

SEIZE the Day

SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION

The Banner of Our Idealism



James Herrmann,
SGI-USA Youth Leader

On Sept. 4, 41 youth representatives from the United States arrived in Tokyo for the SGI Youth Training Course. Upon our arrival, we presented SGI President Ikeda with the newly created SGI-

USA Youth Division flag—a symbol of our determination to fight for kosen-rufu in the 21st century.

The roaring lion king on the flag is the image of our mentor, a symbol of powerful and courageous advance. It is also a symbol of our resolve to unite on the path of the eternal bond between mentor and disciple.

The gold shield represents our determination to stand firmly for justice and to protect our precious SGI movement. The green laurels within the shield symbolize our firm conviction for the realization of peace through culture, education and the victory of the common people.

The tri-colors of the SGI streaking across a field of indigo blue serve as the foundation for the shield itself—a foundation of strong faith

and conviction in the eternal advance of the SGI, always with the spirit of a “blue deeper than the blue of the indigo plant itself.” Red stands for victory, yellow represents glory and blue for peace.

When we arrived at the 9th Headquarters Leaders Meeting at Makiguchi Memorial Hall, we were surprised to see our flag onstage next to the altar. Our youth members were whispering, “Why is our flag on stage?” I could sense the anticipation in the youth’s faces. Something was about to happen.

When President Ikeda arrived in the auditorium, the crowd of more than 2,000 erupted in applause. I watched in what seemed like slow motion as President Ikeda made a beeline for the SGI-USA flag. Standing before our banner, he solemnly saluted. Holding his salute for what seemed like an eternity, I suddenly felt that this was a deeply significant ceremony.

In President Ikeda’s eyes, I saw a concerned father who wants to encourage each youth in America, believing in our infinite potential. It was as if he were saying to each and every one of us: “You and me together! Let’s advance kosen-rufu in America!”

As our trip continued, I kept tracing back through my mind, trying to grasp the significance of the historic flag exchanges between second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda and President Ikeda. What did the ceremony mean? What did it signify?

In an essay by President Ikeda, he describes receiving a flag as a young men’s leader directly from President Toda: “As he handed the flag to me, his eyes glittered brilliantly behind his glasses, asking, ‘Are you ready to fight together with me your entire life for kosen-rufu?’ He said to me: ‘Fight hard to the very last battle, ever waving this flag high! I am counting on you Daisaku!’” (Aug. 10 *World Tribune*, p. 8).

The picture was becoming clearer. I began to feel that President Ikeda was telling us that the era of America that he has long awaited had finally arrived; that indeed it was time for us to create a new era of peace, together with him, for the sake of the world’s people.

With each passing day, SGI-USA’s Youth Division Flag takes on deeper meaning. In another essay, President Ikeda stated: “Happy are those who hold high such flags and advance until they score the final victory in life—until the very last moment when the flame of their life force is extinguished. ‘This is the flag of my life! This is the flag of my conviction!’ is their declaration” (March 17, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 12).

Our flag is not a banner of shallow patriotism. It is a symbol of our oneness with President Ikeda. It is the banner of our idealism. Now, more than ever, it is time to dignify it with our action. ●

The 2001 SGI Youth Training Course—

By Monica Soto, Seattle

Forty-one SGI-USA youth representatives attended the 2001 SGI Youth Training Course Sept. 4-11 in Tokyo, Japan, joined by more than 400 other youth from 50 countries, including Ghana, Mexico and San Marino, the smallest and oldest republic in the world.

Each of the 41 U.S. youth members represented one year since SGI President Daisaku Ikeda made his historic first trip to the United States in 1960. On behalf of the U.S. members, the youth presented President Ikeda with a statue of a lion atop a marble platform, with a passage from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* engraved on it, "A cub sired by a lion king will become a lion king" (p. 323).

President Ikeda was presented with the SGI-USA youth flag. Upon receiving the gift, President Ikeda asked each country to design its own youth division flag, keeping one copy of the flag at home while sending another to Tokyo, where the flags would be displayed collectively at a future meeting.

The youth members attended two meetings with President Ikeda during the eight-day training course, including one in which he received The Knight of the Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of Saint Agatha, the highest award of the Republic of San Marino. They also attended numerous study and guidance sessions, with an emphasis on Soka Spirit, and exchange meetings with the members of districts in the Tokyo area.

The participants, each of whom pledged to shoulder kosen-rufu in the U.S., were en route to Los Angeles Sept. 11 when their plane was rerouted to Vancouver, Canada, and they learned of the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. The group remained in Vancouver for three days before driving to Los Angeles via bus. The participants then took flights home to their respective cities.

Upon leaving Vancouver, the U.S. participants learned that President Ikeda named them the "Ever-victorious Group." ●



SGI Youth Training Course Impressions

Foo May Lew, Honolulu

There are so many precious experiences I gained from the recent training course in Japan. For me, participating in this trip was like entering the treasure tower, where I could grasp as many treasures as I needed in order to fulfill my mission in life and for kosen-rufu.

Even though the training course was short, we managed to visit many significant places such as Soka University, Makiguchi Memorial Hall, the Shinanomachi area, the International Friendship Hall and the Soka International Women's Center. While visiting these places, I sensed how fortunate I am to be able to meet and stand side by side with our great mentor, SGI President Ikeda, to fight for kosen-rufu. I was honored to receive the SGI gold pin from President Ikeda, which has made a mark on my life.

During the first meeting with President Ikeda at Makiguchi Memorial Hall, I was not able to absorb all his profound guidance in my heart. However, based on sincere daimoku the next morning, I was able to understand his expectations of the youth division.

Another highlight of the training course was studying Nichiren Daishonin's writing, "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" from a different perspective. After the lecture, the youth from the Pacific Zone had an opportunity to receive guidance from an SGI senior leader. Through his comprehensive explanation, I was able to recognize that the greatest evil is to lead people to suffering through self-serving actions. In order to protect the true Law of the Daishonin's Buddhism, I am determined to create friendships with members of Nichiren Shoshu.

Participating in this training course with 40 other youth members was my greatest fortune. Because of the tragedy that struck on Sept. 11, the day we were returning to the United States, I strongly believe all 41 of us have an enormous responsibility for the kosen-rufu movement in the U.S.

This unforgettable training course has made my conviction for kosen-rufu and shakubuku stronger than ever. In fact I believe the "Ever-victorious Group" has already begun the journey of making history for the second chapter of worldwide kosen-rufu.

I would like to share a passage from *The New Human Revolution* in which Shin'ichi Yamamoto states: "The key to establishing peace and prosperity in our world, as expressed here, lies in the human heart—in people's prayer for order and tranquility in society—and in each person establishing a solid self-identity through the process of human revolution" (vol. 4, p. 245.)

To the "Ever-victorious Group": I just can't wait to meet all of you again. Please take good care of yourselves. ●



Kathy Reynolds, Sunnyvale, Calif.



I was so amazed to see members from parts of the world in which I had no idea people practiced Buddhism—countries like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mexico and Austria, to name a few. In our fourth silent prayer of gongyo, we pray each day for the great desire of world peace to be fulfilled. While I was in Japan, I really felt that there was hope for this to come true.

On our way back from Japan, tragedy struck the U.S. Many of us did not know the reality that faced us at first, but we soon learned of the devastation back home. I had feelings of pain, sadness, worry and fear run through me. As I looked at my fellow Buddhists, I could see the same emotions in them, too, especially those who were from New York and Washington, D.C. All we could think was, "How could this have happened and why?" We felt this time was so important since we were just in Japan with other youth from around the world who were sharing stories of how they were fighting injustice and working toward peace.

While en route to the U.S., we received a message from President Ikeda. In his encouragement he referenced the letter from Nichiren Daishonin, "Great Evil and Great Good." The writing states: "Great events never have minor omens. When great evil occurs, great good follows. Since slander already exists in our land, the great correct Law will spread without fail. What could any of you have to lament?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1119.)

We stayed in Canada for three days trying to get home. Many of us were unsure of how we were going to finally make it to our respective areas. I am so appreciative for the SGI organization. While in Canada, the members provided us with food. On one particular night, a young men's division member gave all of us shirts since we had to leave our luggage on the plane. These members reached out to us with such sincere concern that I never felt alone or frightened. I realized that, in fighting evil, the action that one person takes for the good of another is the most important thing.

The idea that the inner reformation of an individual can have an influence on society is the core of this philosophy. I saw this on my trip: Young people standing up in society fighting for world peace and against injustice. Now there is even more reason to take action for myself and the world. ●



Exchange Meeting Impressions



Mark Woods, Chicago

One of the major highlights of my participation in this year's youth training course was attending the exchange meeting. All of the 41 American youth were separated into four groups and each attended a different local meeting in Tokyo. My particular meeting in the Minato Ward began with a brief tour of several historic Soka Gakkai sites, including the grade school where first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi taught, as well as the original offices of the Soka Gakkai.

Afterward, we were taken to a local restaurant owned by a Soka Gakkai member and were treated to a delicious meal. During our dinner we had the opportunity to hold a dialogue with several local youth members. Being a Gajokai member, I was encouraged to find that several of the youth there were also Gajokai members. I even had the opportunity to meet the local Gajokai and Soka Group leaders. Their sincerity and warmth moved me.

After dinner, we were taken to a local community center where we were blown away by the enthusiastic reception from the Japanese members. Bright smiles and thunderous applause greeted us as we made our way into the Gohonzon room. Realizing the members had made every effort to ensure our comfort and warm welcome, we took our seats and began to chant appreciative daimoku. After gongyo and a brief introduction, the meeting began with an inspiring experience by a local young women's division member. Her sincerity and determination encouraged me as she recounted her personal struggles. Next we were honored with a beautiful dance performance by the women's division members.

As I watched the faces of the women in the audience, I was reminded of my mother's struggle to help me build my own faith. Tears flooded my eyes as I realized that my practice, as well as that of my family, was a direct result of the efforts of these courageous pioneers. Through their expressions of compassion and sincerity, I could clearly feel SGI President Ikeda's heart.

I felt an immediate connection to every member present. And despite the differences in culture and language, I felt as if I was at home. At the end of the meeting we were flooded with gifts and well wishes. Several members approached me to shake hands or embrace. Although we could not communicate clearly with words, the messages we sent through our hearts were crystal clear. Several Boys and Girls Group members also approached me. Their courageous and joyful spirit thrilled me. As we began to leave, I made a determination to bring their compassion back to the United States and share it with my members. Furthermore, I determined to repay their sincerity with a revitalized sense of dedication to fight to advance the American kosen-rufu movement that they and our mentor, President Ikeda, have fought to establish.



Renee L. Richards, Hartford, Conn.

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the Shinjuku Honjin District members for the wonderful dinner, inspiring musical and dance performances, as well as the amazing experience given by a member of the Soka Gakkai Doctor's Division during the exchange meeting.

The hospitality the SGI-USA youth group received during the exchange meeting was the most beautiful display of camaraderie I have ever experienced. I was humbled by the members' attention to detail in planning for our arrival. They were thoughtful enough to even provide shoe compartments for us, labeled with each participant's name.

During the course of the meeting, the SGI-USA youth taught the Japanese members a cheer, which they performed with enthusiasm. As we exchanged gifts with the Japanese members and their guests, the SGI-USA youth emphasized that these gifts were an extension of our friendship and also an encouragement to visit us someday in America. The gifts we received from the Japanese members reflected their efforts to unite with President Ikeda and create a global solidarity within SGI and the world.

Once the meeting had officially ended, the SGI-USA youth met with the Japanese youth and shared our experiences and favorite passages from Nichiren Daishonin's writings. We also exchanged e-mail addresses with the promise to keep in contact. As we were leaving the district meeting, the Japanese members gave us sandwiches and fruit for a late night snack.

The tremendous efforts demonstrated by the SGI-USA youth and the Japanese members to care for and cherish each other during the exchange meeting is testimony to how we, as disciples of President Ikeda, have grasped our mentor's vision to devote ourselves to kosen-rufu through united bonds of friendship and trust. President Ikeda stated at the headquarters leaders meeting we attended that one of our greatest treasures should be the bond of friendships we create within the SGI and throughout the world. I am confident that one of my greatest treasures will always be the time I spent with the members of the Shinjuku Honjin District.

("Impressions" continued from page C)



Andy Matsuda, Chicago

Every aspect of this training course was an incredible learning experience for me. What impressed me most was the amount of care shown by SGI President Ikeda and the members in Japan. As soon as we stepped off the plane in Tokyo, women's division members waving SGI flags greeted us. Everywhere we went, we were enthusiastically welcomed in the same way. Every day, President Ikeda gave us encouragement and asked us to take care of our health. Through the actions of others, we were shown how important it is to spare no effort in taking care of the members.

During a Future Division and Doctor's Division general meeting, The Knight of the Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of Saint Agatha, the highest award of the Republic of San Marino, was bestowed on President Ikeda. It was incredible for those future division members to witness President Ikeda receive such an award. I could see a sense of pride come over their faces. President Ikeda warmly encouraged them during the meeting, telling them to do their best in school and to listen to their parents. You could tell he was trying to etch this experience deep in their lives.

We repeatedly studied Soka Spirit. Some youth gave inspiring reports about

how they had proven the justice of the SGI in their countries. It reminded me that the temple issue was not simply a dispute between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, but a manifestation of the darkness that each of us challenges to overcome in our own lives. Little did I know that the same point would be underscored on our trip back to the U.S. on Sept. 11.

As our plane was diverted to Vancouver, B.C., we received bits of information about the tragic events back home. I could not believe it was really happening. After enjoying a training course where I felt so safe and cared for, I was suddenly thrust into a circumstance so terrible it defied imagination. Without regard for how or when we would get home, we immediately started chanting for the safety and peace of the people in the United States.

Everything we learned during the training course was tested by the very events that prevented us from returning home. We studied each day during the one week it took to return to our respective cities. We were constantly encouraged by messages from President Ikeda and by the care of the members that greeted us at every stop along the way. We realized that through our deeds and words we could give hope to those who are struggling to find meaning right now. We realized that the SGI youth will play a major role in changing the course of America and the world.

I am determined to try even harder to give hope to and care for those that are suffering and encourage them to do their human revolution. I am convinced that this is the way to ensure peace in America.