

Living BUDDHISM

March • 2001

Vol. 5 • No. 3

4 General Director's Message

The Future is Created by Youth

6 Buddhist Concept for Today's Living (23)

Cherry, Plum, Peach and Damson: We Are All Unique!

8 Passages to Victory (4)

Victory Through Constant Practice

10 The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

"Letter to Niike"—Study Material for April

17 What's the Secret of Living?

An Introduction to the Practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

21 March 16

A meaningful date

23 Victory Over Violence At a Glance

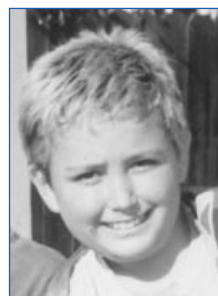
A Look at How VOV Has Progressed

25 Boys & Girls Group

SGI-USA Activities for Children

27 Soka Spirit Q & A

Protecting the Purity of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism



25



46

23

31 Achieving Success On the Stage of Life

Opera Singer Natalie Levin's Victory Over Inner Turmoil Leads to Happiness

35 The Path of My Human Revolution

Yoshi Ieda — On the Road to Accomplishing His Dream

40 Essays From SGI-USA Youth

"One-to-One Dialogue" by James Herrmann.

"Renewing My Faith in the Twenty-first Century" by Melanie R. Trass. "Joyfully Creating History Through Not Begrudging One's Life" by Jason Berg.

"Young Women Dedicated to Peace" by Kelly Dunlap.

"Growing Up Buddhist" by Jason Henninger

46 Unforgettable Friends From Around the World

Roberto Baggio — Italian Soccer Superstar

COVER: Southern California youth in front of a mosaic at SGI-USA's Los Angeles Friendship Center (see inside front cover). Photo by Jean Pritchard.

LIVING BUDDHISM (USPS 385-750) (ISSN: 1093-5169)

Published monthly by SGI-USA Publications, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401. Periodicals postage paid at Santa Monica, CA 90401, and additional mailing offices. Postmaster — send address changes and returns to *Living Buddhism*, SGI-USA Subscriptions, P.O. Box 1427, Santa Monica, CA 90406-9907. Copyright© 2001 SGI-USA. All rights reserved. Printed in U.S.A. Subscription rate: \$50.00 per year, \$90.00 for two years. RETURN POSTAGE GUARANTEED.

To Our Readers

I am very glad to announce the appointment of Dave Baldschun as managing editor of *Living Buddhism*. Dave, who was previously the assistant managing editor, brings a high level of dedication and concern for the quality of SGI-USA's study journal. Also, Stephanie Celano returns to the magazine after two years with the *World Tribune*.

As editor in chief, I will continue to contribute to the magazine's mission to correctly present Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Sincerely, Ted Morino, Editor in Chief

GLOSSARY

Buddha

"Enlightened One." One who perceives the true nature of all life and leads others to attain the same enlightenment. The Buddha nature exists in all beings and is characterized by the qualities of wisdom, courage, compassion and life force.

Gohonzon

The fundamental object of devotion in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It is the embodiment of the Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, expressing in graphic form the life-state of Buddhahood, which all people inherently possess. Go means worthy of honor and honzon means object of fundamental respect.

Kosen-rufu

Literally, it means to widely declare and spread (Buddhism); to secure lasting peace and happiness for all humankind through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Lotus Sutra

The highest teaching of Shakyamuni Buddha, it reveals that all people can attain enlightenment and declares that his former teachings should be regarded as preparatory. Reciting excerpts from the Lotus Sutra is part of SGI members' daily Buddhist practice.

Nam-myoho-enge-kyo

The fundamental law expounded in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, it expresses the true aspect of life. Chanting it

allows people to directly tap their enlightened nature. Although the deepest meaning of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is revealed only through its practice, the literal meaning is: *Nam* (devotion), the action of practicing Buddhism; *myoho* (Mystic Law), the essential law of the universe and its phenomenal manifestations; *renge* (lotus), the simultaneity of cause and effect; *kyo* (Buddha's teaching), all phenomena.

Nichiren Daishonin (1222–82)

The founder of the Buddhism upon which the SGI bases its activities. He inscribed the true object of devotion, the Gohonzon, for the observation of one's mind and established the invocation of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo as the universal practice for attaining enlightenment. Daishonin is an honorific title that means great sage.

Shakyamuni

Also known as Siddhartha Gautama. Born in India (present day southern Nepal) about twenty-five hundred years ago, he is the first recorded Buddha and founder of Buddhism. For fifty years, he expounded various sutras (teachings) culminating in the Lotus Sutra, which he declared his ultimate teaching.

Ten Worlds

Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Heaven (or Rapture), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. The Ten Worlds are also interpreted as states of life.

living
BUDDHISM

EDITORIAL STAFF:

Publisher: Fred M. Zaitse

Assistant Publisher:

Greg Martin

Editor in Chief: Ted Morino

Managing Editor:

Dave Baldschun

Staff Writers: Alexis Trass,

Stephanie Celano

Publications Translation

Department: Jeff Kriger,

Shin Yatomi

Art Director/Designer:

Stephanie Sydney

Research: Erica Ogihara

Volunteer: Mark Koral

WRITTEN/ARTISTIC

CONTRIBUTIONS:

Send all written, photographic or fine art submissions to Living Buddhism, 606 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401 or e-mail: LivingB1@aol.com

Contributors assume liability for all copyrighted material. All written submissions become property of SGI-USA.

Frequently Cited Sources

For convenience, all citations from the following works will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows after the first listing:

— *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin:* **WND**, followed by the page number.

— *Gosho Zenshu:* (The Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin in Japanese) **GZ**, followed by the page number.

— *The Lotus Sutra,* Translated by Burton Watson: **LS**, followed by the chapter and page number.

From Our Readers

Due to the volume of letters we receive, not all can be printed, and all are subject to condensation. Letters printed here do not necessarily reflect the views of SGI-USA or 'Living Buddhism.' Please include signature, mailing address and telephone number with all correspondence. Mail to: Letters, Living Buddhism, 606 Wilshire Boulevard, Santa Monica, CA 90401 or e-mail: livingb1@aol.com

NEWS JUNKIE

I hope that in "Seeing the World Through the Eyes of the Buddha" (February), Geoff Rohde is not encouraging Buddhists to stick their heads in the sand when he says: "If being a news junkie makes us and our cheerful practice of Buddhism ill, why continue to watch, read or listen to so much news? ... The news — the immense misery afflicting the human race — can also obstruct our happiness."

Geoff's point, it seems to me, is that we should not allow ourselves to despair at bad news. I do not disagree. At the same time, shutting our eyes and ears to misery is hardly a Buddhist approach.

When Shakyamuni Buddha was a young prince, his parents did everything they could to shield their son from misery. Despite this artificial "information bubble," the prince eventually encountered people who were suffering. These encounters inspired him to leave princely life and discover a way to relieve all human misery. Thus, the path of Buddhism began.

Thanks to the ubiquity of news and information, we can't (and don't) live in a cheery bubble, insulated from human misery. While it may seem that we can do nothing for those who are suffering on the other side of the planet, we can listen and care — and that's doing a lot.

The Lotus Sutra describes The Universal Gateway of the Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds. This bodhisattva hears the pleas and cries of immeasurable millions of beings undergoing various trials and suffering. When they cry out, this bodhisattva immediately renders aid.

Lisa Jones, West Hollywood, California

GOOD FRIENDS

I thoroughly enjoyed the January issue article, "Good Friends and Bad Friends." However, there are a couple of things I thought were left out or not emphasized enough.

First, I think it should have been made clear explicitly that the difference between a good and bad friend lies within us. A person isn't a good or bad friend based on his or her actions, but on our response. If Devadatta had managed to silence the Buddha, or Hei-no Saemon had actually discouraged the Daishonin, they would have been bad friends. However, they became good friends due to the effect they had on the Shakyamuni and the Daishonin.

Second, I think it should have been noted that, the temple issue has functioned as a "good friend" for us. Think about it: High Priest Nikken Abe severed the ties between the SGI and a shallow, self-serving priesthood that was holding us back from accomplishing kosen-rufu. This was something *we* couldn't do, because we had committed ourselves to support the priesthood, no matter what. Also, he has shown us proof of the validity of our movement, in the form of the most powerful of the three powerful enemies. Lastly, he's challenged us to develop our practice and show actual proof. After all, as we are taught, only by defeating a powerful enemy can one show his or her true potential. Therefore, even as I oppose High Priest Nikken and his destructive and divisive actions with my life, I'm also aware of the meaning of the Daishonin's statement, "I am grateful when I think that without [him] I could not have proved myself to be the votary of the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 770).

Robert Webster, Auburn, Washington

Correction

In "Summary of the Lotus Sutra" in the November issue on page 26, first paragraph, the Buddha referred to as Victorious Through Great Penetrating Wisdom should be named Great Universal Wisdom Excellence Buddha. In the third paragraph, the sentence that begins, "He establishes the connection of these interdependent living beings..." "he" refers to Shakyamuni. We apologize for any confusion.

Thanks to Leietta Wacker, Wilderville, Oregon

THE **FUTURE** IS *Created By Youth*

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*! In your hands, you have a very special issue of *Living Buddhism*. It is an issue for the youth, written entirely by young people. I would like to thank the editorial staff and the volunteer writers who worked so hard to see this to fruition.

As you know, March holds a special significance for us. We commemorate March 16, 1958, as the date second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, charged his young disciples with the responsibility of inheriting his vision for the future. Less than one month later, he died, and this date has become symbolic of the passing of the torch from one generation to another; of youth awakening to their responsibility to accomplish and finish what their mentor started.

“A new era will be created by the passion and energy of the youth.”

This is the opening line from Mr. Toda’s famous declaration, “Precepts for Youth.” His successor, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, included this quote in his New Year’s address for this year. This statement is an expression of the confidence he has in the dynamism and creativity of youth, and his conviction that the world of tomorrow will be made by the young people of today.

In one sense, the world of tomorrow will happen on its own; even if all of us do nothing, history will progress and society will continue to move. But if we want to see a more hopeful future, then we must take action to create the world we wish to see.

What is youth? What does President Toda mean when he talks about the “passion and energy of youth?” On one hand, this refers to chronological age.

But more than that, youth, as described in Mr. Toda’s statement, refers to an outlook, a spirit and a passion.

In the final installment of the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” President Ikeda says: “To the end of his days, President Makiguchi would say: ‘We are all youth! Youth is not a matter of years according to the calendar. It’s about constant growth and advancement.’ There is no such thing as age in Buddhism. The beneficial power of the Lotus Sutra is ageless and undying.

“It is my hope that the youth who will shoulder the twenty-first century will engrave these words in their hearts. Idleness is the cause of decline. Construction takes tenacious and painstaking effort. Destruction takes but an instant” (*Living Buddhism*, October 2000, pp. 42–43). In other words, youth means to possess a spirit of advancement, a spirit of constant self-development and a spirit to create a new world.

How would you characterize youth today? Most of us know excellent young people who are talented and passionate about living meaningful lives. Yet, when I ask this question, the answer I hear is that young people today lack purpose. Of course, since many people of my generation were young college students during the sixties and early seventies — a time of great idealism among young people — perhaps this opinion is not an objective one. Nevertheless, many people do seem to share this concern.

Last year, President Ikeda held a dialogue with youth representatives from the SGI-USA, and in this discussion, he said: “When I met with Dr. Allen Sessoms, president of Queens College, University of the City of New York, on January 18, he commented that American youth used to have

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. They are the only thing which ever has.”

—Margaret Mead



clear causes to fight for, ‘enemies’ to fight against. They had targets to focus on, such as the Vietnam War or bad government or racial discrimination. But today, he noted, the causes which youth should direct their energies toward are getting harder to identify. As a result, the youth lack positive outlets for expressing their passion. In reality, there are many causes — quite large ones in fact — that they should take up, such as environmental degradation, overpopulation and poverty. But it is not easy for youth to recognize them as causes without good knowledge of them, Dr. Sessoms said” (*World Tribune*, February 25, 2000, p. 7).

Buddhism inspires hope. It inspires us to reform and improve ourselves and to contribute to the happiness of others. Inspiring youth to have great dreams, reminding them that they have the capacity to create any world they choose — this is the spirit of Buddhism.

The Mahayana Buddhism we practice is an engaged philosophy. Though some in American society may see a Buddhist way of life as emphasizing monastic discipline or as demanding separation from the mundane world, we recognize that Buddhist practice lies within struggling amidst the realities of life. We know that in the real world, overcoming problems is the arena where we attain enlightenment.

In his “Precepts for Youth,” Mr. Toda refers to the young students of the past who were revolutionary leaders of society. Indeed, when we examine history — the American revolution in the United States, the Meiji restoration in Japan, or the revolutions in

Africa, Latin America and throughout the developing world, which ended European domination — many of these movements were spearheaded by idealistic young students. This is in contradiction to apathy and feeling powerless.

The famous American anthropologist Margaret Mead once said: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. They are the only thing which ever has.”

This is the conviction of youth. It is the conviction that we are not spectators of world history, but the actors and authors of our own futures.

“All sorts of injustice and evil still exist in the world. It is the mission of youth to fight against them. Strong are those who have resolved to create a better world than the one in which they now live. Such a sense of mission elevates your life” (*World Tribune*, February 25, 2000, p. 7).

During this month in which we celebrate the passion and energy of youth, let’s all refresh our spirit to live youthful lives dedicated to creating a better world. At the same time, let’s cherish and nurture all the young people in our lives because they will be living in and creating the twenty-first century.

Thank you very much!

Daniel K. Nagashima

SGI-USA General Director

Cherry, Plum, Peach and Damson

WE ARE ALL UNIQUE!

BY WILLIE MACK, LOS ANGELES



How often do you feel that you aren't good enough? How many times have you felt that because of who you are, you won't be able to succeed or because of your background or lifestyle you won't be accepted? Most people feel this way at one time or another. When we are faced with an obstacle or challenge, our insecurities rise up within us. Some of this fear is of being different, but what is important is how we express our differences and how we accept others' differences.

Diversity is one of the greatest gifts the world has to offer. What kind of world would this be if we were all the same — if we all thought the same, dressed the same, acted the same? There would be little or no growth in society because no fresh ideas would be expressed. How would we learn and develop? SGI President Daisaku Ikeda says, "Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism deeply respects each person's individuality, situation and character and shows the way to display one's particular abilities to the fullest" (*Selected Lectures on the Goshō*, vol.1, p. 154).

The Daishonin states, "Cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms all have their own qualities, and they manifest the three properties of the life of the Buddha without changing their character" (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 784). Simply put, each one of us contributes our own unique qualities through the role we play in society. The Daishonin uses the example

of the cherry, plum, peach and damson flowers to make his point. The cherry flower is renowned for its beauty; many people enjoy seeing the cherry blossoms in the spring. The plum blooms in late winter — while other flowers usually bloom in the spring — and it, too, is known for its beauty. According to an old

Chinese tradition, peaches are said to bring longevity and ward off evil. The damson flower's appearance is different from the others, but it is associated with assiduousness and perseverance.

Each of these flowers is unique, that is why the Daishonin uses them as an example of how each human being is unique. As hard as it might try, a cherry can never become a plum and a plum can never become a cherry. Although each is different, they all embody the three properties of the Buddha. The same goes for ordinary people; each of us embodies the three properties of the Buddha.

The three properties of the Buddha are: the Dharma body, which indicates the fundamental truth of life, or the Mystic Law; the reward body, which indicates the wisdom of the Buddha that we develop by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; and the manifest body, which represents the bodhisattva actions to save all people from suffering. Each of these three properties is embodied in each one of us, and through our actions, as practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we can manifest them each day and live happy lives without ever hav-

“Total revolution will be achieved only when people with all sorts of characters and talents fully live up to their abilities as they scale the peak of kosen-rufu on into the coming century”

ing to change who we are.

Our lives are originally endowed with the three properties of the Buddha. In other sutras, these bodies are thought to be three separate Buddhas, but it is in the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni reveals that all phenomena possess each of the three properties at the same time. Since we are all endowed with the three properties of the Buddha, then each one of us is a Buddha. It doesn't matter where we came from, what our situation might be, or how much money we make. All that matters are our efforts to reveal our Buddha nature.

Now you might be thinking, “I know I am a Buddha, but I still feel like I'm not like others. I always compare other people's actions with what I'm doing and it just doesn't feel like it's good enough.” Developing our character and sense of personal worth is important. President Ikeda says: “Do not allow yourself to compare yourself to others! Rather than comparing your every joy and sorrow to that of others, aim to surpass your limits in your current situation. Those who can accomplish this throughout their lives are true victors, the true geniuses” (*The Way of Youth*, p. 121).

Attaining enlightenment does not require us to become anything other than a human being; it is recognizing our own true value and worth exactly as we are. By being true to ourselves, we can become happy. Only we know what it is that makes us happy and only we know when we are making efforts to make ourselves happy. Comparing ourselves with others only leads to a sense of inferiority or superiority. By focusing on surpassing our own limitations — without focusing on what others are doing — we will find it much easier to grow. No matter how much we try to become like someone else, we can only be ourselves.

Each one of us plays a valuable role in society and in the movement toward world peace.

“Buddhism teaches that all things have a unique beauty and mission. Every person has a singular mission, his or her individuality and way of life. That is the natural order of things” (*Faith into Action*, p. 140). The SGI is an organization where each of us is free to express ourselves in our own unique way, while striving to accomplish world peace. For the SGI to work as an organization for the people, it has to be made up of many different types of people. “Total revolution will be achieved only when people with all sorts of characters and talents fully live up to their abilities as they scale the peak of kosen-rufu on into the coming century” (*Selected Lectures on the Goshō*, vol. 1, p. 155).

The SGI is based on the concept of “many in body, one in mind.” This represents the many different individuals that make up the SGI and our combined efforts or determination to accomplish world peace. Our mission is to learn to appreciate the differences in each individual, while striving to achieve the common goal of kosen-rufu. Nichiren Daishonin uses the analogy of fish in water to explain the unity of “many in body, one in mind.” President Ikeda explains further, “‘To become inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim’ is to realize that our existence flourishes within, and even depends on, the beautiful tapestry of human relationships woven together with the people around us” (*Selected Lectures on the Goshō*, vol. 1, p. 155).

Everyone has a specific role to play in society. Our mission as Buddhists is discovering what that role is and challenging ourselves to go beyond our limitations. When we make these daily efforts, we will be contributing to kosen-rufu as individuals and as Buddhas. ☸

Based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study) published by the *Seikyo Press* in 1994.

Passages to Victory (4)

VICTORY Through Constant Practice

Over years of practice, particular passages from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have become favorites of those who practice his Buddhism. This series introduces some of those passages and the people whose lives they have impacted, proving that it is, indeed, a living Buddhism.

“None of you who declare yourselves to be my disciples should ever give way to cowardice. Neither should you allow concern for your parents, wife or children to hold you back, or be worried about your property. Since countless kalpas in the past you have thrown away your life more times than the number of dust particles of the land for the sake of your parents, your children, or your lands. But not once have you given up your life for the Lotus Sutra. Each and every one of you should be certain deep in your heart that sacrificing your life for the Lotus Sutra is like exchanging rocks for gold or dung for rice” (“The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 764)

BY SUNGCHUN LEE, LOS ANGELES

I was born into a family that practices Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in Korea. Even though I knew this Buddhism was wonderful through attending meetings and listening to other members’ experiences, I was not sure it would work for me. I never tested it because I was fortunate enough — due to my parents’ practice — to have few difficulties in my family, school or elsewhere.

When I joined the young men’s group and went to a university in 1990, I seriously wanted to know if my Buddhist prayers would be answered. I set a goal to study abroad and become the best computer scientist for kosen-rufu. This seemed impossible at the time, but I was determined to challenge it. No one in my family had ever studied in a foreign country. Even though it was hard and required unbelievable efforts in terms of study, Buddhist practice and financial savings, my dream came true eight years

later. I was accepted to a master’s program in computer science at the University of Southern California.

When I came to the United States in 1998, the economic situation in Korea was bad.

Due to the surprising increase of the currency exchange rate between American and Korean currencies, the amount of money that I saved for one year’s tuition and living expenses would only last six months. I was planning to find a research assistantship after one year, which is hard for international students to obtain due to a lack of English proficiency, but I had to get one within one semester or go back to Korea. Since going back to my country without a graduate degree would have been a defeat, I was desperate to continue my studies in the United States. It was another impossible goal, but I tried my



best to show my capabilities to my professors.

The difficulty during this time was balancing my studies and involvement in SGI-USA activities. When I came to Los Angeles, I joined a district comprised mostly of Koreans and some Americans. Because of communication problems, few Korean members were attending district meetings. Even though my English was not great, I was determined to help them communicate by interpreting. I went to the district more than twice a week to support the members.

At that time, many Korean youth who were born in the United States or came here at an early age, did not attend meetings because they did not have an interest in Buddhism. One reason was the language barrier with their Korean parents. Their parents could not explain Buddhism well in English. Some other youth and I started a weekly meeting with these youth and invited leaders to the meetings to connect with them. At the same time, we began visiting each one at their homes. I ended up going to SGI-USA activities several times a week. As a graduate student majoring in computer science, it was not easy.

I worried about homework assignments, keeping up in class and exams, but I did not want to stop attending activities. Every day, I had to balance my studies and SGI activities. I always fought against my inclination to take the easy way. At each crucial moment, I kept the passage of Nichiren Daishonin's writing quoted above in mind. I thought of the selfless, dedicated behavior of the first two Soka Gakkai presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, and how President Ikeda is realizing his mentor's dream. I could not rest or live like other graduate students. I determined to sacrifice my life for the Lotus Sutra and kosen-rufu. I slept less so I could study and still attend activities.

In the beginning, only six or seven members were attending the district meetings. At our district general meeting in 1999, we had 106 members and guests attend. It was because of the beautiful harmony between the Korean and American members that we could accomplish this. We received an award for being the number one district in the United States for new members in June 2000. The Korean youth have grown quickly, too.

Last year we held the "SGI Movements: Peace, Culture and Education" exhibition during the Korean festival in Los Angeles to introduce the SGI to the Korean community. During the four-day exhibition, approximately 700 people visited our booth and 160 guests signed our interest list. Twenty of those people are currently attending our meetings. We also broadcast the Korean version of "Up Close: Daisaku Ikeda" through a local TV channel and more than 150,000 households watched the program.

In the meantime, I found an advisor who offered me a research assistantship, which pays all of my tuition and provides a monthly salary. To be honest, I was not the best student in his class; I did poorly on a mid-term exam and made lots of mistakes. Despite this, the professor said to me: "I am not satisfied with your grade. But I want to work with you because your interaction during class is impressive." Typically, a professor wants to work with qualified Ph.D. students. It is rare for a master's degree student to be an RA, especially after just one semester. As I was chanting to the Gohonzon with appreciation, the passage "like trading rocks for gold or dung for rice" stood out in my mind. I realized that I accomplished my goal because I dedicated myself to kosen-rufu. I looked for more opportunities.

During the spring of 1999, some student division members and I formed an official student club at USC called the Value Creation Society. We started with weekly chanting sessions held in classrooms, dormitory libraries or members' apartments. We chanted to succeed in our exams, attain happiness and overcome our problems. Whenever we met, we invited leaders to help us refresh our determination and to help other students connect to the organization. We held monthly introductory meetings and had a Victory Over Violence workshop to create awareness among students on how to make a difference in diminishing violence in society. Currently, we even have our own Web site! (<http://www-scf.usc.edu/~vcs>)

Now I am working toward a Ph.D. in computer science. The more I devote myself to kosen-rufu, the more capable I become, and that is reflected in my daily life. I want to continually expand my capacity and see how far I can go! 🌀

The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin

“Letter to Niike”

(*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1027; *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1440)

The following is an excerpt from “Letter to Niike.” This is the study material for April study meetings in the SGI-USA.

How swiftly the days pass! It makes us realize how few are the years we have left. Friends enjoy the cherry blossoms together on spring mornings, and then they are gone, carried away like the blossoms by the winds of impermanence, leaving nothing but their names. Although the blossoms have scattered, the cherry trees will bloom again with the coming of spring, but when will those people be reborn? The companions with whom we enjoyed composing poems praising the moon on autumn evenings have vanished with the moon behind the shifting clouds. Only their mute images remain in our hearts. Though the moon has set behind the western mountains, we will compose poetry under it again next autumn. But where are our companions who have passed away? Even when the approaching tiger of death¹ roars, we do not hear and are not startled. How many more days are left to the sheep bound for slaughter?

Deep in the Snow Mountains lives a bird called the cold-suffering bird that, tortured

by the numbing cold, cries that it will build a nest in the morning. Yet when day breaks, it sleeps away the hours in the warm light of the morning sun without building its nest. So it continues to cry vainly throughout its life. The same is true of human beings. When they fall into hell and gasp in its flames, they long to be reborn as humans and vow to put everything else aside and serve the three treasures in order to gain enlightenment in their next life. But even on the rare occasions when they happen to be reborn in human form, the winds of fame and profit blow violently, and the lamp of Buddhist practice is easily extinguished. Without a qualm they squander their wealth on meaningless trifles, but begrudge even the smallest contribution to the Buddha, the Law and the Buddhist Order. This is very serious, for then they are being hindered by messengers from hell. This is the meaning of “good by the inch and evil by the foot.”²

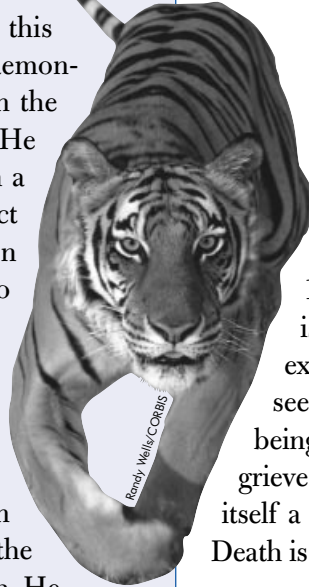
1. The “tiger of death” image is derived from a passage in The Treatise on the Great Perfection of Wisdom that states that, no matter how sweet the water or lush the grass, sheep will go hungry for fear of the ferocious tiger.
2. Here the Japanese word *ma*, or “devil” is being translated as “evil” for clarity of expression. In this case, it means what obstructs a greater good.

Background

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1280 to Niike Saemon-no-jo, a samurai official in the Kamakura government of Japan. He was so named because he lived in a place called Niike in Iwata District of Totomi Province. Nikko Shonin had converted him and his wife to the Daishonin's teachings. Not much is known about Niike, but he was a dedicated believer who supported the Daishonin despite government opposition.

In this letter, the Daishonin explains from several perspectives the correct attitude and benefits of faith. He tells Niike of one's great fortune to have been born in the Latter Day of the Law with the mission to spread Buddhism. He also warns that it would be foolish to take faith in the Lotus Sutra and then commit slander.

The Daishonin laments for those who—although born at the time of the Mystic Law's propagation—refuse to take faith in it. Because human life is ephemeral, he stresses the importance of not wasting time on immediate pleasures. He uses the example of the cold-suffering bird to encourage his followers not to neglect their Buddhist practice.



Commentary

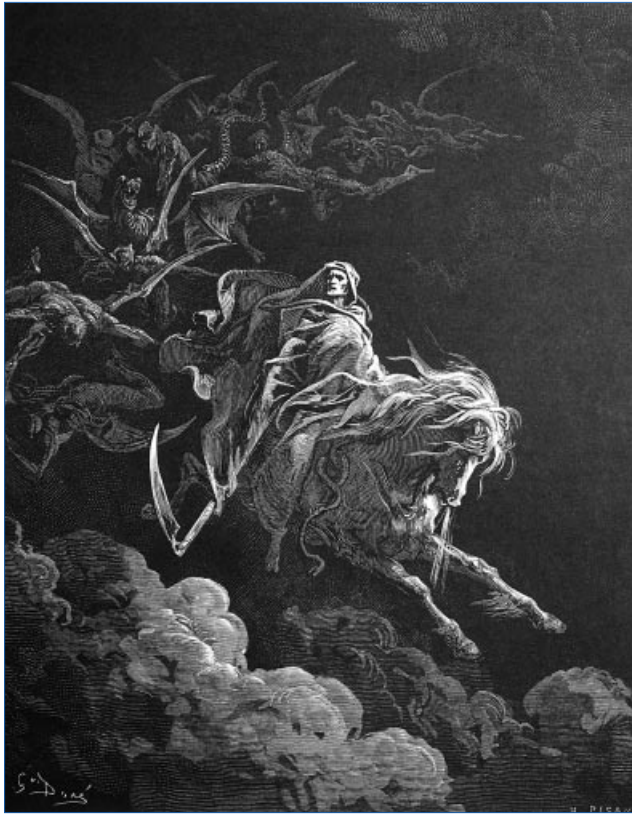
This is arguably one of the most beautiful and poetic passages that Nichiren Daishonin has written. He uses rich imagery and symbolism to discuss death and underscore the fact that we should “learn first about death and then about other things” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1404). Understanding death and its role in life is the key to leading a truly happy and fulfilled existence. When we are able to do this, we can see the value in a loved one's passing without being hindered by fear or despair. Naturally, we grieve over our loss, but we understand that death is itself a function of life and not an end unto itself. Death is a means to renew a continuing, eternal life.

“Even when the approaching tiger of death roars, we do not hear and are not startled.”

Each day we live brings us one day closer to our deaths. Even though we know this intellectually, many of us do not recognize this reality and spend much of our time and energy chasing trivialities. We don't want to think of death because of our fear of the unknown. This fear causes some people to go to outrageous lengths to avoid death. We have heard stories of people who freeze their bodies with the hope that medical science can someday bring them back to life, or people who take pills or herbs that are “guaranteed

Papilio/CORBIS





Buddhism teaches that an understanding of death will enrich one's life. Above, "Death Riding a Pale Horse," by Gustave Doré.

to extend life.” Further, we can become preoccupied with questions about where we go when we die or if our lives continue eternally. While these concerns are natural, they can impede us from addressing practical matters associated with death.

Even outside the spiritual realm, we don't like to deal with matters that surround our demise. Many people die without life insurance, a will or directions to surviving family members about how their affairs should be handled after their death. It is so much easier — not to mention more pleasant — to concentrate on the joys of living. The Daishonin says in “Letter to Niike,” “Even when the approaching tiger of death roars, we do not hear and are not startled” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1027).

In “Conversation between a Sage and an Unenlightened Man,” the Daishonin also says, “Though everyone recognizes this [death] as a fact, not even one person in a thousand or ten thousand

truly takes the matter seriously or grieves over it” (WND, 99). But he never advises us to think only of our deaths. Being preoccupied with death would make it difficult to be fully engaged in living. Rather, he encourages us to create maximum value in our lives now with an awareness of the reality of life and death. Since this existence does not continue infinitely, we must live in a way that expands our potential and leaves no room for regret at the moment of death. He urges us to “Be resolved to summon forth the great power of faith, and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with the prayer that your faith will be steadfast and correct at the moment of your death” (“The Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life,” WND, 218).

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda suggests that we ponder this important subject. “What is death? What becomes of us after we die? Failing to pursue these questions is like spending our student years without considering what to do after graduating. Without coming to terms with death, we cannot establish a strong direction in life. Pursuing this issue brings real stability and depth to our lives” (*Faith into Action*, p. 22).

It is how we live that shapes how we experience the continuity of birth and death. When we are aware of the limit to our present life span, we will become more conscious of creating value. We will take decisive action to become happy and help others do the same. We will even look at our problems from a new perspective. When we understand that the state of life we develop, not fame or material wealth, determines what happens to us after death, we will see life on a grander scale. Life comes into a new focus, and we can redefine our priorities. With our Buddhist practice, we can discover a joy that transcends death. The Daishonin even says, “No one can escape death once born as a human being, so why do you not practice in preparation for the next life?” (WND, 1026).

In the same vein, President Ikeda says in the “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra” series: “Having an awareness and understanding of death actually raises our life condition. For it is when we are cognizant of the reality and inevitability of death that we begin to earnestly seek ‘something eternal,’ and determine to make the most valuable use of each moment of life” (*Living Buddhism*, March 1999, p. 35).

THE THREE TREASURES:

The Translation of Sangha, Buddhist Order, Into Chinese and Japanese

BY SHIN YATOMI, SGI-USA VICE STUDY DEPARTMENT LEADER

On the morning of October 6, 1536, an Englishman was strangled and burned at the stake in Belgium after sixteen months of imprisonment. William Tyndale was charged with translating the Bible from the original Hebrew and Greek texts into English — against the will of the Roman Catholic authorities. After his death, his name was largely forgotten, but his translation survived the relentless book burnings instigated by the bishop of London and eventually became the basis of the King James version to reach millions of English-speaking readers until today. Tyndale's enemies, including Sir Thomas More, vehemently attacked his new and daring translations of some key biblical terms. Tyndale translated, for example, the Greek words *ekklesia* as “congregation” instead of “church” and *presbyter* as “elder” instead of “priest,” and he was correct.¹ Scrolls and dictionaries — these were not the only things the translators of sacred texts had to deal with in the past; they also had to listen to (or choose to ignore) the voices of those dressed in holy robes. As we see in Tyndale's tragic death, the translation of sacred texts has been often a source of controversy involving religious authority, and Buddhism is no exception in this regard.

As many Buddhist texts in Pali and Sanskrit were translated into Chinese in the early centuries of the Common Era, the original meanings of some words were obscured in the process — sometimes deliberately to suit the translating monks' or their superiors' personal motives and circumstances. One such mistranslated word is *sangha* (also spelled *samgha*), which meant the Buddhist Order in the context of Buddhist scriptures. During Shakyamuni's time, the same term described a number of political groups and trade guilds; it was also applied to religious groups.² The general notion of the *sangha* included the four groups of Buddhists: monks



“Seng” (Chin.) or “So” (Jpn.): The Chinese character adopted for the Sanskrit *sangha* or “Buddhist Order” eventually came to denote an individual “priest.”

(*bhiksu*), nuns (*bhiksuni*), laymen (*upasaka*) and laywomen (*upasika*).³ When it is used in early Buddhist texts, however, the term usually refers to the two types of religious orders: the order of monks (*bhiksu-sangha*) and the order of nuns (*bhiksuni-sangha*). The Buddhist Order was often called *samagra-sangha* or “harmonious order.” It was thought that members of the *sangha* should practice in harmony since they share the same goal of attaining enlightenment.⁴

Sangha was translated into Chinese as *seng-chia*. (To be precise, this was a transliteration of the word *sangha*.) *Seng*, the Chinese abbreviation of *seng-chia*, eventually came to mean an individual monk instead of the community of the Buddha's disciples. In India, an individual monk was referred to as *bhikkhu* or *bhiksu*. In Buddhist texts, the usage of the term *sangha* was strictly distinguished from that of *bhikkhu* or *bhiksu*. The *sangha* was considered one of the three treasures of Buddhism along with the Buddha and the Dharma (i.e., the Buddhist Law or teaching), but an individual monk was never considered an object of veneration as an element of the three treasures.

I-Ching (635–713), a Chinese Buddhist scholar, after visiting many Buddhist sites in India, pointed out to Chinese Buddhists this misapplication of the term *sangha* to individuals.⁵ Many scholars acknowledged the error, but they insisted on continuing to use the term to refer to an individual priest or monk. This misuse of the term was accepted by the Japanese when Buddhism took root in Japan, as well. The Japanese term *so*, the Japanese pronunciation of the Chinese *seng* of *seng-chia*, came to signify an individual priest. As a result, this mistranslation significantly altered the concept of the three treasures in China and Japan. Particularly in Japan, the term was misused to promote reverence toward an indi-

“Deep in the Snow Mountains lives a bird called the cold-suffering bird that, tortured by the numbing cold, cries that it will build a nest in the morning. Yet when day breaks, it sleeps away the hours in the warm light of the morning sun without building its nest. So it continues to cry vainly throughout its life. The same is true of human beings.”

The Daishonin uses the example of an imaginary animal—the cold-suffering bird—to illustrate how foolish people can be when it comes to facing the impermanence of life. The cold-suffering bird lives in the Himalayas, and once the temperature goes down at night, it is tormented by the cold. It promises to build a nest when the morning comes, but forgets the pledge when it gets a chance to rest in the sun.

It is easy to see the foolishness of the cold-suffering bird, whose life is based on the immediate reality of pain or pleasure. Actually, birds are not so foolish and instinctively build nests. It is human beings who behave like the imaginary cold-suffering bird. It is our own shallow wisdom that limits our sense of reality to only what we perceive in the here and now.

In the allegory of the cold-suffering bird cited by Nichiren Daishonin, a “day” represents life and “night” represents death (dormant life). The main point is, what does it mean to build a nest? For us, it means to expand our life-condition, to strengthen our Buddha nature. This is our “nest.” It is all that we will take with us—it is our peaceful and secure place in the universe after we die. That is why it is crucial to attain genuine happiness in this life and not be swayed by the transitory “warm light of the morning sun”—the “winds of fame and profit.”

The “winds of fame and profit” are the shallow or false values we are confronted with in today’s society. Society is based on a view that our happiness lies almost everywhere except in our Buddhist practice—in our looks, our prestige or fame, our material possessions and so on. These things have their place as long as we understand that true happiness is built from within through undergoing a human revolution through our Buddhist practice. It is the process of



It is easy to see the foolishness of the cold-suffering bird, whose life is based on the immediate reality of pain or pleasure. Actually, birds are not so foolish and instinctively build nests. It is human beings who behave like the imaginary cold-suffering bird.

overcoming the barriers to happiness existing within us—changing the karma that is unique to each of us.

Like the cold-suffering bird, we bask in the sun of temporary security until the next crisis. We are swayed by the misperception that immediate pleasures equal happiness. Pursuit of these things can make us neglect our Buddhist practice and render us unaware of our approaching deaths. While caught up with life’s gains and losses, we live in the moment with little thought to the continuing cycle of birth and death.

“When they fall into hell and gasp in its flames, they long to be reborn as humans and vow to put everything else aside and serve the three treasures in order to gain enlightenment in their next life. But even on the rare occasions when they happen to be

vidual priest. It is this misinterpretation that Nichiren Shoshu has been leaning on to dogmatically define its high priest as being part of the three treasures.⁶ As discussed earlier, the treasure of the *sangha* originally referred to the Buddhist Order, which, in the broadest sense, included all Buddhists, both monks and lay believers. The *sangha* was revered especially after Shakyamuni's death precisely because the Buddhist community as a whole fulfilled the important role of preserving and spreading the Buddha's teaching.

In light of those historical facts, I feel the components of the three treasures would best be expressed as the Buddha, the Dharma and the *sangha* in order to emphasize the original meaning and intent of the concept. The "Law" or the "Teaching" for the Dharma, and the "Order" or "Community" for the *sangha* may be used if English terms are preferred. In terms of etymology and common usage, the word "order" is more associated with ecclesiastical or monastic hierarchy; the word "organization," which we often use to describe the SGI, was originally related to the vital functions of a living body but now sounds bit inorganic and cold; the word community, however, still retains a sense of the Latin word *communitas* or fellowship, which is akin to the spirit of *samagra-sangha* or "harmonious order." But translating the treasure of the *sangha* as "the treasure of the priesthood" would be, I feel, a diminution of the original term, and "the Treasure of the Priest"⁷ an outright distortion. I am pleased that in the recently published *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, the treasure of *sangha* is translated as the treasure of the "Buddhist Order," not "Priest" as in the previous editions of *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*.

I welcome this translation of *sangha*. There is no doubt that the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood's excommunication of the SGI in 1991 ultimately afforded such freedom for the translators and editors to make such improvements. The priesthood probably meant the excommunication to "exclude" the SGI from "communion" with the high priest, but it ironically put the SGI closer to the true teaching of Buddhism. The SGI is certainly not the first to adopt "the Buddhist Order" as an English translation of *sangha*; in one sense, however, it took us thirteen centuries to correct the mistranslation of *sangha* noticed by I-Ching. Some may feel reluctant to change the accustomed usage of



William Tyndale, translator of the Bible into English.

the word even if it is wrong, but it is never too late to correct a past mistake. The effort is worthwhile especially when we think of the nameless, faithful translators who long ago risked their lives to spread Buddhism, as Tyndale did for Christianity.

(This essay is partly based on the author's previous essay "Do We Need Priests?: A Historical Perspective on the Early Buddhist Order" published in *Living Buddhism*, October 1999, pp. 5–15.)

1. David Daniell. "Introduction." *Tyndale's New Testament*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989. p. xxix.
2. Akira Hirakawa. *A History of Indian Buddhism: From Sakyamuni to Early Mahayana*. Translated and edited by Paul Groner. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1998. p. 62.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
5. Hajime Nakamura. *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India, China, Tibet and Japan*. Edited by Philip P. Wiener. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964. p. 259.
6. Nichiren Shoshu promotes the absolute obedience to the high priest, using the concept of the three treasures. For example, "The Treasure of the Priest (s) was first received by Nikko Shonin through the Bestowal of the Living Essence of the Law by the Daishonin, and after that, the Pure Law was passed down to each successive High Priest in the lineage of the Heritage, spanning the generations up until the present day. . . . In short, with perfectly sincere faith and self-imposed, strict obedience, we should hold the High Priest's instruction in deepest reverence. . ." Quoted from *Dai-Nichiren (Special Edition): On the Soka Gakkai Problem—The Correct Way of Faith in Nichiren Shoshu*, published by the Nichiren Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs, pp. 13–14.
7. In Nichiren Shoshu, the treasure of the *sangha* is translated as "the Treasure of the Priest." See, for example, *Dai-Nichiren (Special Edition): On the Soka Gakkai Problem—The Correct Way of Faith in Nichiren Shoshu*, published by the Nichiren Shoshu Bureau of Religious Affairs, pp. 10–16.



Catherine Kernen/CORBIS

We live in a society that stresses accumulating material possessions. These things have their place as long as we understand that true happiness is built from within.

reborn in human form, the winds of fame and profit blow violently, and the lamp of Buddhist practice is easily extinguished. Without a qualm they squander their wealth on meaningless trifles, but begrudge even the smallest contribution to the Buddha, the Law and the Buddhist Order.”

The three treasures are what we revere as Buddhists and what all people should revere. They are the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that enables us to attain enlightenment; the Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, whose teachings reveal the Law to us; and the Buddhist Order or community, the SGI, that protects and propagates the Law. By revering the three treasures in our practice of Buddhism, we create good fortune in this lifetime and the next.

We make offerings to the Buddha by offering our prayers to the Gohonzon and respecting and developing our Buddha nature and encouraging others to do the same. We support the Law by spreading the teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. And we can support the Buddhist Order through our network of human relationships and by supporting those practicing Buddhism. We are fortunate to be members of the SGI. Without the community of believers, the Law revealed by the Buddha would be lost.

Through the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we can strengthen the core of our lives—the life-condition of Buddhahood. When we live with our mission to fulfill kosen-rufu firmly rooted in our hearts,

we will most certainly win over the shortcomings that prevent us from becoming happy, now and in the future.

President Ikeda reminds us that we all have the potential to be absolutely happy — a happiness that is not shattered by death — when he states: “We can attain a happy life state that shines like a diamond, solemn and indestructible under all circumstances. And we can do so in this lifetime. The Lotus Sutra exists to enable all people to attain such a state” (*Learning from the Goshō: The Eternal Teachings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 42). With courage and confidence, we can build a life that is a testament to the immeasurable power of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. ☸



Fotografica/CORBIS

“Without a qualm they squander their wealth on meaningless trifles, but begrudge even the smallest contribution to the Buddha, the Law and the Buddhist Order.”



What's

The Secret of Living?

AN INTRODUCTION TO
NICHIREN DAISHONIN'S BUDDHISM

BY (ABOVE, LEFT TO RIGHT) JOMO THORNE, SGI-USA HIGH SCHOOL LEADER, NOBUKO KOBAYASHI, SGI-USA HIGH SCHOOL LEADER, BOBBIE STEMPLE, SGI-USA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEADER AND SHAN SERAFIN, SGI-USA JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL LEADER

Have you ever wondered why you were born and how you can become happy? Many of us move through life without understanding why we experience the things we do or how we might create the type of life we'd like.

If you were to look up the word *life* in any dictionary, chances are you'd find a few variations on a biological definition. Explanations like these, while technically accurate, don't truly answer the most basic questions about the meaning of our existence. If we don't understand the meaning of our life, how can we hope to lead a happy one?

Through this brief article, we hope to shine a light on how Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism understands life and how SGI members use this understanding to lead happy lives.

Nichiren Daishonin and the Buddhist View of Life

Nichiren Daishonin, a thirteenth-century Japanese Buddhist teacher and reformer, founded the school of Buddhism practiced by SGI members. The Japanese people of that time faced a series of disasters — frequent earthquakes, floods, widespread starvation, disease, political unrest and enemy invasion. The Daishonin spent his youth in search of a way that would help all people lead happy lives and change the destiny of the nation.

He described life as a dynamic whirlpool of ever-changing reality. On a basic level, human beings experience life's transient nature through changes in what Buddhism refers to as life-conditions. Our individual life-conditions are the states of our inner realm in which we live from moment to moment — a combination of the environment we find ourselves in (the place, the people, the situations) and the perceptions we have of that environment (feelings, interpretations). A person's life-condition is subject to change from moment to moment, and can be affected by external and internal events. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to develop a life-condition that enables us to respond positively to even the most difficult situations.

Nichiren Daishonin taught that the strongest possible life-condition is called Buddhahood (enlightenment), and he proved that every single one of us has that potential.

What Is Buddhahood? How Does one Manifest it?

Buddhahood is not a supernatural state of being. Rather, it is a condition in which a person experiences the greatest wisdom, compassion, vitality, courage and good fortune. It is a condition in which a person finds fulfillment in daily activities and comes to understand his or her purpose in being alive. In other words, Buddhahood means fully enjoying the ever-changing nature of life. When we experience this state, the courage and compassion we gain inevitably helps us lead others to the same state of indestructible happiness. These traits make a Buddha the most human of beings.

Nichiren Daishonin studied a wide range of Buddhist teachings or sutras. Hidden in the Lotus Sutra he found the universal Law of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. By embracing this Law and living in accord with it, we can unlock the hidden potential in our lives and achieve perfect harmony with the environment. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is the essence of all life and the universe itself.

The literal translation of the phrase *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo* is “devotion to the Mystic Law of cause and effect through the Buddha's teaching.” Each syllable stands for a principle that describes the workings of life.

The character *nam*, for instance, is derived from the Sanskrit word for “devotion to” or “to derive wisdom from.” Among other things, this character reminds us that the things we devote our lives to become the source of our power.

Myoho stands for Mystic Law. Mystic does not mean magic, but the reality that life is beyond intellectual thought or verbal explanation. Simply put, *myoho* stands for the functions of the universe that are always present but invisible to the scientific eye and beyond the comprehension of our minds.

Renge literally means lotus flower. The lotus

flower seeds and blooms at the same time and, for that reason, it signifies the simultaneous occurrence of cause and effect. This principle is very important in Buddhism because it makes us aware that our actions in the present instantly determine consequences in the future.

Another aspect of the lotus flower is that it blooms in muddy water. The muddier the water, the more nutrition the lotus flower receives, allowing it to grow stronger and thrive. In the same way, our problems become a source for happiness through the practice of Buddhism. We do not separate ourselves from the difficulties that life may bring—in fact we are able to use all our difficulties as a source of growth.

Kyo means sutra or teachings. It can also be interpreted to mean the rhythm of life, or sound.

Nichiren Daishonin gave this universal Law concrete form by inscribing a mandala in Chinese characters called the Gohonzon. The Gohonzon is a scroll that has Nam-myoho-renge-kyo written down

the middle. Surrounding that phrase are characters that represent all the various conditions of human life. The Gohonzon's layout depicts the truth that enlightenment is possible when Nam-myoho-renge-kyo illuminates all our life-conditions. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon is the fundamental cause that enables us to manifest our Buddhahood and attain enlightenment.

The Basics of Buddhism in Daily Life: Faith, Practice and Study

There are three intertwined components to our practice: faith, practice and study.

We may wonder how we can believe in something that we have never experienced before. In starting out, faith is nothing more than an expectation or desire to improve our lives. Naturally, in trying Buddhism for the first time, we may have doubts, but through practice, through the trial of seeing results, we will confirm the power of our own Buddha nature.

Practice involves chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and reciting portions of the Lotus Sutra. This is what we call our morning and evening prayers. In addition, we attend discussion meetings at one another's homes and larger gatherings at SGI-USA community centers. By interacting with fellow practitioners, we form a network of friendly support. We call upon this very powerful camaraderie to inspire us and help us win in our daily lives.

Study is crucial to the development of our faith. We study *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. This is a collection of essays and letters he addressed to his followers more than 700 years ago. By studying the teachings, we deepen our understanding of how life works and our role as human beings. His writings are a prime source of insight into how we can challenge inner conflicts and emerge as vibrant, powerful people who can contribute to society. We also study the speeches of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda to provide a perspective on the application of the Daishonin's teachings in the modern world.



Human Revolution — Restoring Our Humanity and Changing the World

No one is a stranger to problems. Even the healthiest, wealthiest people face hardships. Living well does not mean avoiding problems, but challenging and overcoming them. Imagine being able to take your negative circumstances and not only transcend them, but ultimately utilize them as a source for growth and triumph. This is the way of Buddhism. As each one of us reforms the conflicts from within, we experience a “human revolution”—a transformation of our inner life. The most wonderful aspect of human revolution is that a significant change in just a single person has the profound power to influence the entire world. ❁



Jean Pritchard

“By interacting with fellow practitioners in the SGI, we form a network of friendly support. We call upon this very powerful camaraderie to inspire us and help us win in our daily lives.”

*Subscribe
today*



- CHARGE MY VISA
OR MASTER CARD
PAYMENT ENCLOSED

Check One:

- 6 Months \$28
(6 issues)
 1 Year \$50
(12 issues) SAVE \$22
 3 Years \$125
(36 issues) SAVE \$91
U.S.A. only

CARD #

EXPIRATION DATE

SIGNATURE

All credit card orders are subject to bank approval

NAME (PLEASE PRINT)

PHONE #

ADDRESS

CITY

STATE

ZIP

Source Code (If known)

For gift subscription, please indicate gift giver

Subscriptions: (800) 835-4558 • email: sgisubs@aol.com

MAIL TO: SGI-USA Subscriptions, PO Box 1427, Santa Monica, CA 90406-9907



**March
16,
1958**

The Spirit of Mentor and Disciple

BY CORY TAYLOR, LOS ANGELES

Would you stand up against the country of your birth if you had the foresight to see it and all its people heading for ruin? Would you find the courage to speak out for the sanctity of human life, when doing so meant imprisonment or execution? What if the national policies you sought to challenge were being celebrated in public rallies? What if speaking out meant endangering your friends and family? Would you be willing to take these risks in order to avert a national disaster? First Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and second president, Josei Toda, faced these questions. And their decision is the legacy of the Soka Gakkai.

It is a matter of fact that few of us would ever

have come into contact with this legacy if it weren't for current SGI president, Daisaku Ikeda's worldwide propagation efforts. There would be hardly a tear of joy shed or single hearts flush with the surge of hope.

March 16, 1958 — as his life was drawing to an end, Josei Toda addressed an assembly of 6,000 Soka Gakkai youth and declared: "Never forget that you are heirs to this legacy. I want you to fight and advance bravely, as valiant young warriors, in the proud battle to spread the Law. Today, I want to bequeath this mission to you young people. I entrust the future to all of you. I'm counting on you — counting on you to accomplish kosen-rufu!" (*Seikyo Times*, August 1995, p. 42).



For thirteen years, since his release from prison in 1945, Toda had lovingly devoted himself to the poor and sick of Japan. In those chaotic post-war years — when values had been turned upside down — he had resurrected hope in the hearts of nearly a million citizens

through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. But prison's bitter cruelty had robbed him of his health. By March 1958, Toda's emaciated body and labored steps revealed that his time was running out.

Early that month, President Toda proposed holding a youth gathering as a dress rehearsal for kosen-rufu. "Shin'ichi, I'm thinking of March 16 as the occasion on which I will formally transfer the mission for achieving kosen-rufu to all of you" (*Seikyo Times*, March 1995, p. 49).

Word of the gathering reached every corner of the youth division with lightning speed. The youth were willing to do whatever was necessary to be by Mr. Toda's side.

In the pre-dawn hours of March 16, thousands of young people arrived for the gathering at the head temple. Toda had made preparations for hot pork soup to be provided for each participant. "The hot soup satisfied their hunger and warmed their bodies to the core. When they realized that the food had been provided out of President Toda's concern for them, many were moved to tears at their mentor's sincerity" (*Seikyo Times*, June 1995, p. 54).

Directed by young Daisaku Ikeda and deeply concerned about Toda's ailing health, youth members had prepared a litter for the president to ride in. President Ikeda describes the scene in *The Human Revolution*: "Looking at Shin'ichi, Toda smiled and nodded. He then allowed his disciples to help him onto the seat they had affixed to the center of the litter. Carried by several young men's division members, who had been selected for the task, the litter quietly moved down the path toward the Grand

Lecture Hall. Shin'ichi walked closely alongside.

"A sense of love and pride filled his heart as he gazed at the youth who lined the walkway. Deeply moved by their robust growth, Toda addressed them in his heart, 'Thank you for coming! I'm so happy to see you. How splendidly you have grown! You've really developed. This will probably be the last time I'll be able to meet you like this. After I'm gone, it will all be up to you! I'm counting on you to realize kosen-rufu!'" (*Seikyo Times*, July 1995, p. 53).

"When the litter carrying Josei Toda arrived in the square in front of the Grand Lecture Hall, joyous cheers arose, like the sound of crashing waves, from among the youth waiting there. 'It's President Toda, it's President Toda!' Though Toda was gaunt and emaciated, the youth were beside themselves with joy to see his dauntless form after so long. Some of the young women strained to hold back a rising surge of emotion and keep from sobbing" (*Seikyo Times*, August 1995, p. 40).

That day, President Toda declared: "The Soka Gakkai is the king of the religious world. We are afraid of nothing. Never forget that you are heirs to this legacy" (*Seikyo Times*, August 1995, p. 42).

Forty-three years have passed since then. The year is 2001. Soka Gakkai International members exist in 163 countries and territories. A new generation of youth has taken the lead in the American kosen-rufu movement.

The meaning of March 16 lies in the bond between mentor and disciple; history will record how we respond to the call of our mentor, President Ikeda: "I ask that each of you, the young leaders of the new century, please realize that now is the time to develop yourself. So please journey boldly along your chosen course of magnificent humanism, surmounting all billows and swells so that you may establish the immortal castle of happiness in your heart" (*World Tribune*, March 20, 1998, p. 1).

"Your mission is to ensure that this precious organization endures for all time, to create a Soka Gakkai that nothing can ever destroy" (*World Tribune*, April 17, 1998, p. 10). ☸

Cory Taylor is an SGI-USA Vice Youth Leader.

Victory Over VIOLENCE

AT A GLANCE

BY YVETTE EDMOND, LOS ANGELES

Victory Over Violence is a grassroots initiative sponsored by the SGI-USA youth division that promotes awareness of the causes of violence and encourages youth

to address solutions to break the cycle of violence. It aims to promote introspection among people in our communities while placing primary emphasis on the value of dialogue in building a culture of peace. VOV was inspired

by the long-standing Buddhist traditions of non-violence and respect for all living beings, however, VOV

programs focus not on religion, but on our human potential. Youth are encouraged to develop tolerance, trust and friendship with each other despite differences in race, religion and language. Colin

Powell's volunteer organization, America's Promise and the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation endorse VOV. The following list includes some of the larger VOV activities, but smaller group discussions and school



An exhibition carrying the message of Victory Over Violence has been traveling the United States since February 2000.

meetings continue to go on throughout the United States and abroad.

Since the launch of Victory Over Violence in August 1999:



- Over 5,000 small group discussions have been held throughout the United States.
- 110,000 pledges have been signed.
- Presentations have been given to various city officials around the country.
- San Francisco youth held a VOV meeting that attracted over 1,000 people and included 20 Non-Governmental Organizations.
- The mayor of Memphis, TN declared October VOV month.
- SGI-USA youth marched together with the Santa Monica, California Police & Fire Departments and other youth groups in “Night Out Against Violence”—a march to unify the Santa Monica community against violence.
- VOV meetings have been held in high schools and colleges throughout the nation.
- The Victory Over Violence project has received international attention with requests for information coming from France, England, Turkey, Mexico and other nations.

- A VOV portable exhibit was created and has been traveling around the United States since February 2000.
- Members created a VOV booth and participated in the Los Angeles Million Mom March where over 850 pledges were signed.
- Youth Peace Committee members in New York hosted an exhibit called “Closing the Gaps to Create Cultures of Peace” which was attended by Bangladesh’s Ambassador to the United Nations, Anwarul Chowdhary.
- VOV project was presented at the Northern California United Nations Association on May 12, 2000 and at the Creating Cultures of Peace Committee meeting in April 2000 in San Francisco.
- VOV.com, the Victory Over Violence website, went online in February 2000.
- A Victory Over Violence dialogue entitled, “Fostering Nonviolent Activism in Youth” was hosted by the YPC and published in the March 2000 issue of *Living Buddhism* mag-

azine with youth representatives from the Gandhi Institute, the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, the Simon Wiesenthal Center/Museum of Tolerance, Soka University and the SGI United Nations office.

- On May 25, 2000, Yvette Edmond, YPC Advisor, spoke about VOV at the SGI sponsored seminar in support of the Millennium NGO Forum, “Toward Creation of Violence Free Communities.”
 - In June 2000, a Victory Over Violence concert featuring Nestor Torres was held in Puerto Rico, bringing attention to the widespread problem of youth violence and to encourage youth to live nonviolently.
 - In October 2000, the University of Michigan adopted Victory Over Violence and held a week long series of VOV activities, which included seminars, panel discussions and culminated in a concert. Guest speakers included Dr. James T. Yamazaki, author of “Children of the Atomic Bomb.” The governor of Michigan and the mayors of Detroit and Ann Arbor, Michigan each proclaimed October 1-7 as Victory Over Violence week.
 - In November 2000, Colin Powell’s organization, America’s Promise, endorsed Victory Over Violence.
- Yvette is Youth Peace Committee Advisor.*

Boys & Girls Group

The purpose of the SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group is to encourage friendships among the children and to teach them the basics of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the spirit of the SGI peace, culture and education movement.

On these two pages are some examples of Boys and Girls Group activities from around the United States. Parents and Boys and Girls Group coordinators are encouraged to share these reports with the children in their area. Please look for the Boys and Girls Group *Friends for Peace* newsletter appearing monthly in the *World Tribune*.

SGI President Ikeda says: "Those who make many friends have greater opportunities for growth and self-development; as such they make society a better place and lead happy, satisfying lives. We need to initiate and nurture friendships and contacts with many people, both within the organization [the SGI] and in society at large [everywhere else]. Our lives will open and be enriched to the extent that we do so" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 164).

2001 — Year of Total Victory for the New Century!

1. Study hard at school.
2. Try your best at gongyo and daimoku everyday.
3. Cherish your friends.
4. Respect everyone in your family.
5. Believe in yourself. No matter what, never give up on anything!



Everett Goto, as Dracula, and his grandmother, Mrs. Ruby Goto, at a Halloween activity. In Hawaii, they hold fun activities like the Haunted House, the Menehune Summer Fun Fair, picnics, skits and talent showcases. Last year, they even created a 30-foot dragon to celebrate the Chinese Year of the Dragon!

"This year, as you try your best in everything, please keep the spirit of the lion king in your heart so you will have the courage to win every day!"

— Boys and Girls Group Coordinators



In Dallas, the Boys and Girls Group holds an art class. Here, members of the class stand with their artwork. Front row: Forrest Massey, Gabe Romero. Second row: Emily Gallagher, Sara Luther, Andrew Gallagher, Sasha Snow, Elizabeth Estrada, Danielle Romero. Back Row: Nellida Gallagher.



Ren Beard

The San Francisco girls and boys held a meeting with singing, dancing, a magic show, a skit and games. Silicon Valley girls and boys sing "This Land is Your Land."

On January 21, 2001, the Boys and Girls Kickoff Meeting was held at the Seattle Culture Center. A study presentation based on



Champayne Burke

"General Stone Tiger" was held to encourage the boys and girls to make great determinations and goals for the year. Bobby Butler was the tiger and Alana Chapman served as emcee for the meeting.



Girls and boys, visit our Web site; (Be sure to check with your parents first!): www.sgi-usa.org Once you are there, select "The SGI-USA" and then click on "For Kids" and have fun!

Jill Shively

The Santa Monica, California, Boys and Girls Group is called Z-Wave. Each group in Z-Wave does a different activity like sewing, singing and recording CDs, cooking, painting and creating a magazine. Periodically, they have a Living Museum to showcase what they have created. Front row: Nicole Finn, Tracey Inoue, Honey Shively. Back row: Louis Espinoza, Sam Sachnoff, Davey Martinez.

SOKA SPIRIT

Q&A

BY STEPHANIE ARAIZA

In November 1991, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, under the leadership of High Priest Nikken Abe, excommunicated all of the more than 10 million members of the Soka Gakkai International. At the center of the conflict was the clergy's insistence that priests are necessary intermediaries between Buddhist lay believers and their goal of enlightenment. The SGI, under the leadership of President Daisaku Ikeda, disagrees with that assertion and believes that the struggle toward enlightenment is entirely up to each person's efforts. The SGI believes that priests hold no special power over the faith of believers and that the priesthood's claims contradict the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

The following article answers some commonly asked questions about this subject referred to as Soka Spirit.

We see injustice all around us. It's in our schools, government, courts, families, friendships — everywhere. As a young person, it is easy to lose hope and feel there's nothing we can do. The Soka Spirit movement, the movement to clarify and protect the truth of Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, is the perfect vehicle to learn how to identify injustice at its root and eradicate it. This type of training is exactly what our generation needs to effect the kind of

change the world needs in the twenty-first century.

What is Soka Spirit? Who started it? Why does it matter? In the ten years since Nichiren Shoshu excommunicated millions of SGI members, a whole new generation of people — especially young people — has embraced Buddhism in the SGI. In the hope that they can feel as empowered as I do, I would like to share the answers I've found to some fundamental questions about this revolution we call Soka Spirit.



Stephanie Araiza says, "Soka Spirit provides the perfect stage for our own human revolution — the perfection of our

true selves through battling external evil."

Why is it now called Soka Spirit and not the temple issue?

If High Priest Nikken resigned tomorrow and Nichiren Shoshu apologized for its actions, things would not go back to "normal." This is not simply an issue between the temple and the SGI. This conflict with the priesthood serves as a wake-up call to learn how to protect the SGI and the pure essence of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Soka Spirit is the fundamental spirit of the SGI, a spirit perhaps best expressed in the Daishonin's own words, "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (WND, 385).

Soka means value creation. What better way to create value than to identify and oppose those forces that would destroy the SGI and lead people to suffering? This issue is a wonderful opportunity to learn the true power of the Daishonin's Buddhism — the power to lead suffering people toward happiness.

It's about learning — as the first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai did — that the real battle is an internal one, developing the courage to practice as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and fight against the fundamental darkness inherent in all life. While Nichiren Shoshu may be the focal point of this particular struggle, the real battle is waged within ourselves, against our own passivity. In this way, Soka Spirit provides the perfect stage for our own human revolution — the perfection of our true selves through battling external evil.

Why should I care about this? What does Soka Spirit have to do with me?

Many of us began our Buddhist practice with the desire to see changes in our daily lives — to receive benefit. SGI President Ikeda has said: "The Daishonin writes, 'The *ku* of *kudoku* (benefit) means to extinguish evil and *doku* means to bring forth good' (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762). Good is not simply a matter of doing charitable deeds or living piously; it includes fighting evil and injustice. By rebuking evil, we expiate our negative karma and bring forth good fortune and benefit. This is the meaning of benefit in the Daishonin's Buddhism. Happiness is born when we fight injustice" (*World Tribune*, October 29, 1999, p. 5).

When we read the fourth silent prayer every day, we pray "that the great desire for *kosen-rufu* be fulfilled, and that the Soka Gakkai International develop eternally in this endeavor." Soka Spirit activities provide us an opportunity to take action toward these goals.

When we refute Nichiren Shoshu, are we slandering them?

The Daishonin dedicated his life to strictly correcting anything contrary to the teaching of Shakyamuni. He held public debates and prayer-challenges with priests of other sects to determine the correct teachings of Buddhism and wrote many strongly-worded letters of remonstrance with other schools of Buddhism. Our efforts to clarify the Daishonin's intent through refuting the errors of Nichiren Shoshu are a continuation of this spirit.

Central to the Daishonin's teaching is the declaration that all people equally possess the potential for enlightenment and that the power to bring forth the Law exists within all people. Nichiren Shoshu teaches that the high priest alone bestows this power,



“As a young person, it is easy to lose hope and feel there’s nothing we can do. The Soka Spirit movement, the movement to clarify and protect the truth of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings, is the perfect vehicle to learn how to identify injustice at its root and eradicate it.”

that the priesthood is inherently superior to the laity and we can’t attain enlightenment without them. They teach that correct faith is “absolute faith in and strict obedience to the high priest” (*Dai-Nichiren Special Edition: The Correct Way of Faith in Nichiren Shoshu*, p. 13). This is not the teaching of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism based on the Lotus Sutra; therefore, we must refute it.

In “Letter of Petition from Yorimoto,” the Daishonin states, “If one sees a misguided priest sending others into hell with his evil teachings and fails to reproach that priest and expose his errors, then one is oneself betraying the Buddha’s teaching” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 807).

So how do we refute erroneous teachings? We can pray sincerely for those people who have been swayed by the priesthood. We can study Buddhist teachings, clarifying the truth for ourselves and share this understanding with others. Some people do not have a solid understanding of the history of Buddhism, and may not be able to stand firm against those who would distort it.

We can also share Buddhism with our friends. When we have the courage to reach out to others with genuine compassion, we can increase the

allies of the Buddha and further negate the influence of distorted views.

It is important to understand that the SGI is not attacking Nichiren Shoshu out of pettiness, but is refuting those who would interpret the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin for their own purposes.

When we introduce people to Buddhism, should we tell them about the conflict with Nichiren Shoshu right away?

When I began my Buddhist practice in 1997, I had a hard time with this one. People in America have a lot of experience with corrupt religions and spiritual leaders trying to take advantage of them. I felt as if I needed to carefully consider when someone was ready to hear about the temple issue, as it was then referred to.

After I actually studied the issue, however, I realized it perfectly displayed the central theme of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism — that every person has the right and ability to become happy, regardless of their circumstances or access to the clergy. The Daishonin states, “There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women” (WND, 385).

This is the complete opposite of my past religious experience and is what drew me to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in the first place.

Armed with this awareness, I feel pride in sharing that my religious organization actually practices what it preaches. I can’t think of a better way to express the greatness of Buddhism than through the SGI’s spirit to protect the Daishonin’s teachings.

We are not simply about sharing the correctness of the true teaching. We refute views that lead people to suffering, particularly from those who portray themselves as possessing the correct teaching.

I would warn my friends about a car salesman who once ripped me off. Similarly, I would share with those I introduce to the Daishonin’s Buddhism that

there are people who try to distort it. When we propagate our faith, we can best protect new members by explaining this issue along with the basics of the practice. If they know the truth from the start, how can anyone mislead them?

Is it our responsibility to protect the purity of the Daishonin's teachings? If so, what is our role?

It is easy to assume that it is enough to understand the Daishonin's teachings for ourselves, to make sure we're not slandering the Law ourselves. But the Daishonin says, "To hope to attain Buddhahood without speaking out against slander is as futile as trying to find water in the midst of fire or fire in the midst of water" (WND, 747). He clearly states that our pursuit of absolute happiness is not possible without refuting

slander. To truly practice Buddhism, we must stand up for justice in our prayer and our study, and by sharing it with others.

The members of the SGI are now in a position to prevent the past transgressions of Nichiren Shoshu from being repeated. Through our own efforts, we can keep the Daishonin's teachings from being available only to those who show allegiance to the head temple. It was the Soka Gakkai that created the structure of our current gongyo. It was also the Soka Gakkai who refused to declare Shinto superior to the Law, as the priesthood did.

It is now our time, the youth of the SGI, to stand up for the teaching that will lead humanity to peace. We cannot expect that someone else will do it. We don't need to be confined by history. We can build the type of kosen-rufu movement we want — one that follows the Daishonin's intent. We can guarantee that our children and grandchildren have the same opportunity to benefit from this wonderful teaching, the way it was intended to be practiced. ☸



"It is now our time, the youth of the SGI, to stand up for the teaching that will lead humanity to peace. We can build the type of kosen-rufu movement we want — one that follows the Daishonin's intent."

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

on the Stage of Life

An Opera Singer's Victory Over Inner Turmoil Leads to Happiness

BY NATALIE LEVIN, ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND



Where do I begin? My life has changed dramatically since I received the Gohonzon on November 14, 1999, a little less than a year-and-a-half ago. I have experienced tremendous benefits as a result of my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

My dear friend, Cindy Cordes-Ross, introduced me to Buddhism, but I was very hostile at first and uncomfortable with her faith in it. I told her on several occasions that I thought it was weird and I hated that she practiced it. I couldn't understand why she would do something I saw as flaky and ethereal. I never entertained the possibility that anything existed outside of the physical world that I couldn't see with my own eyes.

My view of life and the universe began to unravel when I began to experience debilitating panic attacks in July 1998. Overcome with the feeling that I was losing my mind, I sought therapy at Northwestern University, where I was a graduate student.

As a result of therapy, I came to understand that I had been involved in a sexually abusive relationship with my mentally ill cousin for the past nine years. I was living in a state of denial regarding the nature of this relationship. I was devastated, scared to death and didn't know who I was anymore. I didn't want to speak with anyone in my family because it felt too unsafe. My life was a mixture of pain and anxiety and I began to feel suicidal. I didn't see any light at

the end of the tunnel and I felt I literally could not bear to live with the pain another day.

I am an opera singer, and in the midst of all this pain, I managed to fly to New York for an audition. I stayed with my friend Cindy for the weekend. One morning, Cindy and her husband, Michael, were preparing to do their morning prayers. I usually left the room to avoid the discomfort I felt with her Buddhist practice — but this time, I felt compelled to stay. Without their even asking me, I said scornfully, "Alright. I'll try chanting with you."

I held the sutra book in my hand and followed along pretty well. I then chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with them. I felt so foolish and uncomfortable that I started laughing to break the tension I was feeling. Michael had a wonderful response to my laughter.

"That's great, Nat! You're already experiencing the joy of Buddhahood!"

Cindy and Michael were not angry with me for laughing during their ceremony. I was dumbfounded. What happened to all the strict rules I had associated with religion? I was intrigued. Cindy gave me *The Buddha in Daily Life* to read, and a friend of hers I had met only briefly sent me a sutra book, beads and a copy of *The Winning Life*. I was deeply touched that a person who I hardly knew cared enough to give me these gifts. I wasn't used to such sincerity and I decided to start practicing.

I returned to Chicago to finish my master's degree. I chanted a little each day and tried to learn to recite



Natalie and her mother, Susan.

the sutra. I became concerned, however, that every time I started chanting, I burst into tears. It was difficult to chant and suicidal feelings persisted. I managed to graduate and drive to Santa Fe, New Mexico, to do an apprenticeship with the Santa Fe Opera.

In spite of my pain, I continued to chant because I truly didn't know what else to do. I felt like I was on to something, and Cindy told me that my feelings made sense to her, she understood that I was feeling really horrible every time I chanted. She said that Buddhism functions like a mirror to show us the reality of our lives and what we need to change through our practice. My faith in Cindy's words was what convinced me to keep chanting.

The SGI-USA members of Santa Fe took great care of me. Their sincerity and kindness struck me. At this point, I was still having severe panic attacks and feeling suicidal. Despite this, I performed well and was recognized for my singing and pleasant attitude.

About halfway through the summer, my sickness came to a head. There was a three-day period during which I couldn't stop myself from crazy, tormented laughter and I couldn't sleep. I had one panic attack after another and I was haunted by of suicidal thoughts and of the sick man who sexually abused me. No place existed in which I felt safe. I had hit rock bottom.

I began intense therapy. I know it was because of my Buddhist prayers that I was able to find excellent doctors. I saw a local psychopharmacologist who diagnosed me with bipolar II disorder, which is a milder form of manic-depression. I began therapy with a psychiatrist who prescribed medication for me. Ordinarily, one has to do several interviews with a therapist to find the "right match," but I know it was my chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo that brought me to my compassionate doctor in Santa Fe.

I spent the rest of the summer adjusting to the medications. I continued working and performed well. I was even awarded a grant in recognition of my career potential. When I completed the Santa Fe Opera season, I moved back to Rockville, Maryland where I lived with my parents. I was still depressed and could barely get out of bed. I found another wonderful therapist in Washington, D.C., who truly cared about me.

My life revolved around attending Buddhist meetings, therapy, exercise, singing and sleep. The members continued to care for me. I hadn't received a Gohonzon yet, but one of my leaders encouraged me to receive it and another gave me an altar. I couldn't believe her generosity!

I could see benefits happening in my life. My parents and I were beginning to communicate sincerely with each other and I began to have a relationship with my sister that made me feel joyful when I saw her. I was able to be more honest with my friends and they responded in kind. This practice brought a sincerity into my life that I had never known before. My parents embraced my practice, and I enshrined my Gohonzon in their home. I had a party the day my Gohonzon was enshrined, and I really enjoyed myself for the first time in months!

In the fall of 1999, I went on two auditions in

New York. I prayed earnestly for the energy to rise above depression and make it all the way to Manhattan. In the opera world, singers go to twenty or thirty auditions and can hope, at most, to get one job out of them. I had gone to only two auditions and wanted both jobs. When I sang for the Santa Fe Opera, I had the intention of returning as a second-year apprentice. When I sang for the Virginia Opera, I had the intention of understudying the role of Carmen and singing in their year-long apprentice and outreach program. Though I accepted a contract for the coming summer with the Santa Fe Opera, I didn't receive a callback for the Virginia Opera. I believed that my prayers to the Gohonzon would bring about the best for my happiness. I decided to trust the outcome of my auditions.

While participating in SGI-USA youth activities, I met a group of incredible young women. At the community center one day, one asked me if I would be interested in going to the organization's Arts Division conference at the SGI-USA Florida Nature and Culture Center in the spring of 2000. I didn't really know what the FNCC was, but I decided to attend. I began saving the money I was earning at my job at Starbucks.

It was an amazing conference. I met artists from all over the United States and had an opportunity to talk with SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima. I explained my situation, dreams and worries to him about going out into a world of unknowns and uncertainties. He was understanding and compassionate, and he suggested that I think of all the lives I could touch with my voice and talent. He urged me to remember that my professional success to date was a result of all the causes I had made to study and hone my craft and that it would be a waste to not continue in that vein. He encouraged me to "sing for kosen-rufu" and "be the Madonna of the opera world." I determined at that moment to sing for world peace and the happiness of humanity.

I left for Santa Fe shortly after the conference and had a great summer there, professionally and personally. My environment was mirroring the incredible changes I had been making in my life. My inner human revolution was reflected in the lovely rela-

tionships I was building with colleagues and the honors I received being cast in huge roles in the apprentice showcase.

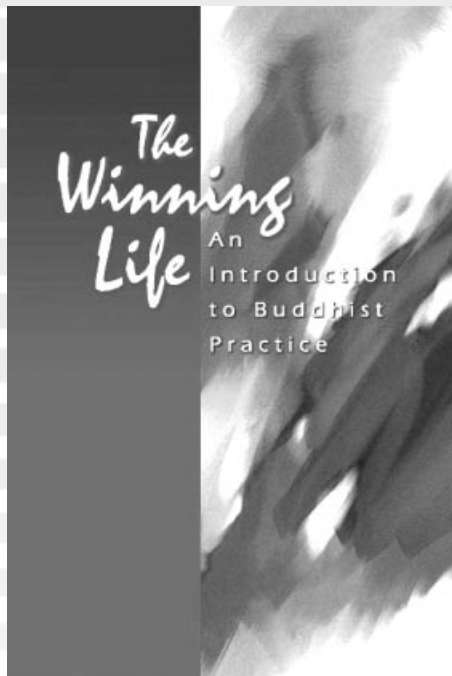
I finished the season with the Santa Fe Opera and moved back to my parents' home in Maryland. I made up my mind to move to New York and do what was necessary to have an opera career: audition, audition and audition. One week before I was to make the dreaded move to a life of temping and waitressing to fund my auditioning, I received a call from the Virginia Opera. One of their mezzo-sopranos wasn't working out and they wanted to know if I would be available to understudy the role of Carmen and sing with their Young Artists Program through June 2001. I couldn't believe my fortune! Not only did I not have to move to New York; it turned out that I had been offered the very contract for which I had auditioned in November. My exact prayers had been answered!

I moved to Norfolk, Virginia and began working with the company on the day I arrived. I am thrilled to be singing for a living. I am paid well and my housing is provided. I learned the entire role of Carmen and am touring with several members of the company in the state of Virginia. I work with elementary school children who have learned the songs and speaking lines to a children's opera called Cinderella, and after lunch, we perform the opera for the entire school. Talk about singing for kosen-rufu! I love working with such beautiful, pure children every day, and I chant to touch their lives.

Recently, I was in a supermarket looking for Ben & Jerry's ice cream. As I stood at the freezer contemplating which flavor to buy, my glance fell upon a little girl with a huge smile running toward me. She gave me a hug and I realized that she had been involved in a performance of Cinderella the week before. I had touched her life and was receiving the affection and joy of a trusting child!

My practice has allowed me to experience such incredible gifts of humanity. My determination is to forever sing for world peace and the happiness of humanity. ☸

Email Natalie at natalia9_1971@yahoo.com or to the editors at livingb1@aol.com.



The perfect tool to have and share.

The bestselling booklet, *The Winning Life*, has been redesigned with a fresh, new look. This concise introduction to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism remains the perfect tool for introducing others to the benefits of practice.

Still only \$1.00.



Available at all SGI-USA bookstores. Or purchase your copies via mail order: 1-800-626-1313; sgiusamoc@aol.com M/O #: 4105



Subscribe today

Check One:

- 6 Months \$28 (6 issues)
- 1 Year \$50 (12 issues) SAVE \$22
- 3 Years \$125 (36 issues) SAVE \$91

U.S.A. only

CHARGE MY VISA OR MASTER CARD PAYMENT ENCLOSED

CARD # _____

EXPIRATION DATE _____

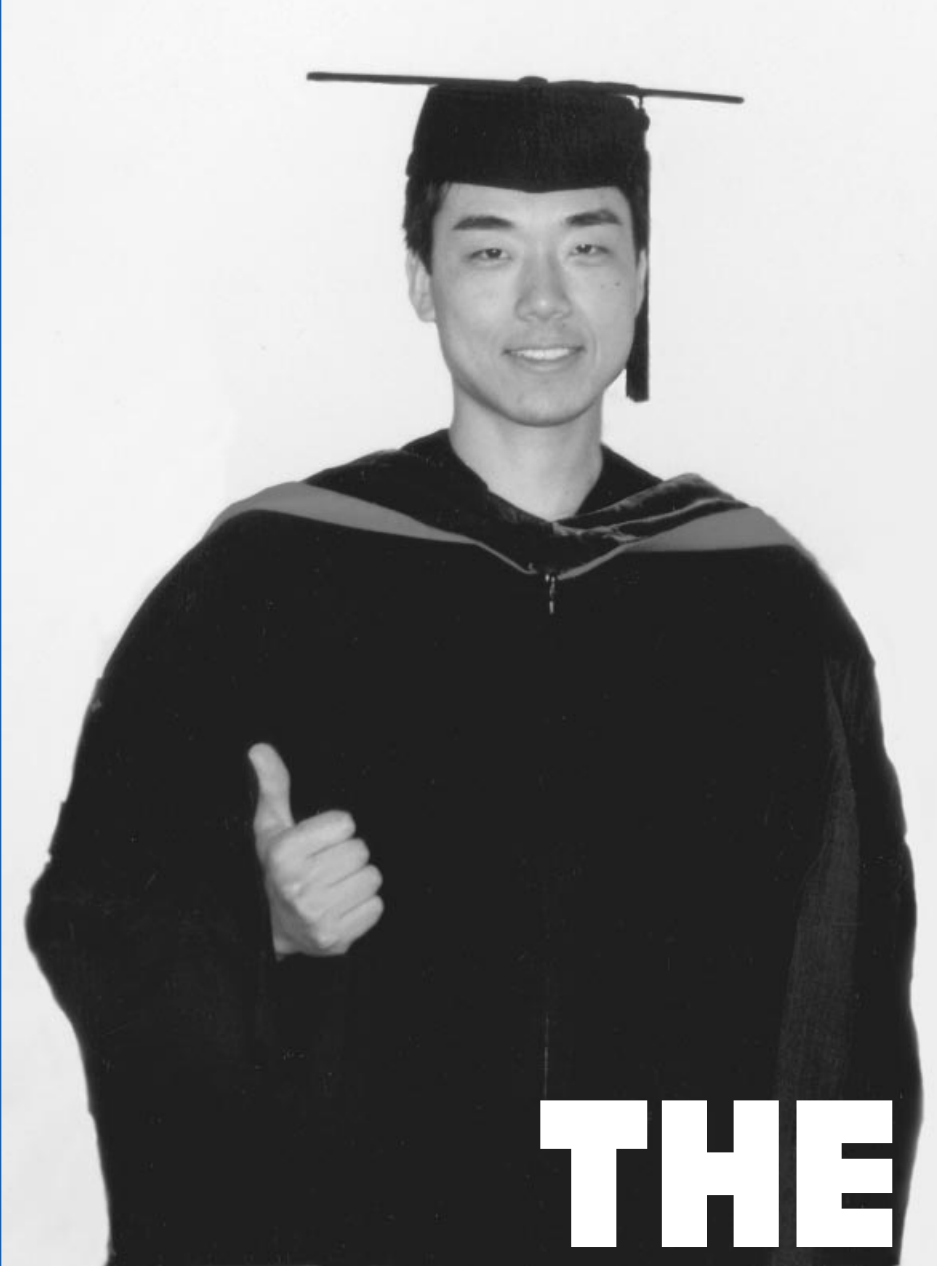
SIGNATURE _____ *All credit card orders are subject to bank approval*

NAME (PLEASE PRINT) _____ PHONE # _____

ADDRESS _____ CITY _____ STATE _____ ZIP _____

Source Code (If known) _____ For gift subscription, please indicate gift giver

Subscriptions: (800) 835-4558 • email: sgisubs@aol.com
 MAIL TO: SGI-USA Subscriptions, PO Box 1427, Santa Monica, CA 90406-9907



THE PATH

of My Human Revolution

BY YOSHIYA IEDA, WIXOM, MICHIGAN

“So, why do you want to be an astronaut?” This question was the beginning of everything.

In late February 1992, I was visiting my best friend in Madrid, Spain. Takaaki Yuge and I had gone to the same junior high and high schools and could talk about anything. I

had many friends, but he was the one with whom I could share my most intimate dream of becoming an astronaut. He was an invaluable friend to me.

Ever since I saw the flight of the space shuttle on TV when I was 10, I wanted to be an astronaut. However, there were no Japanese astronauts in those days and nobody at that time would have thought a Japanese could possibly become an astronaut. So I had to keep this unrealistic dream to myself in order to avoid being laughed at. Takaaki was the only

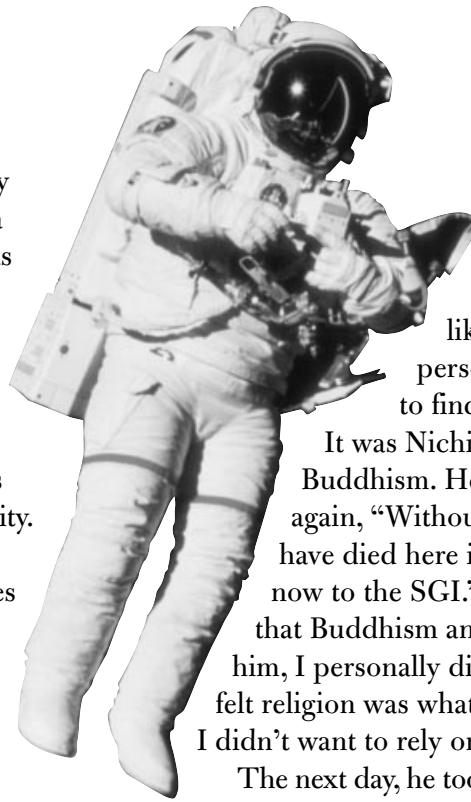
exception because he had an extraordinary dream as well. His dream was to become a professional guitarist, which seemed just as unrealistic to me. We often discussed our future plans when we got together after school, but we always arrived at the conclusion that neither of us knew what to do to achieve our goals.

When we got to high school, Takaaki's dream suddenly drew much closer to reality. He said he would go to Spain right after graduation to learn classical guitar. Besides playing guitar in a band, he had already started learning Spanish, which made me feel pressured and impatient. He was my best friend, but at the same time, he was also a good rival. I did not want to be beaten, but all I could do was study hard to get into college and continue training my body.

An unexpected incident took place when we were 17. Takaaki stopped talking to me. I was so upset, because I had no idea what made him shut me out. I tried everything to find out what happened to make him behave like this, but he refused to speak to me. About a year later, I had almost given up on him. Many of my other friends told me that he had gone insane and nothing could be done. Although I didn't want to believe it, that indeed seemed to be the only possibility.

He finally called me one day in 1989 from Tokyo's Narita International Airport and said: "I am leaving for Spain today. I wanted to tell you before I left." I found myself unable to say anything except "good luck." I was happy that he had finally had spoken to me, and I was glad to know that he had not given up on his dream. About a month later, I left for Hokkaido to attend college.

I heard nothing from my friend for a year until I received a postcard from him. He wrote, "Yoshi, I found a profound philosophy." I didn't understand what he meant. After a while, I got another strange postcard. Again, I wasn't sure what he wanted to tell me, but it sounded like he was striving for something. "What is going on with this guy?" I thought. I decided to visit him in Spain to find out.



When Takaaki picked me up from the airport, I immediately noticed that he was full of energy, like a completely different person. It didn't take me long to find out what had happened.

It was Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. He repeated over and over again, "Without this Buddhism, I would have died here in Spain. I owe what I am now to the SGI." Although it was obvious that Buddhism and the SGI had changed him, I personally didn't feel like practicing. I felt religion was what made people dependent; I didn't want to rely on religion.

The next day, he took me to the SGI community center in Madrid. I was introduced to Shinji Shimizu, who had been helping my friend with his Buddhist practice. After hearing my opinions on religion, he asked me a question, "Why do you want to be an astronaut?" This was a question I had never asked myself before. All of the answers that came to mind were self-centered, such as money, fame and success. I was so ashamed, I couldn't say anything. He continued: "If you really want to be an astronaut, please start practicing Buddhism. That will give you a decisive advantage."

I left Madrid and traveled around Spain by myself. This was a great opportunity to reflect on my life. Mr. Shimizu's question never left my mind. I thought about the purpose of my life.

One day I lost my wallet. Because it was a Friday night, I had to survive with no money until Monday, when I could cash some travelers' checks. I ended up at a homeless shelter.

This experience changed my life. For the first time, I lived under the same roof with society's underprivileged. I keenly felt the disparity in wealth and the inequality into which people are born. When I left the facility, the orphans who I played with cried and asked me not to go. Holding back my tears, I realized I wanted to do something for them.

When I returned to Madrid, I told Takaaki about my experience. He told me we all have infi-

nite potential and that it is Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism that teaches the way to bring out that potential. Our inner determination can transform even the world. Although I still had many doubts and not everything was clear, I decided to try practicing. I wanted to do something to make society better, and I wanted to believe in my best friend.

I returned to Japan and a totally different life based on faith began. I became a member of the Soka Gakkai Student Division and practiced as my best friend told me — chant first, win in the morning and have clear goals. When chanting, trust that my prayers will be answered. Trust the Gohonzon. Study the Daishonin's writings and read SGI President Ikeda's guidance every day. Support SGI activities and share this practice with friends.

It did not take long to realize the power of this practice. When I chanted, I felt tremendous life force welling up and challenged everything. As the first step to becoming an astronaut, I made up my mind to go to America to get a Ph.D. in Engineering. Taking my English language ability and financial situation into account, it was a pretty reckless idea. However, I prayed earnestly every day. At the same time, I devoted all my energy to studying English. Since I was a senior in college at the time, it was a huge challenge to cope with schoolwork, preparation for studying abroad, a part-time job, extracurricular activities and

SGI activities. I felt overwhelmed, but thanks to constant encouragement from my seniors in faith, I accomplished everything.

One year after I started chanting, I found most of my prayers had already been answered. I graduated from college and was accepted to the graduate school of the University of Wisconsin-Madison. I was also granted a one-year scholarship from the Rotary Foundation. I had an opportunity to meet the first Japanese astronaut, Mamoru Mohri, and gave him President Ikeda's book on space. I was just amazed by the power of this practice.

The biggest benefit was that I finally found the answer to the question of why I wanted to be an astronaut. I realized that becoming an astronaut was not my final goal, but a means. My final goal is to contribute to the realization of world peace and human happiness.

Astronauts can be particularly influential for children. If I could become an astronaut

who inspires them to have courage, and use this influ-

ence for the sake of their happiness, I would be contributing to society. That's why I want to be an astronaut. Recalling the orphans I played with in Spain, I made a pledge to

become such an astronaut.



With conviction and hope, I arrived in America on July 7, 1993, and this was the beginning of my real struggle. Studying in graduate school in a foreign language was much harder than I expected. I couldn't understand the professor. Even if I wanted to ask a question, I didn't know how or what to ask. The classes were competitive and the homework was difficult. I had to stay up all night just to understand the homework. I studied frantically, but the result of my first midterm was the lowest in the class. No matter how much I studied, I was always the weakest student. Everyone in the class looked like geniuses to me.

I later took a qualifying entrance exam for a Ph.D. course. I chanted and studied hard, but the result was miserable. Usually students don't fail, or even if they fail, they need to improve in one or two subjects. I failed all my tests. My professor was surprised at my poor results and told me to focus on study. Students are allowed to take this exam twice, and if they fail twice, they have to leave the university. I had one more chance to take the test in seven months. I needed to improve in all subjects.

Because of these difficulties, I sometimes felt I was wasting my time and I seriously doubted my potential. An SGI-USA member who was struggling in school told me: "In the end, a person who has a mission wins. And mission is not something given to us, it's what we create." His words reminded me of the pledge I made when I left Japan. "Yes, that's right! I'm the person who decides if I have a mission. Because even though I may be doing poorly, I know why I am studying." I started with sincere prayer and resumed studying with all my might. "Victory comes down to offering sincere prayer and working three times harder than others." "This faith makes the impossible possible." These were the words of President Ikeda I repeated to myself.

When I took the qualifying exam again, I did my very best. I could honestly say that even if I failed, I would have no regrets. The results arrived a week later. "Conditional pass." That meant I didn't fail the exam, but I needed to clear a certain condition to officially become a Ph.D. candidate. The condition was to get straight A's that semester. Without resting

even a moment, I plunged into the new battle.

My goal was to study ten hours a day. I synchronized my goal with SGI activities. I read President Ikeda's guidance for inspiration. The more I struggled, the more I realized the greatness of my mentor. I felt as if he were watching my battle. Because of the encouragement of my mentor, I enjoyed every challenge. I asked many questions in class and participated in discussions. I received the top score on two midterm exams and made straight A's. In January 1996, I was officially accepted into the Ph.D. program.

Writing my thesis and defending it were the only remaining hurdles, but that was going to be difficult. I first needed to conduct experiments and get data. But no matter how many times I ran the same test, the data was not repeatable. I had to redesign the hardware and reconsider the experimental procedure many times. It was a continuous process of trial and error. Two years had passed since the preliminary exam and I still had no valid data. I started feeling uneasy in the summer of 1999.

My final battle had begun. Again, I experienced many failures, but didn't stop. I chanted before each set of experiments for valid data. Every moment was a struggle against self-doubt. Whenever I got stuck, I chanted and summoned up the courage to believe in the power within myself. "I can make it. Faith is to believe and keep believing no matter what."

When I was struggling the most, big obstacles appeared in my life. One of them was my mother and sister's traffic accident. (They were injured and are recovering.) Since I couldn't get back to Japan to see them, all I could do was call and send my prayers. I kept experimenting with tears in my eyes and clenched teeth. One night as I read President Ikeda's diary of the struggles he overcame in his youth, I cried for the first time saying, "President Ikeda, I want to see you!" I was surprised at what I said. But that was the moment when my mentor entered the deepest part of my life. During this most difficult time, I received tremendous support from the members of Madison Chapter. Some delivered dinner to me almost every night until the crucial day. It is impossible to describe how much those meals helped and encouraged me.



SGI-USA members in Madison, Wisconsin, with Yoshi (second row, second from right). Because of their support while attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Yoshi dedicates this article to them.

In the middle of October, I finished collecting data and discovered new scientific facts. I began writing my thesis, and wrote more than one hundred pages in just two-and-a-half weeks. I couldn't believe what I had accomplished. At last, on November 18, 1999, I finished. In the acknowledgments section, I introduced President Ikeda's words, which had been one of my dreams to do. The evaluation of my thesis was an A.

It took six years and three months, but I finally received my doctorate, and it was financed through my research assistantship. Looking back, nothing would have been possible without this faith, and all of my prayers were answered. Just as my best friend

told me in Spain, I owe what I am today to the SGI. I am so grateful for this practice because I have gained true friendship, a sense of purpose and a mentor in life.

Now I'm working as a sales engineer in Detroit, Michigan. I am determined to show even greater proof and help others become happy. When I chant, I vividly recall the eyes of the orphans I played with in Spain. I'll never forget my pledge to them.

According to a recent Japanese newspaper, NASDA (National Space Development Agency of Japan) will accept applications for new astronauts in 2002. I am definitely going to apply. ☸

One-to-One Dialogue

BY JAMES HERRMANN, LOS ANGELES

I recently had a conversation with a good friend on the topic of dialogue and its importance in spreading Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. My friend is fun and interesting to talk to, and I am always inspired by his ability to hold a conversation with anyone. I asked how he had developed his dialogue skills. It's not like there is a training ground to acquire these skills. He said he was not always like this and shared his experience with me.

His stepfather was a partner with a prominent law firm and through his practice as an attorney, he developed excellent skills in the art of dialogue. However, his stepfather—when using his ability to dialogue—was often more concerned about being right than using his skills to make another person feel special or to inspire them to be happy. He could defeat almost anyone in any argument. When my friend was growing up, his conversations with his stepfather would leave him feeling shut down and inadequate. He could not express himself with his stepfather and found it easier to just stop talking to him. This eventually led to a lack of confidence in his own ability to speak and he just clammed up.

Some people in high school are known for their excellence in academic studies and others for their athletic ability, but almost never for



their ability to conduct dialogue. In sports, one can increase one's ability through a proper diet, weight training, exercise and practice. In academics, one can excel through consistent study. How does one acquire the ability to conduct effective and meaningful dialogue?

My friend carried this lack of confidence throughout high school. It wasn't until his first year of college that he was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI. Practicing Buddhism brought joy and confidence to his life. The moment he started practicing he said: "This makes me feel great. I'm going to practice Buddhism for the rest of my life." He had found a happiness he had not known before.

He immediately shared his newfound joy with everyone he knew, engaging in one-to-one dialogue. As he struggled to explain the greatness of Buddhism with others,

he gradually began to see himself overcoming his fear of speaking. He was often asked questions about the practice he couldn't answer, but he would pray and study even harder to effectively share Buddhism with others. It was in the midst of my friend's suffering that he challenged himself to open up his life. As a result, his joy increased even more.

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda says, "Under favorable circumstances anyone can do well. It is how one fares in adversity that determines his value. One can manifest his true ability only when he struggles against difficulties, and by overcoming them, he can feel the true joy of faith and savor the best life" (*From Today Onward*, vol. 26–28, p. 18).

What I learned from my friend's experience is that the key to overcoming our weaknesses is to challenge ourselves in our personal practice and become capable of sharing Buddhism with others. It is through this process that we are able to expand our own lives and our understanding of Buddhism, develop confidence and fulfill our missions to help others become happy.

As youth, I feel it's important that we enthusiastically engage in the propagation of Buddhism, learning from the great examples of

continued on page 45

Renewing My Faith in the 21st Century

BY MELANIE R. TRASS, LOS ANGELES



I always anticipated the arrival of the new century. I dreamed it would be filled with happiness, wealth and advancement for me. I developed an image in my dreams of a door that would open and on the other side, my life would be better. The door would close and the faults and shortcomings of the past would be completely erased from my life. The roadblocks and detours of life's struggles didn't exist in this dream. I had a deep-down feeling that if I simply kept living and made it to the twenty-first century, then all my problems would cease to exist!

Yeah, right, who was I kidding? I was living without challenging myself wholeheartedly. I set goals for myself that were not attainable unless I was willing to fight. Since I had not adopted the spirit of a victor, I found myself giving in to weakness and faltering, failing to meet my goals. This pattern has repeatedly occurred in my life. I always found a way to place blame for my misfortune on someone or something else. I did not see that I controlled everything in my environment — how I chose the circumstances I was in.

In the five years I spent in college, I found that living independently also meant making independent decisions. I make decisions impulsively, but I no longer had my parents to stop me from doing impulsive things. Sometimes, I simply could not control myself. I wasted money, ran up a mountain of debt, partied too much and made a slew of other bad choices. At the moment I made impulsive decisions, I would tell myself “Girl, just worry about it later,” never realizing how quickly later would come. My attitude was like believing that effects from the bad causes I made would just vanish into the universe. When faced with the choice of making

good or bad decisions, I usually made the bad ones.

I was born into this practice, but as a child, I never developed strong faith. I believed it worked, but I only chanted when I wanted something or attended a meeting with my parents. I thought the meetings were boring. However, I was eager to participate in youth activities. I enjoyed the fun and friendships of the Boys and Girls Group and later young women's activities and the SGI-USA Fife and Drum Corps. I am grateful for the strong young women leaders I met. Much of their guidance has stayed with me, and I often refer to it in my mental notebook during life's adverse moments.

While in college, my practice was sporadic. I would attend meetings only when things were going right, because I did not want people to see the hellish state of my life. I chanted only when I needed to pass a course or when I did not have money to pay rent and other bills. I found myself turning to the Gohonzon as a last resort, so I was always pleading to get out of the current predicament. Once my prayer was answered, I wouldn't chant until the next crisis. I didn't challenge myself to address the real issue of dealing with my karma.

It is now the beginning of the new century. I just graduated from college and am now faced with dealing with the repercussions of my past decisions. I am only 23, but I am challenging myself to change. As the Daishonin states in “The One Essential Phrase”: “All the beings of the Ten Worlds can attain Buddhahood in their present form. [This is an incomparably greater wonder than] fire being produced by a stone taken from the bottom of a river, or a lantern lighting up a place that has been dark for a hundred, a thousand, or ten

continued on page 45

Joyfully Creating History

THROUGH NOT BEGRUDGING ONE'S LIFE

“Since nothing is more precious than life itself, one who dedicates one’s life to Buddhist practice is certain to attain Buddhahood. If one is prepared to offer one’s life, why should one begrudge any other treasure for the sake of Buddhism?”

(“Letter from Sado,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 301).

BY JASON BERG, BLOOMFIELD, NEW JERSEY



Recently, in the middle of evening prayers at the New York Culture Center, I suddenly became acutely aware of the beauty of my surroundings. Seated in the middle of the room, I was overcome by the elegance of the setting. Wood paneling, a plush red carpet on the floor and a graceful two-story high ceiling surrounded me. In front of me sat the majestic altar that was designed to direct our focus toward the Gohonzon enshrined within. Filled with people earnestly chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the room itself truly felt and looked like the Buddha land.

Taking in this scene, I asked myself what I had done to help create this. I came to the realization that despite a handful of years as an active member of the youth division, what I had contributed to help make this all possible was rather insignificant. My mind turned to the massive struggle that the pioneers of our movement had gone through in America and how they had created a tremendous history, forging the foundation for the American kosen-rufu movement led by SGI President Ikeda. How had they done it? What was it that had enabled these members to overcome the tremendous difficulties they faced and create the beautiful SGI-USA organization that we enjoy today?

What occurred to me is that it comes down to the

fact that these members fought side by side with President Ikeda for the sake of kosen-rufu without begrudging their lives. Our pioneers spared nothing as they worked to propagate the Mystic Law and did so without complaint. They put everything they had on the line while they challenged themselves again and again to spread the message of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism to those who were suffering. Guided by President Ikeda’s constant encouragement, these sincere men and women created lives of victory as they helped many other Americans become happy through the power of the Mystic Law.

While in Hong Kong recently, President Ikeda shared: “The Buddhist law of cause and effect is strict. I want you all to be confident that those who dedicate their lives to the Mystic Law will be healthy, wealthy and beautiful, in body and mind, in lifetime after lifetime, and, as great leaders, contribute to society, winning people’s praise and admiration, and enjoying lives of supreme fulfillment” (*World Tribune*, January 1, 2001, p. 11). Is there anyone that embodies this statement more than our pioneer members, who have been working so hard for so many years?

It is time for us, as the inheritors of this golden legacy, to build upon the tremendous foundation that has been laid. Let us truly devote ourselves to kosen-

continued on page 45



Kelly (right) and her sister, Ushonda.

Young Women DEDICATED TO PEACE

BY KELLY DUNLAP, SAN DIEGO

As SGI President Daisaku Ikeda welcomes the twenty-first century as the “Century of Women” he states, “Every woman who devotes her life to kosen-rufu is a person with the noblest of missions” (*World Tribune*, December 15, 2000, p. 8).

Now is the time for young women to stand strong and work for peace all over the world. To do this, it is important that we understand the history of women to further inspire us. We need to understand the importance of our role as women in society. Many young women do not recognize their own greatness. I feel fortunate to be a woman. If it weren’t for the great women of the past who dedicated their lives to justice, equality and peace, I don’t think we would enjoy the freedoms we have today.

My determination is to have a heart like the great pharaoh Hatshepsut. A leader of Africa’s golden age, she ruled an empire in Egypt at a time when it was uncommon for women to lead and were only thought capable to assist men. Because she was a woman, she had to prove herself over and over again. At times, Hatshepsut wore men’s clothing in order to be taken seriously, and people referred to her as “Pharaoh.” She was both brilliant and beautiful, a lover of peace who prayed for it frequently. She loved to study the history of her family. Her father was her biggest influence. He taught her military matters and raised her to become a pharaoh — the leader of her people. Through her studies and determination, she built many temples and engaged in foreign trade, thereby advancing her empire. She successfully ruled for thirty-one years as the only female pharaoh in history. Through her example, I am motivated to expand beyond the traditional role

of women and become a leader for world peace.

It is important for women to understand the crisis of women in other countries. On a recent talk show, I heard women share experiences of other women who were raped and stoned to death. In Afghanistan, women have few rights. If a woman is raped, she can be killed. If she wants to divorce her husband, she can be killed. If she has sex before marriage, she can be killed. In certain parts of India, some women who choose not to marry have had acid thrown in their faces. In some parts of the world, young girls are sold into prostitution, while others experience genital mutilation. It’s important to learn about the injustices perpetrated against women not only in America, but worldwide so that we can determine to work that much harder for kosen-rufu.

As women practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we have a unique mission to not only uphold and fight for our rights as women, but to expose and fight injustices committed against women everywhere. We must create true equality among all people!

When the unity between men and women becomes strong, together we can create a solid foundation for peace. Women of the SGI, let’s strengthen our practice through prayer, study and action. In “The Unity of Husband and Wife,” Nichiren Daishonin states: “If a woman’s faith is weak, even though she embraces the Lotus Sutra, she will be forsaken. For example, if a commanding general is fainthearted, his soldiers will become cowards. If a bow is weak, the bowstring will be slack. If the wind is gentle, the waves will never rise high. This all accords with the principle of nature” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 464). ☸

Growing Up Buddhist

BY JASON HENNINGER, LOS ANGELES

I was born in Los Angeles in 1970 in the first wave of American children born into Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It was a chaotic time. The Vietnam War was still claiming lives. The struggle to end the war, to establish gender and ethnic identities and to reevaluate social paradigms brought about both hope and unease. It was a time for both genuine reformers and opportunistic phonies. In this wild time, the kosen-rufu movement began in America.

I think the pioneers of kosen-rufu are among the strongest and most dedicated people. They reached out—sometimes with only a few words of English—to teach Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to a tangled morass of Americans. One such American was my mother. The early organization in Los Angeles was a combination of immigrants and so-called hippies like my mom. These disparate groups somehow managed to create the foundation for a religious movement in a remarkably short period of time. It was far from easy. My family and I went to meetings nearly every night. I took naps at the community center nearly as much as I did at home. Everything was strict, everything was urgent, and everything was important. Somehow we built a fortress in a monsoon.

Though I didn't clearly understand all that went on around me, I knew something very important was happening and that even little kids were part of it. I don't want to give you the impression that I was always happy to go to meetings. I was a kid, after all, and I wanted to play. There is no doubt I had my resentful moments. I usually chanted when I felt obligated to, not when I wanted to. But I knew that sometimes practicing Buddhism meant your life would be more disciplined than most, yet happier as well.

Even as a child, I knew that being a Buddhist



Jason with his wife Lalena Henninger.

made me different from other kids. I didn't believe in the Christian concept of God as most of my friends did. I was busy almost every night. I knew lots of funny words in a foreign language. Most of my friends had never heard of Buddhism, and those few who had heard of it assumed I worshipped a statue. Nevertheless, I was proud to belong to the misunderstood, very busy, funny-words religion.

If the seventies were a monsoon, then the eighties were a hurricane: more focused, but just as intense. In the early eighties, I was just as involved as ever, but as I grew into adolescence, I attended fewer meetings. I practiced less, and began to distance myself from other members. I became miserable, brooding, dark and lonely.

I have given a lot of thought to that time. For about ten years, I hardly practiced at all. I used to think I was the only person born into the practice to do this,

continued on page 45

continued from page 40



our seniors in faith and especially President Ikeda, who has stated that dialogue is essential for peace in the twenty-first century. He also said: “Socrates continually strove to carry out sincere and forthright dialogue. Because

he deeply trusted his companions, he was able to speak his mind in a frank and unpretentious manner. To talk with others, heart to heart, free of pretension, is to show them the deepest respect. Undertaking this sort of conversation also requires great humility” (*From Today Onward*, vol. 26–28, p. 21).

I feel this is the proper spirit in sharing Buddhism with others. Propagating Buddhism requires heart-to-heart exchange based on mutual respect. ❁

James Herrmann is the SGI-USA Youth Leader.

continued from page 41

thousand years. If even the most ordinary things of



this world are such wonders, then how much more wondrous is the power of the Buddhist Law?” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 923).

No matter what I may have done in the past, I will challenge myself to build strong faith in my Buddhist practice. I have set chanting goals, and I am already seeing my life more clearly. I believe that the twenty-first century will definitely be all that I expected and more, because of my fresh determination to persevere for the sake of kosen-rufu. I actually look forward to facing challenges because that is the way to develop the spirit of a courageous person. I have friends who are suffering and I will show them the power of the Gohonzon through my life. I will continue to chant no matter what adversity I face. This is my determination for the new century.

I still have my dream, but now I see a path on the journey toward realizing it. ❁

Melanie Trass is a recent graduate of Purdue University.

continued from page 42

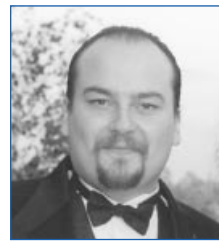


rufu. Showing actual proof at work, in our families and in society, let us pursue the path of mentor and disciple without begrudging our lives. Without reluctance, fear or hesitation, let us create a new era together with

our mentor, President Ikeda. When we do this without begrudging our lives, then we will enjoy the immense benefit of the Mystic Law. ❁

Jason Berg is an SGI-USA Vice Music Corps Leader, musician and a teacher.

continued from page 44



but I’ve since found out it’s a pretty common occurrence. During the early nineties, President Ikeda initiated phenomenal changes in the SGI and then there was the split with the priesthood. Meanwhile, I learned

what it felt like not to practice, and to put it bluntly — it was terrible. When I resumed my involvement in the SGI, it was like Dorothy stepping out into Oz. So much had changed! I had changed because my practice was my own and not something I felt obligated to do. The SGI had changed — the monsoon and the hurricane had passed and the fortress was being rebuilt as a global village.

Now, my time as a youth division member is nearly done. I’m very excited to see what happens next. What’s the next storm going to be? What improvements and advancements will the future bring? When I have children, how will they feel about their Buddhist heritage?

Josei Toda, second president of the Soka Gakkai, once said, “One year’s growth of the lay organization will be equal to ten year’s growth of other organizations.” In just a few decades, we have proven him absolutely right. I am witness to an incredible piece of history unfolding, yet I know it is only the beginning. ❁

Jason Henninger is a freelance writer.



Seikyo Press

SGI President Ikeda praises Italian soccer star Roberto Baggio and his wife, Andreina, at the 50th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall in Hachioji, October 5, 2000.

Unforgettable

FRIENDS FROM AROUND THE WORLD

BY SGI PRESIDENT DAISAKU IKEDA

In this series, SGI President Ikeda has recorded his impressions of the many friends he has made in his travels for peace. In his New Year's poem in the January issue, he states: "I will continue to knock on the doors / Of diverse cul-

tures and civilizations, / Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly alive / At the heart of each, / Believing that sincere dialogue/In search of our shared humanity / Will build a rainbow bridge linking the world."

Roberto Baggio — Italian Soccer Superstar

I remember my reaction when I heard about the intense struggle that had taken place in the 1994 World Cup soccer finals, which had fans all over the world on the edge of their seats: "Baggio has done a wonderful job! What a pro! He

kept his promise to continue fighting to the very end."

I first met Roberto Baggio, the Italian soccer superstar, in the front courtyard of the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo in June 1993. He had the intrepid gaze of a person used to taking on momen-

tous challenges and winning, along with the humility of one who could not be swayed by fame or popularity. His wife, Andreina, was also pleasant, refined, and had a beautiful smile.

When I met the young soccer star again in Milan the following year, it was just before he was to play in the World Cup. I encouraged him: “You’ve got to fight to the last moment, fight to the very end.” He nodded, smiled, and left for the United States.

But qualifying to play in the World Cup series had been a tough struggle. The Italian team just barely made it, incurring harsh criticism at home, where hopes for their victory ran high. Still, Baggio was unshaken. In an interview on Italian television, he said, “No matter how I am criticized, I am what I am. People call me a superstar, but I’m just a human being. Whether I am praised or blamed, I play the game the way I play it.”

And play the game superbly he did. Through his almost superhuman effort, he led the Italian team to victories in the preliminary finals over Nigeria, Spain and Bulgaria. The world cheered his long series of incredible, often seemingly miraculous, plays.

But the cost of those triumphs was very high. He was in the worst possible physical condition as he faced the final with Brazil. He had pulled a muscle in his thigh, while injuries to his knees and Achilles tendons were causing him intense pain. He was faint with exhaustion. He couldn’t decide whether he would play in the final match until the morning of the game. But then he did: “I’ll play, even if it means losing a leg.” He forced himself to rise to the occasion, though he could barely stand.

He played the entire game in that condition. The match went into overtime. But, astonishingly, even that did not decide victory, and a penalty-kick play-off (when five players from each team kick in an elimination round) would decide the winner. It was his iron determination that had got them this far.

When Baggio’s kick missed the goal, the long battle was over. Under normal circumstances, it would have been impossible for him to miss such a shot. But his legs no longer had the strength to control the angle of the ball.

He had given all he had to give, and he showed

it. Fans around the world were deeply moved. His team had won many victories through his brave efforts, and now, when he had lost, he took full responsibility. The spectators showered him with more applause and cheers than they did the victors.

I sent him a message, too: “Your brilliant fight to the very last moment, your unbending and invincible spirit, is a great victory of faith.”

Roberto Baggio was born in a small northern Italian town in 1967. “I learned to walk and kick a ball at the same time,” he says. It was a plastic ball, and he kept it nestled at his feet even when he was eating. But even for a natural, things do not always go smoothly or easily.

He suffered from knee injuries, and for his first two years in professional soccer, couldn’t play up to his abilities. He had major surgery three times. Before really beginning his career as a professional player, he was forced to face the prospect that he would have to quit. It was then that he learned of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism from Mr. Maurizio Boldrini, who ran a shop that sold CDs and souvenirs. “Buddhism teaches that we are responsible for our own happiness or unhappiness,” Mr. Boldrini told him. Roberto Baggio was drawn to such a philosophy. When he chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, he felt strength welling up inside. He was so earnest that he felt the power of faith in his entire being. The more he suffered, the stronger he became. His whole being and outlook were revitalized.

In an interview after winning the Golden Ball award as Europe’s top player in 1993, he said, “When a person triumphs over adversity that becomes their personal treasure. When I was ill, I told myself, ‘You can do it. You have a strong will. Every minute you spend in this bed is making you stronger, so that you can face bigger difficulties in the future.’”

He discussed his philosophy of winning: “When two teams are equally matched, what is it that decides victory? When the crucial moment arrives, it is the team united in the belief they will win that is going to triumph. ... After reaching a certain level, there is little difference between the strength and skills of the opposing players. That’s when mental strength becomes so important — how much the



Seikyo Press

SGI member and Italian soccer superstar Roberto Baggio makes a guest appearance at the JOMO Cup Exhibition soccer match at Tokyo's National Stadium, October 4, 2000. "When the crucial moment arrives, it is the team united in the belief they will win that is going to triumph," says Roberto Baggio. "A pro must win. It is his mission to keep on winning and inspire courage in others. That is why I take pride in what I do."

"When a person triumphs over adversity that becomes their personal treasure."

team can concentrate, how strong their will is to give their absolute best. The team that is most determined to win will do so."

How true that is! One must win in all challenges. There are times when you will be in poor physical condition. The more famous you are, the harder your opponents will be on you. You may have to contend with jealousy and malice. Lies may be written about you. You may be dissatisfied with your coaches or teammates. But once you have decided to win, you must do so; you must give your very best

and score a personal victory, triumphing over any disadvantages and all obstacles. If you fail to do so, if you give less than your all, then whatever justification you try to give will just be an excuse. This is as true in life as it is in the realm of sports.

We, the members of the SGI, too, must be dedicated players in the arena of kosen-rufu — experts in helping people become happy.

Roberto Baggio says, "A pro must win. It is his mission to keep on winning and inspire courage in others. That is why I take pride in what I do." ❁



An architect's drawing of renovations to the World Peace Ikeda Auditorium scheduled to be opened in 2001.

What are the SGI & Living Buddhism Magazine?

Living Buddhism is the study journal for Soka Gakkai International-USA (SGI-USA), an American Buddhist movement that promotes peace and individual happiness based on the philosophy and practice of the Nichiren school of Mahayana Buddhism. SGI-USA works in association with 75 other SGI organizations comprising members in more than half the world's countries. SGI-USA activities are driven by our understanding of the inseparable link between individual happiness and the peace and prosperity of our diverse communities. Our religious teachings place the highest emphasis on the sanctity of life.

Through their Buddhist faith and practice, our members aim to improve their lives by taking up the challenge to create value, to live without fear, to take responsibility for their circumstances, to care for their families and to live with compassion for others.

What we believe...

Our core philosophy is expressed in the concept of human revolution, a process of inner transformation that centers on the idea that the causes we make through our thoughts, words and actions have influence that extends beyond their immediate context to affect the vast and complex web of life. Through undergoing our individual human revolution, we awaken to the responsibility we each have for our own circumstances and for our environment. Our inner transformation will lead us to take the actions that bring about personal fulfillment and help us contribute to the harmony and healthy development of society. These ideals are based on the Buddhist worldview of dependent origination, a concept of interrelation where all things in the realms of humanity and nature are dependent upon each other for their existence and nothing can exist in isolation.

The Buddhist tradition...

The roots of the SGI-USA worldview can be traced to the teachings of the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, who lived some 2,500 years ago in what is modern-day Nepal. His enlightenment to eternal, universal reality was most succinctly articulated

in the Lotus Sutra. Following Shakyamuni's death, the Lotus Sutra spread through Central Asia into China and Japan.

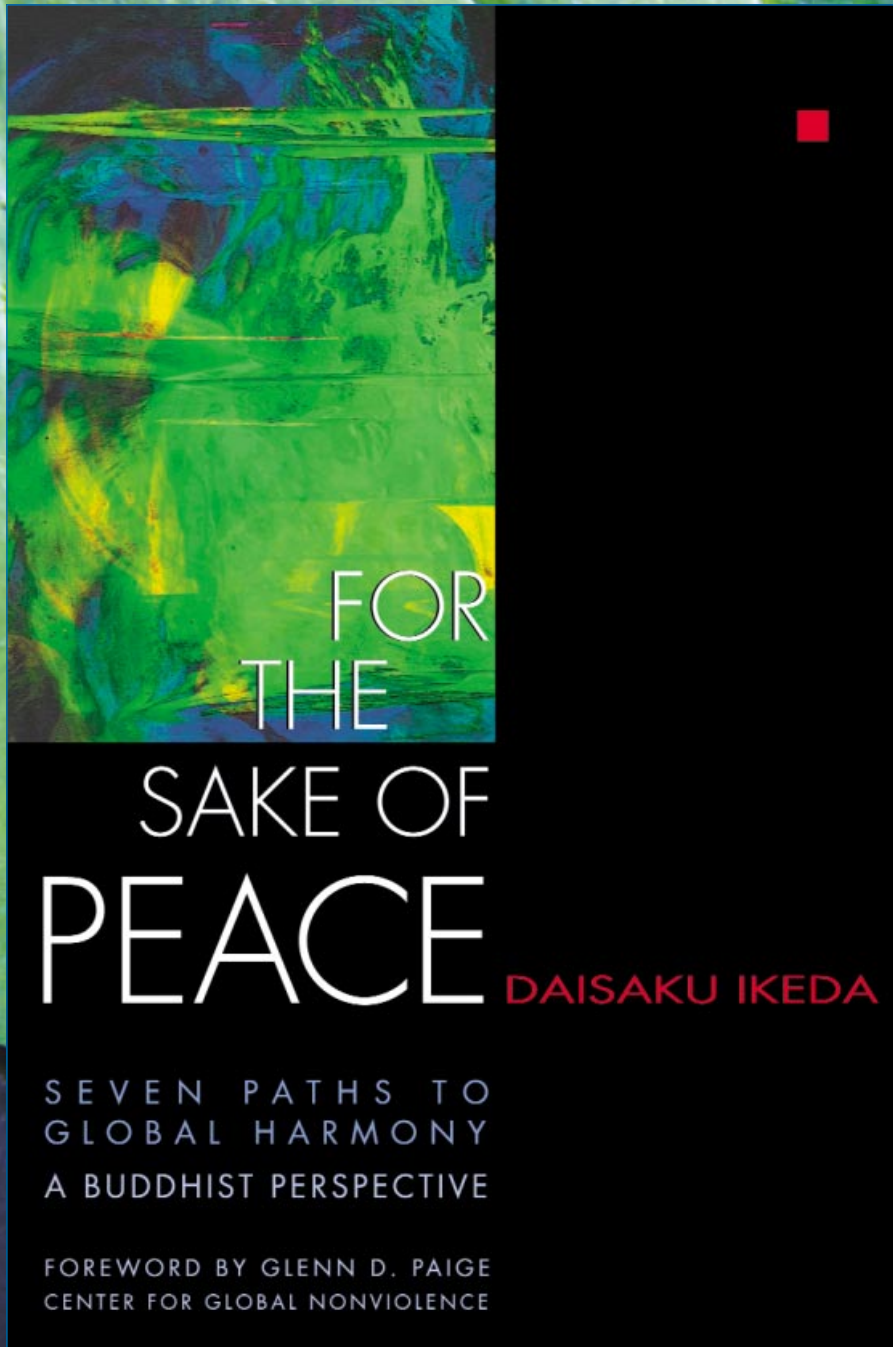
In the 13th century, Nichiren Daishonin revealed the truth hidden in the Lotus Sutra. According to Nichiren Buddhism, the workings of the universe are an expression of a single principle or Law — Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the title and essence of the Lotus Sutra. By putting their lives in rhythm with this Law, individuals can unlock their hidden potential — the Buddha nature — and achieve creative harmony with the environment. Nichiren Buddhism is a vehicle of individual empowerment — that is, individuals have within themselves, the power to transform the inevitable sufferings of life into happiness and to be a positive influence in the community.

The SGI Heritage...

The SGI organization has its origin in the educational theory of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, whose quest to understand the deepest meaning of life eventually led to his encounter with Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Here, he discovered a philosophy that recognized and sought to develop the wisdom inherent in all human beings. The term *soka gakkai* (value-creation society) was first used by Makiguchi in 1930 when he founded the lay organization. During World War II, Makiguchi and his disciple Josei Toda were imprisoned for their opposition to the war. Makiguchi died in prison within eighteen months at the age of 73. After the war, Toda rebuilt the organization and it achieved remarkable growth until his death in 1958. On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda became the third president. Under his leadership, the organization has grown to its present membership of 12 million in 163 countries and territories.

Based on the humanistic principles of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, SGI President Ikeda has founded the Soka School System which includes universities in Japan and the United States. He is also the founder of the Toda Peace Institute, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, and more. He is the author of numerous books that have been translated into many languages and has received world-wide recognition for his peace efforts.

New from Middleway Press



Based on more than 20 years of peace proposals and university lectures, *For the Sake of Peace* expresses SGI President Ikeda's passionate yet practical vision of the way to achieve peace in the new millennium.

"In *For the Sake of Peace*, Daisaku Ikeda invites us to a 'dialogue' on seven paths to peace that seek to overcome major obstacles to global well-being. The courage, clarity and informed nature of his call to follow 'The Path of Disarmament' contrasts greatly with the silence or contrary advocacy by political leaders of today's major military states. For this alone respectful readers may wish to award him a people's peace prize for the 21st century."

—From the foreword by
Glenn D. Paige, Center for
Global Nonviolence

"Any individual who has questioned whether he or she could actually make a difference should read this book, become inspired and walk the path of peace."

—David Krieger, President,
Nuclear Age Peace
Foundation



Applying Buddhism to Daily Life

Available now from your favorite neighborhood or on-line booksellers.
(Not available at SGI-USA bookstores.)

Living Buddhism
Periodicals Postage Paid
at Santa Monica, CA 90401
ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED
Return to: SGI-USA Subscription Office
606 Wilshire Boulevard
Santa Monica, CA 90401

living

BUDDHISM

JOURNAL FOR PEACE, CULTURE AND EDUCATION \$6.00 MARCH 2001

Special Youth Issue!

**An Opera Singer,
an Aspiring Astronaut,
a Soccer Superstar and More!**

**Accepting the Mission to
Accomplish World Peace—
SGI Celebrates March 16**

**Don't Be Like
the Cold-Suffering Bird!
"Letter to Niike"—
Study Material for April**

Elizabeth Crummett, 21 (below)

"I feel so unbelievably fortunate to be alive and young in this era of the SGI, and to fight side by side with SGI President Ikeda for world peace."



Blaise Hossain, 19 (left)

"I feel the SGI represents what religion should be about."

Janice Kinjo, 19, (below)

"I treasure my practice and the SGI, and I will do my best to promote world peace."



Rhys Buchele, 25 (below)

"The whole experience of chanting is about being alive."



Pamela Palacio, 21

(above)

"It's my responsibility to hold my head up high and become a strong individual through my practice."

Miguel Atwood-Ferguson, 20 (right)

"Through my actions, I hope to encourage people to follow their heart."

