

MESSAGE FROM SGI-USA MEN'S LEADER TARIQ HASAN OUR MISSION OF HOPE AND COURAGE

‘This is the time for us to discard our transient identities as merely common mortals,’ says SGI-USA Men’s Leader Tariq Hasan, ‘and reveal our true identities as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.’

On behalf of all New York members, I convey my heartfelt appreciation to all the SGI-USA members and SGI members around the world who sent condolences, prayers and words of encouragement during the last few weeks. I cannot overstate how much this constant outpouring of concern has meant to us as we cope with this tragedy. Once again, I feel so proud to be a member of the Soka Family.

I also want to say how proud I am to be living in this city. The people of New York have a tremendous resiliency and ability to move forward in spite of horrendous circumstances. There has been an incredibly positive change in the midst of this most difficult time—the bonding among people in the city. I am especially proud of our SGI-USA youth, who sprang into action within hours and volunteered to help their community.

Of course, many of us are still recovering from feelings of horror, fear and anger as we try to understand these events from a Buddhist perspective. None of us will ever forget the disaster we witnessed—it was too horrible to ever forget. One cannot help but be profoundly affected by the enormous number of hopes, dreams and families that have been devastated.

Because of this, some members are in a quandary, stuck between feelings of anger and the need to respond to the attack, and realizing that as Buddhists we advocate peace. This is a great challenge. I believe in the long run it is essential for our own development as disciples of Nichiren Daishonin that we chant, think and study about the Buddhist concept of peace when we are faced with the reality of terror or war.

During a recent meeting in Japan, President Ikeda mentioned once again that the mission of Soka University of America was to raise global citizens. He also said very clearly that without global citizens, we cannot achieve peace. Now, in the context of current events, it is becoming so clear what he meant. Of course, being a global citizen does not preclude us from having pride in our own country. But at the same time, we should learn about the cultures of other countries so that we can understand the hearts of people everywhere.

I was also deeply touched by the profundity of President Ikeda’s words in the Sept. 28 *World Tribune*: “Ignorance is a dangerous thing. Without factual knowledge, stereotypes and the imagery they spawn invariably assume a momentum of their own, proliferating out of control” (p. 1). It is easy to see everyone in a far-away culture as a group of people rather than as individuals and, therefore, assume everyone holds the same views as some extremist faction.

As many of you know, I was born into the Muslim faith in Pakistan. I am also proud to be an American who immigrated here 33 years ago. Because I have this bicultural background, it is natural that when I think about the people in South Asia and their culture, I hear music, I hear a language filled with humor, I recall their hospitality toward strangers. If I had not lived there as a teenager, I would never have been able to understand

this based merely on what is reported in the media.

On the other hand, I can also see how some people in other parts of the world may be unaware of the beautiful human traits that have made the United States, by far, the greatest country of tolerance and diversity in the world. As President Ikeda has been pointing out for so many years, without dialogue between countries and cultures, there can be no lasting peace. I can now clearly see the importance of the mission of SUA in raising global citizens and the need for all SGI-USA members to take on the challenge of becoming global citizens for the sake of peace.

It was perhaps a strange coincidence that this event took place right around the time of 730th anniversary of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, which took place on Sept. 12, 1271. Recently, while in Japan, I visited some of the sites associated with this incident in Kamakura. During this persecution, the Daishonin showed us that courage was key to practicing Buddhism. He demonstrated how one individual can stand up to injustice and pave the way for humanity to fight against all forms of evil.

In his recent essay on the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, President Ikeda wrote: "This was the moment in which the Buddhism of the sun broke through the fundamental darkness of fundamental delusion to illuminate the earth with its brilliance" (Aug. 3 *World Tribune*, p. 10). This is the time for us, as well, to discard our transient identities as merely common mortals and reveal our true identities as Bodhisattvas of the Earth who practice Buddhism at this time to give hope and courage to people beset with fear. The conditions for discussing the Daishonin's Buddhism are wide open at this time because people are desperately looking for a way to create a peaceful and harmonious world.

I believe here, in New York, is where the movement for kosen-rufu must be strong enough to protect the entire nation. I am both optimistic and determined that we will rise from the ashes of this catastrophe and, together with our fellow members from around this nation, start a fresh wave of propagation to help create a great, peaceful and joyful America.