

**SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION**

SEIZE the Day

SGI President Ikeda's Message for March District Introductory Meetings
Commemorating Kosen-Rufu Day

Become the Greatest Allies to Suffering Friends

The dynamic spirit of youth fills the month of March. On March 16, the day of our eternal foundation, youthful disciples shall stand up to take full responsibility. My sincere congratulations on this gathering of American youth to commemorate this significant day, and my heartfelt thanks for all your untiring efforts!

At the solemn ceremony on March 16, 1958, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, expending his very last ounce of energy, declared like a roaring lion, "The Soka Gakkai is the champion of all religions!" This means that we are the leaders of philosophy. We uphold the supreme Mystic Law, which is the source of infinite hope. We are therefore the true winners, who triumph over ourselves.

Nichiren Daishonin states, "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the greatest of all joys" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788). When we share this great confidence, we will emerge as magnificent champions who are full of joy and fear nothing.

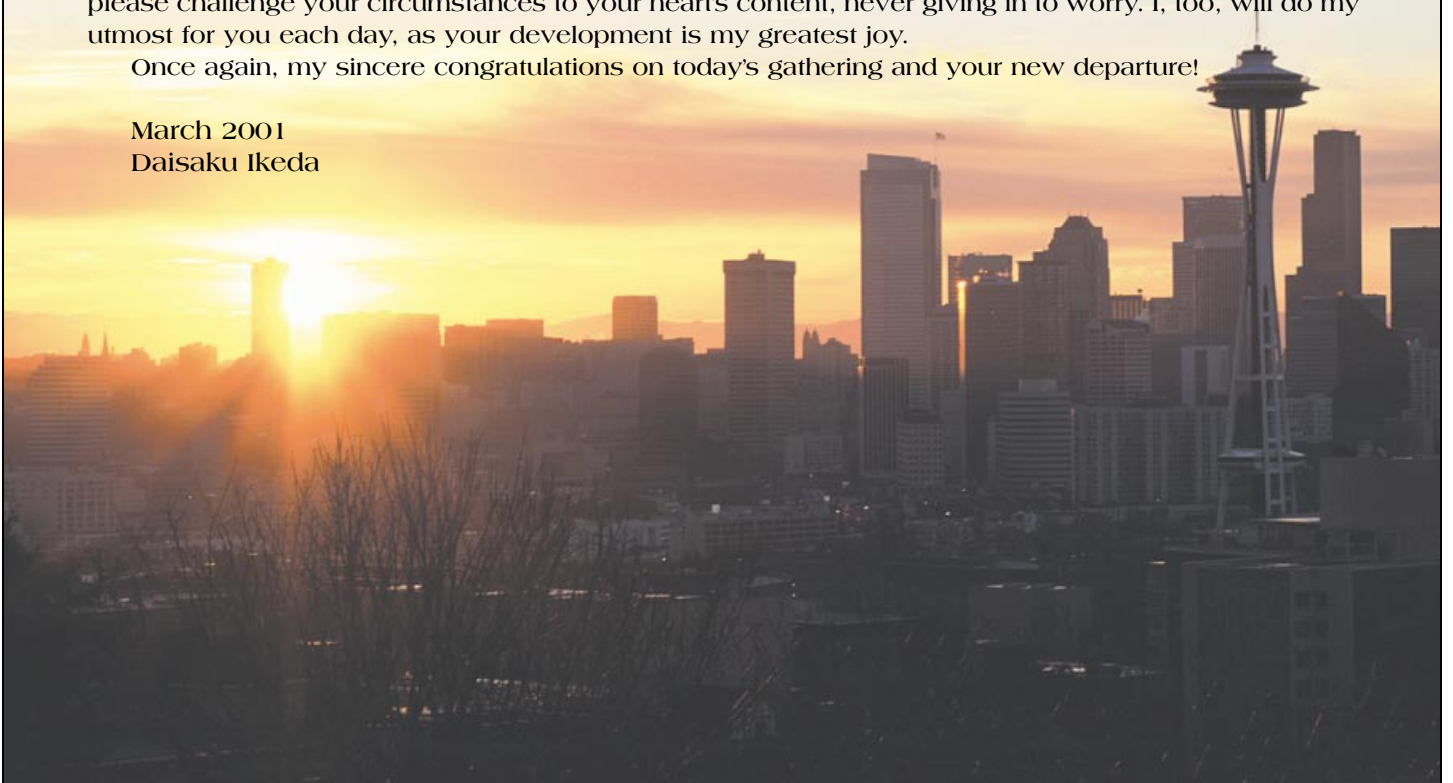
Beethoven once said: "Hope — you forge the mind into iron!" Hope is confidence, hope is courage, and faith is the ultimate form of hope. In Beethoven's genuine declaration shines the infinite potential of life.

I ask that each of you build an eternal, indestructible palace of joy in your lives and become the greatest allies to suffering friends, rushing to their side and encouraging them with all your heart. Please build a beautiful castle of solidarity as you expand your network of friendship, justice and happiness at your work and in your community.

I am praying day and night for your excellent health, successful endeavors and splendid growth. So please challenge your circumstances to your heart's content, never giving in to worry. I, too, will do my utmost for you each day, as your development is my greatest joy.

Once again, my sincere congratulations on today's gathering and your new departure!

March 2001
Daisaku Ikeda





Cory Taylor,
SGI-USA
Vice Youth
Leader

History

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respond to the
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President
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The meaning
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f Mentor and Disciple

Would you stand up against the country of your birth if you had the foresight to see your country and all its peoples heading for ruin?

Would you be able to find the requisite courage to speak out for the sanctity of human life when doing so in your present circumstances meant imprisonment or execution? What if the national policies you sought to challenge were being celebrated day in and day out in mass public rallies? What if speaking out meant endangering your friends, your family and your children? Would you be willing to take these personal risks, in order to avert a national disaster? First and second Soka Gakkai presidents Makiguchi and Toda faced these questions. And their decision is the legacy of the Soka Gakkai.

It is a simple matter of fact that none of us would ever have come into contact with this legacy if it weren't for SGI President Ikeda's worldwide propagation efforts. Not a tear of joy would have been shed, nor a single heart flush with the surge of hope.

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

For 13 years, since his release from prison in 1945, President Toda had lovingly devoted himself to the poor and sick of Japan. In those chaotic post-war years, when values had been turned upside down, Toda had resurrected hope in the hearts of nearly a million citizens through the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. But prison's bitter cruelty had robbed Toda of robust health. By March of 1958, Toda's emaciated body and labored steps revealed that his time was running out.

Early that month, President Toda proposed holding a youth gathering as a "dress rehearsal for kosen-rufu." "Shin'ichi, I'm thinking of March 16 as the occasion on which I will formally transfer the

mission for achieving kosen-rufu to all of you" (March 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 49).

Word of the gathering reached every corner of the youth division with lightning speed. "They [the youth] would do whatever it took to make the time to go to Toda's side" (June 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 54).

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

Directed by young Daisaku Ikeda and deeply concerned about Toda's ailing health, youth members had prepared a litter for the president to ride in. President Ikeda describes the scene in *The Human Revolution*:

"Looking at Shin'ichi, Toda smiled and nodded. He then allowed his disciples to help him onto the seat they had affixed to the center of the litter. Carried by several young men's division members, who had been selected for the task, the litter quietly moved down the path toward the Grand Lecture Hall. Shin'ichi walked closely alongside.

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

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

sobbing" (August 1995 *Seikyo Times*, p. 40).

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

Forty-three years have passed since then. The year is 2001. President Ikeda is 73 years old. Soka Gakkai organizations exist in 163 countries. And a new generation of youth, personified by the newly appointed young men's and young women's leaders of SGI-USA, have taken the lead in the American kosen-rufu movement.

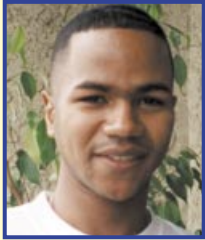
History will record how we respond to the call of our mentor, President Ikeda. The meaning of March 16 lies in the bond between mentor and disciple.

"I ask that each of you, the young leaders of the new century, please realize that now is the time to develop yourself. So please journey boldly along your chosen course of magnificent humanism, surmounting all billows and swells so that you may establish the immortal castle of happiness in your heart" (March 20, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 1).

"Your mission is to ensure that this precious organization endures for all time, to create a Soka Gakkai that nothing can ever destroy" (April 18, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 10). ☀



YOUNG DISCIPLES



Jomo Thorne
SGI-USA
High School
Division Leader

The following is part 1 of a summary of recent discussions I've had with representative members of the SGI-USA High School Division. The discussions revolved around issues related to the mentor-disciple relationship and are presented here as one dialogue. Participating in this dialogue are Rey Estevez, a 14-year-old high school freshman from San Francisco; Niiaiyi Quaye, a 15-year-old high school sophomore from Chicago; Brian Nakamura, a 17-year-old high school senior from Metairie, La.; and of course, me.

Grabbing the Rope

Jomo Thorne: Hey guys, how's it going?

Rey Estevez: It's cool, cool...

Niiaiyi Quaye: I'm doin' all right...

Brian Nakamura: Things are going well.

Jomo: I was wondering if I could get some of your thoughts on a topic I know a lot of Buddhist youth have a hard time understanding—the mentor-disciple relationship.

We hear lots of talk about the three presidents of the Soka Gakkai and how they kept Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism pure because of the mentor-disciple relationships that existed among them. We also hear a lot about SGI President Ikeda and all the great things he has done.

Still, I know that sometimes it's hard for us as youth to really appreciate why we need to focus so much on the mentor-disciple relationship and what it has to do with our own lives. What do you guys think? Have you had any experiences with a mentor in your lives?

Rey: Well, I think that a mentor is a person who can help broaden one's perspective. I mean, I think that youth are the most misunderstood group in society and that we need a lot of room to breathe.

There are lots of times when I feel like I have so much energy and that there's so much I want to do. But I get frustrated by how hard it seems to do the things I want—it feels like no matter how much I do sometimes I'm still in the same place.

Jomo: Yeah, as youth it seems very natural for us to go after what we want with lots of energy. But because we sometimes lack experience, it can seem that we keep running into obstacles in spite of our best efforts. Sometimes it feels like our lives are like cars whose wheels are spinning in place.

Niiaiyi: I think that the value of having someone to look to as a mentor is that they can relate to the struggles that you're going through. They've probably gone through what you're going through right now and you can learn from their mistakes. As youth, we do have a lot of energy but we don't always know how to best use that energy.

Brian: My wrestling team coach encourages us during practices by sharing some of the experiences he had when he was on his school's wrestling team. When he was a sophomore in high school, he came in first place at the state wrestling championship.

The following year he made it to the state championships once more, but this time he had a really cocky and arrogant attitude and got beat really badly (he came in fifth place). That defeat really affected him deeply.

His senior year he went into the state championships with a new determination. He wrestled and beat the number one seeded wrestler and won the championship once more.

I think that being able to hear his experience encouraged the guys on the team....

(Look for part 2 of this article in the April 20 issue of *Seize the Day*)

Trailblazers!



by John Kasahara,
Northeastern Zone
Student Division Leader

Sharing Buddhism With Others

Recently, I had the immeasurable fortune to begin my journey as a student division leader in the Northeastern Zone. I am filled with joy, appreciation and determination as I embark on this road filled with hope and opportunity.

In April of 2000, I returned to New York from studying at Soka University in Japan for one year. As a student there, I lived in a dorm and attended classes with students from all walks of life and many different countries. Every day I witnessed students challenging their university life with various struggles.

When I returned, I began to pray to be able to use what I had learned overseas to help people here in the United States to overcome their sufferings. My first prayer was to be able to propagate this Buddhism to one person. After living overseas for a year, I realized that the num-

ber of my friends outside of the SGI were minimal. I thought to myself, "How can I propagate this Buddhism without anyone to propagate it to?"

After about one month of praying in this way, I encountered a young man at the New York Culture Center who came in and basically said that he wanted to know what we did there. He was grappling with so many problems, so I told him to just make a list of long- and short-term goals and that he had nothing to lose in trying this Buddhism. To make a long story short, he became a member of the SGI-USA in August of 2000.

The most amazing part of introducing this young man to Buddhism was watching his life change so dramatically from sheer misery to pure joy in only a few months. I was so focused on praying for this young man that at times I would find myself praying for his happiness rather than my own. But through the law of cause and effect, I, too, was able to see my life change in areas I had not thought possible.

Through this whole experience, I kept reading the following words from SGI President Ikeda: "Nichiren Daishonin writes, 'If you light a lantern for another, it will also brighten your own way' (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1598). Please be confident that the higher your flame of altruistic actions burns, the

more its light will suffuse your life with happiness. Those who possess an altruistic spirit are the happiest people of all" (*Faith Into Action*, pp. 93-94).

I began to think about who has the most exposure to people in society and the answer without question is students. Students who attend universities and colleges encounter hundreds of people everyday. Therefore, I feel that students possess an incredible mission to propagate this Buddhism far and wide.

Students suffer with lack of study time, financial comfort and human relation issues all of the time. There is no other faster way to solve the dilemmas of every day life than to joyfully share this Buddhism with others. The foundation of this Buddhism is the concept of practice for oneself and practice for others.

Each time we encounter an obstacle, pray sincerely and then scale that mountain of difficulty, we should naturally share the joy derived from this experience with all of our friends. Through seeing our lives grow, our friends and comrades will want to know what it is that we are doing.

Once we start this wave of propagation, I am confident that we will be able to uplift the atmosphere at our campuses and truly make a difference. The possibilities are endless!