

## Freeing Our Imagination

By Jomo Thorne, SGI-USA High School Division Leader

**My mentor called to us: Do not become blank-eyed spiritual sleepwalkers! Do not become people whose minds are closed and rigid, who are unable to dream! — SGI President Daisaku Ikeda (Dec. 1, 2000, World Tribune, p. 6)**



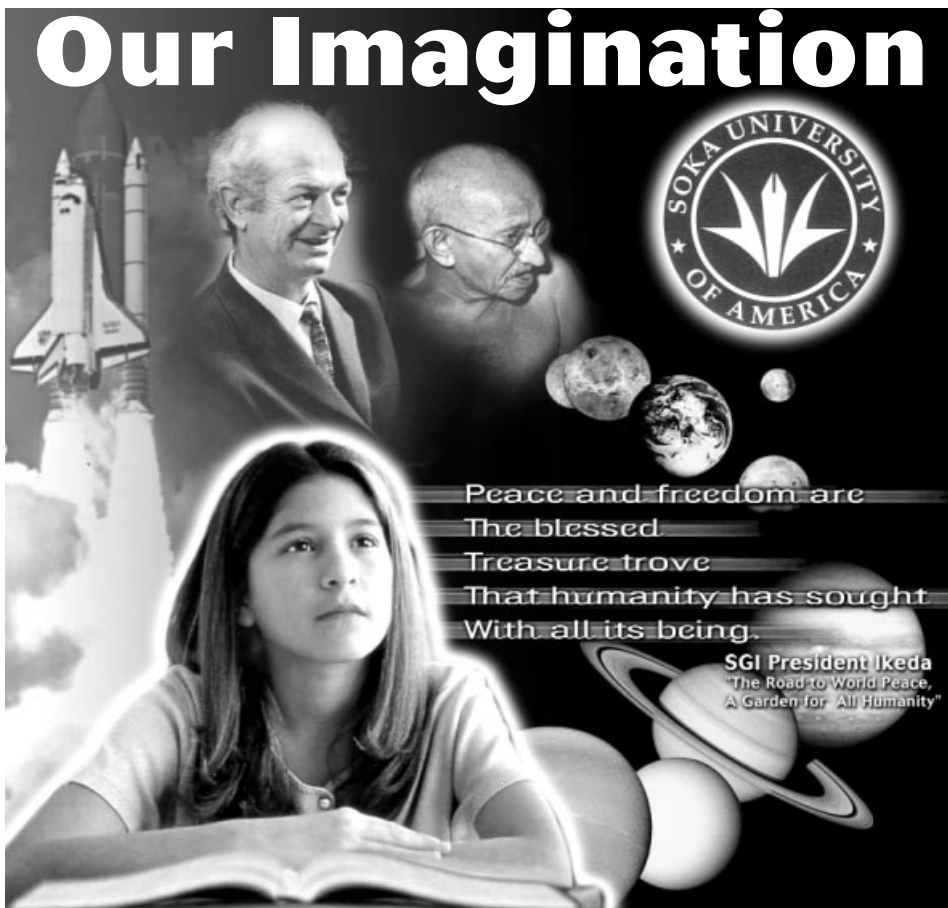
Recently I teamed up with Hamilton, one of the high school students in my chapter, to do a presentation at a Nov. 18 district general meeting.

We wanted to discuss the founding of the Soka Gakkai and the many important lessons the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, taught us about living life through their examples. Hamilton and I shaped our presentation in the form of a dialogue. Our goal was to inspire everyone attending to personally embody the spirit behind the founding of the Soka Gakkai.

In preparing for our presentation, Hamilton and I discussed the social, economic and political factors at play in Japan during the first half of the 20th century. The Japanese government of the time, in a desperate attempt to catch up with the Western powers, threw the nation into a building and development frenzy. Government officials saw the need to mobilize millions of regular people to work relentlessly for the sake of the state. Among other strategies used toward this end, the government fashioned a national education system and curriculum that emphasized blind submission to the state and discouraged free thought and inventiveness. As Hamilton and I deepened our understanding of President Makiguchi's struggle against authoritarianism, it struck me how education could be such a powerful tool for control over people.

In fact, the more I thought about it, the clearer the link between education and human liberation became to me.

During the American civil rights movement, for example, education played a key role in advancing freedom for black Americans. In the famous Brown vs. The Board of Education case, the United States Supreme Court found that the system of segregating schoolchildren by skin color created inequalities that affected both the



Peace and freedom are  
The blessed  
Treasure trove  
That humanity has sought  
With all its being.

SGI President Ikeda  
"The Road to World Peace,  
A Garden for All Humanity"

lives of all children *and* society as a whole.

All this made me think about something that happened when I was in Japan earlier this year. I had the opportunity to witness a dialogue between President Ikeda, Dr. Lawrence E. Carter, dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta, and George Miller, professor and director of the Scholars Academy of Lewis University in Illinois. The three met for about two hours after a ceremony in which President Ikeda was inducted into the chapel's Hall of Scholars.

President Ikeda began the exchange by asking Dr. Carter if he could interview him about his life and his experiences with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (who was one of Dr. Carter's early mentors). Dr. Carter shared wonderful stories about Dr. King's life. Through their exchanges, President Ikeda and his guests impressed me with their deep insights into human nature. I did my best to absorb everything. In witnessing this meeting among leading world educators and a veteran of the American civil rights movement, I thought: "Wow! What an incredible manifestation of the concept of Soka!"

Soka crystallizes President Makiguchi's belief that all people are naturally creative and resourceful. Makiguchi believed that through education a person's creativity could be unleashed and used for

the benefit of society. Education is what liberates people—it is what frees their minds. In a way, we can say that President Makiguchi's "retirement home" was a small jail cell. But from that jail cell he imagined that the principles of Soka education and world peace would spread widely. His incredible conviction in the face of persecution, was the initial cause for the present development of our movement for peace, culture and education. A person whose mind is free, who can access his or her imagination, can change the world.

I believe that as we move into the 21st century, the crucial battles for human liberation will be waged in our nation's classrooms and lecture halls. The new Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America being dedicated on May 3 of this year, will be a training ground for men and women who will lead a dramatic struggle to liberate people in the new millennium.

I hope that all the high school members and their supporters in the SGI-USA will determine to support SUA. I hope that they will determine to take responsibility for educating themselves and their communities. Let's move beyond a superficial understanding of our missions and possibilities. Let's free our imaginations in 2001! ♪

**If you'd like to get in touch with Jomo, please feel free to email him at [jathorne@hotmail.com](mailto:jathorne@hotmail.com).**

PERSPECTIVE

# Friendship Ties Us Together

By Emi Gwin,  
Newly appointed SGI-USA Music Groups Leader



SGI-USA MUSIC GROUPS

**H**appy New Millennium! How fortunate we are to be alive as we embark on a new journey in the 21st century! Together with SGI President Ikeda, we will ring in the second series of seven bells!

First, I would like to extend my deepest and most sincere gratitude to Emy Mukumoto for the time and energy she put forth developing the SGI-USA Music Groups for the past three years. Her tireless efforts are an inspiration and a foundation for me to learn and grow from.

Growing up in the Fife and Drum Corps, I found one of life's greatest treasures—eternal friendship. My closest friends today are young women I met in the Fife and Drum Corps.

President Ikeda states: "Friendship is strong. Friendship, camaraderie and unity in faith are the heart of the SGI. They come even before the organization. We must never make the mistake of thinking that it is the other way around. The organization serves as a means for deepening friendship, comradeship and faith. To confuse the means with the end is a terrible mistake" (*Faith into Action*, p. 221).

Let us always remember that friendship is a vital part of the Music Groups. Through friendship, we can encourage one another and build a bond that is unbreakable. Friendship is the string that ties us together and unites us as disciples of President Ikeda.

Let's unite together, alongside our mentor, President Ikeda, and support the various activities in 2001! Let's support our mothers of kosen-rufu with their women's general meetings in February. Let's be the frontrunners in the March introductory gatherings, inviting all of our friends to participate! Most of all, let's become the art and creativity that makes the Zone Family Youth Festivals a total success! We must take the reins and lead the way in promoting Soka University of America, exhibiting Soka Care



SGI-USA youth performing groups at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, July 6–9, 2000.

and using Soka Spirit in our daily lives. We are the future of this organization and it is most crucial that we begin to take responsibility for the development of SGI-USA.

Through the art of music and dance, let's show the world how capable we are for the 21st century. President Ikeda states, "Culture and art should be shared and enjoyed by all. They do not discriminate. When we encounter beauty, we return to the essence of our humanity, where all people are equal. From that standpoint, there is no distinction between company president and employee. There are no teachers or students, no specialists or amateurs. Such distinctions exist in society, but we need a place where we can restore our humanity.

That place is constructed by art, by culture. Creating that place is also one of the fundamental roles of religion" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 2, p. 94).

Let's use our instruments, our moves and our spirit to communicate to the world and advance worldwide kosen-rufu. The Music Groups are a place where we are all equal.

I will put forth all of my efforts in order to develop eternal friendships with each of you in the Music Groups. Basing my actions on daimoku and study of the Goshu, I will do my best to unite each of us across America as we turn the pages of history and welcome the new millennium! Let's welcome President Ikeda to America with our hearts radiating joy and total victory in every aspect of our lives! ♪



**Let's use our instruments, our moves and our spirit to communicate to the world and advance worldwide kosen-rufu. The Music Groups are a place where we are all equal.**

# YOUTH *Study* FEBRUARY

## The First Place to Find solutions is Within

Of course, efforts to control violence by external measures such as the elimination of weapons of destruction, the establishment of more adequate laws, and the signing of treaties between nations are also important. But violence stems from the animality that is inherent in life. Even if we eliminate all weapons from the face of the earth, violence will never disappear unless we successfully control the animality within us. That is why transforming ourselves from within is so important (SGI President Ikeda's discussion with SGI-USA youth representatives, Feb. 25, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 5).

By Ken Saragosa, Orange County, Calif.

**W**hy does Buddhism always emphasize changing ourselves first? Whenever there is any kind of a problem—problems with difficult people at work, problems within a community, problems at school or at home—we hear about how we have to start with ourselves, change our karma and change ourselves from within. What does that mean?

In the quotation above, President Ikeda is discussing the issue of violence in society. Violence is a problem between nations, but it is also a problem between individuals. And, while we must act together to reform laws and change society as a whole, President Ikeda reminds us that “violence will never disappear unless we successfully control the animality within us.”

Violence seems to be the ultimate expression of something external that is hurting us. It can be in the form of someone with some kind of power over us asserting himself, or it might be the expression of people who feel powerless and who feel that lashing out in anger is the only way that they can gain some measure of power in their lives. But fundamentally, the urge to dominate, to gain power or control, is what is behind violence.

In 1990, President Ikeda gave a speech at Harvard University in which he talked about “hard power” and “soft power.” Hard power refers to physical force, military might or political power. Soft power refers to information, knowledge, culture and ideas.

At first, the difference seems to be between using gentle means to get what we want versus forceful means (sort of like gentle manipulation rather than physical force). But in truth, the difference is between external power and internal power. Or, put another way, it's between doing something because you're told to and doing something because you want to. President Ikeda explains that hard power means using “tools of coercion to move people” whereas soft power depends on individuals freely choosing how they will act. “[Soft power] is an internally generated energy of will created through consensus and understanding among people. The processes of soft power unleash the inner energies of the individual.”

In a way, violence is a crisis in relationships; it represents a breakdown in communication. Buddhism teaches us that creating harmonious relationships based on respect and communication is what we ought to strive for. In our relationships with others, it means that we don't insist that others accept our views. Instead, we need to cultivate the ability to explain things to people, to reason with them, to speak using our heart, our sincerity and our intelligence. This is true at work, in our friendships and in all our personal relationships.

But most of all, developing good relationships—ones which don't result in a violent breakdown—is about self-control. We don't have a whole lot of control over how other people feel or what other people do. But we have almost total control over our own feelings and actions. This is why Buddhism directs us to ourselves—to change what we have the ability to change. ♪

for discussion

QUESTIONS

1. Does it make sense to change ourselves first? Are there some problems that seem too big? Does it sometimes seem to make more sense to change the outside first?

2. Does anyone have any experiences addressing “big” problems through their own individual efforts?

3. Discuss *hard* and *soft* power. What are some examples of *hard* power in your life? Are there examples of *soft* power in your life? How can you transform *hard* power into *soft* power in your life?



### The Youth Study Page Seeks Your opinions!

Please write or e-mail your views to Youth Division Study Committee c/o Seize the Day, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401 or [seize@sgi-usa.org](mailto:seize@sgi-usa.org). We'd like to include your insights and experiences in our youth division study activities.

How has study affected your life?

In what way does understanding Buddhism help you to deal with something in your life?

We have been talking about *mission* and about *inner-motivated change*. What does this mean for you? What is your view of mission? What impact do you feel you can have in the world?

How have you come to learn about Buddhism? What experiences brought Buddhism home to you? How have you come to have your own sense of mission or purpose in your life?

## Youth Peace Committee Takes on the New Year



**Maiya Murphy**  
**Newly Appointed Youth Peace**  
**Committee Coordinator**

I am so excited to join the Youth Peace Committee (YPC) in taking its activities into this new century. My interest in YPC was sparked earlier this year when I joined it in New York City. I was stunned by how the YPC takes Buddhism into the community and translates its philosophy into concrete programs such as Victory Over Violence.

The YPC members inspired and challenged me, forging a strong resolution that the YPC is the vehicle to carry the SGI-USA into the future. Throughout this year, I look forward to helping every major city develop their own YPC to address the needs of their community, and on a global scale, to create an international coalition of friendship and cooperation.

I am determined to help the YPC maintain its dedication to carrying out SGI President Ikeda's vision and spreading his spirit beyond all barriers of culture, race and religion. The YPC will function as a group of President Ikeda's disciples who take YPC programs into everyday society and expand SGI-USA's global community of friends. ♪

## MATERIAL request

### SEND IN YOUR STUFF

Our youth publication is only as strong as what you bring us.

Poems, Articles, Pictures, Stories, Commentaries, Pulitzer Prize insight ...whatever you got, get it to us.

### HOW?

#### Postal Mail:

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#### Email:

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## Trailblazers!



by **Boston Snowden**  
**SGI-USA Vice Student**  
**Division Leader**

### Steadily Advance One Step at a Time

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the student division on a wonderful year 2000!

We have truly made much advancement, however, these advancements were not easy and some of our goals were not attained. I know personally that there are many goals that I wanted to accomplish for 2000 that have not yet come to fruition.

Last year in my region, I wanted to have at least one student division leader per area to take on some of the responsibility for the local student division members. The idea was to make communication faster and more accessible. Many obstacles were a hindrance in accomplishing this goal. We did accomplish a great amount, and I'd like to thank all four divisions for their continual support.

I feel good that we did accomplish part of our goal, which was to identify members who

are eager to take on the role of a student division leader. We have even taken the steps to finalize these appointments.

I am confident that this year in our region these positions will be filled with the most capable leaders. In some parts of our region many of the student division members have already made giant steps in fulfilling the national student division goals. There have been exhibits and conferences held, there has also been new campus clubs organized, and friendships formed because of the student division's efforts in our region.

This year, I have made three determinations to help myself accomplish my goals: First, to put my practice first. I learned early in my introduction to this faith that keeping the Gohonzon first would keep me in rhythm with the cosmos.

Second, keep my composure when responsibilities increase. Wandering around aimlessly just gives me a headache. Third, I need to try to stop clutching all the fortune, and give others the opportunity to gain benefit by asking for their help.

It's time now to put the past behind and move towards the next goal—even if was last year's. In his speech to the student division, SGI President Ikeda reminds us that "youth means to burn with hope, daring to face hardship and challenge, to forge a new path based

on philosophy, passion and struggle. To steadily advance on your chosen path one step at a time."

President Ikeda further said: "I want each of you to make discoveries on your own. I want you to make lasting achievements. And they don't have to make headlines. They can be ordinary things. What matters the most is that you know what you have done. I hope that you will leave something behind, something of which you can proudly declare to the world: This is my discovery! This is how I lived my life!" (Aug. 27, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 8)

My hope for the student division of our region is that we continue to follow along the path of mentor and disciple, and continue to form campus clubs, do shakubuku and make friends! I get so excited when I think of this new year and the new challenges it brings. There is nothing to fear because, as President Ikeda says, "Victory and hard work go hand in hand...[and] our strength is indomitable" (Nov. 10, 2000, *World Tribune*, pg. 4).

I am determined to do everything I can to support all areas of the Texas/Oklahoma student division and our new leaders. Together, with the help of all four divisions we'll make this a "Year of Total Victory for the New Century." ♪