

Living BUDDHISM

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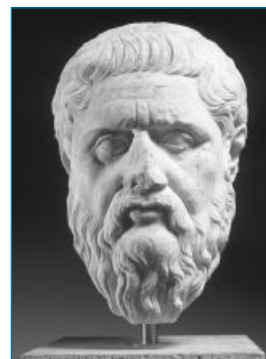
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Photo by Martin Cohen.

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To Our Readers

The first issue of the *Seikyo Times* (the former title of *Living Buddhism*) was published in January 1965 in Japan. I began practicing Buddhism the following year in California. In 1970, I found myself sitting at a desk in Tokyo interning for the *Seikyo Times*. When I returned to Los Angeles in 1971, I never in my wildest dreams thought I would find myself to be the managing editor — but then, the promise of Buddhism lies in that realm beyond our wildest dreams.

For thirty-six years this publication has been the study magazine for the SGI-USA. Study is not a hot topic in society. It is not “sexy” by advertising standards. So you might think that being referred to as the “study magazine” would not invoke great excitement.

But in this case, I think the opposite is true. Studying Buddhism is exciting, even sexy. That’s because the study of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism leads to self-empowerment and self-discovery — and those *are* hot topics.

The Daishonin’s Buddhism may be unique in that study is integral to the practice. “Without practice and study there can be no Buddhism. Both practice and study arise from faith” (“The True Aspect of All Phenomena,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386). When we pray to the Gohonzon, the object of devotion, by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, our spiritual investment in that practice — our faith — determines the results we will receive. This is where I have found study to be crucial.

Through reading Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, we are infused with his confidence, his absolute conviction that our prayers will be answered. He states that as long as “the earth fails to turn upside down and the tides of the ocean continue to ebb and flow, there can be no doubt that the prayers of those who put faith in the Lotus Sutra will be answered” (“On Prayer,” WND, 346). SGI President Ikeda is a living example of what faith in the Gohonzon can produce, and we find the same conviction in his writings.

In addition to works from Nichiren Daishonin and President Ikeda, the desire of the staff is that all the articles in *Living Buddhism* inspire hope and confidence in our readers. Though not all articles will appeal to every person, we sincerely pray that everyone will find something in each issue that moves them. The staff of *Living Buddhism*, Alexis Trass, Stephanie Celano and myself, and our art director, Stephanie Sydney, appreciates your continued support and comments.

Sincerely,
Dave Baldschun
Managing Editor

living BUDDHISM

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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

"THANKS FOR SHARING"

I wept quietly as I read Linda Kaye's courageously shared experience, "N8JOY," in the February issue. Though I am a man, I was sexually molested as a child by my grandfather from the time I was three until I turned 15 when I escaped into drugs and anti-social behavior. It was not until I was 39 that the myriad of emotional and mental problems I'd become fed up with came to light. Now, at 52, I have thought about going back to counseling because it has become obvious that I didn't finish "cleaning out the closet" several years ago.

Thanks to Linda for sharing. I've determined not only to go back to counseling, but to seek my mission to help others. Linda is correct in trusting SGI President Ikeda. I have had only positive results. I want her to know that sharing her experience has helped me so much, and others, I'm sure.

Richard Smullen, Hancock, Maine

I just finished reading Linda Kaye's story in *Living Buddhism*. I just wanted to drop you a note to thank you for sharing your experience. In light of the situations you've had to overcome in your life, I feel like a "golden child." Although there are always problems, my family has been loving and close. I've had only a few people close to me die, and I have a few very warm and wonderful friends. Your experience has helped me see the appreciation I need to have for my life and everyone I'm connected to. I have also determined to become happy!

I recently came to the realization that throughout my life I've been willing to do much more for other people than I will for myself. It's been hard to understand that I do deserve to be happy and that my happiness cannot help but affect others in my life. So now, you've helped reinforce my obligation to become happy and show actual proof to other members, friends and family.

Peter Marino, Jeffersonville, Pennsylvania

HATS OFF

Hats off to Youth Division members for your superb work on the March 2001 *Living Buddhism* issue! Thank you for every rejuvenating page of bold, courageous conviction and fresh insight.

Especially inspiring to me was Stephanie Araiza's "Soka Spirit Q&A." As an SGI-USA chapter leader and Soka Spirit committee leader, I am often called upon to provide meaningful explanations about the Soka Spirit movement. In reading Stephanie's keen and wise commentary — conveyed in such a refreshingly current style — I gained new perspectives that will enable me to better communicate the essential meaning of "Soka Spirit."

The article stated, "It was the Soka Gakkai that created the structure of our current gongyo." This raises a question for me. Until now, I had understood that the current structure of gongyo was originally formulated by various Nichiren school priests and then later officially adopted by the Soka Gakkai. I would appreciate it if *Living Buddhism* could provide clarification on this point.

Again, I offer sincerest thanks for the SGI-USA youth that have shared their uplifting writings in this issue. We look forward to seeing more of your penetrating words!

Penny Parker, Annandale, Virginia

Editor's Note: To clarify the issue of gongyo, it was the Soka Gakkai that decided its members should perform gongyo. This was unusual for the time in that only priests recited sutras, often only in conjunction with ceremonies, rather than as a regular part of their individual Buddhist practice. The idea of the laity performing gongyo originated with Presidents Makiguchi and Toda. The current format of gongyo goes back to the days of twenty-sixth High Priest Nichikan Shonin.

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

A Religion Suited to **the Current Age**

“Now, at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law, I, Nichiren, am the first to embark on propagating, throughout Jambudvīpa, the five characters of Myōhō-rengē-kyō, which are the heart of the Lotus Sutra and the eye of all Buddhas...My disciples, form your ranks and follow me, and surpass even Mahākāshyapa or Ananda, T’ien-t’ai or Dengyō! (“The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 764–765).

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism!* What a beautiful spring! This is the first spring of the new millennium. Everywhere I travel, I see heartfelt joy and the blossoms of benefit. People are very excited to be practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in this new century.

On April 28, we will celebrate the 748th year since the establishment of Buddhism. In 1253, Nichiren Daishonin — then a young man of 32 — first revealed “Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō” as the Law of the universe to a small audience in Japan at Seichō-ji temple, where he had entered the priesthood.

That moment began Nichiren Daishonin’s lifelong work to propagate his teachings and refute the errors of other sects. From that moment, he sought to illuminate the Buddhahood dormant within all people and to reveal the practice that would enable them to realize their inherent enlightenment. That action of revelation was the first step on the “thousand mile journey” into the Latter Day of the Law. Our global SGI movement for peace and humanism, which is based on the philosophy taught by

Nichiren Daishonin, has its origin in that very moment. From that single invocation of “Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō” has come wave upon wave of practice, benefit and joy. These waves now reach every continent, and the recitation of Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō can be heard in 163 nations and territories around the globe.

For more than 70 years, our lay movement has been dedicated to the practice and study of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, and on bringing benefit and joy, which millions of people have experienced. We express our appreciation through continued dedication to faith, practice and study.

The spirit to study the Daishonin’s teachings is not simply one of intellectual interest or curiosity. We seek a profound understanding of Buddhism, one born of experience rather than just doctrinal theory. Through actual practice, we can understand and appreciate the depths of Buddhism within our own lives.

We practice and study Buddhism for our own inspiration and to encourage others. The understanding we gain through practice and study enables us to communicate with other people on a funda-

“The Lotus Sutra teaches of the great hidden treasure of the heart, as vast as the universe itself, which dispels any feelings of powerlessness. It teaches a dynamic way of living in which we breathe the immense life of the universe itself. It teaches the true great adventure of self-reformation.”

mental, human level. Through our experiences, we can share Buddhism in a way that is true to ourselves and that touches people’s lives.

Every religion and philosophy originates in a specific time and place. But not every religion or philosophy can transcend that time or place. What is the difference between teachings or ideas that we might consider universal and teachings that are only applicable or beneficial within a specific cultural context? What is the purpose of religion itself? Why did Nichiren Daishonin teach Nam-myoho-renge-kyo? Why is it only now, on the cusp of a new millennium, that Buddhism is being learned and practiced around the world?

As SGI President Ikeda stated in his lecture at Harvard University in 1993: “In an age marked by widespread religious revival, we need always ask: Does religion make people stronger or weaker? Does it encourage what is good or what is evil in them? Are they made better and wiser by religion?” (“Mahayana Buddhism and Twenty-first Century Civilization,” *A New Humanism: University Addresses of Daisaku Ikeda*, p. 151).

These questions point to religion’s potential capacity to make people strong, to encourage them to develop their best qualities and to cultivate their wisdom. Many teachings have spread throughout the world through their connection with specific military or economic interests. In this new century, however, if a teaching fosters dependence, narrow-mindedness or unreasonable attachment to dogma, then it is not a religion with universal validity, regardless of how widespread it may be. Only a philosophy or teaching that inspires hope and fosters true independence of the spirit can be considered universal.

In *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra* (vol. 1), President Ikeda discusses Nichiren Daishonin’s core teaching that everyone “has always been a Buddha

from the eternal past and will always be a Buddha into the eternal future” (p. 14). This concept is the fundamental reason the philosophy of the SGI is precisely suited to the current age.

“Some say the prevailing mood in the world today is one of powerlessness. Whatever the case may be, we are all aware that things cannot continue as they are. Yet decisions about political, economic and environmental issues all seem to be made somewhere beyond our reach. What can the individual accomplish in the face of the huge institutions that run our world? This feeling of powerlessness fuels a vicious cycle that only worsens the situation and increases people’s sense of futility” (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 6).

“Nichiren Daishonin, the votary of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law, made it possible for all to embody this truth within their daily lives. The Lotus Sutra teaches of the great hidden treasure of the heart, as vast as the universe itself, which dispels any feelings of powerlessness. It teaches a dynamic way of living in which we breathe the immense life of the universe itself. It teaches the true great adventure of self-reformation” (Ibid., p. 14).

We are so fortunate to have encountered the Daishonin’s teachings. Thank you all for your continuous efforts in faith, practice and study. I hope that this month we can renew our dedication, inspire our own personal practice and take action to study and contribute to our movement based on a sense of profound appreciation.

Thank you very much!

Daniel K. Nagashima



SGI-USA General Director

THE THREE

EXISTENCES

**Everything is
determined in
this moment**

We often feel bombarded with one situation after another that makes us wonder, “What did I do to deserve this?” or, “Why is this happening to me?” Especially when we are struggling in life, some of us might perceive ourselves as victims who have no clue about why we are suffering the way we are.

How do we answer the, “Why me’s?” How do we improve our lives?

The renowned Chinese Buddhist scholar T’ien-t’ai (538–597) said: “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (“The Opening of the Eyes,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 279).

Many people seem to look at life as if it is limited to this one existence. In Buddhism, however, we view life as eternal. Therefore, our lives are not just limited to this present existence. “Causes that existed in the past” refers not only to what we did yesterday or ten years ago, but also to previous existences since the remotest past. Though some of us like to wonder and even fantasize about what our past lives must have been like, because life is more vast and profound than we can imagine, it is difficult to fathom our actual past existences.

All the causes we made in the past have accumulated in lifetime after lifetime and these causes are

manifested as karma. We create our own karma. The moment we do something, say something or think something, an effect is registered in the depths of our being. As our lives meet the right circumstances, the effects of those causes take shape in various forms. These various manifestations of our individual karma are what lead to the uniqueness of our appearance, the situations we face and our lives.

“If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present.”

In order to understand our past causes, or our karma, we do not need to go to a psychic or a guru. In light of the eternal law of cause and effect, by simply looking at our life at present, we are able to understand what causes we made in the past.

Though we cannot undo the causes we made in the past, we can determine the way their effects influence our lives in the present. Reflecting on our experiences — and based on our own decisions and the actions we take — we either stagnate or advance forward. Each moment builds upon the previous one. So, how do we create the best causes for our future?

“If you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present.”

Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism teaches us that in our present environment, regardless of how excruciating our suffering may be, we do have the power to determine our future. The actions we take at this present moment influence the outcome of our

future. The greatness of Buddhism is that it shows us we are responsible for choosing how we lead our lives, and it teaches us how we can change our karma. Karma is not unchangeable like fate, which is a predestined path of what our life will be. We can change our karma based on the actions we take right here, right now. It is never too late to change our lives for the better.

For example, in the aftermath of a big earthquake, your house may have completely collapsed (with your entire family safe, of course) and you set yourself to the task of rebuilding your house. Given that you have all the resources you need to reconstruct your house, what course of action will you take? It would certainly be easier to rebuild the house according to the original plans, but how safe would you feel when the next earthquake rolls around? You are naturally determined to try and construct your new home to withstand the next earthquake. And now due to the tragedy of losing your first house, you have an idea of what kinds of adjustments you can make to try and avoid the same problem and improve your new home. The ultimate goal would be to rebuild your house to withstand all the earthquakes to come!

Likewise, instead of repeating the same cycles of suffering in our lives, we can choose to use our struggles as a springboard to fortify our inner strength. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which encapsulates the essential spirit of the Lotus Sutra, is the greatest resource available to us for constructing an eternally indestructible fortress of happiness in our lives. Chanting this phrase is the key to fusing with the law of life that exists throughout the universe. It is the greatest cause we can make for our lives. This cause remains in our lives throughout the three existences of past, present and future.

Chanting to the Gohonzon and teaching others about Buddhism represents the greatest possible good and accords with the law of life itself. It is the way to attain a state of eternal happiness.

Though we cannot see our past or future lives, we can find clear direction on how to live in this present life based on our understanding of the causal law of

life operating across the three existences of past, present and future. Through chanting, we are able to elevate our life-condition and perceive our fundamental karma. Once we realize our karmic tendencies we are able to challenge them head on.

In “On Attaining Buddhahood in this Lifetime,” Nichiren Daishonin explains: “The Lotus Sutra is the king of sutras, the direct path to enlightenment, for it explains that the entity of our life, which manifests either good or evil at each moment, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law. If you chant Myoho-renge-kyo with deep faith in this principle, you are certain to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime” (WND, 4).

Each moment of our lives is a struggle between creating good causes and giving in to our own weaknesses and negativity. We always have the choice of taking responsibility for our future and taking action with the strong conviction that it is never too late to change our lives for the better.

Nichiren Daishonin, in encouraging Shijo Kingo to live happily in the present without dwelling on past events or worrying about what might happen in the future, says: “Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law? Strengthen your power of faith more than ever” (WND, 681).

Happiness is not something that we will find somewhere off in the distance; it is to be found in the present. Both past and future are contained in the present, and though we know that life is eternal, everything exists in the present. There is no need to ponder too long on the “Why me’s?” since we know that we alone are responsible for our present situations. Why waste time wallowing in the misery of the unchangeable past when there is so much joy and appreciation to gain in making each moment, each day, a valuable step toward the unlimited potential of the future? ❁

By Rika Hashimoto, based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study) published by *Seikyo Press* in 1994.

Living the Teachings (5)

The Heritage of Atsuhara

BY FRED ZAITSU, PUBLISHER

The region beneath the southern slope of Mount Fuji offers some of the richest rice paddies in Japan. Several rivers thread their way through these fields in Shizuoka Prefecture where I grew up. I used to wander through the paddies, and from time to time, I'd come upon a stone monument that looked like it had been there forever. It was a memorial to the three martyrs of Atsuhara. I thought little about it until I learned the whole incredible story after joining the Soka Gakkai.

Seven hundred years earlier, farmers harvested rice from the same land I walked as a child. On September 21, 1279, twenty farmers from Atsuhara Village working on the harvest were arrested on fabricated charges, that included armed attack on a priest's residence at Ryusen-ji temple and theft.

The arrest was a direct result of the farmers' faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Successful propagation efforts by Nikko Shonin, the disciple and successor of Nichiren Daishonin, aroused hostility among local Tendai priests. In particular, the deputy chief priest of Ryusen-ji temple, Gyochi, was the central figure behind the Atsuhara Persecution. His power extended beyond temple walls, as he was a member of the politically powerful Hojo family. Already a corrupt force in the area, he became totally perverse when three priests from his temple,

"Urge on, but do not frighten, the ones from Atsuhara, who are ignorant of Buddhism. Tell them to be prepared for the worst, and not to expect good times, but take bad times for granted" ("On Persecutions Befalling the Sage," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 998).

as well as many farmers in his parish, converted to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

SGI President Ikeda has recently written about Atsuhara, beginning with a quote from the Daishonin: "If teacher and disciple are of different minds, they will never accomplish anything" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 909). During the Atsuhara Persecution, Nikko Shonin sent detailed reports on the unfolding events to Nichiren Daishonin, who was then at Mount Minobu, and received practical guidance and instruction from him. He faced this persecution completely united with his mentor, the Daishonin.

"In 1278, Gyochi — the deputy chief priest of Ryusen-ji temple in Atsuhara Village — forged a government directive with his cronies outlawing faith in the Lotus Sutra in what was an underhanded attempt to stop the spread of the Daishonin's teachings. The Daishonin declared that he did not even have to see the directive to know that it was fake. And in fact, it was quickly exposed as a forgery" (*World Tribune*, March 16, 2001, p. 8).

The arrests culminated in the beheading of three brothers for refusing to renounce their faith. The Daishonin alone had borne the brunt of persecution throughout his life. Now it was falling heavily on his followers, but they remained steadfast in their faith. This display of faith among his disciples precipi-

tated the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon the following month, which he dedicated to humanity.

In learning the story of the Atsuhara martyrs, I saw the familiar countryside of my childhood differently. I felt proud that my hometown was full of historical places related to the Atsuhara Persecution. The remains of Ryusen-ji temple still exist and nearby Jisso-ji temple still stands. It was in the sutra library of Jisso-ji that the Daishonin did research for writing “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land.” It is also where he first met thirteen-year-old Nikko Shonin who aided him in his research and became his disciple.

After the SGI and Nichiren Shoshu separated in 1991, a question kept popping up in my mind — why are the people in Atsuhara predominantly believers of the Minobu school of Nichiren Buddhism? That school traces its origins to one of the five senior priests who rebelled against Nikko, the Daishonin’s chosen successor. Although Minobu believers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, their interpretations of the Daishonin’s teachings betray his intent and are contrary to the views of Nikko Shonin. They relegate the Daishonin’s status to that of a mere adherent of the Tendai school and do not appreciate the significance of the Gohonzon as the sole object of devotion.

My family — on both my mother and father’s side — belonged to the Minobu sect. I remember the only times we chanted were at funerals, memorials and ceremonies. When we visited our family’s graves my mother and grandmother would tell me to chant, so I did. Once or twice a year, a priest would come to our house, recite the sutra and collect a donation.

I have wondered why a region so closely connected to the history of the Daishonin and Nikko Shonin does not bear their orthodox legacy. I did some research looking for an answer but found none. All I can do is reason out what might have happened.

The Daishonin died in 1282, and in 1298 Nikko Shonin built a seminary at Omosu Village that emphasized the intensive study of Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings and distinguished between the doctrines of the Fuji school and those set forth by the five senior priests.

Nikko Shonin died in 1333, shortly after the death of another key figure in the Atsuhara Persecution, Nanjo Tokimitsu, a strong lay leader and landowner in the area who provided support and protection for the farmers. (Nanjo Tokimitsu also donated the land for the head temple of the Fuji school founded by Nikko.)

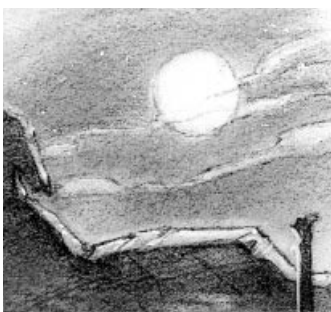
Without strong, leading practitioners who understood the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin to instruct and encourage them in faith, I imagine that farmers in the region eventually lost confidence and were swayed in their beliefs. Left on their own, they probably saw little or no difference between the Fuji school and the Minobu school. Because of their conflict with Nikko Shonin, the Minobu priests probably looked at the Atsuhara area as a prime target for propagation. They must have watched for just the right time. Converting the Atsuhara farmers to Minobu would not have been so difficult. The only area that they hesitated to approach was the area immediately surrounding head temple Taiseki-ji. To me the tragedy of the Atsuhara farmers did not end in 1279.

The more similar that Nichiren schools appear in practice and doctrine, the more vigilant we must be in pointing out the differences. This is why Nichiren Daishonin strictly refuted the Tendai school. They had once correctly embraced the Law and then had gone astray. This was of more concern than those sects that followed teachings other than the Lotus Sutra. To allow confusion to go unchallenged is contrary to the Daishonin’s spirit of compassion. This is as true today as it was seven hundred years ago.

The battle between fundamental enlightenment and fundamental darkness — between the Buddha and the devil — is most evident in the realm where the Buddha’s teachings can be altered ever so deceptively. This is most likely what happened in the province where I grew up. Without a courageous teacher of the Law to clarify the truth, people gradually succumbed to the propagation efforts of the Minobu sect, unaware of their mistake. We must not make the same mistake again. This is why the Daishonin admonishes us to be prepared for the worst. “The worst” is becoming incapable of seeing injustice and being victimized by evil. ☸

My Story— Niike

The following story is a fictionalized first-person account of Niike Saemon-no-jo and what it might have been like for him to live in thirteenth-century Japan as a follower of Nichiren Daishonin. Nikko Shonin converted him and his wife to the teachings of the Daishonin. Niike was a samurai official in the Kamakura government of Japan and a dedicated believer despite the government's opposition to his practice.



Niike is the recipient of “Letter to Niike” which appeared in last month’s issue as the study material for April. One of the most familiar quotes from the Daishonin is written in this letter: “The journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?” (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 1027).

BY FAY HOVEY
ILLUSTRATIONS BY ED LEE

a discreet but firm knock on the gate comes, and one of the servants brings the messenger to me. It is a priest, Nikko, obviously weary from his travels. He has a letter addressed to me from Nichiren Daishonin. I think of Nichiren at Minobu, like a beacon in the darkness of this age. The earnest face of the priest and the packet he unwraps from the sleeve of his garment moves me to suggest we sit in the far reaches of the garden, rather than risk the paper-thin walls of my house.

As a representative of the government, I cannot be too careful. Oh, they know of my conversion and that of my wife, and though we are a good distance

from them, their reach is long. We face a stream of criticism and are considered to have suspicious motives, yet they leave us alone. Why the military government hasn’t removed me, I can only guess. Perhaps they think I am more useful alive and in my village where I might be party to information that could be forced from me later on. At any rate, these are dreadful times — most animals act with more reverence and humility than human beings.

“Nichiren asks that I read this to you several times,” Nikko says. As the letter unfolds before us, I think how wise Nichiren is. Although I can read and cipher well enough, there is something profound in hearing his words — words that have traveled so far from his mountainous retreat. As I hear his words,

my heart can see the twists and turns of the trails and the narrow places washed away. The dizzying glance down sheer cliffs is enough to frighten an experienced climber. As birds fly, it is not far; but by foot, it is a journey to the moon.

At dusk, I offer Nikko a meal. We are both hungry from our discussions, and I have asked my share of questions, especially about Zen, a popular religion that many embrace.

With Nichiren in retreat at Minobu, it is Nikko who has traveled the country sharing the true teachings of the Lotus Sutra.

Kamakura is thick with Zen temples and samurai officers; courtiers and bureaucrats alike satisfy themselves with strutting and arrogance.

The world is changing so much. There was always strife of some kind in the past — locusts, famines, fires and floods — but now it comes in multiples.

Just this month, we have been ordered by the Imperial government to pray for victory over the Mongols again. We wouldn't be teetering on the edge of foreign invasion if the governor at Kamakura didn't see fit to lop off the heads of every Mongolian delegation that dares show itself on our shores. In this age, however, civilized mercy is considered weak.

Soldiers leave the arms of their crying wives and children to march to the front at Hakone to await the armies of the merciless Kublai Khan. I pondered these things late into the night. It was quiet save for the pacing of the guard and the sounds of bamboo clacking and groaning in the grove. I lay abed, and the memory of a journey I made to Minobu less than a year ago rises before me. Once again, I see the endless twisting trails.

Did I say “trails”? It is better to say “foot paths.”

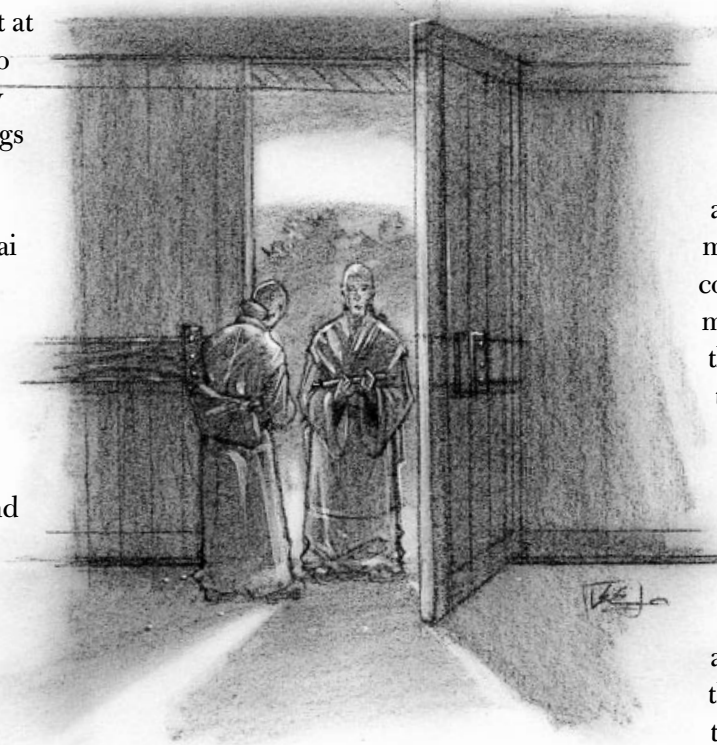
The howling of wolves and the calls of monkeys seem ghost-like. But I get ahead of myself. I am not the vigorous man I once was. I traded the saddle for the writing desk. I travel from time-to-time, but only on the Tokaido road or other well-worn thoroughfares. A week in the saddle over rough terrain leaves me hobbling for days. The road to Kamakura boasts an assortment of civilized inns, but the way to Minobu is

populated by mountain demons and “accidents” too numerous to mention.

My wife is a brave woman, braver than I am. Still, she frowned at my departure, thinking I could send a more able messenger with offerings than risk losing me. I had to see Nichiren for myself after hearing about him from his chief follower, Nikko. I felt I needed to see the source of the river after having tasted its waters, and a river's source in the mountains is where the peaks are so high, the

birds have difficulty flying over them. I took with me two men skilled with sword and bow and two horses loaded with food, supplies and gifts. We set off in the fragrance of April where the warmth of sun is on the lowlands and one could almost forget the threats of war on such a day. I was reminded of my brothers and I hunting with my father.

Once one leaves sea level, there is rough going. The dragons of the earth still live and breathe fire. Hot springs and steaming places make the rocks a danger. In some regions, it looks as if a giant tossed boulders into the sky and they rained down indiscriminately upon these mountains, each boulder and outcropping offering ample cover to thieving folk. A more treacherous place than the mountains of old Japan could scarcely be found.



At night, we slept in the worst hovels, or we would decline such mean shelter and sleep only at dawn in the woods with one man standing guard. Even the horses were reluctant to go further, their ears twitching and nostrils shivering. In the higher reaches, it is easy to disappear without a trace. The Fuji River roared down steeply through a massive gorge, tumbling down into mist and foam — a white mass growling with menace. Thick forests of birch, cypress, pine and cedar carpeted the land, and a deep, impenetrable gloom hugged the pathway. An army of 40,000 men could lurk there without so much as a glint off their armor.

Resolutely, I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, keeping our destination in mind. My men, toughened by many campaigns, would have gladly quit that place if I so much as raised my hand. How appropriate it was to hear the Daishonin's words about the journey to Kyoto and how one will never see the full moon there if one turns back. His words described the very challenge I faced, as it became clear that we might be lost.

Life requires a good deal of courage and a deaf ear to fear and danger. We pushed on. All I had were the directions given to me by others who had gone before. At any point we might have taken a wrong turn. We roamed the crags endlessly like beggar spirits squinting at passersby. There is a numbness that comes with such travel. Every mountain looks like the one previously climbed, each valley a copy of the one before. So it was with a startle that we heard something, a crack in the forest and stopping, we twisted on our saddles to catch the direction. There it was again, crack, and the crashing of a tree in the underbrush.

Dismounting, we ventured off the path into the forest and found them: two woodcutters and quite a pair they were! They were well muscled and stripped to waist and covered in mud from the eyebrows to boots. They looked to be less like men



than spirits of those woods.

“Ho, there!” I called out as we advanced on them carefully. “I seek a priest who lives here in these mountains somewhere close by. His name is Nichiren. I bring him food and offerings from the province of Totomi. Do you know of this man?”

They looked at me and then at one another. We looked fairly unsavory ourselves.

“How do we know you tell the truth and are not out here to kill him?” one spat out.

“I have a letter from him,” I said, reaching for my pack.

“We don’t read. Your letter means nothing to us!” the other said, still holding his axe at ready.

“But I have many things that he could use. Food, seaweed, rice, writing materials—and I am friend of his disciple, Nikko.”

At the mention of Nikko’s name, they lowered their axes and agreed to take only me and the horse-load of goods to the Daishonin. I don’t know who had to trust more, for they could have killed me and made off with the horses and everything we’d brought. After a half day’s journey, we arrived at a clearing 100 yards wide at the confluence of four rushing rivers. The sound of the spring surge, icy cold echoed off the surrounding ramparts.

We were hailed from afar by a slight figure and as we drew closer, his appearance was surprising. He was dressed like a wild man of the mountains. His cape of broad leaves kept off the late afternoon drizzle. His eyes were penetrating and bright in spite of

the shabby deerskin he was clad in. It was the very person I was seeking, Nichiren.

“I have just been seeing off an old friend, he said. A monkey. There’s something about him, something in his eyes that reminds me of one of my father’s friends who was a fisherman. In the winter months, the monkeys are my only visitors. And now that you both have appeared, it is like a vision or mirage!” He clapped the woodcutter on the shoulder. “To see a human being coming down the ravine in the early spring is to be disbelieved at first!”

I bowed low and introduced myself. My legs trembled from the long ride and my relief at finding him at last. I found it difficult to speak and fell to one knee.

“I know, Lord Niike, it is a far and mean way you have come. Surely you must have been my father or brother in another life to forge on bringing gifts and food. Most men don’t have the gratitude of the otter, which always leaves part of his meal as an offering. Please come and rest yourself. My house is rude and humble but not as bad as the lodgings along the way, eh? I sometimes think I have become a spirit of this place myself. It is so good to hear a human voice!”

That night, I slept in his bark-sided hut after we cooked sweet potatoes and rice over a small fire. We’d never met, yet we were fast friends and there was much to say. I marveled at his vibrant face, intelligent eyes and eloquence. Glancing discreetly into the darker corners of the small dwelling, I saw his altar, a magnificent Gohonzon, some sumi ink and brushes with paper and a few pots and pans. I wondered to myself what he had been eating all this time, as I saw no food stores.

“Fern shoots,” he said, as if he could read my thoughts. “And berries in the spring. In the winter there is snow for rice. In the summer, I have more visitors and my meals are more

tasty,” he chuckled. I could see the things I had brought him were invaluable. My wife had sent a warm robe and medicinal herbs.

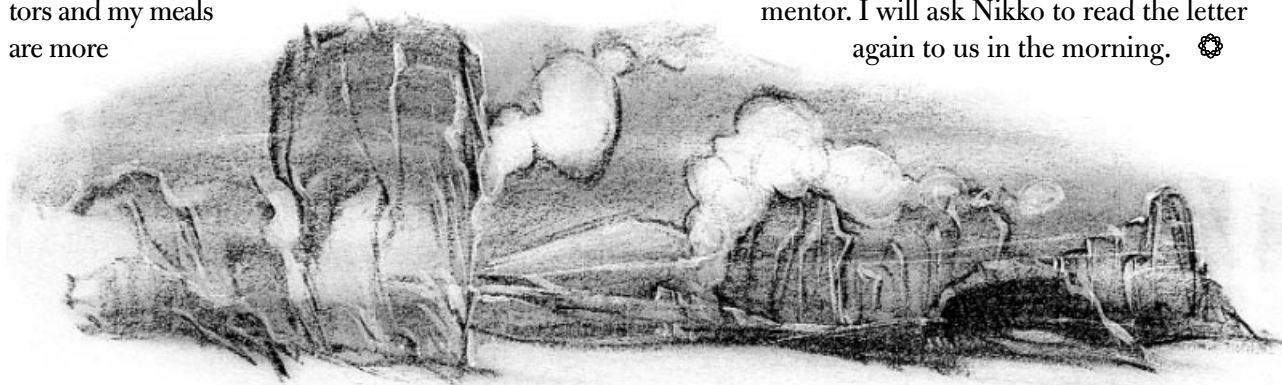
How long will he be able to go on like this? I thought to myself, hoping he didn’t hear my concern. I fell asleep listening to the chill howl of wolves and the roar of cascading rivers.

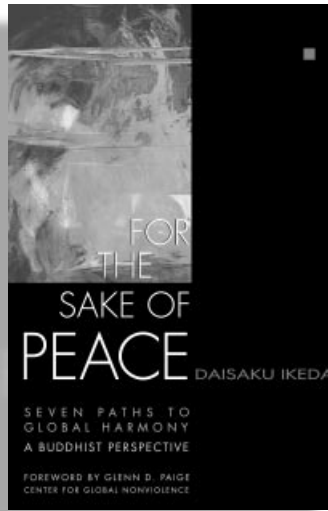
Stirring in my warm bed this night at Niike village, I remember his face smiling into mine when I awoke. “How did you know seaweed is one of my favorite things to eat?” he asked. “It takes me back to the time when I was Zennichi-marō, a fisherman’s son — a child of the ocean side.”

Each moment of my stay with him at Minobu is an irreplaceable treasure to me. I asked every question I could think of, we chanted the Lotus Sutra and daimoku together. We sat by the river’s edge and spoke of the changes to come, the dangers of life we would have to face.

When I left many days later, he warmly embraced me saying: “Be diligent in your faith, Lord Niike — until the last moment of your life. Think how much regret you would have carried home in your heart if you had not pushed on and made it here. If you had turned back, we would not have enjoyed this remarkable time together. This is the kind of faith to have. But I will write more of these things to you later. Please give my appreciation to your wife, who was so brave to stay at home when surely she would have ridden by your side if she could. See me in the sun, Lord Niike, I am there in the sun, he pointed to the sky. And bring your family here if things go badly!”

Outside my hall where everyone soundly sleeps, the moon has risen and soon the sun will rise. I hear the Daishonin’s voice again telling me to never give up. I take my strength from his words. In a world filled with every vice and threat, I had finally met my mentor. I will ask Nikko to read the letter again to us in the morning. ☸





Anthology of Peace *Shines Light on the Possibilities*

COMMENTARY ON 'FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE'

BY ALFRED BALITZER, PhD

Dr. Balitzer is the Dean of Faculty at Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo, California, which will begin its first semester in the fall of this year.

For the *Sake of Peace* is a new collection of writings by Daisaku Ikeda. The work of this prodigious Buddhist author runs the gamut from poetry (his poetic tribute to Walt Whitman is a must-read for all lovers of this great American poet) to wondrous children's stories that edify as they excite the imagination. Although Ikeda is not well-known to English language readers, among those who have read him (or who have been privileged to hear his occasional American lectures), he is recognized for his views on global citizenship, culture and diversity,

human rights, "soft" power as a tool of international diplomacy and environmental degradation.

All of these subjects are touched upon in *For the Sake of Peace*, each leading irresistibly — as Ikeda's arguments unfold — toward one overriding, unshakable concern: the centrality of peace to the human condition. Peace is not just the absence of armed clashes between nations; rather, it is a manifestation of the life condition of individual human beings. Throughout the book, Ikeda associates peace in the broadest sense with the ability of individuals to actualize peace in their own lives.

Peace Begins with Self-mastery

This important and compelling book is about the conditions of peace — how to think about peace, how to develop a culture of peace and how to make peace a part of the ultimate reality of every human being. In one of the most brilliant chapters of the book, Ikeda explains how peace begins with “self-mastery.” It is difficult to read his discussion of self-mastery without thinking of that noble phrase that rolls off the American tongue from centuries of usage — self-government. Ikeda’s discussion of self-mastery is about self-government at its best, drawing the conclusion that a nation cannot be truly self-governing if the individuals that compose it are not self-governing.

This is an important chapter for every democrat. His discussion of democracy is a reminder of the time before the triumph of the democratic age when thoughtful men worked hard to nurture democracy while at the same time correcting its vices. Noting Plato’s critique of democracy — noting it perhaps more than would make most democrats comfortable — Ikeda proposes self-mastery as the solution to democracy’s central problem, the lack of self-control.

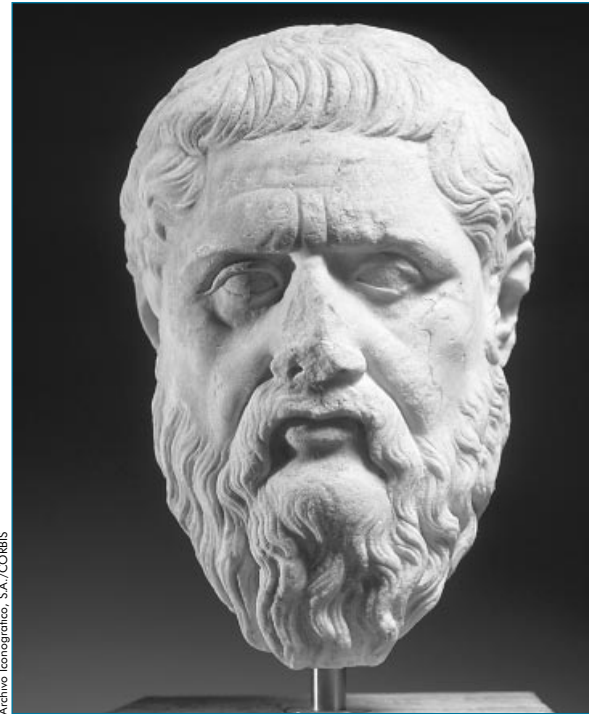
Self-mastery starts with gaining control over anger and other tendencies that cause us to tyrannize and make war on ourselves, hence, on others. The first and most important step in self-mastery is victory over the ego — victory over the liberated self that, detached from any higher understanding of humanity, seeks unlimited gratification.

Self-mastery also means distinguishing between things that are transitory and things that are of permanent value, thereby checking the two sources of greed, unrestrained appetite and the desire to acquire. Self-restraint flows from self-mastery, Ikeda argues, establishing a government within that subjects passion to reason and war to peace. Drawing on Plato and other great Western thinkers, he weaves them into a tapestry on cloth supplied by his Buddhist faith. Speaking of the “path of self-mastery,” Ikeda refers to this as a “human revolution,” motivated and sustained by spiritual values.

Self-mastery means abandoning aggression for

living in harmony with oneself, with others of our species and with nature. The human revolution, by preparing human beings to achieve the promise of their nature, turns good men into good citizens, making for a sound and healthy democracy.

That which causes peace within the individual is the source of “good citizens of the world.” Ikeda’s thought places him firmly within the grand tradition of Western political philosophy that draws the good society from the well-spring of human nature.



Archivo Iconografico, S.A./CORBIS

Plato

An Advocate of Global Society

Building on that tradition, Ikeda makes his own, special contribution to this 2,000-year-old history. The Greek philosopher Aristotle championed the polis, or city-state as a condition necessary to leading a virtuous life. In his scheme, the life dedicated to virtue does not make for a society dedicated to peace. Aristotle assumed that all other states, small or large, driven by jealousy, would be at war with the virtuous city. John Locke, the seventeenth-century English philosopher, envisioned the cultivation of property, the basis of freedom, as taking place within the nation-state. Once men form a civil society, according to his argument, they agree to live under articles of peace that protect life and property. Locke, however,

makes no provision for peace between nation-states, thus leaving them in a permanent state of war with one another. By contrast to Aristotle and Locke, Ikeda argues for a global society because he believes that peace is man's greatest need.

Ikeda is critical of the worldview associated with Locke because it encourages unchecked appetite, destroying the very freedom that gives rise to it. From Ikeda's point of view, the modern capitalist state (and, I would add, the socialist state) lacks self-control, a concept that approximates Aristotle's notion of virtue. Rejecting the worldview associated with Locke, he also rejects the worldview associated with Aristotle. According to Aristotle, virtue is necessarily the possession of the few. By contrast, Ikeda contends that the virtues of Buddhahood are a potential of all men. For Ikeda, beyond the city-state and the nation-state lies a better global society. Global society allows Ikeda to appropriate a form of Aristotelean virtue, putting self-mastery within reach of all men. It also allows him to appropriate a form of Lockean prosperity by adopting a broader understanding of freedom, one that is rooted in community and culture. In this way, Ikeda uses Locke, the author of the Liberal state, to reach beyond Liberal or Lockean notions.

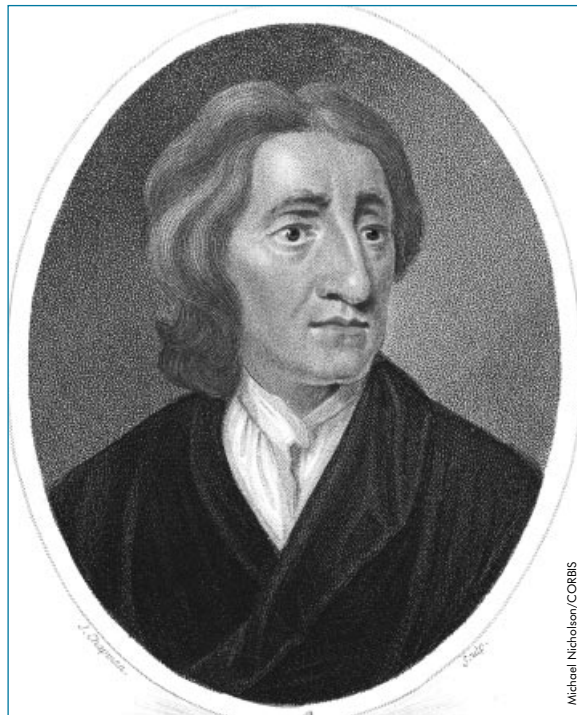
Locke, the first political philosopher to make the distinction between state and society, creates the possibility of a sphere of freedom and creativity for men separate from the direction of government and law. Continental philosophers, such as Jean Jacques Rousseau and Alexis de Tocqueville, deepen and give further meaning to this distinction through the discussion of custom and culture. Ikeda, well aware of these schools of thought, is also steeped in knowledge of the world's great religions that long before the advent of modern political philosophy

focused on the quality of life separate from any association with government or regime. Ikeda's political philosophy, drawing on the Western philosophic tradition and Buddhist thought, fully develops this notion of society as man's natural home, leading the way to a discussion of justice separate from government or classical regime theory.

As far as I can tell, Ikeda does not argue for a world state or government, a fashion of the last century. His basic mistrust of politics and politicians causes him to stop short of this. Nor does he argue for a classless, stateless society, as was another twentieth century fashion. Moreover, Ikeda is neither "right" nor "left," rather; he has developed a political philosophy that is firmly rooted in people sans ideological gloss. While liberals speak of the rights of individuals, Ikeda focuses on the individual himself, viewing his rights through the lens of culture, community and need. While conservatives speak of the distinction between freedom and tyranny, Ikeda looks behind and beyond this distinction to how people, regardless of regime, must live their lives. Americans speak of man's natural rights, whereas Ikeda speaks of human rights — a distinction not just of degree, but also of kind, the former a "self-evident" truth, fixed and

"inalienable," while the latter is the product of culture and thus variable. This said, Ikeda is not a relativist, cultural or otherwise. Cultural relativism, he argues, is a passive approach to peace, ultimately undermining it.

Ikeda is an advocate of global society, not necessarily of globalization. His emphasis is on people and culture, not the exchange of technology and capital investment. Technology has made for a shrinking world. The destruction of multitudes in the wars of the last



Michael Nicholson/CORBIS

John Locke

century established a yearning in people for peace that, through technology among other things, allows people to reach out to one another regardless of culture, age, race, ethnicity or gender. This is the beginning of global citizenship. Conversely, Ikeda rejects technology that deprives people of the customs and cultures that give meaning to daily life. He also rejects the top down perspective of multinational financial institutions that make decisions that affect the lives of ordinary people. By contrast, Ikeda has a grass roots approach to global living. Men living freely in institutions that spring from their own cultures inspire Ikeda's advocacy of a global society. Ikeda contends that when uncorrupted by governments or otherwise left to their own, people will do the right thing, such as seek peace. When institutions are rooted in the people, national lines dissolve as people, embracing one another, cross them to fulfill very human aspirations.

Ikeda points to the proliferation of nongovernmental organizations to make his point, a growing number of which are transnational in character, representing people who reach out to one another across national boundaries to solve common problems. In the process of doing this, the participants in this process find themselves, willy-nilly, becoming global citizens.

Buddhism: The Internal Cause of Peace

Ikeda's political philosophy, transcending the distinction between ancients and moderns, establishes peace as the preeminent human goal, not just a goal of governments. He also provides the vehicle — global citizens of a global society. This is his special contribution to the history of political philosophy.

Ikeda's vast erudition, drawing on knowledge of history, philosophy, literature, psychology and religion appears prominently in his writing. More than a polymath, Ikeda demonstrates exceptional insight into the great works of Western literature — knowledge of which today is rare for Western writers let alone for writers from Asia — moving effortlessly and elegantly between Eastern and Western thought as

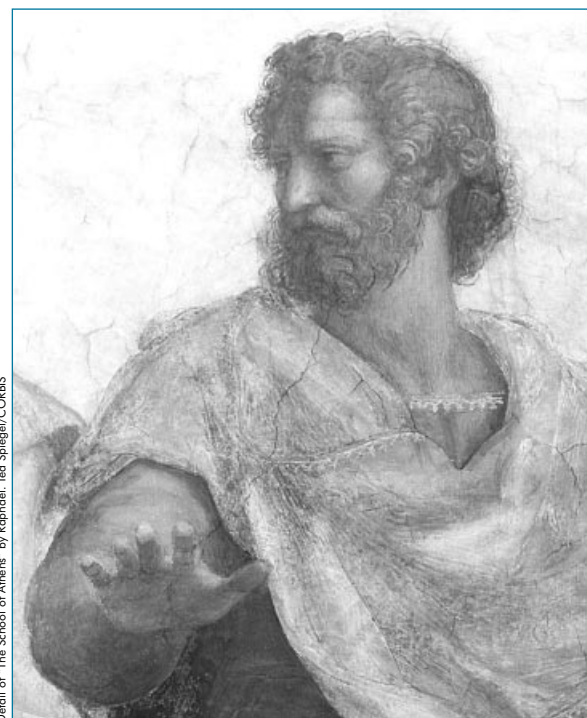
he discusses ways to think about peace. Buddhism, however, is the true fountainhead of Ikeda's writings. A renowned Buddhist thinker and leader, Ikeda never concludes an argument without illuminating it with

the wisdom of his Buddhist faith. Invoking the teachings of Gautama Buddha, he supplements it generously with the wisdom of Nichiren Daishonin, the thirteenth-century Buddhist reformer and spiritual father of the modern day Soka Gakkai, the lay Buddhist organization of which Ikeda was the third president. Ikeda also draws upon the first and second presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the latter Ikeda's beloved mentor.

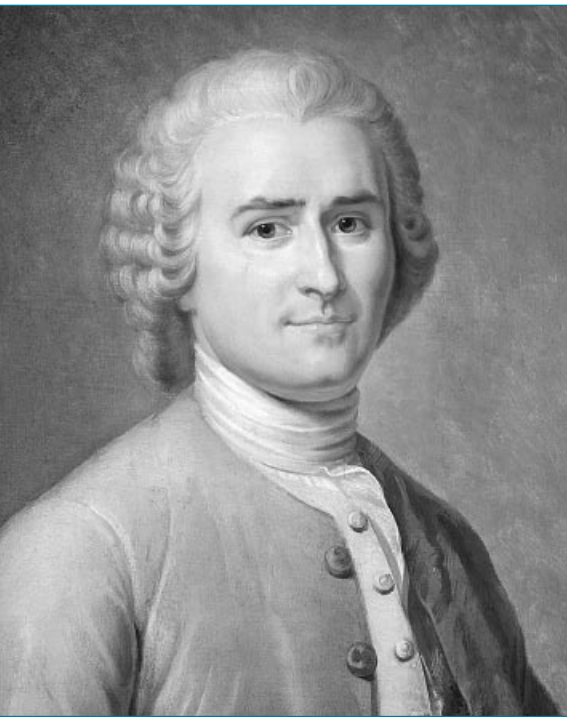
Ikeda's Buddhism is characterized by its public spiritedness. Public-spirited Buddhism rejects life behind a walled garden in favor of active participation in the agora [or marketplace]. His Buddhism is not passive but — as he reminds us about the commitment to peace itself — requires active engagement of the world. Enlightenment begins with embracing humanity with all its joy and pain, a posture that will surprise many in the West whose image of Buddhism is inward looking, saffron-robed monks who find enlightenment from withdrawing from the world and its cares. His Buddhism is not exotic — perhaps disappointing some Western intellectuals who look to Buddhism for escape — but, rather, is realistic, even hard-nosed.

Because Ikeda's Buddhism focuses on the internal causes of peace and therefore on the individual, he rejects the simplistic ideological and mechanistic

Detail of "The School of Athens" by Raphael. Ted Spingel/CORBIS



Aristotle



Portrait by Luce de la Harpe, Archivio Iconografico, S.A./CORBIS

Jean Jacques Rousseau

argues that it takes peaceful men to make a peaceful world. Contrary to the tendency of modern thought, Ikeda contends that peace does not result from a mechanistic arrangement of institutions, passions or interests but, rather, from a transformation of individual human beings who, gaining self-knowledge and thus self-control, overcome the desire to exact violence on others.

One expression of how Ikeda looks beyond ideological and mechanistic formulations is his treatment of the individual. Embracing the individual, he rejects individualism. The individual is ennobled by his capacity for Buddhahood, the fulfillment of what is truly human in man. It is the capacity and inheritance of every human being. By contrast, individualism is an ideology, defining man by the lowest common denominator. Viewing men as atoms in a universe of nondescript atoms, the doctrine of individualism proclaims that forces external to man decide his fate. Rooting the peace process in the individual humanizes the process and focuses on building a coalition for peace one person at a time. While it is tempting to address the sources of war with grand theories that point to underlying causes, in the end such theories are unreliable and doomed to fail because they disregard what is most human about

formulations of peace that dominated nineteenth- and twentieth-century thought. In this, he draws upon an antique mode of thought that is no less vital or relevant for being old. Just as Plato argues that only good men can make good government, Ikeda

man. Slow but certain characterizes Ikeda's approach to the peace process.

Ikeda's Buddhism is not just another variant of the "feel good" philosophies that are so popular today. It is neither confessional nor does it ooze with sentimentality. It is not therapeutic Buddhism but, rather, a faith drawn from ancient texts that identifies the whole person with the timeless law of the universe. "Getting in touch with yourself" has little meaning in Ikeda's philosophy disassociated from life's ultimate reality. His Buddhist thought commences with the Mystic Law, the law of cause and effect, showing the oneness or wholeness of the universe by providing a common thread to its disparate parts. The Law tells men that they are at home in the universe, not alienated from it, as is the teaching of so many contemporary philosophers. The Law is not a principle of creation, as that term is known in the West; it nevertheless links the individual to the first cause of all things (as we would say in the Jewish and Christian worlds). The Law recognizes the inherent cause and effect of everything in the universe, thus recognizing how any one element affects all others. Making a human revolution — the ultimate recognition of the centrality of the Law — is not an easy matter. It takes work to obtain it and requires a lifetime of commitment. It is a way of life for the practitioner and a model for those who, seeing what the practice does, start on the path towards their own human revolution.

A Proactive Pacifist

Ikeda calls himself a pacifist. Certainly he is a pacifist of a different stripe by comparison to the Western version. Pacifism in the West, largely based on Biblical text, turns the other cheek, surrendering the right of self-defense. Admiring Gandhi's commitment to non-violence, Ikeda admits within reason the legitimacy of a nation's concern for its national security. Nor does he embrace the cause of unilateral disarmament, although he insists upon the immediate abolition of nuclear weapons. Ikeda's pacifism is more complex than the pacifism of the West. Abhorring violence,

he is not utopian in his approach to peace largely because he believes that the ultimate source of peace is internal, a potential of every human being. Ikeda is a muscular pacifist. Standing up to injustice, he urges his reader to seek victory in life, assuming a proactive, engaged attitude toward the battle for a more peaceful world.

Often described as a visionary, Ikeda excels at translating theory into practice as evidenced by the many organizations and institutions of which he is the founder. The Soka Gakkai International, of which he is now president, has branch organizations in 163 countries and territories. He is also the founder of a school system that includes kindergarten, grade and intermediate schools, high schools and universities. Soka University of Japan has more than 7,000 students, and in the United States, Soka University of America will soon open its doors to its first undergraduate class. SUA will offer students a curriculum that responds to Ikeda's vision of what it means to lead a fully human life. Over the last twenty years, he has built museums, cultural organizations and institutes, including the Pacific Basin Research Center, a joint project of Harvard University and Soka University.

These institutions and many others — the list is too long to mention here — demonstrate practical virtue of an uncommon sort. At the heart of practical virtue is prudence, unusual insight and judgment that results from experience and from knowledge of human nature. Ikeda is long on both. As with men of great practical virtue, Ikeda does not discard what is already in place but, rather, working with things as they are, moves them toward what they could become.

Supporter of the United Nations

Consider Ikeda's discussion of enhancing the role of NGOs in the United Nations, one of the practical peace proposals to be found in the book. These private and voluntary associations, he argues, are early warning systems for flash points around the globe spanning a range of potential crises from looming environmental disasters to clashes among rival ethnic groups. NGOs now operate on the periphery of the United Nations. Ikeda proposes to give them access to the General Assembly and the Security Council, improving the flow of information and, thereby, the

decision-making systems of the world body. NGOs bring people into the process of decision-making and peace making. As grass roots organizations, NGOs grow out of the culture and needs of people. Besides information, they give heart and soul to large, mechanically organized institutions. Moreover, NGOs bring a transnational perspective to their work, providing the United Nations with a people's perspective that crosses traditional boundaries. He also favors the United Nations as a means of promoting global civilization, the ultimate guarantor of world peace, since the



Alexis de Tocqueville

United Nations is a vehicle, the only vehicle of its kind, for harmonizing differences. By proposing that NGOs become a familiar part of the highest decision-making bodies of the United Nations, Ikeda suggests a union of substantial new value, enabling each of the parts to fulfill more completely their inherent mission.

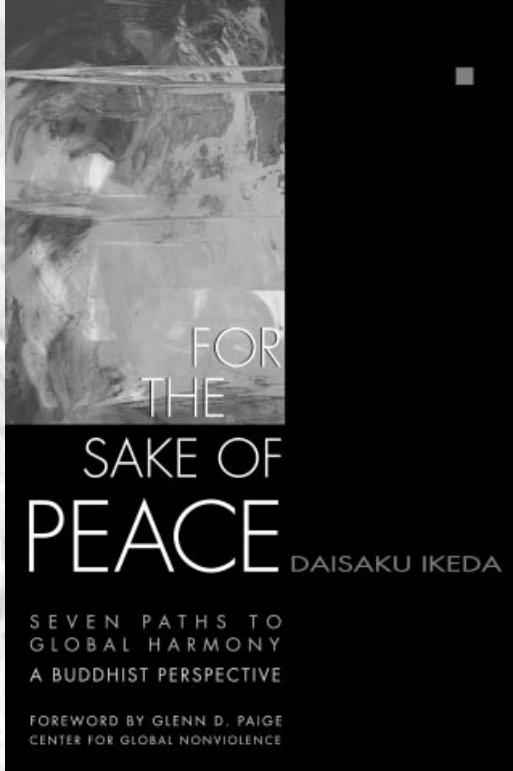
This book charms while it persuades. Part of the charm of Ikeda's art of writing is that he draws on

the works of great authors but never speaks to his audience except in language that is plain and intelligible. One might say of Ikeda's art of writing that while he speaks of concepts that are not always simple to grasp, he always talks about them simply. Ikeda draws in his reader by making each one feel as if he is speaking directly to him or her — a style that flows from his knowledge of people and his belief in the importance of the individual.

His book is also a testament to his extraordinary education. Largely self-taught, Ikeda's education, manifesting itself on every page, recalls a time when education had something to do with being schooled in the great works of the great minds. Ikeda's book reaffirms something that, previously acknowledged, has become increasingly disregarded by a society that celebrates specialization and instantaneous gratification. Ikeda's book reminds us that ideas have consequences for how one should live life. It also reaffirms the significance of books — especially great

books — as something real, something living that can mold the sensibilities of the heart. Ikeda is a son of the liberal arts, thoughtful in speech and deed, compassionate of heart, and resolute of mind. I hope that the students of Soka University of America, his new American university, will receive just a smidgen of the kind of education that Ikeda was able to give himself. Such students will be truly fortunate.

Ikeda's education is also the result of his mentor who recognized in Ikeda an extraordinary young mind. This relationship is wonderfully documented in Ikeda's history of the founding of the Soka Gakkai, *The Human Revolution*, a work, happily, that is obtainable in English translation. Since only a fraction of Ikeda's writings are available in English — an omission that needs to be addressed without further delay — the English reading public owes Middleway Press a debt of gratitude for *For the Sake of Peace*, an anthology of Ikeda's writings on peace over the last twenty years. ☸




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Seikyo Press

Brazilian doctor Maria de Nazaré da Fonseca meets with SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and his wife Kaneko in Sao Paolo, Brazil, in March 1993.

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

cultures 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."

Dr. Maria de Nazaré da Fonseca Solino of Brazil

Maria de Nazaré da Fonseca Solino is a Brazilian doctor. In 1993, during our extended visit to South America, my wife became ill, and it was Dr. Nazaré — as she is fondly known by all — who looked after her with deep concern and tender care.

Dr. Nazaré says: "The greatest benefit I have gained since joining the SGI is that I have been able to feel appreciation for others. Perhaps because I had such a hard life, I used to look at others with the attitude that they owed me something. But after embracing faith in Buddhism, I came to realize that I must

become the sort of person who asks instead what I can do for others.”

Dr. Nazaré is from the small town of Tocantins in the lush forest lands of northern Brazil. In those days, it was a poor town where cowherds brought their livestock to be butchered. “My mother apparently arrived in Tocantins already pregnant with me, and with a small boy — my brother — in tow. I don’t know where she came from. She became a washerwoman for the cowherds of Tocantins, and it was in that town I was born. They say that a native Indian man used to visit my mother, so perhaps my father was an Indian.”

Suffering from complications after giving birth, Dr. Nazaré’s mother was sent to a hospital in the distant city of Belém for treatment. On her way back to Tocantins, the plane she was traveling on crashed.

“My brother and I became orphans,” relates Dr. Nazaré. “A couple whose daughter had recently drowned in the river took me in — an unnamed newborn infant whose date of birth was not known. I have no idea what happened to my brother. I don’t even know if he is dead or alive.”

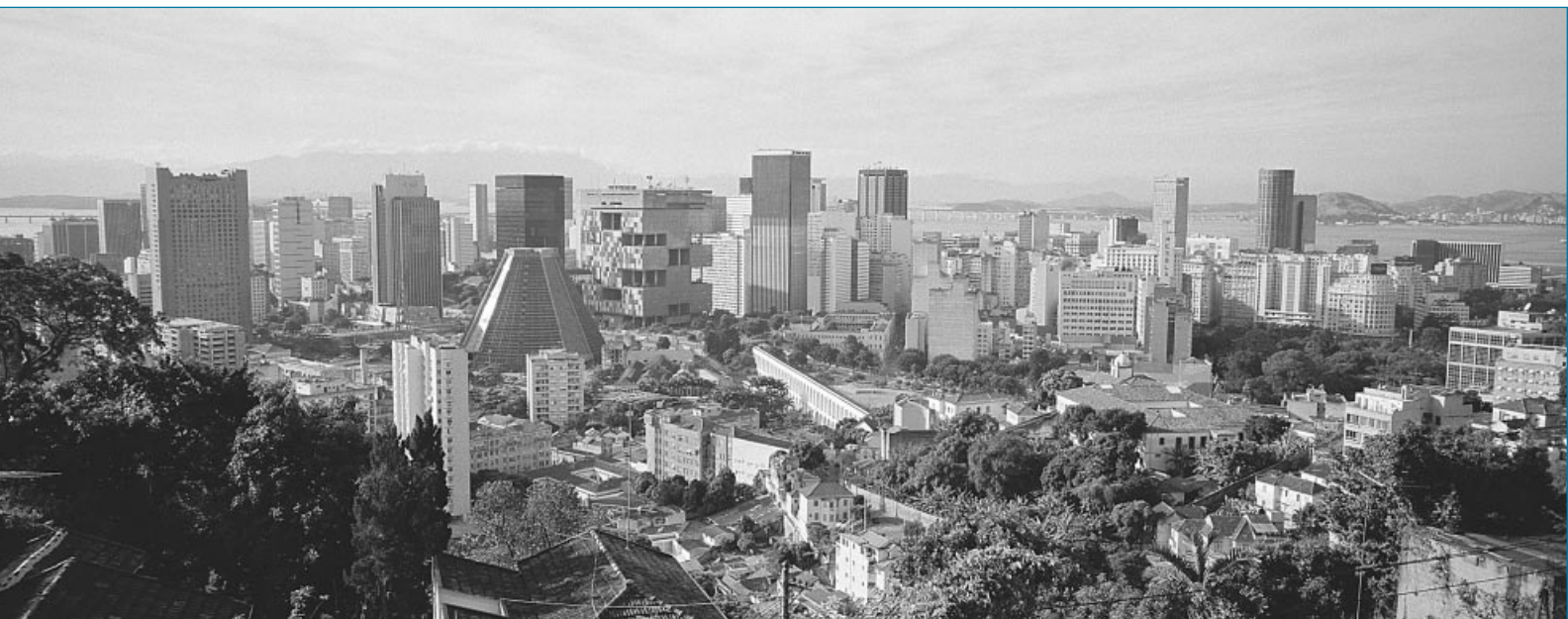
Dr. Nazaré left her hometown at 7, when she was sent to boarding school in the big city, Rio de Janeiro.

Until then, she had spent her days running about naked in the forest. Her only toys were clay dolls. Now everything had changed. The school was very strict, and it was hard for her to get used to the constraints imposed upon her. She felt very lonely and withdrew into her shell.

Dr. Nazaré first learned that she was adopted when she was 10. The news came as a shock. When she heard how her real mother died, she pledged in her young heart to contribute somehow to prevent the repetition of such tragedy for want of readily available medical care.

She became a doctor, specializing in intensive care. Her patients were those hovering on the fine line between life and death. “I wanted to save lives,” she says. But after becoming a doctor she learned a new, harsher lesson: Death is an inescapable part of life. Again and again, she witnessed patients’ final struggles with death. Some patients were beyond the help of medicine. All she could do was hold their hands and pray that they would be free from pain and suffering.

Dr. Nazaré’s adopted father died in an accident, when she was 13. He was a free-spirited, independent man who used to spend more than six months of the



Dr. Nazaré left her hometown at age 7, when she was sent to boarding school in Rio de Janeiro (above).

Daniel Geller/CORBIS



Yann Arthus-Bertrand/
CORBIS

Dr. Nazaré is from a small town in the lush forest lands of Northern Brazil called Tocantins.

year in the forest searching for gold and diamonds. “My father taught me,” she recalls, “‘Never be afraid. Be a strong person. Be strong, so that you can survive.’” Her adopted mother remarried, but her second husband also died after only a few years.

What is death? What is destiny? What is family? These questions haunted Dr. Nazaré.

At the end of 1986, she came to a decision: Next year she would find happiness, she would find what she had been searching for. Something was missing in her life. She had studied hard. Gone to Germany to further her knowledge. Gained experience as a doctor. Encountered different religions. Yet there was an unassuageable emptiness inside her.

On New Year’s Eve, she went to the hairdresser. She was drawn to the cheerful, energetic personality of one of the women who worked there. Hearing from her of the “Buddhahood within,” Dr. Nazaré joined the SGI and started practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. “At

first I used to pray to meet my brother and my blood relatives,” she remembers. “But gradually my prayers changed to wanting to meet the family with whom I am linked by bonds far deeper than any blood ties.”

I myself first met Dr. Nazaré some time after my wife did. My wife and I both wanted to express our thanks to her for her kindness, so we invited her to come along with her mother, Mrs. Leni da Fonseca Solino, to the SGI Brazil Nature and Cultural Center in São Paulo, where we were visiting. We also wished to show our special appreciation to her adopted mother, who had worked so hard to raise her, so we planted a tree in her honor.

The moment I laid eyes on her, I thought, “Here is a strong mother who has bravely endured the unendurable, never showing her tears to others.” I said to her: “Your happiest day is yet ahead of you! Please put your mind fully at ease.”

When her mother became ill two years later, Dr.

Nazaré nursed her with tremendous devotion, determined to create the happiest day in her mother's life. When she recovered, her mother said: "You are an astonishingly good daughter. You are my most precious treasure."

I told Dr. Nazaré, "You are part of my family, a very precious member of my family. The parents whom you have lost have been reborn. There is nothing to be sad about."

Dr. Nazaré is unmarried. I hoped that she would devote her maternal energies to her fellow members, acting as a big sister who'd comfort and protect them.

Says Dr. Nazaré: "My encounter with the SGI gave me the most precious family of all. It gave me my own roots."

The wind is invisible, and so, too, is the human heart. But the wind moves, and so does the spirit. We speak of the three existences of past, present and future, yet we cannot see them. But Dr. Nazaré is surely in no doubt of the eternity of life.

All of us are born alone and die alone. And yet none of us are truly alone. Nor are our encounters limited only to this lifetime; they are due to profound connections in our past lives, bonds that will continue on into future existences.

The grim reality, the indignities, of many intensive-care patients on the verge of death is one from which many people might recoil. Something rare and precious, however, exists in that final passage. Many of Dr. Nazaré's patients speak to her of their lives and their families. The flame of life blazes brilliantly once more before death. Dr. Nazaré senses in that flame something pure and of great dignity. The sum of each person's life is told in those moments. And a surge of deep love and compassion for all existence wells up in her heart.

Dr. Nazaré is a wonderful emissary of Bodhisattva Medicine King. She confronts the sufferings of life and death: as a doctor, from without, and as a Buddhist, from within. Like her father, she is fearless. Like her mother, enduring. ❁



The SGI Brazil Nature and Cultural Center, located in Sao Paulo, Brazil, is where the SGI president first met Dr. Nazaré and her mother, Mrs. Leni da Fonseca Solino.

SEIKYO PRESS

Hokkaido:

GREAT LAND OF THE NORTH

BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

The year 2000 has brilliantly dawned.

My mentor Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai, was born in the year 1900, and so this year marks the centennial of his birth. I also celebrated my seventy-second birthday with the arrival of the new year. It is my greatest honor to succeed my mentor and spend each day working for kosen-rufu in good health.

President Toda and his predecessor Tsunesaburo Makiguchi both had profound connections with Hokkaido.¹ It is the land where they each spent their childhood and youth, where their spiritual backbone and foundation of life were forged. If for no other reason than this, Hokkaido has long been a place of my dreams.

I think many people have a place that remains dear to them in their hearts. In my case, it is one corner of a certain town in Hokkaido. My family once had close ties with this town. The story begins with events that took place around the time of my birth on January 2, 1928.

Although I have never been there myself, from various accounts that I have heard and through my own investigations, I have a vivid image of the town etched in my mind, just like a beautiful painting. It is called Shiranuka.

Shiranuka — Captor of My Imagination

The city of Kushiro in eastern Hokkaido has a relaxed atmosphere and holds a strong allure for the heart of a traveler. It was once the terminal station of the main train line servicing eastern Hokkaido. Arriving there aboard a train from the western city of Otaru, the famous Japanese poet Takuboku Ishikawa (1886–1912) composed the lines:

*Arriving at the remotest station
in the light of the snow,
I make my way
into the forlorn town.*

In June 1938, President Makiguchi, accompanied by Mr. Toda, visited Kushiro to attend and speak at a conference on education. The arrival in Hokkaido of Mr. Makiguchi, a noted educator from Tokyo, was reported in the *Kushiro Shimbun*, a local newspaper.

In 1963, some twenty-five years later, I visited Kushiro for the first time. I have fond memories of the many wonderful members whom I met there. Heading toward Obihiro from Kushiro on



Michael Meilan / Historic Photographs / CORBIS

A Japanese man in traditional attire pulls a rickshaw up a road overlooking Tokyo Bay ca. 1890s. The Ikeda family was among the first in the area to use motorboats to reach places that had seaweed spores.

ent-day Omori in Tokyo, and operated a thriving business harvesting seaweed. Together with his eldest brother, the family head, my father kept the family business up and running. I understand that when the operation was at its peak, there were so many employees that my mother, Ichi, had a hard time providing their board.

My family was one of the first in the area to use motorboats. Crossing Tokyo Bay to Chiba on the opposite side, they would collect seaweed laver spores using broom-like bamboo branches, and then plant the stalks in the seabed off Omori for the spores to grow. Through adopting this method of transplanting seaweed, the Ikeda family business prospered tremendously. This gave them the leeway to invest in cultivating farmland in Hokkaido.

Highway 38, a broad expanse of field opens up to the right, and the vast Pacific Ocean stretches out before one's eyes to the left. The coastal road is glazed white from the spray of the salty waves. Looking out toward the horizon, one can see the silhouettes of distant ships. This was the same ocean that my father had gazed upon as a young man.

About forty minutes by car from Kushiro is Shiranuka, the town that has captured my imagination. Not far from the town, there is an estuary nearly 100 feet wide. This is the Charo River. The name comes from the Ainu² word for mouth, referring to the mouth of a river.

Charo is both the name of the river and the surrounding area. Home to salmon in early fall and

smelt in the latter part of the season, the Charo is a river teeming with life. Originating in hills north of Shiranuka that reach a height of nearly 2,000 feet, it is forty-four miles long. The Charo River basin is known as the Charo Plain. The upper Charo once had coal mines and was a center of bustling activity.

My father, Nenokichi, visited Shiranuka many times in an attempt to develop a parcel of land in the Charo Plain. The application to participate in a program to convert the plain to farmland was made in 1919 by the head of the main branch of the Ikeda family. Documents that were filled out then list his address as Oaza-iriyamazu, Iriarai Town, Ebara County, Tokyo.

At the time, the Ikeda family lived in the Iriarai section of pres-

Fostered by a Majestic Land

A law in place at the time enabled the government to transfer ownership of undeveloped land in Hokkaido to people interested in developing it for farming or other commercial purposes. The only restriction was that failure of the proposed enterprise within a fixed period of time would result in forfeiture of the land assignment and all invested funds.

My family's application was granted on January 9, 1922. This was for the acquisition of a parcel of about 90 acres of undeveloped land in an area then designated as Aza-Charo, Oaza-Shiranuka Village,

Shiranuka Village, Shiranuka County, Kushiro Province.

The Charo Plain is situated in a large valley surrounded on three sides by hills reaching a height of about 660 feet. The Charo River runs through its center. The entire river basin has an area of about 135 square miles, of which my family had obtained the rights to develop one small parcel.

Charo is a place of great scenic beauty. In 1910, the noted Japanese author Roka Tokutomi (1868–1927) rode the train from Asahikawa to Kushiro, a line that had only opened three years prior. Disembarking at Shiranuka Station, he took an excursion to the Charo River. This is the same route that my father took on his trips from Tokyo to Shiranuka.

From the top of the modest hills surrounding the town, one can behold the beautiful sea sparkling in the soft northern sunlight. I imagine that this ocean view must have weighed heavily in the Ikeda family's selection of this particular locale for cultivation, given their long history in seaweed production. As the family's representative, my father began making regular trips to the parcel of land, where he could hear the roar of waves crashing in the sea below. It was located just over half a mile north of Shiranuka Station.

Hokkaido has captivated the hearts of many. It was a true frontier. And it is the majestic land that fostered the progressive dispositions and noble spirits of both President Makiguchi and President Toda.

As a young man, Mr. Makiguchi ran errands for an office in Otaru. He always had a book in hand and used every spare moment he had to read. This earned him the nickname of “the studier.” Thanks to the support of a patron who recognized his diligence, Mr. Makiguchi was able to attend the Hokkaido Normal School, where he later became a teacher. It was through frank and open discussion and research with colleagues in the field of geography that he came to develop the ideas for his work *Geography of Human Life*. The young frontier land of Hokkaido had an atmosphere that fostered people of genuine character and ability, and that was conducive to the free exchange of ideas.

Mr. Toda, likewise, struggled and persevered and paid his way through school, eventually becoming an assistant teacher. Throughout his life, he remained straightforward and open-minded. I believe this can be attributed not only to his inherent nature, but to the vast, all-embracing land of Hokkaido in which he was raised.

Son of a Seaweed Harvester

My father also must have been charmed by this magnificent land. Although seaweed farming is extremely arduous and time-consuming, the summers are relatively free, so it was during that season that my father would make the trip to Charo. In summer,

the land in the area, though still soaked from the thawing snows of late spring, was at last dry enough to receive visitors.

The inn in front of the station kept several horses that it loaned out. Travelers wearing straw sandals on their bare feet borrowed these horses to go out and inspect the land, which was so muddy that it could not be traveled upon except by horse. Shiranuka was known as a horse-breeding district, and there was a training center for military horses nearby. In fact, Shiranuka Station was an important point for the shipment of war horses.

Unfortunately, my family's venture in land development did not proceed according to plan. The ground, which remained moist year-round, was dotted with clusters of sedge, interfering with its ability to be converted to farmland. To make matters worse, the seaweed operation in Tokyo was dealt a serious blow by the Tokyo Earthquake of 1923. As a result, the family could no longer spare either the requisite help or resources to develop the land. With the failure of the cultivation enterprise, the land assignment was revoked. The notice of revocation was dated January 12, 1928, just days after I was born. Notification was made by certified mail at the end of the month.

Hypothetically speaking, if the land development endeavor had gone smoothly, members of the Ikeda family would most likely have relocated to Shiranuka, which means that I could have been born there. And if the family

seaweed business had proceeded successfully, they would have probably put increased energy into the development venture. If, on the other hand, the family business had failed completely, the Ikedas might have uprooted and moved to Hokkaido altogether to make a new start. Either way, my family's destiny would have been completely different than what it was.

My father was known as "Mr. Obstinate"; once he had decided on some course of action, he would not waver in the least. For my father, whose rheumatism made it difficult for him to get around like he once could, the memory of inspecting the family's plot of land by horseback rekindled a pioneering spirit in his heart. I recall being a young boy and listening to my father, who was a quiet man, speak fondly of those days in Hokkaido. "I rode a good horse," he would say. "That horse and I would ride along the one road that stretched across the plain. Ah, and then there was the sea...."

Even after my father's health deteriorated, my family, with my mother at the head, continued harvesting seaweed on a greatly reduced scale in Omori, Tokyo, which was known as a production center for a type of seaweed called *asakusanori*. Days for a seaweed farmer start early. I particularly recall having to scoop the seaweed from the bamboo sticks by hand on cold winter mornings. I did what I could, but because of my weak constitution, the freezing seawater chilled me to the bone.

During the winter months, my mother's hands were always red with chilblains.

I am but the son of a seaweed farmer. I regard such humble origins as a tremendous source of pride. My parents continued to raise me with great love and care, even through the ordeal of downsizing the once prosperous family business. I think that growing up in honest poverty is what led me to ponder what it means to lead a life of true value. Because we had so many struggles, I earnestly sought meaning in life.

My Encounter with President Toda

I believe it is because of my modest beginnings and the hardships I experienced in my youth that I was able to meet my mentor Josei Toda. I am deeply appreciative of the circumstances in which I was brought up, and I can't help but feel that there was something extremely mystic in our fateful encounter.

Mr. Toda poured his life into raising me, a piece of raw ore. Through his training, I was able to set course on the correct path in life that is *kosen-rufu*.

I met Mr. Toda for the first time on August 14, 1947.³ It was a Thursday evening, and I remember that it had been a brilliantly clear day.

Two years and four months later, I began working at his publishing company. When the business went under, I continued working without a salary. Unable

to afford a coat, I went through the winter wearing an open-necked summer shirt. This is now a treasured memory. At the time, Mr. Toda had become completely isolated. I alone stood by his side and protected him. Things were so intense that I even lost track of the passing seasons.

Once the crisis was resolved, Mr. Toda was inaugurated as the second Soka Gakkai president on May 3, 1951. He later suggested the one-year anniversary of his appointment for my wedding day. When the date was set, Mr. Toda took the trouble of visiting my father at his home in Kojiya to seek his approval on my behalf. At Mr. Toda's sincere request to be entrusted with my wellbeing, my father readily agreed. I will never forget how happy and at ease my father looked in his traditional crested kimono at my wedding reception.

My father passed away on December 10, 1956. That night, I stayed at my family's home for the first time in many years. At Mr. Toda's urging, many people came to the house to offer their condolences and pray for my father's repose.

Throughout his life, my father was a model of integrity, carrying himself with composure as he pursued his dream of cultivating land in Hokkaido, and then as he weathered the hardships that followed when the venture fell through. In death, he seemed to smile with satisfaction.

I vividly recall the crackling sound of the fire burning in the garden on the evening of his funeral.



Seastacks on the coast of Hokkaido, Japan. "Hokkaido has captivated the hearts of many. It was a true frontier."

Michael S. Yamashita/CORBIS

Shiranuka Village Today

So what happened to the land of my family's dreams? I understand that a road, which is now Highway 392, was paved along the west side of the parcel. Along the highway, one finds various shops and service stations.

It takes about an hour to stroll through the surrounding area, which is lined with simple but elegant homes, and apartments managed by the town. It has the feel of a quiet new residential community. A large plywood manufacturing plant is in operation on the east side of the parcel, serving as a reminder that lumber is one of Shiranuka's principal industries.

Raw lumber was once floated down the Charo River. Not far from the river is a forest belonging

to Kyoto University. I have heard that although the area has changed dramatically, it retains a beauty typical of Hokkaido.

With the Shiranuka Community Center as their base, our fellow members in the two Soka Gakkai chapters in the area, Shiranuka and Nishi-Shoro, are expanding wide circles of trust and friendship in their communities. Nothing could make me happier.

Incidentally, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of Shiranuka's incorporation as a town.

The Deceased Live On in Our Convictions

April is a month of spring in full bloom. With the arrival of the fragrant season of cherry blossoms, my thoughts

always turn to the death of my mentor. And when I think of my mentor, I inevitably think of his hometown of Atsuta Village in Hokkaido. I will never forget the day I accompanied him to Atsuta for the first time.

With the memory of Mr. Toda coming alive in the blooming cherry blossoms each passing spring, each passing year, I have continued to renew the vow I made as his disciple. It is my greatest joy to report that last month (December 1999) President Toda's hometown of Atsuta named him an honorary citizen of the village to commemorate the 100th anniversary of his birth. [President Ikeda was made an honorary citizen of the village in 1977.]

The thirty-third memorial service for Mr. Toda was held on April 2, 1990.⁴ As human beings, it is important and only natural that we remember the deceased on the anniversary of their passing. And of even greater importance, I feel, is the spirit to firmly and deeply carry on the will of one's mentor.

Historically, performing memorial services at certain prescribed intervals was not part of Buddhism. A prominent scholar of religion comments on this as follows:

"It is not surprising that Japanese Buddhism is characterized as ceremonial religion or funeral Buddhism. Priests claim that by reciting the sutra, performing the last rites and writing the deceased's posthumous name on a special wooden tablet at the funeral, they enable the deceased to attain Buddhahood. They also say that if

you have a priest come and recite the sutra on the seventh day following a person's death, and then on the subsequent designated anniversaries, the deceased will absolutely attain Buddhahood. But isn't that strange? Doesn't that contradict their statement that by performing the last rites at the funeral they have enabled the person to become a Buddha? Just how many times does a person need to become a Buddha?"

It's exactly as he says. His words are simple logic.

One of the two characters making up the word for memorial service in Japanese has the meaning of "detest." This comes from the traditional Japanese belief that the deceased are somehow defiled, and helps explain the folk custom of deifying the deceased lest they should bring a curse upon the living.

But the departed are not to be feared and detested. Rather, they should be appreciated and loved. For they live on in our hearts, reproaching or encouraging us when we grow lazy and need it.

The deceased live on in our convictions. President Makiguchi, who died in prison upholding his beliefs, solemnly lives on in the SGI's advance for world peace. The deceased live on in the convictions that we inherit from them. President Toda is alive in the hearts of all the like-minded friends who have "emerged from the earth"—friends challenging their obstacles through faith. Each day we are living together—no, struggling together—with President Makiguchi and President Toda.

Battling Injustice Is the Greatest Offering We Can Make to the Deceased

In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin tells the young Nanjo Tokimitsu: "If that becomes true [you are protected by the Buddhist gods], there are powerful people who will be alarmed and try to put a stop to it. And there are sure to be more great persecutions. At that time, you should strengthen your determination and your faith even more, confident that your prayers will now surely be realized. Then your late father will become a Buddha, and will fly to your aid" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1512).

He strongly encourages Tokimitsu to fight for justice no matter what persecution may befall him, and that so doing will lead to his father's attainment of Buddhahood. I want to engrave in my heart this teaching of the Daishonin that battling evil and injustice is the ultimate offering we can make for the eternal happiness of the deceased.

The Daishonin further says that Tokimitsu's efforts will bring him the protection and support of his father. In our struggles as SGI members, we always have President Makiguchi and President Toda at our side.

"Never Let Up in the Struggle against Evil"

Looking back now, I see that President Toda's thirty-third memorial service had truly profound significance. It was from around that time that negative forces began conspiring against the Soka Gakkai. Behind the cover of the religious authority of Nichiren Shoshu, they launched a full-fledged attempt to obstruct the flow of the worldwide spread of the Daishonin's teachings.

But the Soka Gakkai, upholding the spirit of the lion king as expounded by the Daishonin, resolutely drove back this attack of the three powerful enemies. Rising up to achieve a Buddhist renaissance, we have begun to fulfill our mission of establishing a world religion based on humanism. This is in accord with Mr. Toda's final guidance to "never let up in the struggle against evil."

The number *thirty-three* is also significant in that it is the number of forms that the Lotus Sutra says Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World's Sounds assumes in order to lead as many people as possible to happiness. Today, these multiple forms are none other than the countless noble members of the SGI who are taking action in their respective fields of endeavor, in accord with the Buddhist principles of "cherry, peach, plum and damson blossoms"⁵ and "propagating the Law according to one's ability." Aren't their efforts to go to



Michael S. Yamashita/CORBIS

Winter countryside in Hokkaido. Josei Toda and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi both spent their childhood and youth in Hokkaido — “where their spiritual backbone and foundation of life were formed.” SGI President Daisaku Ikeda says, “If for no other reason than this, Hokkaido has long been a place of my dreams.”

those who are sad and suffering and help them overcome their difficulties in exact accord with the actions of Bodhisattva Perceiver of the World’s Sounds?

“Thousand Comrades of Hachioji”

Hachioji, where the Tokyo Makiguchi Memorial Hall is located, was once home to a group of samurai known as the “Thousand Comrades of Hachioji.” This was a group of samurai who were given land to cultivate in exchange for their willingness to defend the capital of Edo (present-day Tokyo) should the need arise.

History shows that in 1799, about 100 of these comrades peti-

tioned the central authorities for permission to resettle as farmer-samurai in Hokkaido, and that they took up residence there the following year. After considering such factors as strategic location for defensive purposes, suitability for farming and climate, fifty of them chose Shiranuka as the place for their settlement.

To this day, Hachioji and Shiranuka continue to engage in friendship exchanges.

A Spiritual Dialogue of Life

At the forefront of the movement to create a peaceful world based on the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin are untold comrades who, while exerting them-

selves wholeheartedly to fulfill their various responsibilities, are ready to stand up and fight at the crucial moment with the same spirit as their mentor. They are the pride of the SGI, and are doubtless receiving the sincere praise of President Makiguchi and President Toda.

I have continuously advanced through good times and bad with President Toda’s “lion’s roar” alive in my heart. It is because I have maintained this spiritual dialogue with my mentor that I have been able to achieve what I have today.

At the time of President Toda’s thirty-third memorial, I composed two poems that I presented to youth division representatives:

*On the momentous occasion
Of the 33rd memorial
Of our mentor’s passing —
Never forget the pride
Of living as disciples.*



*The significant memorial
Resounds with our mentor’s call
To avenge the betrayal of our
cause.
Never for a moment
Forget your mission.*

1. Hokkaido: The northernmost and second largest of Japan’s four main islands.
2. Ainu: An indigenous people of the Japanese islands. About 24,000 people in Hokkaido identify themselves as Ainu today.
3. Mr. Ikeda attended a Soka Gakkai discussion meeting in Tokyo’s Ota Ward at the invitation of a former elementary-school classmate.
4. In Western reckoning, this would be the 32nd anniversary of Mr. Toda’s death.
5. Buddhist principle of “cherry, peach, plum and damson blossoms”: Expounds the unique diversity and beauty of all living entities.

SOKA GAKKAI INTERNATIONAL

In Pursuit of Peace

ANNUAL REPORT FOR THE YEAR 2000

The Soka Gakkai International, which celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary on January 26, 2000, engaged in wide-ranging activities last year in pursuit of peace and the promotion of respect for the dignity of life.

The SGI maintains that efforts centering on the United Nations represent the best prospect for creating an equitable and lasting peace for the world's people. It is for this reason that the organization has undertaken initiatives to promote peace, human rights awareness, humanitarian action, the environment and intercultural understanding with an aim to supporting the United Nations, which designated the year 2000 as the International Year

for the Culture of Peace.

With a presence in 163 countries and regions, the SGI is a global association of grass-roots organizations that seek to promote the values of peace and respect for all people. At the heart of the SGI's movement for peace is the ideal of education for global citizenship. Through a wide range of activities, the SGI seeks to foster awareness of the social and environmental responsibilities we all share for the future of our planet.

On an organizational level, the SGI — a non-governmental organization (NGO) with ties to the United Nations — sponsors numerous activities, including exhibitions, educational workshops and humanitarian relief worldwide.

The following is a report on the SGI's principal activities during the year 2000.

A. PEACE AND HARMONY

1. SGI Promotes the Earth Charter in Asia

In January, the SGI cosponsored a series of events to promote the Earth Charter in six countries in Asia in cooperation with other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and institutions already actively involved in the Earth Charter campaign. More than 3,000 people joined activities ranging from public lectures and forums (Hong Kong, Japan, Korea and Malaysia), small group discussions on how the Earth Charter relates

to youth, civil society and spirituality (Singapore), an environmental exhibition "Before It's Too Late" and an academic forum (Thailand) to a seminar for SGI leaders (Philippines).

The Earth Charter is a document that outlines the ethical values needed to guide humankind toward a sustainable future. Its principles cover environmental protection, human rights, poverty alleviation, gender equality and building a culture of peace. Responding to a concern that participation in the Earth Charter process was less active in Asia than in other places, the SGI and the Earth Council planned a speaking tour in order to reach a large number of people in a short time. The aim of the tour was to build on the SGI's initial support of the Earth Charter in the United States and Uruguay.



The SGI's "World Boys' and Girls' Art Exhibition" was shown in Germany, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Panama, the Philippines, Switzerland and Venezuela during the year 2000.

2. First Pacific Islands New Millennium Peace Conference

To commemorate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the SGI's founding, the first Pacific Islands New Millennium Peace Conference was held in Guam in January, where the SGI was founded, with representatives of the governments of Guam, Tonga, Palau, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Northern Mariana Islands attending. Participants, renewing their pledge for peaceful coexistence, unanimously adopted the New Pacific Peace Resolution.

3. SGI Day Peace Proposal Issued

Soka Gakkai International President Daisaku Ikeda released his annual peace proposal — a cornerstone of SGI's commitment to peace through dialogue — on January 26, 2000, coinciding with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the founding of the SGI. In "Peace Through Dialogue: A Time to Talk — Thoughts on a Culture of Peace," Mr. Ikeda proposes the immediate establishment of an international conflict resolution committee within the United Nations system to help assure the application of international human rights and humanitarian law in conflict-plagued areas.

To prevent regional and internal conflicts from escalating into large-scale, protracted violence, the committee would seek to facilitate the early initiation of dialogue and negotiation by holding public hearings so that all concerned parties could meet each other face-to-face in an open, neutral setting.

Noting that conflict is often rooted in the illusion that superficial differences are insurmountable and permanent, the SGI president asserts that human beings are capable of overcoming their discriminatory tendencies, and that such inner change in individuals is the key to creating a solid global culture of peace.

In March, an SGI delegation paid a call to U.N. Security Council President Anwarul Karim Chowdhury at the U.N. Headquarters in New York to present him with the proposal.

4. Conflict and Peace Forums at SGI-UK's Taplow Court

The year 2000 was very busy for the Conflict and Peace Forums, which are hosted by the SGI-United Kingdom (SGI-UK) at Taplow Court in Buckinghamshire. March saw a collaboration with the 21st Century Trust called "Between the Wars," which questioned the role of journalists in the post- or pre-violence phase of a conflict. May saw a major conference on "Corporate Citizenship in the 21 Century: What Can Business Do For Peace?" Speakers included Hazel Henderson, Johan Galtung and Ed Mayo. October marked the opening of a season of events under the broad theme "Power of the Arts: The Role of Arts in Personal and Social Development," which was sponsored by the U.K. Millennium Fund in collaboration with Tate Modern, the Institute of Contemporary Arts, the Maidenhead and Slough Borough Councils and others.

Conflict and Peace Forums was initiated in 1997 as a desire to explore the broad social implications of the Buddhist philosophy, as well as the specific findings of the peace proposals written annually by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. Over four years it has developed activities in four main areas: (1) conflict transformation, (2) the role and potential of the media, (3) corporate citizenship and "business for

peace,” and (4) the power of the arts for personal and social transformation. In each case, Conflict and Peace Forums has formed partnerships with other bodies active in the arena—most notably Transcend, Peace and Development Network, the U.K. Department for International Development, the New Economic Forum and a host of arts and cultural bodies (Web site: www.conflictandpeace.org).

5. Children’s Art Exhibition

The “World Boys’ and Girls’ Art Exhibition” was shown in Germany, Malaysia, Mexico, Nepal, Panama, the Philippines, Switzerland and Venezuela during the year 2000, cosponsored by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in each instance. The exhibition is an appeal for global peace and friendship from those with the greatest stake in the future: the children of the world. There are 400 paintings that are featured in the exhibition by children from 161 countries and regions.

In April, the exhibition opened in Geneva, with support from numerous organizations including ATD Quart Monde/Tapori and the World Federation of United Nations Associations. This exhibition is one of several Flagship Events that the SGI is undertaking in support of the United Nation’s International Year for the Culture of Peace. A major Swiss TV news program covered the successful Geneva exhibition.

6. SGI Italy Members Initiate Peace Bill in Regional Legislature

SGI members in the Campania region in southern Italy conducted a signature campaign and successfully introduced a measure in the Campania Regional Council calling for the promotion and diffusion of a culture of education about peace and human rights in local communities. In only three months, SGI members and their friends collected 13,722 signatures, surpassing the 5,000 signatures necessary to propose a

measure for legislation by the Council. Supporting this effort were humanitarian organizations such as Amnesty International of Campania-Basilicata and Pax Christi, in addition to a number of noted jurists, academics and legislators.

The signatures were presented to the regional government in April 1999, and a bill was introduced in the Campania Regional Council soon afterward. The Council passed the measure and the law came into effect on April 7, 2000. It calls for: the establishment of peace and its bases such as human rights, freedom, human solidarity, nonviolence, compassion and respect in the local community; the establishment of a permanent committee for peace and human rights in the Regional Council to oversee the technical implementation of the new law; and, the designation of December 10—the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights—as “Peace Day” in Campania.

Through the effort, SGI members helped promote recognition in the Campania region about the importance of nurturing respect for human rights and of pursuing peace not as a static end, but a condition that arises from respect for the sanctity of life.

7. Earth Charter Activities Around the World

In April, three SGI-USA representatives participated in the Earth Charter USA National Conference near Washington, D.C., along with representatives from around the country to plan a national education campaign. SGI-USA Vice General Director Al Albergate serves on this national committee. During the spring and early summer, SGI-USA members sponsored some twenty activities around the country to raise awareness about the Charter.

In June, SGI representatives attended the Earth Charter Conference at The Hague in the Netherlands. SGI Netherlands supported the conference in many important areas, including assuming responsibility for translating the official text of the Earth Charter into the Dutch language.

Owing to its efforts to raise awareness about the



The Conflict and Peace Forums are hosted by the SGI-United Kingdom (SGI-UK) at Taplow Court in Buckinghamshire (above).

Earth Charter, Singapore Soka Association was invited to present a paper on the Charter at two international events. In October, SSA Vice General Director Michael Yap delivered a paper on the Earth Charter at the General Assembly and Press Convention of the Thirteenth Confederation of ASEAN Journalists held in Singapore. Then in December, Mr. Yap spoke on “Buddhist Perspectives in Promoting a Culture of Peace” at a symposium on “Facilitating Asian Media in Promoting a Culture of Peace” held in Manila, with participants from India, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines and Sri Lanka.

8. Singapore Artist at Museum of Tolerance in the United States

In May, an exhibition of the works of Singaporean artist Liu Kang opened at the Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles. The exhibition, “Liu Kang at 90: A Celebration of Singapore’s Treasured Artist,” was hosted by the Museum of Tolerance and jointly organized by the Singapore Soka Association (SSA).

The exhibition showcased some 100 of the artist’s finest oil and pastel paintings and pencil sketches, spanning the seven decades of his career. The artist is renowned for his involvement in the

founding of the Nanyang school of painting, a style that reflects the characteristic charm and cultural heritage of the tropics of the South Seas. At this first solo-exhibition in the United States, Liu Kang also displayed a special collection of sketches accompanied by commentary of the atrocities the Japanese imperial army committed in Malaya and Singapore during World War II. These sketches, drawn one year after the Japanese surrender, have been published as peace education material in Japan and Singapore. The exhibition was supported in part by the Embassy of Singapore in the United States.

9. SGI at the U.N. Millennium NGO Forum

In May, SGI representatives attended the Millennium NGO Forum, the first conference of nongovernmental organizations from around the world, at U.N. Headquarters. They contributed to the finalization of the forum report, the “Millennium Forum Declaration,” through their participation in several committees and interventions in a number of workshops.

The declaration’s section on “peace, security and disarmament” embraces an SGI proposition, calling on the United Nations to create a Conflict Prevention Committee within the Security Council to serve as a mechanism for “conflict prevention and early warning.”

Regarding the issues of “sustainable development and the environment,” the document reflects another of the SGI’s ideas: The best way to transform the prevailing consumerist culture is to work for change in human values first.

The SGI also sponsored two symposia as side-events of the forum to afford the general public, which was not able to participate in the Millennium Forum, an opportunity to hear different perspectives and engage in discussions. One titled “From a Century of War and Violence to a Century of Peace and Hope” considered ways to transform a culture of war to a culture of peace, while another titled “Creation of Violence-Free Communities” discussed surmounting violence in personal and local life.

10. Nuclear Disarmament Exhibition in South America

The exhibition “Nuclear Arms: Threat to Our World” was held in Argentina (June) and Bolivia (August–October). This well-traveled display conveys with impact and immediacy the horrors of war and nuclear arms. It was first presented in 1982 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York to coincide with the General Assembly’s Second Special Session on Disarmament (SSD II), in cooperation with the U.N. Department of Public Information and the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The exhibition has since been viewed by 1.2 million people in sixteen countries as part of the World Disarmament Campaign adopted at SSD II.

11. Giving Hope to Children in Nepal

For a majority of children in rural Nepal, getting an education is a dream that often cannot be fulfilled. Learning of their plight, a group of young Soka Gakkai members in Miyagi Prefecture, in northern Japan, decided to take action to make a difference. In a charity called “Post Aid,” the Miyagi youth collected more than 200,000 unused New Year’s greeting cards printed with prepaid postage from their families and friends to raise ¥3,000,000 (U.S. \$26,000) to build an elementary school in the mountainous South Asian country. (Japanese New Year’s cards carry a Chinese zodiac sign, which is used only once every twelve years — the cards lose their social value soon after the New Year’s period.)

The group donated proceeds in July for the construction of Kibou (hope) International School in Dhading District located near Nepal’s capital, Katmandu. The school aims to enable children of underprivileged families and orphans to receive an education in the predominantly impoverished district. Proceeds were used to purchase two acres of land on which construction began in October. The school, which will feature twelve classrooms, an assembly hall and a library, will open in May 2001.

Plans call for the school to expand to offer secondary education in the future.

12. Support for the U.N. International Year for the Culture of Peace

Throughout the year 2000, the SGI supported the United Nations in its International Year for the Culture of Peace (IYCP) by promoting the UNESCO-organized Manifesto 2000 signature campaign and engaging in Flagship Events and other activities to promote a culture of peace and nonviolence.

SGI organizations in four countries gathered more than 179,000 signatures in support of Manifesto 2000 for promoting respect for all life and rejecting violence. By country, the results were: India, 109,270; Malaysia, 19,808; Canada, 40,000; and Japan, 10,000. In addition, the SGI-USA collected another 110,000 signatures in support of the IYCP through its “Victory Over Violence” campaign.

The SGI advocated the IYCP through Flagship Events, which included the “World Boys’ and Girls’ Art Exhibition” held in Geneva in April that was sponsored by UNESCO, and the “Toward a Century of Humanity — An Overview of Human Rights in Today’s World” exhibition held in Italy in the fall. It also organized a forum under the theme “Women Building a Culture of Peace” in support of IYCP on June 10 in New York to coincide with the Beijing–5 Special Session of the U.N. General Assembly.

13. SGI India Collects Signatures for Manifesto 2000

A ceremony called “Peace is in Our Hands” was held on August 30 at the Nehru Memorial Hall in New Delhi, in which SGI India presented more than 109,000 signatures collected by its members for the Manifesto 2000 petition calling for a culture of peace and nonviolence to UNESCO. The signatures were handed to UNESCO director for India, Professor Moegiardi, in the presence of Mr. R.



More than 60,000 people in twenty-one cities in the United States and abroad viewed the SGI-USA-sponsored exhibition "Treasuring the Future: Children's Rights and Realities," which raises awareness of the need to protect the rights of children.

Venkataraman, former president of India. Dr. Radhakrishnan, director of the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Committee, also spoke at the event, at which youth members of SGI India told of their efforts to gather signatures.

Ms. Priya Marwah told how she managed to go beyond her own target by collecting more than 10,000 signatures from local schools. In his speech, the former Indian president paid tribute to Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King and the philosophy of nonviolence, which conquered colonialism without relying on a single bullet. He called for increased efforts to transform the world's culture of war to a culture of peace, and recognized the efforts of SGI President Ikeda and SGI India members.

14. Soka Gakkai Malaysia Supports Manifesto 2000 and the Culture of Peace

The women and young women of Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) initiated a Women's Peace Convention under the theme "Women in the New Era: Leading the Way to a Culture of Peace" with the aim of raising awareness about women's role in building peace.

The Convention was held in 27 venues throughout Malaysia during the month of October with a turnout of 17,000 participants from all walks of life.

Also during this period the women worked together to collect nearly 20,000 signatures for UNESCO's Manifesto 2000 campaign promoting nonviolence and peace throughout the month of August. This is part of SGM's support for the U.N. International Year for the Culture of Peace in the year 2000.

On September 9, SGM members handed over the signatures to Kenneth J. Luis, executive secretary of the Malaysian National Commission for UNESCO, when he visited the SGM Culture Center in Cheras for discussions on the role of UNESCO and the significance of the culture of peace.

15. SGI Unveils Peace Monument in New Zealand

Based on its commitment to nuclear disarmament, the SGI unveiled a special monument in the City of Rotorua in southern New Zealand on September 8, 2000, as a tribute to Rotorua District Council — one of the first councils in the world to declare its city nuclear-free. Engraved on three large granite slabs spaced equidistant and surrounding a fountain are inscriptions for peace from New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark, Rotorua Mayor Grahame Hall, Maori civil servant Councilor Trevour Maxwell and the three successive Soka Gakkai presidents.

On hand at the unveiling ceremony was the Prime Minister's representative, Minister of Internal Affairs Mark Burton, Mayor Hall and Bishop Kingi, a senior Maori statesman. In his message, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda introduced second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's staunch declaration against the atomic bomb in 1958, in which he refers to the weapon as threatening humanity's right to live and an absolute evil that must be eradicated. Mr. Ikeda pointed to this declaration as the basis of the SGI's efforts for peace. The SGI recognized Rotorua for its courageous stand for peace, which is consonant with the philosophy and goals of the SGI.

B. HUMAN RIGHTS AWARENESS

1. Children's Rights Exhibition in the United States

In March, the SGI-USA-sponsored exhibition "Treasuring the Future: Children's Rights and Realities" was held at the Kansas City Public Library in the United States, eliciting a broad response. Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes recognized the importance of the SGI's efforts to raise the awareness of people around the world about the need to protect the rights of children, and presented the SGI-USA organization with a commendation. Originally created by the SGI-USA's New York Youth Peace Committee in 1996 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the exhibition has been seen by more than 60,000 people in twenty-one cities in the United States and abroad. During the year 2000, it was on display in a number of cities, including Jacksonville, New Orleans and San Antonio with the support of many local organizations.

2. SGI Makes Appeal to U.N. Human Rights Commission

In April, an SGI representative addressed the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva about the importance of education in the context of human rights. This is an idea urged by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda over the years. The representative's statement was summarized in a press release issued on the day of the address, and also distributed through the Internet.

3. Exhibition of Children's Holocaust Art in Western Australia

The exhibition "The Children of Terezin: Their Art, Their Legacy," which features drawings by children imprisoned by the Nazis during World War II at the

Terezin concentration camp, was held at the Western Australian Museum in Perth for three weeks starting in late March.

The exhibition, which remembers the children and the mark they left on the world, was held in conjunction with Harmony Day Activities that celebrate cultural diversity each year in the Australian city. The Office of Citizenship and Multicultural Interests (OCMI) was one of the main sponsors for the exhibition together with SGI Australia. The Honorable Minister for OCMI, Rob Johnson, opened the exhibition.

Prior to this opening, SGI Australia organized the exhibition in Melbourne in 1999 at the Glen Eira Council Exhibition Center in conjunction with the Glen Eira Council, the Jewish Holocaust Center and Latrobe University in Melbourne.

4. "Women 2000" U.N. Conference

In June, SGI representatives participated in "Women 2000: Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the 21st Century" (also known as the Beijing + 5 Special Session of the UN General Assembly) at U.N. Headquarters. At the same time, a symposium geared to fostering international dialogue among women was held at the SGI-USA New York Culture Center in New York City. Approximately 400 human rights activists and citizens participated in the event, exchanging views on the role of women in creating a culture of peace.

5. Calling for an End to the Death Penalty

From July 3-5, SGI Italy participated in a conference organized by the Italian Senate to promote the abolition of the death penalty. The conference, titled "European Parliaments Against the Death Penalty," was attended by parliamentarians from ten European Community countries: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal and Spain. Representatives of Amnesty International, SGI Italy and the Community of St. Egidio also attended as observers.



SGI India continued its emergency relief operations in support of victims of a cyclone that hit the eastern Indian province of Orissa on October 29, 1999, by collecting and distributing food, clothing and other necessities.

SGI Italy General Director Mitsuhiro Kaneda delivered a speech underlining the Buddhist prohibition on taking another's life under any circumstances, and presented the conference with 500,000 signatures collected by the Italian SGI in a petition calling for a worldwide moratorium on the death penalty. Human rights organizations welcomed the petition and acknowledged the substantial effort involved in gathering so many signatures, especially as each signature represented the fruit of a heart-to-heart dialogue.

6. Human Rights Exhibition in Italy

The exhibition "Toward a Century of Humanity — An Overview of Human Rights in Today's World" was held at three venues in Italy. In September SGI Italy organized the exhibition in the city of Grosseto, and in October mounted it in Grugliasco, near Turin. Justice Minister Piero Fassino attended the opening ceremony in Grugliasco and stressed that the issue of human rights is one that has a direct

impact on each individual in their daily lives.

The exhibition was mounted next in the Tuscan city of Siena in December at the Santa Maria della Scala Museum. The Italian vice minister of education, Ms. Silvia Barbieri, attended the opening and underlined in her speech the importance of making issues of peace and human rights a part of the official Italian education program.

The Italian tour of the exhibition is being sponsored by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, the Ministry for Social Affairs, Amnesty

International, UNESCO, UNICEF and other institutions. The exhibition outlines the development of human rights and describes existing challenges.

7. "Victory Over Violence" in the United States

Responding to numerous acts of violence committed by school-aged youth in the United States, the SGI-USA's Youth Peace Committee has organized or cosponsored more than 3,000 small "Victory Over Violence" discussion meetings, more than fifty large conferences, youth summits and community events, as well as hundreds of workshops in schools to consider the problem of violence and provide tools to identify and overcome it in their lives. Dubbed the VOV campaign, the program aims to support the United Nations International Year for the Culture of Peace and the International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World.

More than 110,000 individuals have signed a VOV pledge declaring their determination to “value my own life,” “respect all life” and “inspire hope in others.” The SGI-USA organized community events in Littleton (Colorado), New York, Oakland, Puerto Rico and San Diego to promote nonviolence values. Founder Arun Gandhi of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence spoke at seminars organized by the SGI in conjunction with the Institute in Los Angeles and Denver.

In perhaps the largest VOV event, in October the University of Michigan adopted Victory Over Violence and sponsored a weeklong series of activities which included seminars, panel discussions, and a concert by world-renowned jazz musicians who offered their services for this worthwhile cause.

C. HUMANITARIAN ACTION

1. SGI India Sends Relief Materials to Cyclone Victims

SGI India continued its emergency relief operations in support of victims of a cyclone that hit the eastern Indian province of Orissa on October 29, 1999, claiming 15,000 lives and leaving 15 million people homeless. Most of the survivors endured terrible living conditions without proper food, clothing or shelter for many months. The cyclone destroyed crops in many villages and endangered future harvests, having inundated the lowlands with seawater.

SGI India members collected food, clothing and other necessities in New Delhi, Calcutta and Hyderabad, and dispatched supplies to victims in eight afflicted villages (using two trucks). Between December 1999 and January 2000, SGI volunteers hand-delivered supplies three times to survivors in the villages, sometimes using small boats where roads were impassable. SGI India also dispatched a medical team and donated medicine to those rural areas with shortages of doctors and medical supplies.

2. SGI Venezuela Works to Restore Flood-Ravaged Area

The Venezuelan SGI organization formed a logistics team to transport relief supplies to areas devastated by floods in the aftermath of the torrential rains that struck northern Venezuela in December 1999. The organization also assumed a leadership role in the makeshift regional relief headquarters, and carried out volunteer activities in each affected area.

3. SGI Hong Kong Makes Contribution to UNICEF

SGI Hong Kong (HKSGI) presented the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF with HK \$130,000 (about U.S. \$18,000). The money, which came from donations made by visitors to HKSGI-sponsored exhibitions and from the sale of commemorative items, was earmarked for projects to promote health care, welfare and education in impoverished parts of China. UNICEF officials expressed heartfelt gratitude for the support.

4. SGI Members in Taiwan Support Earthquake Restoration Effort

The Chinese Soka Buddhist Association in Taiwan held the “Light of Renaissance Art Festival” in a number of cities, including Taipei, Kaohsiung, Tainan and Keelung, to support restoration efforts in the aftermath of the major earthquake in September 1999. A total of 17,000 people attended the festivals held in September. The Taiwanese SGI organization received eleven letters of appreciation from ten different city governments and one university for their efforts.

5. SGI India Sends Relief Supplies to Quake Victims in Northern India

SGI India members in New Delhi sent emergency relief supplies to earthquake victims in the Chamoli area of northern India. On March 29, Chamoli was hit by a

large-scale earthquake that claimed 100 lives and destroyed or damaged at least 16,000 homes. SGI India members in New Delhi launched an emergency relief drive; members and other local citizens donated a total of fifteen tons of food, clothing and blankets. From April 17 to April 19, SGI India's relief operation team delivered emergency supplies to victims in three villages.

6. SGI India Supports Gujarat Cyclone Relief

SGI India's youth members delivered relief supplies to cyclone-hit Gujarat, India. More than 2,000 people were killed by the large-scale cyclone that devastated Gujarat State with gales and floods in early June. Victims in the worst hit areas lived under severe conditions without sufficient food or clothing even a month after the storm. SGI India youth volunteered in emergency relief efforts for Jamnagar since the beginning of July, in cooperation with UNICEF.

7. Soka Gakkai Thailand delivers emergency relief to flood victims

Torrential monsoon rain in July and October severely flooded parts of north-eastern and southern Thailand, leaving residents without water or food due to the closure of all transportation links with those areas. Soka Gakkai Thailand (SGT) members sprang to action, gathering thirty tons of food, drinking water, clothing, medicine and other articles in Bangkok, loading them onto twenty trucks and charging its own task force of youth members to deliver the relief supplies to more than twenty



The Los Angeles youth perform a "Victory Over Violence" dance as part of the SGI-USA's "Victory Over Violence" campaign to promote nonviolence and a culture of peace.

World Tribune

villages. In many cases, SGT had been the first organization to reach those communities with relief.

SGT donated extra relief supplies to the Rajaprajanugroh Foundation under the Royal Patronage of His Majesty the King Bhumibol Adulyadej of Thailand in order to help other people in need. In December, His Majesty the King honored SGT members with a citation recognizing their sincerity and timely assistance to flood victims.

8. Singapore Soka Association Makes Contribution for International Relief Effort

The Singapore Soka Association (SSA) raised funds for the Singapore Red Cross Society to help provide relief for victims of two recent overseas disasters. In July, SSA raised \$16,237 (U.S. \$9,500) in an emergency week-end appeal for victims of the Sumatra earthquake. In a similar emergency appeal made in September 1999, SSA raised \$42,922 (U.S. \$25,000) — the second largest contribution from a civic organization — for Turkish earthquake victims.



Saito Press

Following the devastating earthquake that struck Taiwan on September 21, 2000, SGI members in Taiwan provide relief for victims using motorbikes to access the stricken area.

9. Continuing Refugee-Relief Effort in Japan

Youth of the Soka Gakkai have been engaging in a refugee-relief campaign on a continuous basis, with the dual aims of raising public awareness about the plight of the world's refugees and collecting funds to facilitate assistance. This year's fundraising effort took place in the fall. The \$600,000 (U.S.) collected in last year's fund-raiser was earmarked by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) for use in assisting refugees from Burundi, Congo, Rwanda and Kosovo. To date, 21 refugee-relief campaigns have been held in Japan.

10. Helping Women Gain Financial Independence in Vietnam

In October and November, Soka Gakkai members in Japan and their friends who work as barbers, beauticians and hair-dressers participated in a novel fund-raising drive dubbed "Charity Cut." Nine hundred hair-care professionals donated their free time to give haircuts to 6,200 participants in return for a 1,000-yen (about U.S. \$9) donation to support vulnerable women and children.

In February, the hair-stylists donated ¥2,000,000 (U.S. \$19,000) in net proceeds from their fundraising efforts in 1999 to the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which uses the funds in a program to repatriate Vietnamese women who have escaped from their captors after being sold into slavery abroad. IOM provides a loan of \$50 (U.S.) to the repatriated women at an interest rate of just one percent to help them restart new lives. More than 1,700 women have been able to embark on the journey of financial independence using these loans since the group began donations to IOM in 1997.

D. ENVIRONMENT

1. SGI Korea Recognized for Community Contributions

Numerous local governments and organizations in the Republic of Korea have awarded SGI Korea commendations in recognition of its long-standing contributions to the community. Since 1998, SGI members in Korea have been involved in efforts to support local beautification and clean-up projects throughout the country's urban areas.

2. Amazon Environmental Exhibition

The exhibition "Symbiosis and Hope: The Amazon — Its Environment and Development" was held in Brazil. Having attracted more than 600,000 visitors in South American countries since 1992, it is designed to raise awareness of the human impact on the environment. The exhibition is cosponsored by the SGI, SGI-Brazil and the Amazon Coordination Secretariat of the Ministry of Environment and Water Resources with the cooperation of the United Nations Development Program and UNESCO.

3. SGI Members Clean German Park to Protect Child Safety

Through participating in a cleaning initiative of the City Recycling Center of Hamburg, the youth of SGI Germany (SGI-Deutschland) discovered the city's "Schanzenpark" is favored not only by many children, but also by drug users. This meant that in addition to regular refuse, one could find drug-related litter, including used needles, at the site. The SGI members felt that they needed to act to protect the children from getting hurt, and from possible infection from the needles.

With the cooperation of the City Recycling Center, the 250-member-strong SGI team decided to take turns cleaning the park four times a year in 1999 and 2000, respectively. This effort resulted in a cleaner park and better protection of the public's health. Dr. Dircksen-Fischer, a member of the city's Health Department, paid a special visit to the SGI Center on November 18 to thank the SGI clean-up crew.

E. INTERCULTURAL ACTIVITIES

1. Interfaith Dialogues: Germany, USA and Singapore

The SGI's efforts to promote interfaith dialogue have been continuing in several countries. In Germany, the SGI joined the European Academy of Sciences and Arts to sponsor their sixth interfaith symposium on the theme "Daily Life and Nature: Environmental Problems." Dr. Karl M. Woschitz of Karl-Franzes University and Professor Shuichi Yamamoto of Soka University explained the respective approaches of Christianity and Buddhism to environmental problems.

In Washington, D.C., SGI-USA took part in a panel discussion "Future Trends in American

Religion" on May 6 as part of the North American (Episcopal) Cathedral Deans Conference. Bill Aiken, director of the SGI-USA Office of Public Affairs, represented Buddhism on the panel, whose other members represented the Islamic and Jewish faiths. Each panelist's 15-minute presentation was followed by a question-and-answer session.

The Singapore Soka Association (SSA) was also invited to represent the Buddhist community by participating in a panel in a public forum on May 12 in Singapore. The event was organized by the Islamic Religious Council of Singapore and the Center for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs on the theme "Civil Society: Its Existence in a Multi-religious State." Chan Heng Yuen of SSA introduced the Buddhist concepts of dependent origination and altruism that form the core values of civic consciousness. Other panelists shared their views from the Muslim and Christian faiths, respectively.

2. SGI-USA Supports Conference of Society For Buddhist-Christian Studies

From August 5–12, nearly thirty SGI-USA members played a major role in supporting the year 2000 conference of the Society For Buddhist-Christian Studies, an international gathering of some 250 scholars and religious practitioners, which is held every four years. A message from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda was read at the conference opening at the campus of Pacific Lutheran University in Tacoma, Washington. Virginia Straus, director of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, which the SGI leader founded, helped to coordinate the daily working group titled "Spirituality and the Earth Charter: Buddhist and Christian Approaches." During one of these sessions, SGI-USA Vice General Director Bill Aiken presented the "Buddhist World View." Vice General Director Al Albergate read a passage from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* during an evening plenary session.

3. Soka Gakkai Seafarers' Photo Exhibit Opens in Mumbai, India

On May 12, “Beyond the Horizon,” a collection of photographs taken by the “Hato-kai,” Soka Gakkai members working as sailors on ocean-going vessels, opened at the Royal Mumbai Yacht Club in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), India. The exhibition displays breathtaking photographic images of natural beauty captured at sea and at port cities. Also displayed are photographs taken by Indian sea captains and valuable photographs from the Rahman Maritime Museum taken of prominent Indian figures, such as Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. Captain K. Guha, who heads the Company of Master Mariners of India, an association of more than 1,500 sea captains supporting the exhibition, lauded the Hato-kai’s efforts to present the display in Mumbai, and praised them for contributing to peace through cultural exchange and friendship. The exhibition has also traveled to the Pacific ports of Russia, the Philippines, China, Vietnam and Malaysia.

4. Seminar on Australian Reconciliation

SGI Australia (SGIA) held a seminar on reconciliation between Aboriginal people and European settlers, which is an important issue in the country, at the SGIA Culture Center in Sydney in October. An Aboriginal woman told her story of the “stolen generation” of native youth and related how she escaped — literally running through the bush — from being separated from her family, to be reared by the government or “adopted out” to a white family. Another woman described the discrimination Aboriginal students faced when they began attending white schools. Now a radio broadcaster, she said that excelling in sports was her way of gaining the respect of her peers as a youth.

“Reconciliation” is a people’s movement that was initiated more than ten years ago in Australia. A committee was formed and they organized reconciliation meetings

in community halls throughout the country. It culminated in the “Walk Across the Bridge,” where more than 300,000 people, including some SGI members, walked across the Sydney Harbor Bridge to signify their support for Reconciliation. Keen interest in this issue on the part of a number of SGIA members led to the presentation of the reconciliation event at the SGIA center.

5. Dialogue on Difference in the Asia Pacific

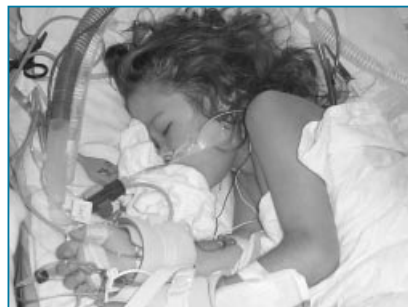
SGI Australia cosponsored a conference titled “Religion and Culture in Asia Pacific: Violence or Healing” in conjunction with Latrobe University and Pax Christi at Latrobe University in Victoria, Australia on October 25. The state of intercultural and inter-religious relations in the region was an important consideration of the event.

In his keynote speech, Dr. Chandra Muzaffar, president of the International Movement for a Just World, opined that individual transformation is essential in resolving simmering animosities and creating a culture of peace. Conference convener Professor Joe Camilleri of Latrobe University spoke of a need for a new spirituality that can underpin humane and legitimate governance. The conference proposed the establishment of an “Asia Pacific Center for Civilization, Dialogue and Training” to support mediation and reconciliation efforts. 🌀



In May, an exhibition of the works of Singaporean artist Liu Kang opened at the Simon Wiesenthal Center Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles.

The Power *of a Mother's Prayer*



The liver failure of seven-year-old Janelle revealed the strength of her mother's faith

BY KIM HAWKINS, NEWBURY PARK, CALIFORNIA

One of the benefits we gain from our practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is the ability to handle difficulty with composure. I say this as an understatement. When I nearly lost my precious seven-year-old daughter Janelle last year, my twenty years of practice paid huge dividends of confidence, wisdom and fortune — even joy — in my darkest hour.

On July 7, my husband, Mike, and I noticed that Janelle's eyes looked yellow. Urine, ultra-sound and repeated blood tests yielded no diagnosis. Within

two weeks, Janelle was entirely golden and sick with vomiting and high fevers. My SGI-USA Area Leader Millie Cohn told me this was happening to expand my life and to trust the Gohonzon. Her words became my life raft. Starlet Vinci, my chapter women's leader, and Kelle Green, my district leader, assured me I would not have to face this alone. We talked on the phone on a daily basis.

Janelle was admitted to Los Angeles Children's Hospital on Friday, July 21, with her liver failing rapidly. Medicine bought time, but failed to correct the toxic ammonia buildup and erratic blood sugar levels that put Janelle at risk for seizures. I chanted Nam-



Martin Cohen

myoho-rence-kyo continuously and unabashedly without worrying about what others thought.

A surgical biopsy on Sunday revealed extensive liver damage. That night Janelle was placed on “the list” and moved to the ICU, which, because of my life-condition, looked like the “Buddha Land.” Only heroes and gods worked here. As her life hung by a thread, Janelle looked “peaceful and at ease.” Instead of panic, I experienced joy and clarity, scribbling this in my diary: “My twenty years of practice have all been for this moment. It took this for me to take the fine medicine of the Lotus Sutra. I am at last, free of doubt, and feel boundless joy from the Law. I really do. I am crying and shaking with it now. People looking in from the outside think I am sad, but I am not. I am the happiest woman in the universe. Janelle, we are one. I will never leave you. You will recover, I promise. We will do whatever it takes to keep you with us, no matter what!”

The next day, I was screened as a living donor for a transplant, but miraculously, a liver became available that very night from a cadaveric donor. In fewer than twenty-four hours of being on the list, Janelle would receive a new liver!

Despite stressful quarrels over religion the day before, my Catholic husband and I enjoyed a beautiful day of supporting each other, just the two of us. With our different faiths, we united as parents in prayer for our child.

Everyone in the ICU was ecstatic after the seven-

hour surgery. One nurse said to me: “Do you have any idea how lucky you are? Do you realize that if Janelle had looked good for one day longer, she might have missed this chance?” What stunning proof of the rhythm and fortune!

Despite the baffling onset of her illness, Janelle’s recovery was textbook, her new liver functioned perfectly. She was discharged within two weeks.

I went home exhausted and soon felt overwhelmed. I had less than a month to complete projects and prepare lessons, as well as find daycare for Janelle, before resuming my teaching position in September. My husband and I did not agree on priorities. I resented his suggestion that I consider finding a job that paid more.

That month, our district began studying “Letter to Misawa,” which explains the workings of the three obstacles and four devils that appear in our lives as a challenge to our Buddhist practice. I wrote in my diary: “The devil king surely is ‘most vexed’ and has summoned his underlings to harass me and test my faith.” Paraphrasing *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, I wrote my declaration of war on him: “Sorry, Mr. Devil King. Yes, I will free myself from the sufferings of birth and death. And I will lead others to enlightenment as well. Yes, I will take over your realm and change it into a pure land. What shall you do? You shall fail! Go torment the slime at the bottom of the ocean or perhaps retire on some frozen planet! Just get lost!”

The road to recovery took a sudden steep and rocky turn. Janelle’s platelet count fell through the floor, putting her at risk for spontaneous bleeding. She was readmitted to the hospital on September 1, and it soon became clear that her bone marrow wasn’t working.

I decided to take a leave of absence from my job and trust the universe. Somehow we would survive the money shortage.

My boss and principal immediately waived my older daughter’s tuition, and began driving her to

and from school. Mike's parents did everything in their power to support us — visiting the hospital frequently, bringing food, books, games and videos. I called my dad in Cleveland right after one of his trips to Las Vegas. He'd hit a \$10,000 jackpot and instantly mailed me a check for \$5,000 to help cover expenses during my unpaid leave.

The doctors tried various strategies with no effect on the crashing platelet count. Soon her white blood cell count took a dive as well. With her immune system suppressed and her body having virtually no white cells, Janelle was vulnerable to "opportunistic infections."

She contracted a respiratory virus, which required

tent treatments in the infectious disease ward. If the ICU was heaven, the fifth floor was hell, with everyone in gowns, masks, goggles and gloves, and ominous signs everywhere, like "Negative Air Flow" and "Stop, Do Not Enter," and posters about "Pain Management." The stage was set for my "meltdown."

I totally lost it when I couldn't get help as Janelle fought against one of her medical treatments. Completely hysterical, I ran down the hall and called my husband from a payphone. It was 6:30 am on a Saturday. When I roused my knight, he went on a charge complaining up and down the hospital chain of command.

Still hysterical, I called Starlet next. She came

You Won't Be Alone

Starlet Vinci is the women's chapter leader for Three Valley's Chapter in California. She shares a few thoughts about supporting Kim Hawkins through her daughter Janelle's illness.

BY STARLET VINCI, THOUSAND OAKS, CALIFORNIA

My immediate reaction when I heard about Kim's daughter was to be there for her — unconditionally. To be the person that Kim could unload everything on. I made a commitment to call her every morning and evening.

There were moments that I would encourage her, but basically I listened more than talked. Maybe I'd throw a word in here and there. I told her that she wouldn't be alone during this process — that I would be there for her.

My husband, Ron, and I were about to go on vacation and were considering whether to go or not. We took a cell phone and told Kim to call at any time. Kim called me while we were in Santa Barbara at 1:30 in the morning after having an incredible awakening. She had experienced something wonderful in her faith at that moment. As I spoke with Kim her life seemed absolutely free and boundless, nothing

attached to her. It's hard to describe.

Millie, Kelle and I were all so in tune with her. There were times we were all on the phone either calling her or buzzing in at the same moments. Each of us had our own unique way of supporting Kim. Listening was the most important thing and to be there for her as a friend. I had two close friends in the SGI-USA who encouraged me and were there for me in that way. They just listened. I felt I needed to do the same for Kim.

I never doubted that Janelle would recover. There was no time for it. Things were happening so fast. There's no reason to give power to negative thoughts. I was totally convinced that Janelle was going to live the moment I first heard about the transplant. Kim told me that she needed to hear that confidence. Sometimes I'd say a word or two and it would be exactly what she needed to hear at that moment.



through as a model leader. “You know, your daughter’s going to be OK,” she said matter-of-factly. “Keep chanting to change this karma. Use this emotion. Use this passion for Janelle. Chant the kind of daimoku only her mother can chant!”

President Ikeda’s guidance for September 25 in *For Today and Tomorrow* struck like a lightning bolt: “Everything depends on whether there is someone who is willing to wage a desperate all-out struggle, someone who will take 100 percent responsibility without relying on or leaving things to others, someone who will work with selfless dedication for the sake of people without concern for what others think. Such a person is a true leader and a genuine Buddhist” (p. 293).

I wrote in my diary: “I am that Buddhist! But what? What? What haven’t I learned yet? Universe, teach me fast! Janelle must survive and encourage many others. I will never abandon my faith, but others may be deeply discouraged or blame my faith. Where is the dawn?”

That day, my husband and I met with Janelle’s doctors in a conference room. It was serious; there was no hope in their eyes. Janelle might need a bone marrow transplant. Our older daughter Michelle was not a match. Despite slim odds for success with an unrelated donor, a marrow registry search was initiated.

Janelle’s own immune system had done all the damage. The plan now was to try ATG, a horse serum that would kill all of her misguided T-cells, giving her bone marrow a chance to recover and make new white cells that would function properly. The four-day ATG infusion, plus weekly shots thereafter, could take anywhere from two months to two years to achieve the desired effect. Until then, Janelle would require frequent transfusions of platelets and blood.

After the ATG, we skated out of the hospital on very thin ice.

Within two weeks, Janelle was readmitted with a potentially lethal fungal infection. The doctors took aggressive measures to locate, diagnose and treat it, including more broncoscopies, CT and MRI scans, and a lumbar puncture to sample her spinal fluid.

Janelle’s condition went up and down, as days turned into weeks, with no end in sight. She was sick with coughing, vomiting and fevers — a lung infection was determined to be the cause.

I received guidance from a senior women’s leader who told me to pray with absolute conviction that I have the solution. “Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the medicine for this karmic illness. Everything depends on your determination.”

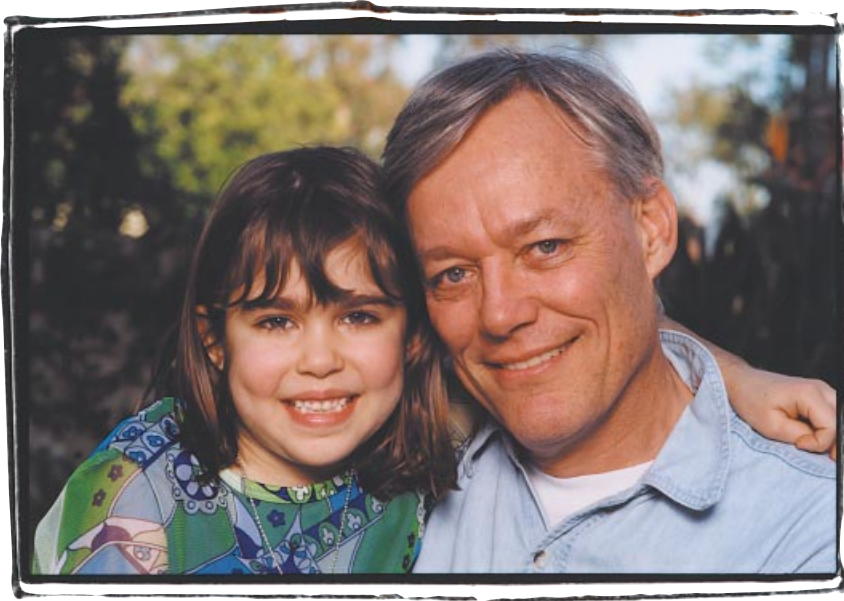
In case I didn’t get it, Janelle’s movie choice the next day brought it home. We watched *Free Willie*. That kid Jesse had determination. He never gave up. Janelle’s karma to die, my karma to lose her might close in like those fishing boats at the end of the film, but my faith and determination would carry her over the rocks and home by Christmas, no matter what!

We learned that Janelle’s lung infection was related to mold in our house. A leaky, old water heater had left mold growing in the platform, which fed into our return air duct, spewing spores all over the house. Stained carpet and puckered wallpaper signaled past water damage. As Michael put it, our house was “Club Med for mold.”

Mike’s parents bought an air purifier for Janelle’s room. We replaced the moldy platform and installed a new furnace with an electronic filter. The carpet, potentially full of spores, had to go. A classmate’s dad, who owns Howard’s Carpet, gave us an inside deal on hardwood floors for the bathrooms and Janelle’s room. With that we’d spent our limit, so we planned to suffer bare concrete in the family and living rooms until we could afford new flooring.

Then a friend in my chapter, Kim Halbeck, spilled our story to the local Home Depot. They stepped in and donated beautiful Pergo flooring as well as vinyl verticals to replace our dusty, old drapes. The newspaper said they put \$12,000 worth of material and labor into our house, but only after Jarret Construction came and fixed a major concrete problem at no charge.

Besides piles of gifts from family, friends and colleagues, Christmas brought a big check from Padre Serra Church through a special collection initiated by my good friend Jane Maiello. The universe came through!



Janelle, 7, and her father, Michael.

As for Janelle, she and I had the time of our lives in the hospital. I kept her laughing, and Grandma waved dollar bills to keep her eating and drinking. One doctor remarked: “There’s an aura in your room. And I’ve never seen so many doctors so interested in one patient.”

Janelle was finally discharged on December 13 with a white cell count of 7.54, which is within the range of normal! She celebrated Christmas and her eighth birthday on January 7 at home!

Three brief hospitalizations in January and one in March were mere speed bumps along the road to recovery. Janelle started back to school in February, and managed to stay out of the hospital for more than six weeks without any transfusions. Her bone marrow has started making platelets, and the registry search has been cancelled. We haven’t cleared all the rocks yet, but I won’t give up until we do. My determination for Janelle’s complete recovery remains unbending.

I’d like to thank the twenty-three people who responded to the call for blood and platelets. And, I’d like to thank the friends and SGI members around the world who supported my family with gifts, greetings, prayers and daimoku. And I’d like to thank my SGI-USA seniors in faith whose wis-

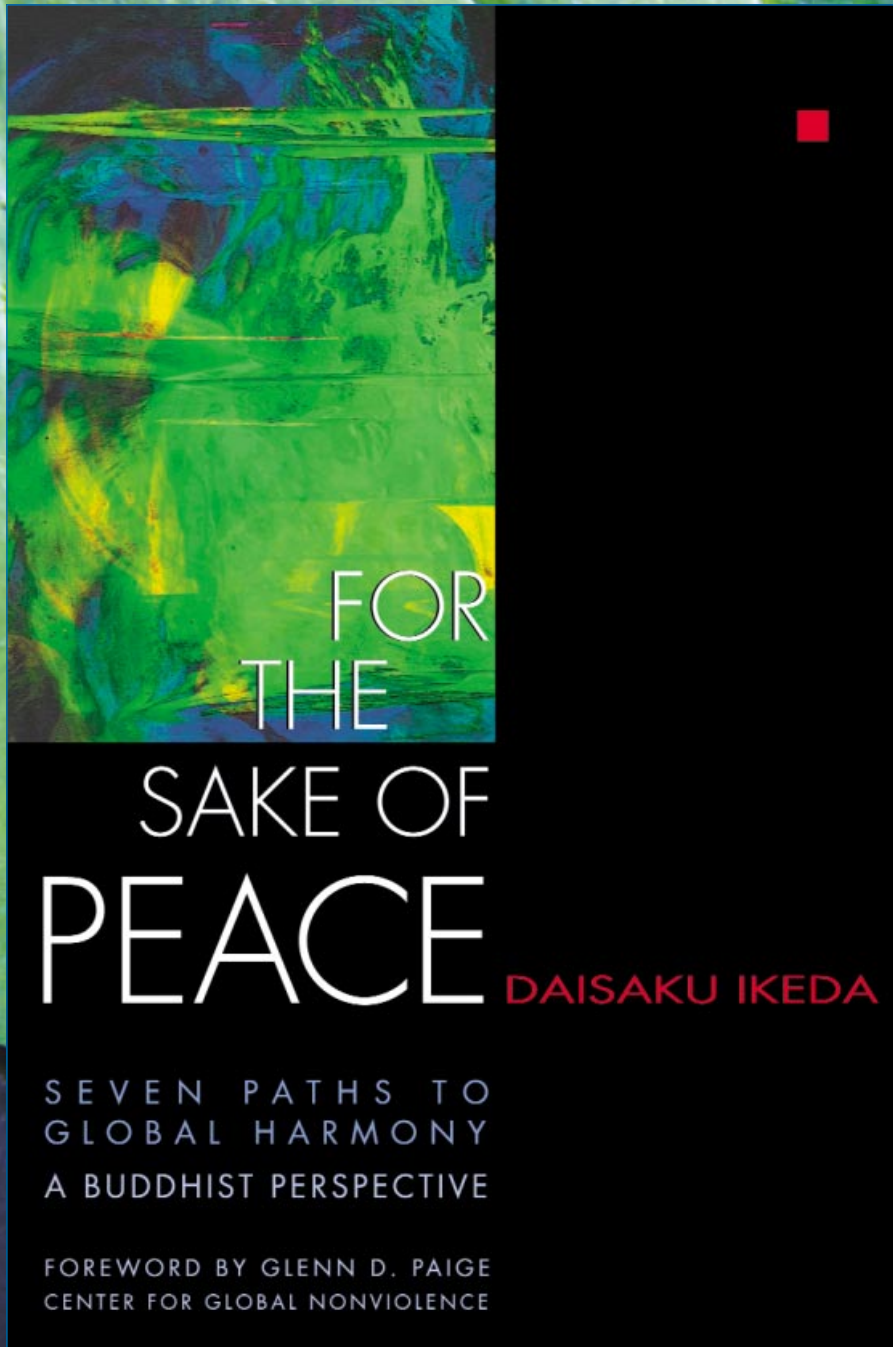
dom is a bright beacon as I navigate this stormy sea using the ship of my Buddhist practice.

In his letter titled “A Ship to Cross the Sea of Sufferings,” Nichiren Daishonin states, “Even a single phrase cherished deep in one’s heart will without fail help one reach the opposite shore” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 33). To this I would add, don’t wait twenty years. Cast off your doubts now! There is no greater ship for the crossing than practicing the Daishonin’s Buddhism with the SGI and President Ikeda. ☸



Kim Hawkins with her daughter Michelle, 14.

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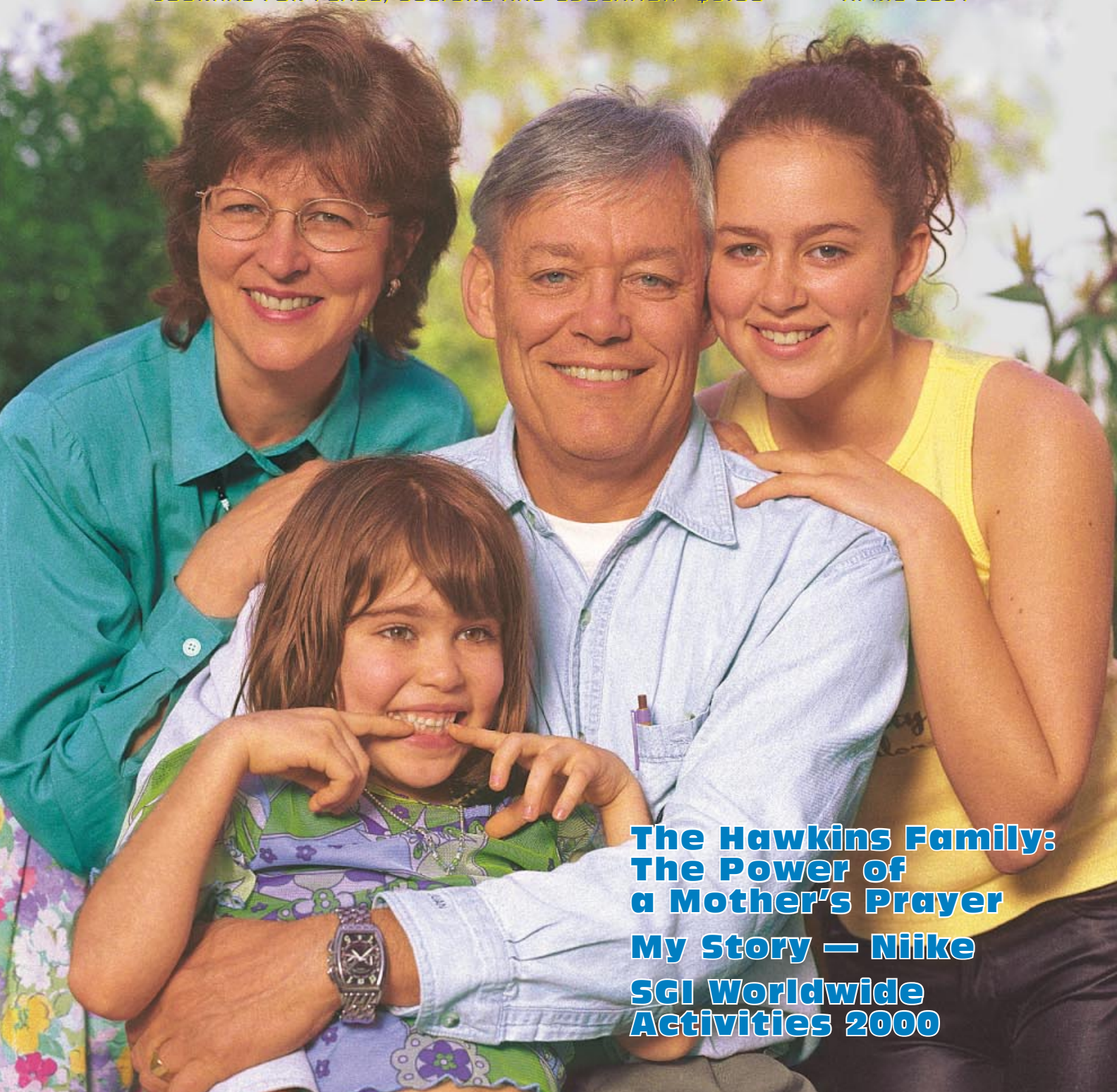
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APRIL 2001



**The Hawkins Family:
The Power of
a Mother's Prayer**
My Story — Niike
**SGI Worldwide
Activities 2000**



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.