

Rebels and Nonconformists, **HEAR THIS!**

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "The hope of a secure and livable world lies with disciplined nonconformists, who are dedicated to justice, peace and brotherhood. The trailblazers in human, academic, scientific and religious freedom have always been nonconformists. In any cause that concerns the progress of humankind, put your faith in the nonconformist" (*Strength to Love*, p. 26).

What is a disciplined nonconformist — an aimless rebel or a person of conviction? Dr. King was a nonconformist. So was Mahatma Gandhi. And, SGI President Ikeda, by opening up new paths and spearheading our peace movement, can also be called a nonconformist. What do their lives tell us of disciplined nonconformity?

The disciplined nonconformist chooses justice over compromise and lives with purpose. And when a mentor refuses to compromise, dedicating his or her life to challenging injustice, the relationship between mentor and disciple becomes the unmistakable path of disciplined nonconformists.

We, the youth of SGI-USA, are also a gathering of disciplined nonconformists. We are striving together to understand our mentor's heart and put it into action. That means sharing our beliefs with others and taking action to help our friends based on a philosophy in which we believe.

We don't conform to a society that is indifferent to the sufferings of ordinary people, a society that shrugs its shoulders at teen violence, a society that discriminates based on superficial appearances and a society that is unconcerned with its young people's future. We are reaching out into our society with the solid conviction that "the human revolution of a single individual can transform the destiny of all humankind" (Forward, *The Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. vii).

To paraphrase Dr. King, we nonconformists are not like thermometers, par-

rotating society's current temperature. We are like thermostats, transforming society's climate!

March 16, Kosen-rufu Day, is our opportunity to make history, to make a statement to the world that the youth of SGI-USA, united in purpose with President Ikeda, are determined to work selflessly for the happiness and welfare of all. As we commence this

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new wave of propagation in March, let us conduct our meetings with the spirit that President Ikeda himself is in attendance at every single gathering.

MARCH DISTRICT INTRODUCTORY MEETINGS

At every district gathering during March, the youth will take responsibility to prepare an introductory meeting designed to share our philosophy with many people. At each of these meetings, we'd like to suggest that the youth prepare a report to President Ikeda.

Please send all of these reports to us at the SGI Plaza via fax, (310) 260-8917 or email, seize@sgi-usa.org. We will compile them together with a record of the number of members present and every guest who came to each meeting.

This collection of youth effort and four-divisional accomplishment will then be sent to President Ikeda as evidence of our determination to inherit his spirit.

MARCH 16: ALL YOUTH GATHERINGS

In addition to our district introductory meetings, on the actual day of March 16, a Friday, we will gather all over the country for ceremonies to commemorate this historic day and to launch an all-out effort to win in our struggle.

Much like March 16, 1958 — when 6,000 youth gathered together with second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda and pledged to take full responsibility for kosen-rufu — several thousand youth in America will gather on the exact day, 43 years later, to express our pledge to our mentor President Ikeda. Imagine such unity — youth throughout the country, meeting on the same day.

For those who can attend — who don't have work, school or other conflicts — this is a grand opportunity to feel the mystic connection of an entire nation of youth division advancing toward one common goal: we'll make March a month of triumph for the people.

This is also a unique opportunity to record the names of each participant who attended, thus documenting a crucial moment in history. We would like to also compile these name lists too, as an eternal record of the people who gathered and celebrated on this first March 16 of the new millennium. This day will generate momentous energy, which we shall take to the districts and use to fuel the fire of action.

This year, all of us will commemorate March 16 with President Ikeda. Celebrating with him doesn't mean that we need to be physically next to him. But it does mean to inherit his vision and share his commitment to creating a new history for the United States and the world. The world won't change by itself. If we want a different society, then we have to be the ones to make it happen.

So this March, let's stand together — every youth in every district across America — to share this Buddhism with our friends and to create a new America, together with our mentor! ♪

Written By...



**SGI-USA Youth Leader
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Connecting One to One

The Power of Visiting Friends

A pioneer women's division member in Chicago once remarked that there are no shortcuts to kosen-rufu. Then she added, "except through home visitation."

The greatness of the SGI lies in our one-to-one connections, our very heroic efforts at the grass-roots level. Some refer to it as making "life-to-life connections." Others call it working on the "front lines." There's something special about going out of your way to encourage a friend in their home and offering warm words of inspiration and hope. It makes an impact on that person's life.

What is it about home visits that leads to the happiness of each member, and further, the growth and happiness of all members in the SGI? How can we confidently wage a "care campaign" toward our youth gatherings on March 16 and our district introductory meetings in March?



History

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi was a towering intellect who hoped to reach many people through his written works. Having failed to attract many people through his writings, he then attempted to convince others about the value of Buddhism through holding lectures and other large forums. Yet, he was not able to convince many people to join the Soka Gakkai.

Makiguchi realized that kosen-rufu would only be achieved through one-to-one dialogue. The growth in the early days of the Soka Gakkai can be traced to Makiguchi's tenacious efforts to engage individuals in sincere and open discussion. He expanded his core of like-minded friends, and that spurred a dynamic propagation movement (see Sept. 19, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 14). SGI President Ikeda states: "If you only attend large meetings, you cannot come to know the participants as individuals. You cannot communicate one to one. Small meetings are very important. A strong, powerful solidarity can only be built through one-to-one dialogue" (Oct. 13, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 7).



Practical Tips

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima determined last year to complete 1,000 home visits and was able to accomplish this in less than one year. Many people were moved to take similar action, setting their own home visit goals. In the process, they realized how difficult it was to schedule home visits around a gamut of meetings. Since then, many youth leaders have reported how valuable home visits are in strengthening heart-to-heart bonds and raising capable leaders to care about each member. General Director Nagashima wrote of five things he learned as he visited members last year:

- The heroes of kosen-rufu are the members.
- We must always deepen our conviction in the Gohonzon. When we chant, nothing is impossible.
- When we strive to understand President Ikeda's guidance, we will naturally practice Buddhism exactly as Nichiren Daishonin intended.
- The SGI family is precious and beautiful.
- Each member is invaluable.

For our March 16 meetings, we can also focus on the following guidelines:

- 1) Make visiting inactive youth a priority; make your own personal goal for inviting guests and visiting members.
- 2) Meet with friends, dialogue on the basics of Buddhism and encourage them to come to our district meetings and youth gatherings. If you aren't comfortable explaining Buddhism, invite a friend to come along.
- 3) Enjoy your struggle!

Exactly as General Director Nagashima mentioned above, home visits are not just for the sake of others—they are also an enormous source of inspiration for ourselves. When we visit members, share the greatness of this practice and encourage one another, our lives are refreshed. We are ready to challenge life's difficulties again based on faith. The same can be said about *shakubuku* (introducing others to Buddhism).

Shakubuku

To care about a friend, to share a part of your life with them in times of suffering, particularly your Buddhist faith, is the greatest act of compassion. And in turn, it completely revitalizes your life. To do this, we must muster the courage to look beyond our own shyness or personal discomfort and care about another person's life as much as we do our own. The source of this courage exists no other place than within our life and can be brought out when we chant for others happiness.

However, as youth, let's not pray for others' happiness in a passive way, expecting that someone else will help them become happy. Let's pray passionately and set ourselves in motion to be the ones who will help people become happy.

During the month of March, let's think of one friend, one family member or one neighbor whom we really know is suffering and whom we want to introduce to this Buddhism. With this person in mind, let's pray to muster the courage and compassion to help him or her become happy.

Listed below are some quotations from President Ikeda about propagation.

"Spreading the Daishonin's teaching is the most compassionate practice we can undertake as human beings—a practice that simultaneously enables us to develop ourselves. Moreover, because it guides people to happiness and peace, it is the ultimate expression of friendship."

— *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 2, p.238

"If you really make Buddhism and faith the basis of your life and have pride and confidence in that, your discussions will just naturally become dialogues on Buddhism. If you find yourself unable to do so, it is because you have somehow built a fence around Buddhism in your mind. It hasn't permeated every aspect of your life and thought.

"And if every time you talk about Buddhism you become defensive, tense up and look severe, people won't be receptive to what you have to say. For us, Buddhist dialogue is the most natural, effortless expression of our humanity."

— July 4, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 5 ♪

The Resoluteness of the Dawning Sun

Quotations from SGI President Ikeda

Seize the Day is publishing the following collection of quotations from SGI President Ikeda as a source of wisdom and inspiration in creating this year's March 16 meetings.

Quotations from *The Human Revolution*, Volume 10

Note: In this novel, President Ikeda is portrayed by the character Shin'ichi Yamamoto. Also, the following paragraphs make reference to the famous "Osaka Campaign" led by President Ikeda.

When Shin'ichi heard what Toda expected of him in the forthcoming Kansai campaign, he responded to his master's call without a moment's hesitation. However, even at that moment he was all too painfully aware of the wide gap which lay between reality and their goal...

They told him that the key to victory did not necessarily lie in the numerical strength but in the indestructible unity of even a few people, and clearly revealed that the power of faith was unlimited. Did not the Goshu state "Before all others, employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra."...

More than anything Toda wanted Shin'ichi to command the campaign. Victory or defeat was secondary to him. He must put his disciple through the arduous task of opening a new path toward kosen-rufu in the future (December 1977 *Seikyo Times*, p. 14).

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"I'm in a fix," Haruki said with his Kansai accent. "I don't have the least idea of what to do."

"We all have a mission to accomplish in this world," Shinichi encouraged him. "We've got to keep that in mind and do everything we can... This is my first maiden battle. It's your first one too. We are both destined to challenge the campaign" (December 1977 *Seikyo Times*, p. 16).

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"Our campaign will begin with the strong prayers of all the members in Kansai. Chanting and praying is only the first condition. The second condition is that we use the best strategy and the most effective action. Without this second part, we will never be able to gain the initiative in order to win. Neither the first nor the second condition alone is enough. Only when both are perfectly harmonized does the impossible become possible" (December 1977 *Seikyo Times*, p. 23).

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"Now is the time for you members in Kansai to make a great leap forward in propagation. Be solidly united so that no one will fall by the wayside. We are not doing this for the sake of the Soka Gakkai. But we have at last discovered that the way of propagation taught us by Nichiren Daishonin and shown to us by President Toda is the surest and easiest way to open up our lives and make both ourselves and others happy" (December 1977 *Seikyo Times*, p. 28).

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"I believe that it is up to us to realize that only those who stand up and fight to save the people can be true disciples of Nichiren Daishonin. It is now the time for us to undertake that mission – the time to accomplish the movement for kosen-rufu by all means" (July 1978 *Seikyo Times*, p. 27).

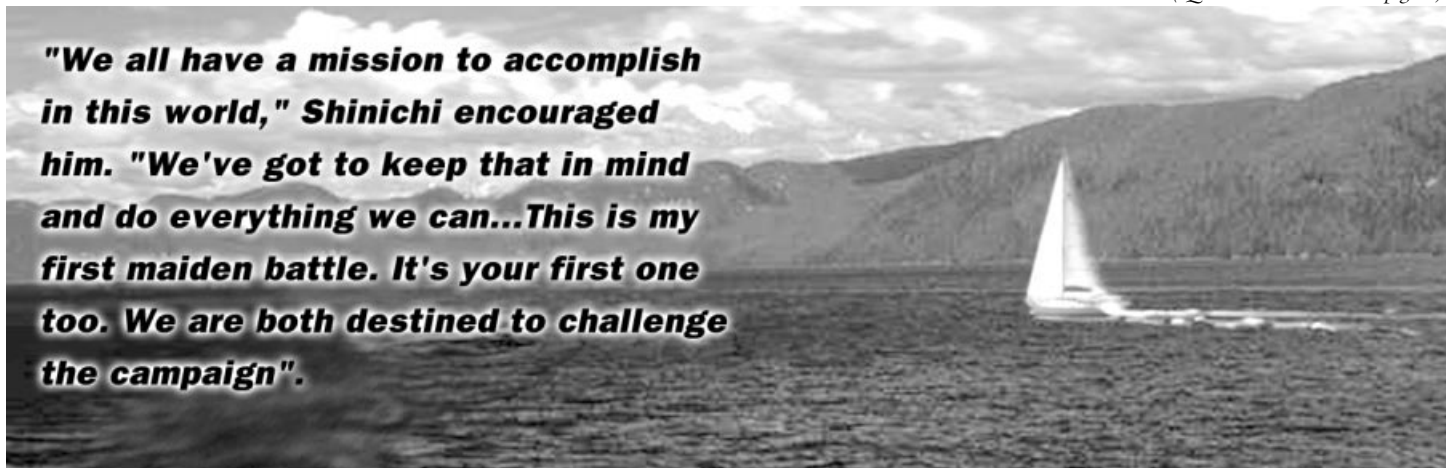
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The general meeting had indeed served as a powerful springboard on which the local members could make a leap ahead. It gave them the resolve to save any person who was crying out in misery and agony. Each was determined to do his utmost, and encouraged others to do the same. They knew that their endeavor would infallibly bear fruit.

They looked around themselves and saw that their city was filled with unhappy people. They thoughts turned toward their next-door neighbors, the people living across the street, relatives and acquaintances whom they had not seen for a long time, friends they had not hear from for years. Now they had awakened to their mission of saving suffering people, they discovered there were many things to do (July 1978 *Seikyo Times*, p. 29).

(“Quotations...” continued on page D)

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By Shan Serafin, Intergalactic Middle School Uisionary

For March 16, Kosen-rufu Day, district meetings all over the country will be led by the youth. This may be very challenging for districts that don't have youth participation on a regular basis. Here are a few ideas to keep in mind as we work to bring youth into the scene.

One of the beauties of SGI-USA is how it represents a cross-section of society. There are people from all walks of life, people of different ethnicities and people from a variety of age ranges. Young as well as old are equally valued. This is vital in the district. The district is the fundamental unit of organization. It offers the most immediate interaction among a diversity of members.

The point is that, though it might be very difficult to attract participation from every person in a district, it's a challenge well worth fighting for.

"Wrack our brains" is a common term in our organization. We usually say we're wracking our brains when we're discussing how to be creative. Of course, creativity

The Keys to the District! *Take It for a Spin!* Tips on the Upcoming Kosen-Rufu Day Meetings



applies to the arts; we can chant to find inspiration to paint, write, dance and so forth. But, there is also the idea of being creative in helping others. It takes ingenuity to figure out how to truly inspire people. Especially when someone has no current connection to us or our activities, we have to wrack our brains to determine the best forum for their involvement.

Chanting is key. As we pray with genuine concern for helping others, effective ideas will come to mind. This is creativity in action.

At any given time, anyone can inspire anyone. We usually regard things like "guidance in faith" as a one-way street, where a person of experience shares wisdom with someone of less experience. But inspiration can come from anyone. This is a fact that doesn't get put into practice often enough. Frequently in America, youth are not considered sources of inspiration. At places like school and work, there is always seniority; meaning there is always a lengthy ladder to climb. People are rarely handed responsibility without satisfying a social requirement—working their way up the ranks. Some schools

operate beyond this tradition, but it seems this rarely happens. In contrast, the SGI-USA district is the perfect arena to give someone instant seniority.

"Here. You're young. As if this discussion meeting were a car, we'd like to give you the keys to the district. Take it for a spin."

The door swings both ways. While this is a splendid opportunity to give the spotlight to a young person, leading a meeting does not require youth to be "the show." Some teenagers might be much more excited to go behind the scenes and be like an architect, assigning roles and masterminding a well-planned operation, as they design a great meeting that involves the participation of all four divisions.

Imagine a district full of 15 people ready to execute the vision of a few young people. No, this doesn't have to result in a perfect meeting, but the energy of this scenario will certainly impact the future. We make good causes as we cherish youth and they learn to shoulder the responsibility for peace as they see we are willing to trust them with it. ♪

("Quotations..." continued from page C)

Understanding Propagation Through the Spirit of March 16: Quotes from SGI President Ikeda

March 16, which came to be called "Kosen-rufu Day," would thereafter serve as a day for us to renew our pledge to build the eternal, indestructible foundation for kosen-rufu.

The entire country at that time lived in poverty, and the youth division members were struggling to make ends meet. They must have used every possible means to spare time and money to go to the head temple, carefully managing their daily obligations.

Unless we young people are fired up with energy, we will not be able to burn away the darkness of life that overshadows the times. Unless we advance, the flames of justice will not reach the people's lives. The true significance of March 16 lies in each of us standing up, taking action, praying and speaking out as a torchbearer in our own right.

"No matter who attends or doesn't, we're going to hold this ceremony for our young people!" [Josei Toda] said. He knew, in his heart of hearts, that as long as the young people who would faithfully inherit his legacy were there, that was all that mattered.

—March 27, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 10

The Soka Gakkai has always devoted itself to the people, and it continues to do so to this day. That is why it has won the people's hearts. There is no greater strength than this.

Devotion to the people is what wins a religion widespread support — this formula will never change. I hope you will remember this lesson of history throughout your lives. It is this point that I especially wish to impress upon you today. I want all of you to be proud of this spirit of the Soka Gakkai. Above all, religion must help the sick, the poor, those who are suffering the most. Wouldn't you agree? To be valued and looked up to are not corrupt, arrogant individuals who despise the people. I want you to inherit my spirit — a spirit of ungrudging service to the people — and put it into magnificent practice in your lives

—April 18, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 1

Each year when March 16 comes around, I am filled with thoughts of various expressions of the mentor-and-disciple relationship.

—*Buddhism in Action*, vol. 3, p. 181 ♪