

IN HONOR *of* JOSEI TODA



By Shan Serafin, SGI-USA Jr. High School Leader

On Feb. 11, we commemorate the birth of the second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda—a man whose life was one of epic struggle and profound achievement.

Born in 1900, Toda worked his way through school and became a teacher. At the age of 20, he moved to Tokyo where he met first president of the Soka Gakkai, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, soon coming to regard him as his mentor in life.

On July 6, 1943, Toda went with Makiguchi to prison—both incarcerated for upholding their religious beliefs and their resistance to the militarist government. While in prison, Makiguchi had passed away behind bars on Nov. 18, 1944. “Mr. Toda only learned of his death on Jan. 8, 1945. ‘Who murdered my mentor!’ he screamed in grief and fury” (March 17, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

Upon his release from prison on July 3, 1945, the Soka Gakkai was on the brink of extinction. Many predicted the organization would not survive. Toda was impoverished and his health poor. The only possession he had was his determination to realize his mentor’s dream. In reply to his mentor, Toda determined to rebuild the Soka Gakkai.

On May 3, 1951, when Toda was inaugurated as Soka Gakkai’s second president, the Soka Gakkai’s membership was less than 3,000 households. Toda poured his entire life to help develop the organization with dreams of worldwide kosen-rufu. Within seven years, the organization’s propaga-

tion efforts resulted in an increase in the number of households, from 3,000 to more than 750,000.

Toda died on April 2, 1958.

As we look around today at the magnificence of the SGI, it’s clear that Toda’s dream is coming to fruition. *Seize the Day* would like to print the following excerpt from a poignant essay “No Greater Source of Pride” written by Toda’s disciple, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. ♪



John F. Kennedy said: “A man does what he must—in spite of personal consequences, in spite of obstacles and dangers and pressures—and that is the basis of all human morality.”

Today, Feb. 11, marks the centennial of the birth of our mentor in life, Josei Toda.

There is no greater source of pride than a life dedicated to serving a respected mentor. This has certainly been true for me. No youth can be as overflowing with vigor and vitality

as one spent following the Buddhist path of mentor and disciple.

It has been my unparalleled honor to have been able to look up to Mr. Toda like a father and walk the strict and demanding path of mentor and disciple. I have lived my life with Mr. Toda, and I have fought to proclaim his truth to the entire world.

This has been my life, my life’s purpose.

(SGI President Ikeda, March 17, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8)

Mattea's Experience *Realizing My Goal*



Mattea Harmon, New York City, N.Y.

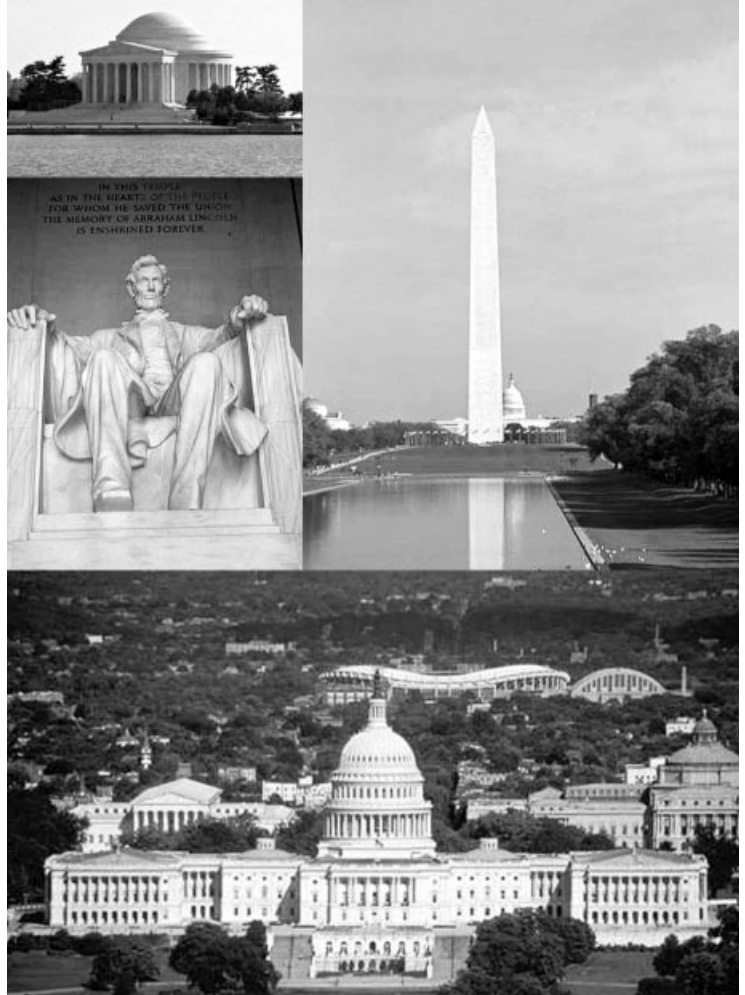
Hi! I'm 15 years old and have been chanting since I was 4. Last year, I applied for a summer program called Leadership Development Summer Institute. This program gives high school students the opportunity to meet with people in positions in government, media, business and nonprofit organizations so that we can learn how our society works. I applied because I believed it would be a good experience and it seemed interesting. After my interview, I was told that I would be notified in about six weeks if I was accepted into this program. I chanted a lot that I would be accepted.

However, six weeks had come and gone, but I received no response. Those who had applied to LDSI and other programs had been notified that they had been accepted. Also, the deadline to respond to the invitation had passed. I believed that I had not been accepted to the program, so I went on with my summer plans and I did not think of LDSI anymore.

But in late May 2000, I presented a poem at a discussion meeting that I had been asked to write. A few days later, I received a phone call at 10:00 at night. I had been accepted into the program. I was really surprised, and the next day I called back to say I would be happy to join the LDSI program.

I started the program on June 19, 2000. It had many benefits, including meeting top public leaders like Mark Green, Rick Lazio and David Dinkins. I received a \$1,200 stipend and a one week trip to Washington, D.C. We interviewed top federal government officials and did some sight-seeing. This experience has proven to me that daimoku and this Buddhist practice works.

I am determined to develop my leadership skills and improve my public speaking and confidence as much as possible. I hope that I can use my leadership skills to bring about kosen-rufu in the future. ♪



EXPERIENCE

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

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Email: seize@sgi-usa.org

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SGI-USA
Attn: Kim Herrmann
Seize the Day
606 Wilshire Blvd.
PO Box 1427
Santa Monica, CA 90406-1427

Soka Spirit

**We stood up resolutely.
We fought resolutely.
We were ready to die for our cause
As we pushed onward in our struggle.
What regrets could we have?
What hesitation?**

**Let persecutions come!
Let trials befall me!
I have the means to generate
Powerful and lofty hope.**

— *The Victorious Future of Mentor and Disciple*,
(Dec. 1, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 6)



**Daisaku Leslie, SGI-USA
Student Division Leader**

In December, I attended a Korean language members meeting in Los Angeles together with Myeong Chung, fellow SGI-USA Student Division Leader, and met with Ms. Yoon Taehee, SGI Korea Women's Leader. I learned so much from Ms. Taehee regarding Soka Spirit. She was so full of conviction and courage based upon her experiences in reaching out to temple members that I could not help but be enthused myself.

She shared how when she sincerely chanted for the happiness of the people associated with the Nikken sect, she was able to respect them and truly care for each person. As a result of her painstaking, step-by-step efforts to improve her relationships with her temple friends, she was able to witness amazing changes in their attitudes. A feeling of mutual respect and friendship developed, and she was able to encourage many of them to make a fresh new departure to practice with the SGI.

That same night Ms. Taehee shared the following letter from Nichiren Daishonin that caused a lightbulb to go off in my head:

“However great the good causes one may make, or even if one reads and copies the entirety of the Lotus Sutra a thousand or ten thousand times, or attains the way of perceiving three thousand realms in a single moment of life, if one fails to denounce the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, it will be impossible to attain the way”
(*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 78).

The Daishonin sounds so strict in this passage, but I realized that this passion to stand up for the sake of Law was something that I must reflect upon. Entering this year, I thought about how 10 years have passed since our spiritual independence was declared. This being the year 2001, I strongly determined that through my prayer I must never forget the injustice that occurred and take action in the Soka Spirit movement.

I hear from many youth, “How can I take action?” Contemplating this question, I thought of the following suggestions that we, as youth, can take as one of the main focuses of our kosen-rufu movement. These suggestions are just the tip of the iceberg in comparison to all of

the ideas that you may have.

We can chant. This is the one thing all of us can do—and the most powerful. With focused and united prayer, we can express our care and our righteous indignation. We can pray for the happiness of the temple members—pray for them to have the courage to recognize the truth.

We can study. Through study of the Goshō, we can deepen our understanding of Soka Spirit by deepening our understanding of the Daishonin's spirit. I have a strong determination to study the Goshō more than ever this year.

We can do shakubuku. When we make genuine efforts to share our philosophy with others, we are creating fortune and learning to express our hearts and how this practice has helped our lives. Through the practice of sharing this Buddhism, we can construct a solid foundation for the correct

understanding of our movement; when people think of the Daishonin's Buddhism, they will understand that he taught a philosophy of the universal equality of all life.

And based upon this compassionate spirit, we can befriend temple members, support the Courageous Hearts Group members and learn first-hand the dedication, courage and heart required in the endeavor to fight for the happiness of others.

In his message to the 50th Central Executive Conference, SGI General Director Eiichi Wada stated that he is counting on the SGI-USA to take full responsibility for the Soka Spirit movement and encouraged us to always involve ourselves with it. Mr. Wada said, “Please do not think that anyone else is going to take care of this most important matter.”

This battle is crucial for the future of the United States. If we do not challenge Soka Spirit now, this issue will come back to haunt us in the future with even greater strength. I feel if we do not fight against evil now while this obstacle is right in front of us, we will regret it later. There are six temples throughout the United States where temple members need our help and our prayers.

I am determined to make history in this year of total victory with all youth members in the SGI-USA as a disciple of SGI President Ikeda. ♪

Ode to Joy
From the 9th Symphony Beethoven

Entering this year, I thought about how 10 years have passed since our spiritual independence was declared. This being the year 2001, I strongly determined through my prayer that I must never forget the injustice that occurred and take action in Soka Spirit.



By Nobuko Kobayashi,
SGI-USA High School Leader

Determining Victory

Thursday, December 28, 1950. Fine and Clear.

“Life is a succession of struggles. But I think the important thing is what we struggle for and what foundation underlies our striving. The purpose of my own battle being sublime, as long as I have not the slightest particle of regret, it will be a battle of supreme happiness. Now I realize there will be no regrets. Therefore, I have only to march ahead with a smile. I wish to adorn the final battle with splendid efforts that are truly worthy of me. Whether I win or lose is secondary. I must make it my first priority, however, to display ability, power of action, firmness and responsibility in this struggle.... Ultimately, there is no other way but to base one’s life to the end upon daimoku.” Home at 11:30 to bed at 1:30. (*A Youthful Diary*, p. 69)

Recently I was flipping through *A Youthful Diary*, a book that compiles SGI President Ikeda’s diary entries when he was a young man. The above entry was made in 1950 when he was only 22 years old. That meant that President Ikeda had only been practicing this Buddhism for three years when it was written.

When I read this, I could not help but be overwhelmed with the depth of wisdom and conviction that he displayed at such a young age and for someone so new to this practice.

I recently visited a high school senior who had applied to Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo through the early

admissions process. This student was notified that his application was deferred to regular admissions. Naturally, this was very disappointing to him. This student worked so hard on all of his admissions requirements and did everything possible to get in early. Yet, when I visited this person, he was in the highest of spirits. I was so impressed by his attitude and determination.

Through our dialogue, I found that he was very positive and very active in his schoolwork, school clubs and his SGI activities despite his apparent setback. He may have been discour-

aged at the beginning, but it was not apparent any more.

After talking to this student, I immediately felt that he had no regrets in his life. He knew he did his best and that he had already won his battle, just as President Ikeda mentioned in the quote above.

Through this student and President Ikeda, I was able to learn a very valuable lesson—the outcome of a goal or endeavor is not what determines victory, but it is the process and the foundation that it is based on that will determine whether there is victory or not. ♪

Poems...Poems...Poems

Fruits of the End

The sweetest fruit I had ever tasted—
The delicious flavor of success—
And the tingling joy left in my mouth
Were all worth it, every moment.

And the memories of the fight prance on,
The struggles to grasp victory,
But to some, a question comes to mind,
“How would defeat be different?”

If I had been weak, it would all be over—
A fall from which I’d never stand.
Yet if I were strong, it’d be even better—
A step closer to winning I’ve come.

Defeat is the key to victors.
It is that from which they learn.
And the more defeats that come before,
The sweeter the fruits of the end.

What I’ve Had

What I have has been taken for granted.
It’s slipped through all my fingers.
I’ve lost what matters without even knowing
What I’ve had, what I’ve had, what I’ve had...

It’s gone now; it can’t be chased.
All that can be done is to wish.
If it’s ever in range to grasp it again,
I’ll reach for what I’ve had, what I’ve lost...

But it can’t be grasped—nevermore.
It has gone and vanished forever.
All I can do is learn from regret
And think back to what I’ve had, what is gone.

Both Poems By Anita Shantes, Boise, Idaho