

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR THE SGI IS A GREAT LIGHT OF HOPE FOR THE WORLD

In his message commemorating May 3, Soka Gakkai Day, SGI President Ikeda said: “We now embark on a new phase in our journey toward the eternal spread of Buddhism and the realization of a world where humanism and peace prevail” (*World Tribune*, May 11, p. 11). In the aftermath of September 11 and the uncharted waters we are now navigating, these words resonate with even deeper significance. For all of us, for all people seriously dedicated to creating a world of peace and humanism, we truly have embarked on a new, more serious phase.

I have been talking with members around the country about how we can conclude this significant year. We all have challenged ourselves this year. I hope that we can reflect on our goals and efforts this past year and make this — the first year of the new century — historic and victorious.

Think about the determinations you made at the beginning of the year. What progress have you made? I strongly believe that SGI-USA’s victory in this coming era hinges on the personal victory of each of us. I repeatedly emphasized this point when I first became general director. And that means our victory as individuals right now.

Every day, we hear news about threats of terrorism, biological and otherwise, and the reality of the United States’ military engagement in Afghanistan. In such a time, it is difficult to maintain a sense of hope or optimism about the future. It seems natural to question the meaning of our individual efforts or of pursuing our dreams. As we look around, it seems that anxiety or despair is indeed the climate of our society.

But I would like to remind everyone of the basic principles of our faith: each life is precious and irreplaceable; each of us possesses the ability to transform our lives and the lives of others; and through transforming our lives, we can create the world that we want.

In President Ikeda’s May 3 message, he said: “The great lesson of the 20th century, therefore, has been that global change and even our very survival hinge on our own inner transformation. When human beings change, all else will follow. The humanism of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, which sheds new light on the human being and enables people to draw forth their infinite potential, is the sun of hope for humankind in the 21st century” (*World Tribune*, May 11, p. 11).

The pursuit of our dreams fuels the transformation of our lives and reveals our deepest potential. Faith, conviction in our mission and confidence in the value of our own lives — these are our tools to eradicate fear, anxiety and feelings of powerlessness. These also ignite hope in the hearts of our friends and loved ones in this time of uncertainty. Each of you is a precious beacon of hope.

This summer and fall, we worked in beautiful unity toward the success of the Victory Over Violence Family Youth Festivals. Our movement for victory over violence has created bridges of friendship and understanding with people from many different sectors of society. These fifty-plus events gathered more than 100,000 people across our nation and showed people what we in the SGI believe in and stand for.

On October 7, the day that the United States began bombing Afghanistan, I was in Los Angeles attending the VOV festival there. Though news of the attack came as a shock, the dominant mood was one of determination. As I spoke to many participants, the prevailing feeling was that “now, more than ever, we must work to establish victory over violence.”

Bernard Parks, the chief of the Los Angeles Police Department, changed his schedule and made an unexpected visit to the event. Chief Parks shared with me later that he came because he was so inspired to see such a diverse array of youth taking a stand to eradicate violence, starting with their own lives.

I believe that all of our festivals were timely and significant. This is a message of hope that we offer, not only for ourselves, but for the world. We should not underestimate the significance of our role at this crucial time in history. In truth, it is up to us — individually and collectively — to determine whether we become an organization that merely reflects the trends of the time or one that creates the positive direction in which our society will move.

In this regard, President Ikeda's May 3 message points us clearly toward the future: "The world is becoming increasingly borderless and interconnected. It is time for humankind to turn away from narrow, individual self-interest and toward the welfare of the planet as a whole. It is time for humankind to develop a common identity as global citizens. In this respect, the harmonious solidarity of the SGI is a great light of hope for the world. . . . Dialogue and exchange are the most effective means to achieving [the creation of a global human community]. I will therefore energetically continue to conduct sincere, ongoing dialogue. Always holding fast to hope, I will continue, today and tomorrow, engaging in exchange for the sake of peace. For I believe that bridging the differences between cultures and civilizations will be one of the biggest challenges of this century" (*World Tribune*, May 11, p. 11).

During this holiday season, I sincerely pray that all of us will cherish those people we love and express appreciation for all the beauty within our lives. As we approach the end of this historic and momentous year, let us pause to reflect on our goals, hopes, efforts and struggles. Let us determine to exert ourselves at this crucial juncture, to accomplish what we set out to accomplish — in our personal lives, in our professional lives and in our organizational responsibilities. Whether we do this or not is entirely up to us. If we don't, it is possible that nobody but us will even notice. But we should understand that the effort to accomplish our goals, the effort to realize our inner transformation, and the effort to expand our movement are the efforts that can transform our world. Perhaps nobody will notice if we don't. But the world will change if we do.

Once again, from the bottom of my heart, thank you all for your dedicated and sincere effort this year. Please take the very best care of yourselves and your loved ones.

Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director