

**LIVING THE TEACHINGS (7)  
MAKING THE REVOLUTION PERSONAL  
BY FRED ZAITSU, PUBLISHER**

**When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality.**

**("On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4)**

Endless deserts, endless green fields and endless mountains — it was overwhelming as I flew across America for the first time in 1971. What a huge country! I had been sent by the *Seikyo Shimbun* to cover the Seattle Convention of the SGI-USA (NSA). After the event, I flew across the country: Las Vegas, Denver, St. Louis, Chicago, Boston, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles and Honolulu. For a month and a half, I went to discussion meetings, talked with fellow Buddhists, and witnessed what was happening in American society.

The upheaval of the '60s was still very apparent in 1971 — the anti-war movement, the civil rights movement, marches, demonstrations and street violence. The air itself seemed charged. TV carried outrageous images of the war in Vietnam and warlike images of outrage on the streets and college campuses of America. Everything was being propelled by youth — especially the hippies and radicals who came out of the '60s.

That generation's fight against injustice shook the country and the world. Young people were seeking answers and not finding them in the social establishment, government or religion. In each city I visited, I talked with young people who had found Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Most considered themselves part of the revolution taking place in society before they began practicing Buddhism. But as they polished the mirror of their lives, they went from complaining about society to taking responsibility for it.

In Denver, I talked to a group of eight or nine young people who had dropped out of society and were living in the mountains. Typical of the times, drugs had been part of their experience of dropping out and turning on. But what appealed to both activist and drop-out alike was the concept of bringing about social change through the inner transformation called human revolution. There was political and social revolution all around them, but Buddhism taught that true and lasting change could only be accomplished by changing the lives of the people. Thus these youth realized the importance of spreading Buddhism.

The idea of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo for world peace was exciting to them, and they channeled their revolutionary zeal into activities for kosen-rufu. Because they felt the world was in such bad shape, there was a real sense of urgency that kosen-rufu had to be accomplished soon. Meetings, parades and conventions were full of the amazing energy of youth. Almost all leadership positions were held by youth with the support of the Japanese pioneers. It was a time of practically running through the streets declaring the greatness of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to everyone.

A young woman from Denver said that her mother had begun practicing first. Just prior to beginning her own practice, she had responded to a questionnaire at her school. One of the questions was "What would you do if you were president of the United States?" She had

answered that she would abolish war and create a peaceful society. When she related this to her mother, her mother said, “That’s exactly what SGI President Ikeda is doing!” This led her to begin practicing herself.

Leaders that young people looked up to — for example, John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. — had been assassinated. Other leaders were seen as corrupt or hypocritical. In Daisaku Ikeda, they found someone they could trust.

President Ikeda has great expectations for America. In his poem “The Sun of ‘Jiyu’ Over a New Land” he wrote:

*My treasured friends,  
there is no question that  
your multiracial nation, America,  
represents humanity’s future.  
Your land holds secret stores  
of unbounded possibility, transforming  
the energy of different cultures  
into the unity of construction,  
the flames of conflict  
into the light of solidarity,  
the eroding rivulets of mistrust  
into a great broad flow of confidence.  
On what can we ground  
our efforts to open  
the horizons of such a renaissance?  
It is for just this reason,  
my precious, treasured friends,  
that you must develop within yourselves  
the life-condition of Jiyu —  
Bodhisattva of the Earth.  
(Songs for America, pp. 37–38)*

Thirty years have passed. I sometimes run across some of these same people with whom I spoke in 1971. Many are now leaders in society and the SGI-USA. They have changed and so has our organization. Today, our youth talk with pride of their involvement in their communities through programs such as Victory Over Violence, the “Treasuring the Future: Children’s Rights and Realities” exhibition, or the opening of Soka University’s new campus in Aliso Viejo, California.

No matter the age, President Ikeda’s message remains the same. Writing to our current SGI-USA Family Youth Festivals, he asks: “What will end people’s suffering? The fundamental solution lies not in politics, economics, government, the media or in the law alone. Only through seeking an inner transformation for each person, based on the ideal of respect for individual life, can we achieve a fundamental transformation of our society” (*World Tribune*, July 20, 2001, p. 1).

Our mission today to propagate the Law remains unchanged, but we are reaching out through a variety of avenues to touch as many lives as possible for the sake of peace. The SGI-USA youth of today are the revolutionaries of today, and they are making it personal, which will lead our society and world through a remarkable change.