the Victory

Over Violence project and many other creative activities all over the country. But it was the SGI-USA Youth Culture Festival in Los Angeles where we saw the first expression of their awesome potential.

Here in Los Angeles, this culture festival became a turning point in the kosen-rufu movement. It was through the process of preparation toward this festival that many young people first began seeking their mentor and awakened to the concept of human revolution. One year later, they are now the driving force of Southern California.

This is proof of the victory of our parents and seniors, those pioneers who, together with President Ikeda, built the American kosen-rufu movement.

The idea for youth culture festivals was born from President Ikeda's amazing wisdom. These events give youth the opportunity to challenge their limitations and discover their hidden potential. They are the greatest venue to inspire and activate a new generation of youth. When you look back, each major culture festival marked a significant turning point in the history of kosen-rufu.

## SPEECHES GIVEN AT THE CEC TELECONFERENCE

## Toward the Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings

By MATILDA BUCK  
SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER

SGI President Ikeda recently sent us the wonderful poem "Soar— Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" In it, he affirms us as Bodhisattvas of the Earth who are beginning a new and empowered era. These are his words:

*Our lives renewed,  
we begin a grand movement,  
spreading the spirit of true  
friendship  
throughout society.*

— Aug. 11 World Tribune, p. 5

Of course we do this as individuals, but as an organization, the place where we spread the spirit of true friendship is in our districts. That is where kosen-rufu grows. That is why at this CEC we spent many hours discussing the growth of the districts.

Above all, I want to praise all of you for your most earnest and tireless efforts to help form these districts through the challenging task of the geographical reorganization. Thank you for nurturing the leadership that supports these districts. Because of your efforts, we have happy and thriving groups all across our country. As President Ikeda says, the Bodhisattvas of the Earth have emerged!

These districts will be holding Nov. 18 Commemorative Meetings soon to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai. I know this because I've already been invited to several. These are always great meetings. Everyone makes tremendous efforts to visit old friends, bring guests, bring food and work hard to have a wonderful program. It



seems everyone contributes something to these shining meetings. I think that is why we always enjoy the November meetings so much—everyone feels it is their meeting.

When people feel needed and can contribute, it creates a happy atmosphere of unity and purpose, and the spirit of true friendship is felt by members and guests. Through preparing for these meetings, many new people can stand up and take responsibility. When they do this, they strengthen the bodhisattva in their lives. They move from just attending a meeting to truly taking action to encourage others to practice. This brings them personal joy, growth and benefit.

So I have a proposal: Why don't we as leaders make the November meetings a focus for us to help the districts take the next step in their growth? Can all of us, together with the chapter leaders, visit the district leaders and find out what help they need?

Some districts are like a small family where the same group of people have been together for a long time. How can we work with them to inspire them to expand their family and bring in fresh faces and ideas?

Then there are big districts where many members participate and new people are joining, but the leaders feel overwhelmed trying to take care of their daily lives and really care for all these members. And they don't seem to find people who are willing to take on new leadership. So let's use our experience and work with them, helping them to inspire people to take responsibility.

Then there are places that are so large that they usually meet at the group level. Let's be bold and trust those group leaders to become district leaders. I can still remember the first night when, after being a group leader for a year, my partner and I held our very first district meeting. We were nervous, we were excited, and we were independent. But most of all, we felt determined to respond to the trust that others had in us.

There are districts that have grown very naturally, where there are people ready to become leaders if that district were divided in half. I know that members who have practiced together and built friendships and talked to others about this Buddhism don't really want to split up. During the CEC, we discussed this, and we thought that, even if that district only divided into two, perhaps in a case like that it could become a chapter. Then, the members could remain together and new people could still take responsibility.

All of your zone leaders had so many ideas about how we could help support and foster leadership at the district level. Among their ideas was to invite the many youth leaders who recently graduated into the men's and women's division to take responsibility as district lead-

ers. We also have many vice leaders at various levels who have so much experience to share in helping to develop a new district.

I really believe that there is so much untapped potential among our existing membership. There is so much room for very organic, natural growth. If we become bold and trust those members, we can make it happen.

These are just some of the ideas that we discussed, but it is so important that all of you join in with your wisdom and creativity. The important thing is that we come up with ways of supporting the districts—the forefront of taking care of our members.

I want to close with guidance that I heard recently from SGI North America Bureau Director Norimasa Saito. I had a discussion with him about depression, and I want to share with you what he said: "When I talk to SGI-USA members, they often cry, men or women. They feel they have some kind of sin or guilt. They feel they must suffer to rid themselves of their karma. Perhaps they have been given guidance that they must eradicate their heavy karma, that they must chant and chant to get rid of their fundamental darkness. We shouldn't be stuck in the past in that way—our future happiness lies in this moment, in challenging this moment, in how we feel this moment. 'This is the Buddhism of the sun,' President Ikeda says. If we have a spirit of hope and joy, we attract benefit. If we think we can't win, or that we have somehow sinned, this is not Nichiren Daishonin's spirit. Challenging ourselves to believe in ourselves—that is Buddhism. Within ourselves, we have boundless wisdom.

The moment we chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we are actually changing our karma. Doing SGI activities, we are changing our karma.

"A woman who lost her child was told by her leaders, 'This is your karma to have your child die.' She carried the pain for 20 years because of a leader's words. Instead, as leaders we should cry together with them and tell them there is meaning and value in what they are going through. We should stick together and continue to encourage them, like the Daishonin encouraged Lady Nanjo. President Ikeda always encourages us to advance with a positive and hopeful spirit.

"Our goal is to become happy. We may have to suffer a bit now, but we are Buddhas, so we should live with assurance. Essentially, we must praise humans. That is the focus of guidance."

During our conversation, I realized that as leaders, when people approach us with problems, it's so important that we lead them along the path of hope.

As leaders, let's ask ourselves: "Am I someone who nurtures hope in others? In my own life, am I feeling hope? Am I creating an organization that inspires people to have hope?"

Let's use this time preparing for the November meetings as an opportunity to meet with the district leaders and to use our creativity to find ways to help them. Because of all of you, we have such a wonderful organization, so with real pride in what we've done so far, let's move another step forward in creating an organizational structure that is functional, flexible and can support the many, many new members we will welcome! **WT**

It is time for the youth all over America to write our new history of kosen-rufu, alongside our mentor, President Ikeda.

In his message to the first SGI-USA Culture Festival, he said: "I am determined to continue the solemn work of creating venues and opportunities for you to enact the grand drama of your lives."

True to his determination and promise, next year we are holding SGI Family Youth Culture Festivals in each zone.

During the September Headquarters Leaders Meeting, Pres-

ident Ikeda said that the greatness of Martin Luther King Jr. was his ability to draw in bystanders, to inspire and activate those people who normally stand on the sidelines. This is exactly why we want to hold these culture festivals—to draw the youth out of the woodwork. President Ikeda said during his speech that "Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream. We, too, have a dream. Our dream is kosen-rufu." Just as Martin Luther King Jr. was able to inspire people to join in the common cause of civil rights,

our culture festivals will inspire youth to join in the noble drama of kosen-rufu.

How many new youth will emerge? How much will this be a turning point in your organization? This is entirely up to you! This is your time to create history. Youth, let's not hesitate to take the initiative to ensure that these festivals draw all the youth to join in our great dream.

When it comes to matters of faith and experience, no one beats our men's and women's division members. So let's really seek them out.

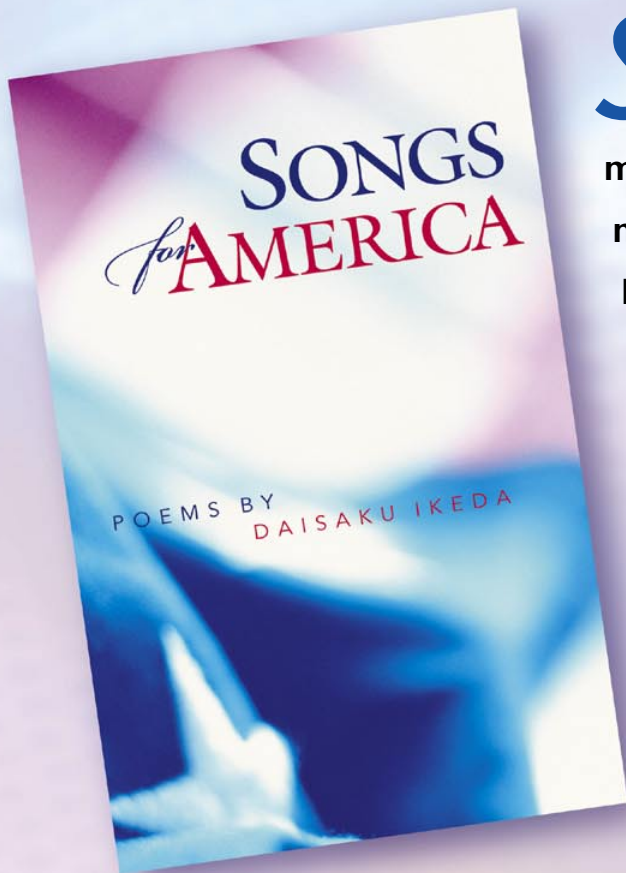
When it comes to creativity and initiative, the youth of the SGI-USA are unmatched. So let's take full responsibility.

Toward May 3, 2001, each day is so precious. Let's make the most of each significant day. Crucial to the success of these festivals is that each of us have our own personal goal. And as we count down the days, let's use each day as an opportunity to grow and progress in our lives. How much value will we create each day? And how will we measure what we've done? With the opening of Soka Uni-

versity of America, Aliso Viejo as our target date, let's fight to accomplish our goals, let's bet our lives and let's have no regrets. And let's unite to welcome President Ikeda back to America with thousands of new youth members! **WT**

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# NEW from World Tribune Press



**S***ongs for America* contains four major poems by Daisaku Ikeda dedicated to SGI members in the United States—including his most recent, “Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” Each one contains the SGI president’s hopes and dreams for America as the center of the worldwide movement for peace, culture and education. These poems represent twenty years of Mr. Ikeda’s passionate resolve to support his cherished friends in America and will no doubt serve as sources of inspiration for years to come.

*Take steady steps on  
this firm, indestructible earth.  
Lift your eyes to an endless sky  
glittering with stars!*

*Burning with cheerful resolve,  
forge on, radiantly embracing all  
With the boundless expanse of  
your own inner sky.*

— from “Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!”



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