

**EDITORIAL**  
**TALKING WITH OLD FRIENDS**  
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**‘It will be exciting to make many new friends next year, but dialogue with our old friends is also of great value.’**

One important part of the Year of Expanding Dialogue, the SGI’s theme for 2002, will be talking with our old friends. Of course, it will be exciting to make many new friends next year, but dialogue with our old friends is also of great value.

For most of us, these old friends include those who have, for one reason or another, left our Buddhist community. Some are now trying other religions. Some say that they have given up on religion altogether. Some have joined Nichiren Shoshu.

But they are still our friends. Especially at a time like this — with all that has happened since Sept. 11 — hearing from us again can be very encouraging for them. It can even become the first step toward them practicing in one of our districts again.

The most important thing is the act of extending ourselves to these friends — this will surely expand understanding between us. Dialogue is not just talking; it includes the simple effort, though sometimes challenging, to send that letter, make that call or pay that visit. Our old friends see that effort, which speaks volumes.

The 1999 movie *The Straight Story* makes this point. A 73-year-old man, Alvin Straight, journeys on a lawnmower from Laurens, Iowa, to Mount Zion, Wis., to make peace with his ailing brother. The brothers’ relationship is so damaged that they have not spoken in 10 years. In a sense, Alvin’s undertaking, despite his emphysema and bad hip, is the crucial part of his dialogue with his brother. His herculean effort is what communicates his love and reopens his brother’s heart.

Perhaps we can think of our old friends in faith who are currently away from the SGI-USA as family members away from their family. Deep in their hearts, they must miss us a lot — and we miss them. They must have many things they want to share with us, and vice versa. We have a profound connection, after all. As the Daishonin reminds us: “In the past, all men have been your father at one time or another, and all women have been your mother. In lifetime after lifetime, you have been indebted to all of these living beings, which is why you should wish that all will attain Buddhahood” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1527).

With this wish and with this prayer for them, let us talk again with all our old friends in the Year of Expanding Dialogue.