

**SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION**

SEIZE *the Day*

Youth Blossom in Northeastern Zone

The following articles tell the stories of three young people who participated in the Northeastern Zone Family Youth Festival held on July 14 at Madison Square Garden Theater in New York City. We begin with words from a women's division member who made a determination to find young people in her community to get involved with the festival.

Claudia Wellington, Yonkers, N.Y.

South Yonkers is an international melting pot primarily consisting of young people between the ages of 18 and 29—and it seems as if they are all on my street corner on Friday and Saturday nights! I often look at their bright faces, so full of hope for the future and wonder, “How can I reach them?”

It appears as though the city has given up on these young people. There are few organized activities, and the one neighborhood movie theater is closed. Many of the young men in the neighborhood gravitate toward street rivalries and many young women are single mothers.

I moved here four years ago and immediately felt this was where I could take a stand for world peace. I made friends with the local vendors through casual dialogue and by sending them New Year's greetings. I also befriended the residents of my apartment building, inviting them to SGI-USA meetings. They were polite, but the answer was always no. I had to reach out in a different way. It was time for me to actively take Buddhism out to the community, rather than asking the community to come to me.

When plans for the Northeastern Zone Family Youth Festival were announced, I felt this was a great opportunity to put SGI President Ikeda's guidance into action and fulfill my dream of fostering young people.

I chanted sincere daimoku. I was appointed my district's promotion leader for the festival. At our planning meeting, Miguel Paz, a father of two teenage girls, noted that whatever teens do, they want to feel there is something in it for them. He said the biggest attraction for this event was the fact that they would have the opportunity to perform on the

stage at the Madison Square Garden Theater. We decided flyers would be a great way to promote the festival.

I hit the streets, putting up flyers on lampposts and talking to every young person I met. The flyers were torn down by the next morning, but undeterred, I put more up. I was on a mission!

When approached with flyers, neighborhood vendors responded enthusiastically. Almost every restaurant, deli, video store and grocery store I visited put flyers up in their business and promoted the festival for me. The local McDonald's even allowed me to promote inside their restaurant.

One afternoon, I got a call from one young man named Rafael Rodriguez. He was excited about the chance to perform in the festival.

When I went to rehearsals for the festival, I saw Buddhists and non-Buddhists rehearsing and chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo together. Many guests readily joined the chanting sessions in a way that seemed as natural as breathing.

I also watched the leaders of the various performance groups encourage these young people in a friendly manner to use chanting to help them perform better. This is what I had always hoped—that somehow we could take the practice further away from the “talk” aspect and make it an immediate, personal and practical experience for guests.

The thing that is so fantastic about this entire experience is that, even though the festival is over, I still get calls from excited young people who have seen a flyer and say they have an act that they want to put on the stage. My dream is to one day hold a South Yonkers Youth Festival. ●



Rakshanda Iftikhar, 16, Yonkers, N.Y.

I participated in the Family Youth Festival as part of the gymnastics group. It was such an exciting part of the show. It was wonderful for me to perform with my group in front of thousands of people. Whenever I see any type of show on television I love it, and I knew I wanted to do that, too. When I got this opportunity, I didn't let it go. I took advantage of it and learned so much, and I did it in front of people. I would like to show my appreciation to Claudia Wellington, who told us about the show and to all our group leaders who trained the performers.

I am not a Buddhist, but I liked it when everyone got together to chant. I felt it gave everyone the courage to do well. This show made us strong and gave everybody a chance to show their talent. In my opinion, it was the greatest show I had ever seen. ●

(“Northeast..” continued on Page C)

Newly Appointed Youth District Leaders

In an ongoing effort to support the SGI-USA's goal to appoint young men's and young women's leaders in every district, *Seize the Day* will continue publishing the names of newly appointed district leaders and their districts.

As SGI President Ikeda states: "In the SGI organization, the district is the foundation of eternal victory and a base for people's happiness. The district is the True Land of kosen-

rufu and of attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime. To shun it is to lose sight of the place for one's true mission in this world" (Oct. 22, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 7).

Below is a partial list and we apologize if we have missed anyone. If we missed you or someone you know, please contact your region youth leader. Look for other new appointments in future issues of *Seize the Day*.

Central Zone

Champaign District	YWD	Devin Atkins
Decatur District	YMD	Takahiro Kumagai
East Lansing District	YWD	Tomoko Miyakawa
Elk Grove District	YWD	Rie Uchiyama
King District	YMD	Terrick Wilkerson
Museum-A District	YMD	Martin Mathis
Museum-B District	YMD	Stanley Henderson
Museum-B District	YWD	Erica Jackson
Poplar Creek District	YWD	Chanita Momoh
Rose Hill District	YMD	Erik Sutton
Rose Hill District	YWD	Dyan Stankiewicz
Royal Oak District	Vice YMD	Cole Beber
Sunrise District	YWD	Mineko Abe
Twin Valley District	YMD	Nick Wong
West Oakland District	YMD	Suri Naveen

Northeastern Zone

Ansonia District	YWD	Ruth Gallogi
Bayshore District	YMD	Hirai Takahiro
Beacon District	YMD	Sol Romano
Belvedere District	YMD	Patrick Smith
Brooklyn Central District	YWD	Aisha Henry
Brooklyn North District	YWD	Machiko Takeuchi-Philip
Century West District	YMD	Yoshiyuki Manaka
East Flushing District	YMD	Raymond Chen
Flatbush District	YWD	Debra Corins
Genesee Valley District	YWD	Elizabeth Sullivan
Lefferts Wingate District	YWD	Gabrielle Peterkin
Planetarium District	Vice YWD	Motoyo Yamashita
Planetarium District	YMD	Eric Zuelke
South Bay District	YWD	Smitha Kumar
Tri County District	YMD	Wes Zosche

Pacific Zone

Aliiolani District	YMD	Arucan Alexander
Bingham District	YMD	Erick Agarijo
Central District	YWD	Hauoli Busby
Haleiwa District	YWD	Auwae Ikaika
Hawaii Kai District	YWD	Bridgid Conn
Hui Ohana District	YWD	Audrey Barthalamew
Kaala District	YMD	Kaleo Dela Cruz
Kaala District	YWD	Darilyn Dela Cruz
Kaheka District	YMD	Michael Alonzo
Manana District	YMD	Andrew Ching
Manana District	YWD	Rona Ching
Manoa District	YWD	Hokunani Busby
Nanaikapono District	YWD	Maria Akau
Pearlridge District	YMD	Lopaka Abuel
Pokai Bay District	YWD	Joanna Brady

Mid-Atlantic Zone

Burtonsville District	YWD	Noni Person
Capitol Hill District	ViceYWD	Sapna Batish
Catonsville District	YWD	Whitney Rose
Center City District	YWD	Mai Ueshima
Center City DistrictVice	YWD	Maya Joseph
Filter Square District	YWD	Yao Sze
Fortune District	YWD	Audrey Yiadom
Oxford Circle District	YMD	Zach Noble
Oxford Circle District	YWD	Judy Feist
Pierce Mill District	YWD	Susana Bustos
Poconos District	YWD	Melissa Marek
Rockville District	YWD	Susy Wandera
Silver Spring District	YWD	Sharifa Johnson
Takoma Park District	YWD	Teresa Ruby
Valley Forge District	YWD	Dina Salzer

(“Northeast...” continued from Page A)

The following articles tell the stories of two young people who participated in the Northeastern Zone Family Youth Festival held on July 14 at Madison Square Garden Theater in New York City.

Tiffany Rodriguez, 11, Yonkers, N.Y.

When my brother Rafael told me he was going to be in a show at Madison Square Garden, I told him I wanted to be in it too, so he took me with him to the next rehearsal.

I wanted to join the African dance troupe but it was already full. The gymnastics group was open, but I was not sure because I had never done gymnastics before. I was also worried that even if I did do gymnastics, I would not follow through and actually be in the show.

In the fourth grade, I had taken African dance and quit before the show went on stage because I was afraid people would boo or laugh at me. I was afraid the same thing would happen this time. I was also worried that it was too late—it was already the week before everything was supposed to start, but the gymnastics leader said to come anyway.

When I got to rehearsal, they were learning to do the wave. I had

to watch and figure this out by myself. When I got in line, I asked the person next to me about how to do the wave and he gave me instructions. When you do the wave, the person next to you pulls you down, and you have to keep your feet hard on the ground. You feel like you are going to fall over, and you cannot bend your knees. I was really afraid I would mess up, and that people would laugh at me. I remembered what the leader said, “If you get nervous, just chant.” I had never chanted before, but I started chanting and I felt much better. I had more confidence in myself.

When we got on stage, it felt so good to have people clap for me. That was the first time I had gotten a lot of applause. I felt like I won. I am always afraid that people will boo at me or that I will not do anything right. When we did the wave and when I started chanting, I felt like I could do it. From now on, with anything I have to do, I do not care what others think, I’ll chant. ●

Rafael Rodriguez, 19, Yonkers, N.Y.

I have always dreamed about performing at Madison Square Garden, and I did it! I performed with the gymnastics team at the Northeastern Zone Family Youth Festival. When we walked into Madison Square Garden the day of the show, I said to my sister who also performed in the show: “Tiffany, touch that door! That’s the door that *N Sync and the Backstreet Boys walked through! Now we’re touching it!” This was my dream, and it had come true!

I saw a sign on a lamppost in my neighborhood that said, “Performers wanted for a show at Madison Square Garden.” I talked to Claudia Wellington, who told me about the show. She said that Buddhists were sponsoring it, but that we didn’t have to be Buddhist to be in it. She said to just come and have some fun and to bring a friend if I wanted to. She told me to be at her house the following Saturday morning at 8:30, but I was so excited, I got there at 8:00!

At my first rehearsal, I heard people chanting. Claudia wrote the words *Nammyoho-renge-kyo* on a sheet of paper and encouraged me to try it. It was strange at first, but I always like to try new things, so I chanted a little bit.

Because I had written a couple of songs and had recorded a demo record, I joined the chorus, but when I saw guys flying through the air and building human pyramids, I knew gymnastics was for me! I like to be active and I like to move a lot. We practiced really hard, sometimes in the sun and through hot weather.

Three days before the show, things started to go wrong. I was working out in a gym and I hurt my big toe. I called Claudia to tell her I couldn’t be in the show, but she encouraged me not to give up. Then I learned that my father, whom I hadn’t seen in many years, was in rehab. The day I was to see him was the day of the show. I called Claudia again and told her I couldn’t be in the show, but she reminded me that since I had not seen my father in so many years, another day would not make any difference. She reminded me of the promise I had made to myself to appear on the stage at Madison Square Garden. I

agreed to do the show because I did not want to give up on my dream.

The night before the last rehearsal, I came down with a high fever. I took a shower to cool off and while I was in the shower, I remembered a little girl at rehearsal who said she had come down with a high fever once and had chanted and her fever had gone away, so I started chanting in the shower. My fever was gone the next morning. I thought, “Whoa! This chanting really works!”

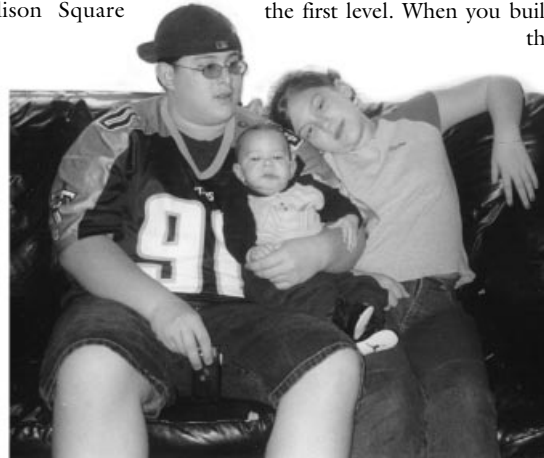
On the day of the show, we were practicing the pyramid. I was on the first level. When you build the pyramid, people step on you and

the weight is heavy. As we were trying to lift the pyramid, one of the guys in my group said he was afraid he could not hold all the weight. I told him, “Don’t think about the weight. Just chant, and you can do it.” I could not believe I was the one encouraging another person to chant when I had only chanted a couple of times myself!

After the show, people clapped for us and congratulated us. I had never experienced that before and it felt great. My mother came to watch the show and she was so happy. She encouraged me to work hard so that maybe I could do it again one day.

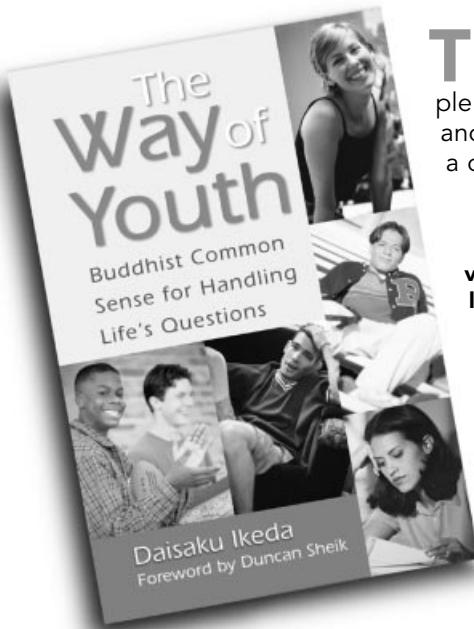
Sometimes I doubt myself and give up trying because I’m afraid I will mess up or because I’m afraid things will not happen for me. With chanting, I can see my whole life clearer and I know I can do whatever I want to do.

When I got home after the show, my friends asked me where I had been all day. When I told them I had performed at Madison Square Garden, they could not believe it! The next morning, I got eight of my friends together in my living room and we built a pyramid based on the instructions I got from the show. I told my friends to chant and they would be able to do it. My fiancée Liz even showed my friends how to chant. We are going to keep rehearsing because I want us to do our pyramid at the New York Culture Center soon! ●



Rafael with his son Angel and sister Tiffany.

The Way of Youth



The following is an excerpt from the hit book *The Way of Youth*, a universally appealing collection of some of SGI President Ikeda's words to young people. His insight reaches beyond all barriers of race, creed, culture and gender and gets to the heart of youth issues. Each one of over 80 topics is covered in a question and answer format.

Dealing With Violence, p. 150

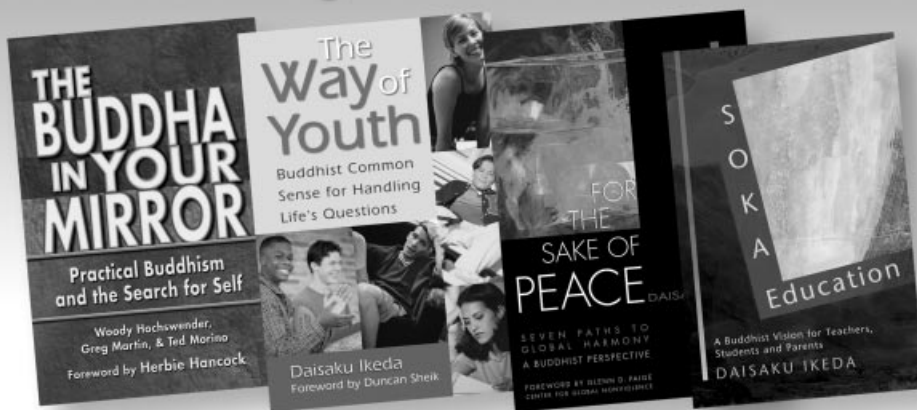
Violence is an absolute evil. No matter how correct what you say is, if you resort to violence to prove it, you are a loser. Even if you appear to triumph as a result of violent action, you will end up losing. Buddhism stresses the interconnectedness of all life. It is only the limited capacity of our senses that causes us to place so much stock in the separation between "them" and "us." Because of this interconnectedness, by using violence you not only injure or destroy the other person but also yourself. Those who use violence and devalue others' lives actually devalue themselves and ruin their own lives.

It's important to understand that the essence of violence is cowardice. Because a person is cowardly, he or she turns to violence. This individual lacks the courage to have a dialogue. Mahatma Gandhi said eloquently that "Nonviolence is not a cover for cowardice, but it is the supreme virtue of the brave. . . . Cowardice is wholly inconsistent with nonviolence. . . . Nonviolence presupposes the ability to strike."

To read more or to find words of wisdom to other questions you may have asked yourself, The Way of Youth can be purchased from your favorite online or neighborhood bookstore.

PEER PRESSURE FINDING YOUR MISSION CHOOSING GOOD FRIENDS PARENTS AND SIBLINGS

Applying Buddhism to Daily Life



The Buddha in Your Mirror Practical Buddhism and the Search for Self

A practical, easy-to-read introduction to Nichiren Buddhism.

The Way of Youth Buddhist Common Sense for Handling Life's Questions

"Readers of this book should emerge encouraged and with their confidence lifted."
—*Youth Today*

For the Sake of Peace Seven Paths to Global Harmony, A Buddhist Perspective

"If all practiced the principles of empathy, dialog and awareness that Ikeda outlines, the world would experience a true peace."
—*Foreword Magazine*

Soka Education A Buddhist Vision for Teachers, Students and Parents

A fresh, spiritual perspective on the ultimate purpose of education.



Available at your favorite bookstore or on-line at www.middlewaypress.com