

World TRIBUNE

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Rick Serna,
former
Nichiren
Shoshu temple
administrator,
returns to the
SGI-USA.

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SGI-USA Celebrates November 18

Commemorative gatherings are held to observe the Soka Gakkai's founding.

In thousands of gatherings across the United States in November, SGI-USA members and friends celebrated the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding on Nov. 18, 1930. In his message for the commemorative meetings, SGI President Ikeda said: "As we prepare to usher in the

century of humanity, I ask all of you to make a fresh and vigorous advance like the brilliant morning sun—with your hearts filled with pride and a firm commitment to your mission to carry out this unprecedented undertaking of spreading Buddhism around the world.... Let us advance toward a new era, armed with fresh determinations, singing new songs and forging new bonds of friendship, as we walk in the glorious sunshine of fresh triumph." **WT**



Members gather in Little Rock, Ark., on Nov. 12 to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding.

Toward a Violence-Free Hawaii

Photo by ROBERT GACO



Young performers entertain the crowd at the Westside Youth Festival in Wai'anae, Hawaii, on Oct. 28.

**By JOHNETTA ADAMS AND
CAROL PELEKAI**
HAWAII CORRESPONDENTS

Awesome!" These are the words of the many young participants who attended the second annual Westside Youth Festival held on Oct. 28 at the Wai'anae Mall Shopping Center on the island of Oahu, Hawaii.

The theme for the festival was "Victory Over Violence, a Culture of Peace." SGI-USA members spearheaded the organizing committee with co-sponsors from Nani O' Wai'anae (a local environmental group), Nanakuli and Makaha Ahupua'a (community) groups and the United Nations Association Hawaii Division. More than 110 companies and organizations supported with donations of all kinds.

The opening event began with the dedication of this year's festival to the late Mari-

lyn Rosario, an SGI-USA member who gave her unyielding efforts in support of peace within the community. The opening performance was a wonderful Dragon Dance by the SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group.

Many friends, families and more than 300 hard-working volunteers and sponsors made this memorable event a great success. Children from the 10 schools in and around the community enjoyed the chance to display their many skills and talents. Huge paper-flower cutouts and straw leis on which each and every child from the schools shared their dreams and hopes for a "Violence Free," "Drug Free" and "Trash Free" community draped the entire event.

Three main tents housed the many different activities, in addition to many food and game booths sponsored by the schools. The mayor of Honolulu, Jeremy Harris, presented Koa Bowl trophies for the

PLEASE SEE FESTIVAL, 5

The Treasure Tower

Back to the Basics

By JASON HENNINGER
LOS ANGELES

Many of the symbols in the Lotus Sutra serve a dual function. On the most basic level, the fantastical descriptions simply say, pay attention, this is amazing stuff. However, beneath the fabulous extravagance, there is a deeper, more specific meaning.

The treasure tower emerges from the earth at the beginning of the 11th chapter of the Lotus Sutra. From behind closed doors, the sonorous voice of Many Treasures Thus Come One declares, Shakyamuni, World Honored One, all you have expounded is the truth. Shakyamuni then explains to the confused assembly that Many Treasures, though long since dead, promised in the infinite past to appear with his funeral tower whenever and wherever the Lotus Sutra is taught. Later in the Sutra, the doors open and Shakyamuni sits beside Many Treasures.

The treasure tower is like a metaphor within a metaphor. It floats above the assembly at Eagle Peak, enormous and mysterious. It is covered in countless bells and banners and emits won-

drous fragrances. Obviously this qualifies as amazing stuff. But what else does it mean?

When Nichiren Daishonin's disciple Abutsu-bo studied the Lotus Sutra, he became quite understandably perplexed by all this talk of jewels and levitating. He asked directly, "What is signified by the Thus Come One Many Treasures and his treasure tower, which appeared from beneath the earth?"

The Daishonin begins his response by mentioning that T'ien-t'ai taught that the closed and open treasure tower represents the theoretical and essential teaching, respectively. But the Daishonin knew that T'ien-t'ai's concept was a difficult one to understand. Instead of elaborating, he switched gears to a more direct explanation. The treasure tower appears, he explained, because at last Shakyamuni's disciples had begun to understand their own Buddha nature. The Treasure Tower is a metaphor for the awakening of our own Buddhahood. "No treasure tower exists," he states, "other than the figures of the men and women who embrace the Lotus Sutra." Similarly, he equates the Gohonzon to the treasure tower, saying, "Faith like yours is so extremely rare that I will inscribe the treasure tower especially for you" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 300).

Ultimately the treasure tower is not a description of Shakyamuni's supernatural colleague; rather it is Myohorenge-kyo. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our Buddhahood emerges from the depths of our being and declares the correctness of the Lotus Sutra, just as Many Treasures had promised. **WT**



Pasadena District Commemorates Nov. 18

Pasadena District (Los Angeles County) members hold their general meeting along with 28 guests on Nov. 19 at the Pasadena City College Educational Center. The meeting's theme was 'What Is the Heart of the SGI?' The goals of the district were: that every person achieve a great personal victory; that each person strengthen his or her connection to SGI President Ikeda, i.e., exemplifying the oneness of mentor and disciple; that each person awaken to his or her mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth and understand what that means.

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Dr. Tomoko Takahashi
Director, SGI-USA Culture Dept.
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EXPERIENCE — RICK SERNA, SAN MATEO, CALIF.

A Few Good Friends

After several years working as a Nichiren Shoshu temple administrator, Rick Serna rediscovers the truth of Buddhism and finds his way back to the SGI with the help of his friends.

There was a time I never thought I'd come back to the SGI. But looking back over my 26 years of practice, it has always been my friends in the SGI that have been there for me and supported my Buddhist practice.

I was raised Catholic, but lost interest during my stay in Vietnam. Then my wife, Junko, introduced me to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism on Dec. 26, 1974, while on vacation in Japan, where she was born. Junko began her practice of Buddhism in 1954.

I, alongside my wife, started attending SGI meetings in mid-1974. I had to attend because Junko didn't have a license to drive yet. As I sat at the back of the meetings, things started to make sense to me. Soon after, Junko got her driver's license, but we continued chanting and attending meetings together in San Mateo, Calif., learning the basics of Buddhist practice: faith, practice and study. With the support of Junko and many leaders within the organization, I developed a consistent practice.

For the first few years as a new member, I questioned where the value was in spending so many hours participating in activities in cold and foggy Daly City, where our community center was at that time. It was during this period that I met some very special people; my young men's leaders tried to encourage me constantly. Of course, I had no idea of their impact at that time in my life, yet these relationships proved to be invaluable and continue to be an important influence in my life.

In time, San Mateo District grew and became two districts, and soon enough, the San Mateo Chapter was born. Members were growing through their con-

stant efforts in Buddhist practice. During this time, I had many opportunities to receive encouragement from then General Director George Williams, and when SGI President Ikeda came to California, I also had many opportunities to be encouraged by his words, actions and compassion.

During my upbringing in this practice, so to speak, President Ikeda and Mr. Williams always showed me the true meaning of a phrase I had heard many times — the stand-alone spirit. And as time went on, I would be tested as to its true meaning. I had developed, as mentioned earlier, deep bonds with a few of my leaders and fellow members, but the most important relationship proved to be between the Gohonzon and me.

After practicing for 14 years in the San Mateo area, we had finally opened our own temple, of which all the members were so proud. I was asked by Mr. Williams to become a member of the temple staff. I was shocked at the invitation and had to go home and talk this over with my wife. I said yes to the offer and resigned from my job as an import agent for a large company.

I began working for the temple in the late 1980s as a temple administrator and did just about everything from mowing the lawn to shopping, bookkeeping and translating. I basically accompanied the chief priest wherever he went. I remember having ceremonies at the temple during the day and then driving to Fresno, Sacramento and San Jose to help conduct more that same day. At the time, I felt honored and would do anything to protect the temple.

In 1991, however, after the schism between the SGI and the priesthood took place, my life changed dramatically. While I worked for the temple, I also was an active chapter leader within the SGI. I started to feel uncomfortable because I didn't know exactly why the schism happened. Of course, I heard that there was a question of President Ikeda's loyalty toward the priesthood surrounding the singing of "Ode to Joy."

Just being able to continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and recite gongyo on a consistent



Rick Serna and his wife, Junko.

basis was a huge challenge. Because the temple employed me, many SGI leaders and members believed that I should abandon my job immediately. The priests, on the other hand, encouraged me to continue to attend my leaders meetings within the SGI organization. I think people thought I was spying for the priesthood, and eventually I was excluded from leaders meetings within the SGI and was never given any real reasons why. I felt a lack of trust was the real culprit behind my exclusion, and for this reason, I began to mistrust people — especially the leaders — within the SGI.

During this big mess, there was my true friend in Buddhism who called me just to make sure that I was still OK — Cliff Sawyer. I communicated with him as often as possible. He was the young men's leader at that time in San Francisco.

Feeling as if my back were against a wall, I made the decision to protect the priesthood and felt that the priests were supporting my practice. Also I was taught, as many were, that the lineage of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism was handed down from high priest to high priest. I accompanied the priests everywhere and severed my relationship with the SGI. I felt that I had to apply all of my energy toward supporting the temple, including helping to form the temple's separate lay group.

The next seven years would become the darkest period of my life because I felt betrayed by both the SGI and the priests.

In April 1991, my employment ended in various misunderstandings surrounding the lax handling of money that eventually wound up in court. I believe the priests used this as a ploy to get rid of me. I felt the priests manipulated me through trying to sway my opinion about the SGI and President Ikeda while High Priest Nikken Abe was being depicted as a saint. The priests knew of High Priest Nikken's aberrant behavior and

nevertheless maintained that even if he wanted to do something wrong, he couldn't because "he had the life-condition of the Daishonin." It seemed that all I was taught by the priests was nothing more than hypocrisy. For the next five years, I stopped practicing Buddhism altogether.

Junko suffered tremendously and was banned from practicing with the temple because she was my wife. I felt as if my life was over. I seriously felt I would be better off dead, that way my wife would not have to worry any longer.

Things got so bad that I began to drink heavily, staying out all night and just not caring about my life — or anything else for that matter. My wife left me because I was never home. I felt completely alone.

After nearly a year, I began to see my wife again. I was living with my mother at that time continuing to drink every night until the bars closed. Junko put me on "probation" for six months before we got back together. I will never forget her undying support and belief in me.

Again, through all of this, one person, Cliff, who is now Southern Zone leader in the SGI-USA, had kept in touch with me — and he's probably the main reason I am practicing today. Danny Nagashima and George Williams kept in touch with my wife — who continued her practice throughout — trying to convince her of the validity of the SGI. Of course, I was so upset that they were communicating with her. Though Mr. Williams visited me once in my place of work, and I was glad to see him, I couldn't see any future for myself in the SGI. Fortunately, I never forgot his words: "Rick, you are always welcome back into the SGI-USA."

Due to the consistent efforts of people such as Cliff Sawyer, Danny Nagashima and Mr. Williams, Junko and I returned to the SGI in August 1999, and are happily attending district meetings. I had reservations about re-

turning at first because I didn't want to practice in what I had previously experienced as an authoritarian environment, but I now see that the SGI has changed. I could not see that for many years, but now I do.

At first, I didn't feel that the issue of the priesthood needed to be spoken of in our discussion meetings, or any other meeting, that our actions will always speak louder than words. But after several years of working under the priesthood, I feel I must speak out about the atrocities that the priesthood has committed. I know from my own experience that the danger of succumbing to my own fundamental darkness and thereby being swayed by the cunning deception of the priesthood will lead one's life totally astray. Their holier-than-thou attitude lacks the compassion that Nichiren Daishonin taught. High Priest Nikken's destruction of the Grand Main Temple and other buildings in 1998, without consideration for the members who gave their last monies in many cases, was a true indication of his lack of understanding of the teachings of the Daishonin.

Furthermore, anyone who feels that he has the power to judge who can and cannot practice Buddhism — exemplified through the excommunication of millions of sincere SGI members — simply cannot be a true follower of the Daishonin's teachings.

I honestly feel that President Ikeda is following and practicing the Daishonin's teachings as they were meant to be because he is sincerely teaching people how to practice Buddhism and not how to worship him, and that his guidance is in accordance with those teachings. I will always follow President Ikeda from this point forward in my life.

As common mortals, we all are equal in front of the Gohonzon. Putting this wonderful practice into action makes the difference in our lives. There is nothing more powerful than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon, studying the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and practicing this Buddhism under the proper mentor in life, who for me is Daisaku Ikeda.

In the writing "Questions and Answers About Embracing the Lotus Sutra," the Daishonin states: "When one has had the rare good fortune to be born a human being, and further good fortune to encounter the teachings of Buddhism, how can one waste this opportunity?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 60). This small phrase has kept me on the quest to find the truth of Buddhism. Again, I will continue to deepen my faith and help others wherever possible to see this same truth. **WT**

Action Counts

A Record of My Life
by Daisaku Ikeda

'Action is what counts first and foremost' when it comes to contributing to international society, SGI President Ikeda writes.

Empty rhetoric has no place when it comes to contributing to international society. Nor will economic aid alone suffice. Action is what counts first and foremost.

This has recently become evident in the growing awareness of the significance of humanitarian assistance. And this is why the SGI has been taking concrete measures to support

the United Nations.

These efforts include the "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World" exhibition, which the SGI cosponsored with the United Nations. This exhibition has been held in 33 cities in 22 countries, including Moscow, Geneva and New York, and viewed by approximately 1.5 million people. Approximately 320,000 people in 13 cities in five countries have viewed the "War and Peace" exhibition. And some 310,000 people in 26 cities in eight countries have viewed the exhibition "Toward a Century of Humanity—An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World."

Other exhibitions that the SGI has sponsored in cooperation with the United Nations are "Nuclear Arms: Threat to Humanity," "Toward the Century of Life: The Environment and Development," "International Textbooks," "World Boys and

Girls Art Exhibition," "Toys of the World and Education," "World's Children and UNICEF" and "What Are the Rights of the Child?"

Also in support of the United Nations, between 1973 and 1999, the youth of the Soka Gakkai have conducted a total of 20 fund-raising campaigns to support refugee relief efforts. Between 1980 and 1999, 14 delegations of youth representatives have visited refugee camps in different parts of the world. These activities have fostered many youth capable of making valuable contributions to the international community.

The SGI has also sponsored public lectures on a wide range of topics and carried out broad-ranging publication activities. In 1998, youth collected approximately 13 million signatures on the Abolition 2000 petition calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons, which were then submitted to the United Nations.

The SGI and the Soka Gakkai in Japan are both registered as non-governmental organizations with the United Nations. It seems, however, that the scope of activities of both organizations is far more recognized in other countries than in Japan.

In my annual peace proposal to commemorate Jan. 26, the anniversary of the SGI's founding, I always incorporate specific agendas for strengthening the United Nations. Each proposal stresses the idea of creating a United Nations with a human face and an organization that people can wholeheartedly support.

With this aim, as early as 1975, I proposed the establishment of an Association of World Citizens to Safeguard the United Nations. The idea was that the United Nations, in addition to being a gathering of national representatives, should include representatives of the people. It has been my constant assertion over the years that the United Nations must listen to the views and concerns of ordinary citizens and make use of them.

With regard to the fundamental problem faced by the United Nations of financial administration, I have proposed that the United Nations be empowered to receive support from individual citizens throughout the world. No ideal

can be actualized without a solid financial base.

Many continue to avoid and overlook the question of financing the United Nations, despite the fact that if the present state of affairs persists, it could spell the United Nations' demise. I therefore recommend that the United Nations accept contributions from companies and organizations as well as individuals—enforcing a rule of no favors in return—in place of the present system of relying entirely on dues from governments. I want to see the people of the world pool their wisdom and come up with a sound program for the United Nations' financial management.

People have always found ways to overcome their ethnic differences and help one another.

We are entering a period of change in cooperative international relations centering around the United Nations. For example, at the time of the United Nations' founding, the ideal of ethnic self-determination was the ever-brilliant promised land. But now those ethnic groups are themselves sparking controversy, and ethnic conflict is breaking out in areas across the globe. This has raised the question as to whether it is enough to simply create borders around individual ethnic groups.

As seen in the example of the former Yugoslavia, the ideal of ethnic independence has at the same time become the tragedy of the post-Cold War era. We have seen similar scenarios played out on numerous occasions. The equation goes: Ethnic group B has been controlled by ethnic group A for a long period of time. After achieving nationhood, group B begins "cleansing" members of group A from the region they newly inhabit.

At some point, this chain of hatred must be broken. It is only natural, of course, that people who have been oppressed will want to realize their independence. But the tragedy resulting from making the establishment of a nation the sole, absolute objective of ethnic independence must not be forgotten.

Can it really be said that in such areas as Sarajevo and Kosovo, where we have witnessed intensified ethnic conflict, relations have always been strained? In my dialogue on "Choices for the 21st Century" with Dr. Majid Tehranian of the University of Hawaii, which was serialized in the Japanese monthly journal *Ushio*, we discussed this point

in detail. We observed how nearly all the regions presently experiencing complicated ethnic strife were once places where diverse groups of people coexisted in peace.

The Nobel Prize-winning author Ivo Andric, a native of the former Yugoslavia, writes the following about Sarajevo: "It is the middle of the night in Sarajevo. First the clock of the Catholic Church lugubriously chimes 2:00. About a minute later, the Eastern Orthodox Church faintly announces 2:00. A little later, the clock tower of the Mosque hoarsely rings 11:00, Mecca time. The Jews, whose synagogue is without a belfry, live according to their own time."

Just 10 years ago, Sarajevo, now a symbol of ethnic conflict, was a symbol of ethnic harmony.

It is a fact that Muslims in the former Yugoslavia once presented a church to Catholics who did not have the means to build one themselves. Also, in Cordoba, the old capital of Spain, around the time when the Muslims unified Spain, the Mosque in the city served as a place of worship for Muslims on Friday and for Christians on Sunday. While Islam and Christianity tend to be thought of as mortal enemies, in light of history, the length of time that the opposite was true is much longer.

In reality, people have always found ways to overcome their ethnic differences and learned to support and help one another in the course of their daily lives. Should not getting back to this original spirit of working together on a popular level be an aim of the United Nations' various aid efforts? Merely forcing the logic of so-called advanced nations on others will only magnify the distortions of society.

The well-known social activist Frantz Fanon says that any reform must be rooted in the lives and awareness of the people: "If the building of a bridge does not enrich the awareness of those who work on it, then that bridge ought not to be built and the citizens can go on swimming across the river or going by boat. The bridge should not be 'parachuted down' from above; ... on the contrary it should come from the muscles and the brains of the citizens."

A society in which the people are rooted in daily life, enjoying heightened awareness and creating value—this is what leads to a world without war. Future



The U.N. headquarters in New York.

Photos by KEITH KAWAMOTO



Local SGI-USA members created the 'Children's Art & Rights Exhibit,' on display at the Westside Youth Festival.

Students from Waianae High School use the festival as an opportunity to raise funds for school projects.

FROM FESTIVAL, 1

longest leis in two different categories, elementary and high school. The excitement kept building by the hour.

There were performances by many school groups and young individuals being featured at the main stage, reigning young pageant queens who made their debut public appearances, talented young business entrepreneurs who setup shops to conduct their business skills and showcase their many hand-crafted products and ideas, and a gallery of murals displayed on individual panels from each

of the 10 schools. The SGI-USA Victory Over Violence Exhibit, along with a local VOV exhibit was displayed inside of the mall. Also, the local Pacific Zone members and youth created their own United Nation Exhibit and Children's Art and Rights Exhibit. Many people enjoyed the exhibits and lots of dialogue took place throughout the day.

The highlight of the day was the creative and spectacular Haunted House, which was cleverly designed and operated by a young man who just graduated from high school in May. His creative ideas and deter-

mination was the fuel that generated the many young—and young-in-spirit—volunteer actors. It was truly a howling and frightening experience. Some kids went back again and again to enjoy the Haunted House. There were informational and educational awareness interest groups who provided for and shared with our community the same messages of hope for a "Violence Free," "Drug Free," "Trash Free" environment.

Hawaii's Lt. Governor Maize Hirono addressed the audience, commenting, "I want to thank the youth and sponsors as the

festival was also celebrating National Make a Difference Day, and I am so excited to see all the schools here participating together."

The City Council of Honolulu also presented the Westside Festival Committee with an honorary certificate and commending the SGI-USA and other sponsors for their efforts in supporting the community.

There were many positive comments throughout the day expressing pride of the youth in the Westside. Hazel Sumile, superintendent of the Leeward School, said: "Thanks to the

festival committee, all the schools on the coast received books last year. I am so excited to see all the kids' artwork and performances today. I want to thank the festival sponsors for doing a wonderful job."

As the sun began to set, the spirit of the event continued into the night with live music and dancing. It was a memorable event put together by folks who truly care about their community. Victory was achieved by all who played a part in its success with the many new and renewed friendships that were created as everyone worked in beautiful harmony. **WT**

FROM RECORD, 4

international aid and international cooperation projects must not overlook the standpoint of people's everyday lives.

People who enjoy self-respect and confidence can guarantee peace.

I touched on this in my 1999 peace proposal for this year, but nationalism is stirred when people begin to lose their sense of ethnic identity. In the case of Japan, the country is currently facing a stagnating economy, and its citizens are losing confidence. Coupled with this is a proliferation of nationalistic tendencies.

When people lose faith in their home country, the tendency is to put on a show of bravado and treat others with contempt. The slightest attempt by an "outsider" to bring up the truth regarding the past actions of one's own country may invite irrational denials—indicating a real loss of self-confidence.

Likewise, on an individual

level, when people lose confidence in themselves, they tend to try to maintain their sense of self by taking on an air of superiority and looking down on others. They display a state of anger where they care for no one but themselves.

The mind-set that allows one to resort to violence against another and the jealousy that rages when one cannot stand the thought of another being better than oneself—both are states of mind that lead people to rally behind the banners of nationalism and fascism.

How can such inclinations toward feelings of superiority and anger be overcome?

In analyzing the psychology of fascism and evaluating Gandhi's thought as the only force that can stand up to it, the German author Hermann Broch, himself a victim of fascist oppression, writes, "With its characteristic philosophical consistency, Indian thought has recognized the central position of the presentation of victory in mania-inspired

events in modern times."

Central to fascism is a mad lust for victory. It is driven by a spirit of jealousy that seeks to win over others at all costs and bring about their downfall, and to do away with those more capable than oneself.

Shakyamuni says: "Though one defeats a million men in battle, one who overcomes the self alone is in fact the highest victor. For one who is self-controlled and always disciplined in action, victory over the self is better than victory over others. The victory of someone like this cannot be made into defeat, even by a god [the heavenly musician Gandharva], an angel, or a devil" (*The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, p. 39).

In the final analysis, the heart is most important. The creation of a culture of people who enjoy true self-respect and confidence, who achieve victory over the self, is the greatest guarantee of national security.

This spirit must be fostered. Toward that end, in addition to activities aimed at preserving

peace, we need to develop activities that actually create peace. As I mentioned earlier, rather than assistance coming from above, I believe it is indispensable for people to receive support that respects and preserves the culture of their daily lives.

The SGI was bestowed the title of Peace Messenger from the United Nations in 1987. This honor belongs to all those who have dedicated themselves to promoting activities in support of the United Nations.

In August 1999, World Federation of United Nations Associations President Hashim Abdul Halim, Executive Committee Chairperson Malcolm Harper and Deputy Secretary-General Sitaram Sharma appointed me an WFUNA honorary adviser, in a ceremony that took place in Japan.

The WFUNA is an organization of U.N. associations in countries around the world that seeks to raise public awareness and understanding of the United Nations and its agencies. Founded in August 1946, it is

the only NGO that is authorized to display the United Nations' insignia. It presently has member associations in 86 countries.

The SGI became formally affiliated with WFUNA in 1997—a significant achievement when one considers that the federation is comprised mostly of national U.N. organizations.

In making the presentation, Mr. Halim said that by appointing me an honorary adviser, he hoped that WFUNA might learn from the SGI's multifaceted activities and participate in the movement that we have developed.

I am determined to respond to his expectations by working even harder to support the United Nations.

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SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S POEM

THE ROAD TO WORLD PEACE, A GARDEN FOR ALL HUMANITY

What is the ultimate conclusion reached
By the common wisdom of humanity?

It is
That we must eliminate
Misery
From the world.

We have freedom,
And so we are happy.
We have peace,
And so we are safe.

Peace and freedom are
The blessed
Treasure trove
That humanity has sought
With all its being.

In rich and stately
Cities around the globe,
Untold people are busy
living their lives.
But once war breaks out,
All of those cities
Are transformed into
giant prisons.

O the spirit of sagacity!
The spirit that strives to
create a new age,
A new stage for the
21st century,
As many people unite
together,
Producing the dynamic
sound
Of vibrant life-to-life
interaction.

And a single gunshot
Brings to these people
Trying to live their lives
In peace and happiness
A pain that would stop all
breath,
Plunging them into a hellish
world
Of suffering, darkness and
agonized screams.

Frightening is the human
heart
And so, too, are human
deeds.
Deep inside
Ever lurks
A vicious precipice
Of jealousy,
Of cruelty and arrogance.

Year after year
Has gone by,
With countless predictions
Of humanity's imminent
destruction
Causing a commotion
and stir

And driving fear into
people's hearts.

Longing for a sure and
certain path
They could walk without
error,
The people, the human
race,

Have faithfully watched
The reverberations of those
portends.

Can we not find
A new creative solution,
Broad and profound?

Violence
Is absolutely evil.
War
Is absolutely the vilest
of evils.

In the face of those forces
That would make us lose
faith
In our dreams,
In our wishes for happiness
And for peace,
We must have an
unconquerable spirit,
And summon it to put
a stop
To the scornful and
contemptuous.

"Do what thou dost, be
strong, be brave;
And, like the Star, nor rest
nor haste."

These are the words
Of the great English
explorer
And Orientalist
Sir Richard Burton.

He is renowned
For his English translation
Of The Arabian Nights.
He was a master of many
languages
And an outstanding scholar.

He crisscrossed the globe
On an odyssey of
exploration,
Leaving us many tomes
of his learning
That open the doors to
unknown worlds.

He did not live a
luxurious life
And wished for neither
comfort nor fame.
He was unafraid of jealous
attacks.
Searching always for
the future of humanity,

He raised many a victory
banner aloft.

Once, in Africa,
He risked his life
In search of the source
Of the great River Nile.

Another time
He probed into the deepest
depths
Of South America,
Beholding new and
exciting vistas.
His rigorous questing spirit
Is widely renowned and
truly praiseworthy.

Yet another time
He walked the treacherous
highlands
Of India.
Battling the harshest
conditions,
Surviving the fiercest blows
that Nature would deal,
He shared with us
His countless precious
experiences.

And once
He raised his voice
Against imperialist
domination
And attacked the clergy
Who were a party to the
slave trade.

It is an undeniable fact
Of human history
That those who fight for
what is right
Are frequently treated like
criminals
And imprisoned.

How terrible the
contradiction
Of human affairs!
Right is defeated by wrong,
Injustice triumphs
over justice.
Evil, vicious individuals
Try to bring down those
who are decent and good.
Such phenomena are
evident in every age.

This unchanging principle
Reveals to us the truth
As if reflected in the bright
surface of a mirror.

Today, too, in the darkness,
Unknown parties
Are secretly scheming.
There are harbingers
That tomorrow, too,
In the bushes,

Plotters
Will be at work.

Their secret intrigues
behind closed doors,
Always under cover of
darkness,
No entry permitted,
Are a dreadful,
Bottomless abyss
Of poison.

How deplorable the
violence of words,
The perversion and abuse
Of the noble ideal of
free speech!
How lowly the culture
Of a nation of envy,
Of a pathetic island country
That violates human rights,
Whose people are cleverly
manipulated
By journalistic hacks
Who will write anything
for money,
Caught in the thrall of
profit
And ever greater sales.

An eminent thinker has
argued
Our fundamental barbarity
as a species
Lives on, unchanged, from
primitive times,
In today's world.

The countless attempts to
bring us down,
The concocted accusations
of impropriety
None had a mote of truth.
These devious designs
All failed
To hit their mark.

Only their black-hearted,

fraudulent
Words remain.
The truth of justice
Has triumphed with ease.

This has also been the
common history,
The experience
Of all great people,
Past and present,
East and West,
All around the world.

My mentor said:
"The achievements of the
first three presidents
Will form the eternal
foundation for our
movement."

The first, second and third
presidents
All three
Were imprisoned,
And all three
Endured persecutions
Based on false charges.

We experienced great
persecution
Just like the Daishonin
predicted,
And I firmly believe we
have laid
A solid foundation that will
grow and endure
For all time.

Do not build your own
happiness
On the misfortune
of others!
Build a self
That will not be swayed
By external circumstances!

The criticism,
The jealousy and slander
of the world
Are just volleys launched
Out of envy of the target's
greatness.

Keep your mind to
the high road
As you live your life.
How foolish it is
To pay heed



Sunrise District's Nov. 18 commemorative meeting in Kansas City on Nov. 13.

To the mean and baseless,
The low attacks
Of the narrow-minded.

The legendary athlete
Abebe Bikila,
Who shook the world with
his victory
In the marathon in the 1964
Tokyo Olympics,
Said: "I am not competing
against the other sixty-
seven runners.
I am competing
against myself!"

These words
Truly
Rang out like a wake-up
call,
Showing us the key to a
wonderful life
Of the most profound
triumph.
I was one of many
Who was impressed by
his words.

My friends!
Rouse your righteous anger
To harshly censure those
who spread evil and lies,
And beat the drum of truth
and justice
With all your strength!

Making justice resound
Through your heart-and-
soul efforts,
Beat the drum
Until the drum's skin
breaks!
Beat the drum,
Laughing loudly at
The black-hearted ones!

I cry out these words,
And may you cry them out,
too!
"Do not be deceived by the
corrupt and evil,
The mangy alley cats
and mice,
Whose lies would lead you
to the bitterest regrets!"

You must never fear
Those pitiful skeletons,
Whose lives echo
unceasingly with the
gunfire of demons.
They are always creeping
and crawling
In the darkness,
And can never look up
to see
The breathtaking
constellations high above.

My friends,
Become strong,
Astonishingly so!
My friends,
Live your lives
As people of towering
character!

Refuse to become victims
Of the detestable torment

Our attackers seek to inflict
upon us.
They are destined to walk
A pitiful path,
A miserable road
Of sighs and lamentation.

O humankind!
O humanity!
Do not be taken in
By hypocrites!

Never forget
That the road to
certain peace
Lies in the hearts of
the people.

Tyrants are demonic,
Possessing weapons
With which to strike fear
in people's hearts
And mete out cruel
treatment.
But
No human being is better
than anyone else;
We are all equal.

We mustn't merely sigh
And allow ourselves to be
driven
To exhaustion and despair
By this stifling authority
That is but an illusion.

We must stand up!
Ever courageous,
We must advance!
With righteous anger,
We must begin the battle!

We must be aware
Of the inner reality
Of these dark,
despotic "heroes,"
Recognizing that the
pleasure they derive from
Laughing scornfully at
the people
Is characteristic
Of their fundamental evil.

The crown of happiness
Is not something bestowed
upon us by those above;
We must win it for
ourselves!

O humanity!
Rise up
With joy!

Adorning your lives
With glorious ideals
To which you can dedicate
your whole being,
Resolutely
Speak out and refute
spurious accusations!
Fight back, and triumph!

When confronted with
The tremendous, organized
Power of the people,
The tyrants
Will never again be able
To look down disparagingly
on others.

O humanity!
Live each day
With passion and joy!
For we possess the right
To live true to ourselves!
We are all equal.

My friends!
Charge ahead
Toward lofty aspirations!
Holding high the banners
of righteous anger and
victory,
Charge ahead
With passion and joy!

We must not be defeated
By crazed,
Grandiose power!
We must not be taken in by
That deceptive,
Dazzling illusion of
superficial popularity.

Despots are incapable of
understanding
That people are suffering.
Though you may offer them
The best and truest
Way in life,
They can only sneer
With arrogance and coldness.

We know
That the only thing worse
Than the existence of such
lowly beings
Is allowing ourselves to
be influenced by their
lowly likes.

Though a dark, gusty storm
May blow,
Though a whirlwind of dust
May fill the air,
Nothing can sever the ties
Of our brightly shining
spirits.

Our foes
Are foolishly walking
A road of destruction,
slander and lies.
They have no beliefs;
Their sole creed
Criticism and persecution.
They do not know
That they are destined
to drown
In a life of pitiful folly.

As they obstinately lock
themselves
In their own inner darkness,
Their woefully cold hearts
Will be consumed by fear
and uncertainty.

Advance,
My friends!

Our march to fulfill our
mission
Of unimaginable meaning
In this troubled world
Of constant conflict
Will carry us over savage
mountain peaks;
It will take us to the citadel

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S 70TH ANNIVERSARY POEMS

The Soka Family Celebrates

SGI President Ikeda has written two more poems to all SGI members in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding. Please see the rest of his 70th anniversary poems in the Dec. 1 World Tribune.

Together you and I,
Members of the Soka family,
Celebrate 70 years
Of the Soka Gakkai.

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

We of Soka have won!
We have won absolute victory!
All Buddhas and heavenly deities
Throughout the three existences
Applaud and protect us.

of justice
And of victory,
Enfolded forever in the em-
brace of the bluest skies,
Where we will live and
dance in joy.

The lives of our foes,
And their citadel, too,
Will crumble into oblivion
in the twilight.
The reality of their ruin
And their sad loss
Is that,
In destroying and bringing
an end
To everything by their
own hands,
They have cast
themselves out
Into the wilderness.

Whatever melancholy event
might occur,
We are invincible creators,
pioneers,
And we must never forget,
under any circumstance,
To walk the great path
To perpetual triumph.

Whether the road underfoot
is hard,
Whether it is gentle,
We will advance
With the highest spiritual
belief,
Making our way
Through this ever-changing
world,
Holding fast to the spirit,
To the lofty ideals,
We have cherished through-
out our lives.

We will walk, uncowed by
anything!

We will walk, dismissing
fear!
We will walk, not dwelling
on our life's end!
And we will run!

We possess
Everlasting hope.
Our proud citadel
Knows no fear, regret,
or end.
It is a citadel forged by an
alliance
Of people rejoicing
together
And helping each other
In a spirit of true humanity!

And from that citadel
We must build
A road to world peace!
We must create
A garden for all humanity!

This
Is the kosen-rufu of
Jambudvipa
The widespread
propagation
Of Buddhist ideals
throughout the globe
That the Daishonin foresaw
And predicted.

"The Buddhist Law will
spread for
Ten thousand years and
more, for all eternity"
This profound teaching of
the Daishonin
Is one we must never forget.
For it is our mission.

*Daishaku Ikeda
August 1, 2000*

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

The Biggest Challenge of the 21st Century

‘The establishment of a correct view of life is the biggest challenge facing the 21st century,’ SGI President Ikeda writes. ‘Life is a continuous, unending cycle—in response to various causes and conditions, it alternately manifests states of emergence and latency.’

In the 1990s, I spoke twice at Harvard University. On both occasions, the city of Boston, one of the world’s great intellectual centers, was draped in the beautiful colors of autumn.

My first address was at the invitation of Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government and took place a little after 6:00 p.m. on Sept. 26, 1991, at the school’s Weiner Auditorium. The theme of my address was “The Age of ‘Soft Power’ and Inner-Motivated Philosophy—For Developing a New Japan—U.S. Relationship.”

The second address was two years later on a lovely, sunny autumn day, a little after 4:30 p.m. on Sept. 24, 1993, at the Yenching Lecture Hall on the Harvard campus. On that occasion, I was jointly invited to speak by the Anthropology Department of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, and the Department of Applied Theology of the Divinity School. I spoke on the topic of “Mahayana Buddhism and 21st Century Civilization.”

At the beginning of my sec-

ond address, I argued that the establishment of a correct view of life is the biggest challenge facing the 21st century and outlined the Buddhist view wherein we embrace both life and death with joy. From the Buddhist perspective, I explained, life is a continuous, unending cycle—in response to various causes and conditions, it alternately manifests states of emergence and latency.

Just as we refresh ourselves through sleep to have energy for the coming day, death is a period of recharging ourselves for our next life. It is not something to be regarded with abhorrence but a blessing to be appreciated, just as we appreciate life. Deep faith enables us to experience joy in both life and death.

The response to my point was much greater than I expected. Dr. John Kenneth Galbraith, renowned economist and professor emeritus of Harvard University, one of the most esteemed scholars in Harvard’s long history, focused on this idea in his commentary after the lecture.

Dr. Harvey Cox, chairman of the Department of Applied Theology and currently Professor of Divinity at Harvard’s Divinity School, one of America’s leading scholars of religion, was equally impressed. He said in his commentary that I presented the audience with a unique view of death. Western society, he continued, tended to deny or euphemize death, and much could be learned from the concept of death that I outlined.

Recently, an American scholar who read my Harvard speech in a published volume of my university lectures, *A New Humanism*, wrote me a letter sharing his impressions. He said that he could understand

life being joyful but that the concept of death being joyful was difficult to grasp. He asked me to explain its significance from the Buddhist viewpoint.

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I once strolled around the Loire region of France with several French youth and visited the chateau where Leonardo da Vinci spent his last days. In the bedroom where this giant of the Renaissance died was a bronze plaque inscribed with his words: “A well-filled day brings good sleep. A well-filled life brings peaceful death.” A person who has lived a good life without regrets is not afraid of death.

What summit of joy, then, lies in store for those who dedicate their lives to working for people’s happiness, for justice and truth, in rhythm with the eternal law that governs all life and the universe?

Nichiren Daishonin tells us: “Continue your practice without backsliding until the final moment of your life, and when that time comes, behold! When you climb the mountain of perfect enlightenment and gaze around you in all directions, then to your amazement you will see that the entire realm of phenomena is the Land of Tranquil Light. The ground will be of lapis lazuli, and the eight paths will be set apart by golden ropes. Four kinds of flowers will fall from the heavens, and music will resound in the air. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas will be present in complete joy, caressed by the breezes of eternity, happiness, true self and purity. The time is fast approaching when we too will count ourselves among their number” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 761).

The Daishonin here describes the state of life of supreme joy found in the vibrant worlds of Buddhahood and Bodhisattva.

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The French literary giant Victor Hugo writes, “We are all under sentence of death, but with a sort of indefinite reprieve.” No one can escape death. True philosophical inquiry begins with acknowledging and confronting the issue of death.

The Daishonin offers this encouragement to a man who has deepened his seeking mind toward Buddhism following a se-

rious illness [in a letter to the man’s wife]: “Any minor offenses he [your husband] committed in this lifetime have probably already been eradicated, and the great evil of slander will also be extinguished because he has taken faith in the Lotus Sutra. If he were to go right now to Eagle Peak, he would be as delighted as if the sun had come out and he were able to see in all ten directions. He would rejoice, wondering how an early death could be so happy a thing. No matter what may happen on the road between this life and the next, he should declare himself to be a disciple of Nichiren” (WND, 938).

The true way of philosophy, the true way of mentor and disciple, is the way of eternal joy.

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Death is the final accounting of our lives. In his “Treatise on Preparations for the Moment of Death,” Nichikan, the 26th high priest, writes that those who have slandered others and hurt others’ feelings will, at the moment of death, experience excruciating pain, as if they were being stabbed and slashed all over by sharp swords. The law of cause and effect manifests at the last moment of life in a strict manner.

The Daishonin asserts that no matter how powerful someone may have been while alive, when that person is “tormented by the wardens of hell, he is no different than a monkey on a string” (WND, 1026). In contrast, the noble lives of those who dedicate themselves to serving others will be rewarded and adorned with others’ gratitude, respect and admiration in direct proportion to all that they have done.

Speaking of what will await devoted practitioners of kosen-rufu when their lives come to a close, the Daishonin exclaims: “How can we possibly hold back our tears at the inexpressible joy of knowing that not just one or two, not just one hundred or two hundred, but as many as a thousand Buddhas will come to greet us with open arms!” (WND, 216–17).

What the Daishonin describes here corresponds to a state of life after death in which we are folded in the embrace of the daimoku chanted in our memory by countless comrades in faith, the wonderful sound of daimoku resounding all around us.

Just as a glorious scarlet sun-

set heralds a brilliant new dawn, the majestic closing chapter to a life in which all desires have been fulfilled promises a next lifetime that brims with hope, good fortune and benefit.

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Shichiro Goro, the youngest brother of Nanjo Tokimitsu, whose family made invaluable contributions to the propagation of the Daishonin’s teachings, died at 16. He was a vital young man of fine appearance and friendly demeanor, and the Daishonin had great hopes for his future. He was the beloved child that his mother, the lay nun Ueno, had in her womb when his father died.

The Daishonin deeply lamented and mourned Shichiro Goro’s death, and he assures the bereaved family again and again that the young man attained enlightenment without question. In the postscript of one of his letters, he writes, “Since he had profound faith in Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra, his death was also magnificent” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1568).

Even when it may seem that someone has died before their time or as a result of some unfortunate accident, there will still be clear proof that they have attained enlightenment. For example, their death may be deeply felt and regretted by many people. Or their surviving family members may be protected and flourish. When those family members carry on with strength and fortitude, the deceased person lives on staunchly in their hearts.

The Daishonin encourages Shichiro Goro’s mother: “I hope that, if you, his loving mother, are thinking with longing about your son, you will chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo and pray to be reborn in the same place as the late Shichiro Goro and your husband, the late Nanjo.

“The seeds of one kind of plant are all the same; they are different from the seeds of other plants. If all of you nurture the same seeds of Myoho-enge-kyo in your hearts, then you all will be reborn together in the same land of Myoho-enge-kyo. When the three of you are reunited there face to face, how great your joy will be!” (WND, 1074).

This is one of Buddhism’s

PLEASE SEE ESSAY, 9



SGI President Ikeda speaks at Harvard, Sept. 24, 1993.

Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI

the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

'SECURING THE FOUNDATION'

VOLUME 8, CHAPTER 1, PART 11-12

'Senior leaders who sit back and do nothing while members struggle — commentating on which chapters are strong and which are weak as if watching a baseball game — are no more than cheap critics,' Shin'ichi Yamamoto says. 'Those who make no effort themselves but look down on others from on high while making irresponsible comments have been poisoned by bureaucracy.'

Shin'ichi Yamamoto ended his speech at the May 3 Headquarters General Meeting speaking about human brilliance.

"What makes our lives truly shine?" he asked. "It is not wealth or power. It is when we, as disciples of Nichiren Daishonin, as emissaries of the Buddha, become allies to those who are suffering.

"When we devote ourselves to that mission, we can savor a life of ultimate radiance and joy. It is the internal flame of our passion toward this mission that causes our lives to shine eternally with the unfading light of humanity.

"Let us therefore continue to carry out faith that flows like water and advance together along the great path of mission and honor, striving to grow as individuals and to build happy, harmonious families."

On this, the third anniversary of his inauguration as Soka Gakkai president, Shin'ichi's words signaled a new beginning.

Determined applause echoed through the auditorium.

Next, Vice General Director Takeo Konishi led the members in "Song of the New Century," a Soka Gakkai song.

When it finished, Shin'ichi

removed his jacket, took a folding fan in his hand and stood up. "Now I'll lead a song," he announced. "What shall we sing?"

"Song of Progress," a voice immediately called out.

"That's a good choice," said Shin'ichi, "since the Soka Gakkai is progressive in the truest sense."

The brass band and fife and drum corps played the melody while the members clapped to the music.

Shin'ichi began to move with all the power and dignity of a mighty eagle soaring in the sky. The 20,000 leaders present sang enthusiastically in time with Shin'ichi's lead. Their voices rang with their resolve to advance with renewed spirit toward the seventh memorial (sixth anniversary) of their mentor Josei Toda's death, which would be on April 2 the following year.

Shin'ichi's movements expressed the strong determination he had spoken of that day to take the lead in the next step of the kosen-rufu movement. They signified the rhythm of fresh advancement, an introduction to a new period of development.

With this day as the starting point, Shin'ichi stood in the vanguard of the Soka Gakkai's

activities once again.

The next day, May 4, he visited the head temple, and on May 5 he participated in the completion ceremony for the new Fuji Community Center in Fuji City, Shizuoka Prefecture. On May 6, he attended the May Young Men's Leaders Meeting at the Taito Gymnasium in Tokyo. On May 9, he delivered a lecture on The Threefold Secret Teachings [one of the six treatises that comprise 26th high priest Nichikan's *Six-volume Writings*] to young women's leaders, and the following day he attended another young women's leaders meeting commemorating the division's fresh start with its new leadership, at the Hibiya Civic Hall in Tokyo.

Shin'ichi was determined to set an example through his actions of the true Soka Gakkai spirit and the way leaders should behave.

After the Headquarters General Meeting, Shin'ichi met with some of the Soka Gakkai directors to discuss activities leading up to the seventh memorial service for Josei Toda.

Hiroshi Yamagiwa, head of the organizational statistics department, handed out charts showing the rate of membership growth broken down by chapter and general chapter, giving a clear picture of the real condition of the organization.

Using these charts as reference, the leaders began to discuss the situation of each chapter. One vice general director commented under his breath: "According to this, the gap is widening between the areas experiencing growth and those that are stagnating. Overall, it seems that the urban areas are growing while the outlying areas are lagging behind."



Illustration by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Another vice general director added: "That's partly because old customs have a stronger hold in the countryside, making introducing people to the Daishonin's Buddhism more difficult. But the real problem lies with the chapter leaders. When the chapter leader is slack, the organization simply will not grow."

Hearing this input, Shin'ichi looked at the two vice general directors and asked sharply, "And what have you, in your capacities, done to help those chapters?"

Surprised by his strict tone, they sat in silence, looking embarrassed.

Shin'ichi continued: "Even in his advanced years, Mr. Makiguchi would go anywhere in Japan to visit even one member. And wherever he went, he would introduce people to Buddhism.

"This is the true spirit and behavior of a Soka Gakkai leader. All across Japan, the men's and women's leaders on both the chapter and district levels are doing their very best. They are constantly racking their brains and exerting themselves wholeheartedly in their Soka Gakkai activities.

"Senior leaders who sit back

and do nothing while members struggle — commentating on which chapters are strong and which are weak as if watching a baseball game — are no more than cheap critics. Those who make no effort themselves but look down on others from on high while making irresponsible comments have been poisoned by bureaucracy. They have started toward their own downfall, though they do not realize it.

"I will resolutely challenge any such leader. If I do not, the members will suffer. As we enter the final phase of completing our goals toward the seventh memorial of Mr. Toda's death, we must first revive within each of our hearts the true Soka Gakkai spirit, the spirit of the early days of our organization.

"On Feb. 11 the year he died, Mr. Toda held a banquet to celebrate his recovery from illness, as well as his birthday. Do you remember what he said then?" Shin'ichi's eyes swept the faces of everyone in the room, but no one answered.

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

FROM ESSAY, 8

characteristics: a fabulous, only-dreamed-of realm of happiness unfolds from the deepest philosophical truths.

In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin states: "To regard birth and death with abhorrence and to try to escape them is delusion; it

is the view that enlightenment is acquired. In contrast, to perceive birth and death as eternally inherent is awakening; it is the recognition of inherent enlightenment" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 754).

In "On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings," the Daishonin states that those who devote their lives to fighting against the three powerful enemies will

be supported and safeguarded by countless heavenly deities — the protective forces of the universe — and will eventually reach the Buddha land of Eternally Tranquil Light.

In October 1993, a month after my second Harvard address, the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji was opened — almost 50 autumns

after our first president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, died for his beliefs. It serves as a magnificent memorial to the life and achievements of Mr. Makiguchi, who was forced by Japan's militarist government to spend his last days in a tiny, oppressive prison cell. Day after day, month after month, warriors for kosen-rufu and dis-

tinguished guests from around the world gather at this hall. It is a palace where our founder's life lives on — a symbol of the joy found in both life and death.

This essay was published in the "Thoughts on *The New Human Revolution*" series in the Nov. 3 *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper.

The Best 'Dance Lesson' Ever

PERSPECTIVE

By NANCY BERGER
HOLLYWOOD, CALIF.



heart, coursing through my pores with new life, caressing away the debris of anger and judgment that had comfortably lodged in the buried compartments of my being.

My universe had expanded. It was about four years ago when I was chanting at a meeting in West Hollywood. After an hour and a half of connecting with my Buddhahood and focusing on goals and dreams, my empty stomach along with the aroma of coffee and freshly baked muffins seduced me to the kitchen, devotedly transfixed in front of the mini smorgasbord. In walked Alice. The inner debate between delicious and too much sugar and flour was resolved.

"Just coffee," I told myself. I flashed Alice a weak smile and cordial nod, pretending I had important business elsewhere.

But Alice wouldn't have it.

Alice never allowed herself to be made invisible.

"I'm sorry. Really. For what happened."

The part of her I had always loved confronted me. The past angst and feelings of betrayal melted. I forgave Alice. I was jelly.

Thank you, Alice. She had gotten beyond our rocky-road friendship. Her genuineness at that moment was stronger than my memory of any past conflicts we had experienced.

Each time I gave her a ride to or from a meeting became an opportunity to discuss our thoughts and feelings. One time after a meeting, we went to get groceries. Inside my car in the grocery store's parking lot, I poured out my frustration over some issue I no longer remember. "I really understand. I don't blame you. I'd feel the same way, too," she admitted.

My burden was suddenly lifted. I was full. I was connected. I was happy. I didn't feel so alone any more. She triggered the switch from doubt to self-appreciation. In resolv-

ing our relationship, I felt I was resolving the distant relationship between myself and my mother.

Alice had a gift for helping others feel better about themselves. That's why she was so loved. Hundreds showed up at her memorial service to honor how wonderful she was as a friend and as a human being.

It was Alice who stayed with me the time I had to go to the emergency room, and Alice who stayed overnight at my place and prayed for my recovery after I had been released from the hospital, drugged to unconsciousness.

But Alice was so much more than a devoted friend and warm, encouraging mother. She could be a pouting, irascible child, a spitfire crusader, an angry princess, and most of all, a sexy Latin dancer — because that's when she radiated her utmost passion and joy.

The art of calmly expressing her emotions was one of her biggest challenges, and though she may have severed relationships with her fiery temper, it also was her charm. She was always completely true to how she was feeling.

When Alice was lying on the hospital bed, weak from the ra-

dition the doctor had prescribed for her suddenly found throat cancer, she asked me to bring her Gohonzon to the hospital — confirmation of our deep bond and how the challenge of our relationship had enriched my life.

Thank you, Alice. Dear sweet Alice. "Sexy Salsa Siren."

Whenever I feel that demon of self-doubt, I think of you, Alice, seductively synchronizing your hips and feet to an exhilarating Latin beat, daring the world with your goddess-like bravado. Because now I also want to dare life and bring joy by creating my own brave new inner world.

"Will you shut up and start dancing!"

"Huh, what, oh...yah, Alice. Just make some room for me. I'm coming on stage with you. I don't want to miss all the fun."

Alice's life blatantly taught me that I can forgive and accept myself for all my imperfections. They are the things that make me unique, that makes me human. **WT**

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Homage to the Protective Forces in the Universe

PERSPECTIVE

By M.J. WARRENDER
PASADENA, CALIF.



trayed a doctor rescuing a construction worker who was buried from an explosion. The sensation developed to the point of my being fearful to simply lay back for a moment of rest.

I tried settling myself, looking inward for some sort of cause: Was I taking on too much, causing myself to feel smothered somehow? Was I ignoring some sort of message? I've heard how disease and other symptomatic phenomena are related to emotion, to lessons needing to be learned or to some kind of imbalance in one's life. Over and over I searched for some kind of connection. But my life was generally well balanced. I wasn't taking on too much. I love my work, my home and my family. My relations on and off the job are joyful and sincere. I get sufficient rest and exercise, and I eat a well-balanced, healthy diet.

So what was going on? I decided to then remove myself a bit and omit any notion of some

possible negative cause I was making or had made. For I tend to see anything in seemingly negative terms, in reference to something bad I may or may not have done. The moment I stopped thinking that way, the moment I cleared my inner vision of self-scrutiny, something strange happened: I had a strong sensation that I needed to get my car checked. I called my sister and asked her to schedule an appointment with my mechanic for the following Saturday I would be in Los Angeles to visit her; I had just moved to Los Angeles and didn't know of anyone reputable.

"The tires needed to be checked," I said, and it just felt like they needed to be inspected. My sister willingly obliged, although later she admitted that she thought I was being extravagant; I had taken my car in for its regular maintenance just a few months ago. She thought my car care was obsessive. I put in high performance oil and gas, take it in for its regularly scheduled maintenance, have it washed and waxed regularly, and have it detailed now and then.

That Saturday, my mechanic

was booked solid and couldn't fit me in, so at the last minute I decided to make the trip down the following Saturday instead, when he could. That week, I drove back and forth from work as usual, living up in the mountains and working down in the city. The longer into the week, the stronger the sensation of fear I had.

The workweek ended, and at last I packed my car to make the trip south. Breezing down the highway with my dog Greta's ears flapping in the wind out the window, I normally feel so carefree and happy while heading out of town for the weekend. But this evening I was fearful and overly cautious of other drivers on the road.

The following morning, I brought my car in to my mechanic. After the inspection, he showed me what was wrong. The tread on the front tires was completely worn on the inside of the wheels; metal was showing. The hose supplying the engine with coolant was ready to burst, and the mechanisms that support and monitor the timing belt were completely worn and in disrepair.

"You are one lucky lady," he

said. "I don't know how these parts didn't rupture. You could've been in a fatal accident, maybe even been crushed."

I just stared at him, thinking of the last few SGI activities I did and the last few colleagues I had introduced to this Buddhism. I thought how strangely wonderful it was just to be alive, to look up at the sky and feel the sun beaming down. Everything appeared crystallized, sharper and brighter somehow. The fear of being closed in vanished, and from that evening on I slept fine.

After the weekend, I picked up my car and headed north for the workweek once again. I thought of the students I take care of in my position as a college counselor, most of them undecided, anxious or fearful. I thought of my doctoral studies in depth psychology, of my travels, projects and friends. Breezing down the highway, carefree in my sports car, with Greta's

PLEASE SEE PERSPECTIVE, 11

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Kansas City Project Promotes Cultural Exchange

By CAROL THRASHER
LAWRENCE, KAN., CORRESPONDENT

On Oct. 26, SGI-USA members from Sunflower District in Lawrence, Kan., dedicated themselves to the care and maintenance of the city's Japanese Friendship Garden. The members have volunteered to be responsible for the weekend maintenance of the new Friendship Garden located in downtown Lawrence.

The Japanese garden was conceived, constructed and

completed early this fall from the idea of nonviolent cultural and educational exchange between sister cities Lawrence, Kan., and Hiratsuka, Japan, for the enjoyment of future generations.

At the official dedication and tea ceremony, Faye Watson, chairwoman of the garden project, expressed appreciation on behalf of the donors and to SGI-USA members for their participation in maintaining the beauty of the garden. Also, in attendance were Kansas State Representative



Photo by MICHAEL LIEBERMAN

A tea ceremony officially dedicates the Japanese Friendship Garden in Lawrence, Kan., which local SGI-USA members have volunteered to maintain.

Barbara Ballard and sister city mayors Jim Henry of Lawrence and Itsuo Yoshino of Hiratsuka. Both mayors

acknowledged their appreciation to local SGI-USA members for their service to the community. **WT**

New England Youth Emphasize Nonviolence

By FLETCHER DALTON
BOSTON BUREAU CHIEF

Just before the youth of New England Region began their Victory Over Violence dramatic and musical performance at the New England Culture Center in Waltham, Mass., the Honorable David Gately, mayor of Waltham, came on stage. To

the surprise and delight of the capacity audience, Mayor Gately read a proclamation on behalf of the City Council naming the day, Nov. 4, "Victory Over Violence Day."

The stage of the culture center has an illustrious history. Professional players have presented many outstanding dramas and comedies there. It is unlikely, how-

ever, that any previous performance has so touched an audience and received such a tumultuous reception.

The settings included a classroom, a street scene, a diner and a battlefield. The youth took an unflinching look at the violence spawned in the 20th century. In graphic skits they pointed out the demeaning of humankind when war, gang violence and racial discrimination run rampant.

Through three months of chanting sessions and rehearsals, the players came to "own" their roles and played them superbly. The audience was able to identify with a soldier's initial desire to fight and subdue communists and how what he saw and endured on the battlefield sickened him. Later, the audience saw how veterans returned to Vietnam and Cambodia to build respectful relationships.

In a neighborhood terrified by gang violence, a small group of women initiated a dialogue with gang members



Photos by SANTOSH CHACKO

David Gately, mayor of Waltham, Mass., proclaims Nov. 4 to be 'Victory Over Violence Day.'

and eventually worked together with them to build up the neighborhood.

In a diner, the oppressive atmosphere of racial discrimination gave way eventually to harmony, although it was clear that a lot of work remained before attitudes could turn around completely.

The dramatic presentation was followed by a musical presentation, not any less intense, and just as optimistic and hopeful. The day's performances were also in celebration of the 40th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's first trip to the United States. **WT**



New England youth lead the audience in singing their Victory Over Violence theme song.

FROM PERSPECTIVE, 10

ears flapping in the wind, I wondered about the protective forces in the universe and in my life and how we become aware of their workings. And I wondered at how often I've been protected unwittingly from

danger, through my intuition, a sensation or environmental circumstance thereof.

As I live my life day to day as a member of the SGI-USA, I see more and more how through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that I am continually connecting myself with the uni-

verse and connecting my life with all the other bodhisattvas throughout time through the lifeblood of faith. Perhaps protective forces function as a response to my own growing wisdom, however minute, or in response to my own exertion in helping others understand their

own seed of happiness and potential within. One thing that seems certain, however, is that the protective forces in the universe exist most definitely for whoever will listen and watch for their meanings, however strange or uncomfortable their mediums may be. **WT**

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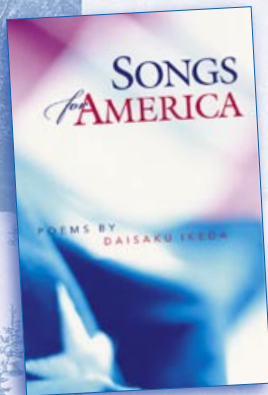
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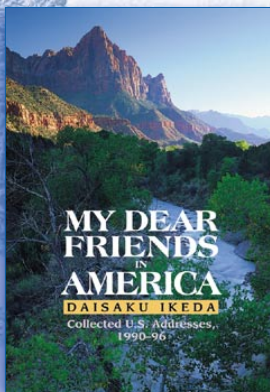
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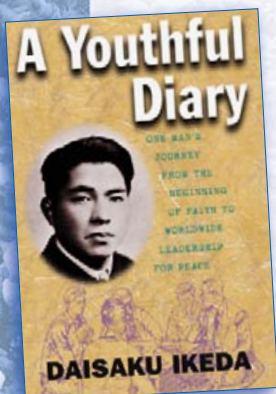
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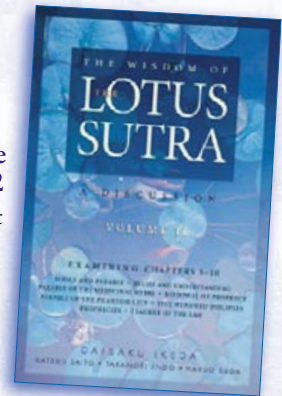
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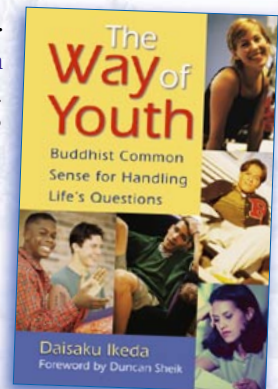
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