

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR PROVIDING THE SPIRITUAL BASE FOR PEOPLE OF CHARACTER

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*. I hope you are taking care of yourselves during the hot summer months. Summer is a wonderful time for students taking a break from school and for families spending time together. This summer is also the summer when, throughout the SGI-USA, we are hosting our Family Youth Culture Festivals, with the theme of Victory Over Violence. I have visited many of these festivals or have seen firsthand the joyful preparations taking place.

I want to express my great delight that our youth are striving so actively for the success of these events. But at the same time, I want to express my humble appreciation to those men and women who are providing support to help them create this historical series of events. Truly, these festivals are an expression of the wonderful family we have in the SGI, and they are only successful when all of us, regardless of age or gender, collaborate together as a family.

There are many reasons why we are preparing and hosting these festivals during the summer. Not only is summer when many young people have the time to participate in this event but it's also when violent crime increases. It is most meaningful for the youth of the SGI-USA to offer an example of how to channel the energy of youth into creating something positive for our communities. All of us, as a family, are taking a stand to declare our conviction in the SGI's message of peace and humanism.

In *For the Sake of Peace*, SGI President Ikeda states: "What can nurture truthful, nonviolent and pure-hearted people? The building of lasting peace depends on how many people capable of self-restraint can be fostered through religious practice. If a religion is worthy of the name, and if it can respond to the needs of contemporary times, it should nurture in its followers the spiritual base for becoming good citizens of the world" (p. 23).

As I look over the news headlines, I am saddened that now, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we still live in a world beset by violence. In the United States, though violent crime fell in the year 2000 according to Attorney General John Ashcroft, more than 25 million people in this country were victims of violence. Internationally, peace talks between Israel and Palestine continue to face difficulties, and protests at the G8 summit have turned violent, resulting in death. But instead of being discouraged, perhaps I should say that I am even more convinced that now is the time to take a stand to change society. I am filled with a sense of mission and deep conviction that all of us need to take responsibility to create a peaceful world.

In a poem commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Youth Division, President Ikeda wrote:

*Climbing the towering peak
Of Mount Everest
Is an act of courage.
Crossing the Pacific
In a yacht
Is an act of courage.
Traveling around the globe
Is an act of courage.*

*But
The journey within our own lives*

*Is far more courageous
And profound.
How are we to explore, discover,
And understand the inner depths
Of our own precious life,
Our most priceless possession?
This spiritual quest
Is far more important...*

*This is truly
Important;
It leads to genuine
Human security and peace.
Otherwise,
I fear
That a reversal—
Back to the war and strife
That have plagued our past—
Will begin to occur
In people's hearts.
(World Tribune, July 20, 2001, p. 8)*

In this heartfelt and powerful poem, President Ikeda urges youth not to lead lives pursuing superficial value, but instead to strive to create the highest value. This, he says, is possible through a way of life dedicated to a noble purpose, dedicated to the strict path of self-reformation taught in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. In these stanzas, when President Ikeda is talking about the courageous path of self-exploration, he is talking about the quest to "explore, discover, and understand the inner depths of our own precious life." This means to place the supreme value of our life, and respect for the dignity of others, at the center of how we live.

The UNESCO Charter reads that "since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." This phrase aptly summarizes the core belief of our movement of nonviolence. The essence of our peace movement is "self-reformation" or "self-mastery"; it is nothing other than human revolution. This is the heart of the SGI peace movement.

In *For the Sake of Peace*, President Ikeda also says: "Peace cannot be a mere stillness, a quiet interlude between wars. It must be a vital and energetic arena of life-activity, won through volitional, proactive efforts. Peace must be a living drama — in Spinoza's words, 'a virtue that springs from force of character.'¹ Eternal peace is a continuum consciously maintained through the interaction of self-restraining individuals within a self-restraining society" (p. 17).

Victory Over Violence summarizes the commitment of the SGI-USA youth to end violence in our society. But it is more than a slogan. It is the spirit of the youth of America to respond to their mentor. It offers the spiritual solutions to violence that lie within Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism; it is a courageous journey to explore our own lives, and overcome the violence within.

Daniel K. Nagashima, SGI-USA General Director

1. Benedict de Spinoza, "Of the Best State of a Dominion," *Political Treatise*, ed. R.H.M. Elwes, trans. A.H. Gosset (London: G. Bell & Son, 1883).