

# World TRIBUNE

## IN THIS ISSUE



### EXPERIENCE

Medical researcher  
Gianluca D'ipolito  
discovers  
happiness.

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Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI, Photo Illustration by STEPHANIE SYDNEY

**Nova Godina** **Happy New Year** **maligaya**  
*Feliz Año Nuevo* **שנה טובה** 새해 복 많이 받으세요.  
**Glad Nyaren** **Bonne Année**  
*Ευτυχισμένη Έτη Νιάρη* **Melkam Addis Amet**  
*Счастливым Новым Годом* **BARKA DA SABUWAR**  
 新年明けまして、おめでとうございます。  
**Eines Glückliches Neujahr** 恭賀新禧 *عید میلاد منجرب*  
*ស័រស័រធីប៊ីអិម* **Heri Ya Mwaka Mpya** **Feliz Año Novo**  
**Felice Anno Novo** **Verheugh Nieuwjaar**



Founders Hall,  
Soka University of America,  
Aliso Viejo

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S NEW YEAR'S POEM

# Raise High the Banner of Humanism and Advance Toward Lasting Peace!

*The brilliant sun of New Year's Day, 2001!  
The dawn of a momentous new page in history!  
The commencement of the second phase  
Of worldwide kosen-rufu!  
My beloved fellow members across the globe,  
Congratulations on the start of the new century!*

*Now, at this moment,  
President Toda's passionate call for peace  
Resounds in my heart:  
"We must allow no people to be  
sacrificed.  
We must eradicate all misery  
from the face of the earth!"*

*Yet, untold tragedies  
Continue to rack the world.  
We have not yet clearly replied  
To the fundamental question  
Put by the sage Erasmus  
In his plea for peace:  
Why cannot human beings  
Have goodwill toward one another?*

*This is our goal:  
A world in which we can all live  
Together in peace,*

*Sharing only the one common designation —  
Human being.  
Now, let us go back and begin again  
From the essential starting point  
Of the human being.*

*My mentor's advocacy  
Of global citizenship, too,  
Was a ringing declaration of humanism,  
Transcending all differences  
And respecting the dignity and equality of all —  
How brilliant was his vision  
Of the 21st century!*

*His was a challenge to realize the ideal  
Of one human race  
That had long been an elusive dream.  
His was a philosophy of unity and harmony  
That viewed the earth  
As the common homeland  
Of all humanity;  
A philosophy of coexistence and human rights  
That saw all human beings  
As equal sovereigns  
Of this planet;  
A philosophy of peace and global citizenship  
That placed highest priority  
On the survival  
Of the human family.*

Oct. 2, 1960—  
 With my mentor's lion's roar and visage  
 In my heart,  
 I took my first step for peace,  
 Venturing out into a world  
 In the grip of the Cold War.  
 Forty years have since passed.  
 The SGI's alliance of the people  
 Now spans the globe  
 And Buddhism has spread  
 Throughout the entire world—  
 A world that has surmounted  
 And moved beyond the Cold War.

On the day of the SGI's founding  
 In January 1975,  
 I called out from Guam  
 To our members everywhere:  
 "When people of all nations unite,  
 Help each other, and advance  
 Based on the Mystic Law,  
 We will definitely achieve lasting peace."  
 I would like to address  
 That declaration of peace  
 Again now  
 To our members in 163 nations and territories,  
 To tell them that our solid alliance  
 Of global citizenship  
 Will change human history without fail.

From this day forth, too,  
 I will continue to knock on the doors  
 Of diverse cultures and civilizations,  
 Seeking out the humanity that is vibrantly alive  
 At the heart of each,  
 Believing that sincere dialogue  
 In search of our shared humanity  
 Will build a rainbow bridge linking the world.

I ask each of you, too,  
 Together with me,  
 And in my place,  
 To deepen the dialogue  
 Of real human exchange and communication,  
 In all cultures, among all peoples of the world.

From one individual to another,  
 Starting in our immediate environment,  
 From small, modest efforts,  
 Let us steadily carry on our movement.  
 A commitment to treasure each person—  
 In that daily, unceasing practice  
 Lies the dynamism  
 To transform the entire planet.  
 And there, too, shines a life  
 Of unparalleled value-creation.

Now, let us courageously advance together  
 Into the uncharted frontier  
 Of a new millennium of hope!  
 As we ring in the second series of Seven Bells,  
 Let us raise higher and higher still  
 The banner of humanism of Buddhism!

With my prayers for the increasing  
 good health  
 And prosperity of my beloved fellow  
 SGI members,  
 And the wish that all of you may  
 live victorious lives  
 Filled with joy, wisdom and  
 strength.

New Year's Day, 2001  
 Daisaku Ikeda  
 President, Soka Gakkai  
 International

Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS



SGI President Ikeda and his wife, Kaneko, wearing Malaysian apparel given to them by Soka Gakkai Malaysia members, Dec. 1.

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM SGI-USA GENERAL DIRECTOR DANNY NAGASHIMA

# Your Victory Is America's Victory

Happy New Year! I am so happy to greet this new year together with all of you. SGI President Ikeda has referred to this as the century of life and the century of hope. Finally, this new century has dawned! This is also the year that we will see the opening of the Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America.

As we enter this new year, President Ikeda and the entire world are focused on the United States. We have the honor of being the people who embrace Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and take responsibility for establishing this philosophy in American society.

The SGI's theme this year is "The Year of Total Victory for the New Century." This is the year where we show victory in our lives — not just for our own sake, but for the sake of the new century.

Every new year, many of us set goals. I myself have a huge list of goals. Every year I review that list and cross off those I accomplished, adding new ones to the list.

This year, I want to urge you



Photo by PETER NELLHAUS

Danny Nagashima greets a young SGI-USA member at the Victory Over Violence Summit in Denver, Oct. 5.

to set your own goals. Don't hesitate. Since this is such a special year, why not think big? Why not embrace big dreams?

And then, based on your sincere prayer, take action every day, even a little bit, to make progress toward your dreams.

"Total victory" means showing proof of benefit in every aspect of our lives — in our jobs, our families, our relationships and

our areas of responsibility in the SGI-USA. I hope you are convinced that challenging yourself to accomplish the goals that you set is the very best cause you can make toward "total victory" in the new millennium.

As we greet a new year and new century, now is the time for us to advance with an awareness of the great contribution each one of us can make. When President Ikeda talks about his hopes for America, I believe that *America* means every one of us. As each one of us reveals our true ability, and as each one of us strives to create happy and meaningful lives, then America will express its greatest potential.

Together with our mentor, we are creating the dawn of a new era. This is the enactment of a great drama, and you are the main actors. Your victory is America's victory; your victory is a victory for the new century.

Thank you so much for all you've done this past year. Because of your tremendous and sincere efforts, I am determined to work harder than before to support all of you. **WT**

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM SGI-USA MEN'S LEADER TARIQ HASAN

# Accomplish Goals Through Teamwork

Happy New Year and congratulations on welcoming 2001 to all the readers of the *World Tribune*. It is certainly auspicious to be starting this new millennium with both SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda in the best of health. Thank you for all your efforts that lead to the historic advancement for American kosen-rufu achieved last year.

This year has been named "The Year of Total Victory for the New Century" by the SGI worldwide family. I was fortunate enough to be at the headquarters leaders meeting in Japan where this theme was announced with world famous soccer star and SGI member Roberto Baggio also in attendance. In his speech on that occasion, President Ikeda said, "Mr. Baggio states his belief that in any job the key to success is solid teamwork. The tremendous success of the Soka Gakkai, too, has been won through our solidarity. Being able to unite is wisdom in the truest sense" (Nov. 17, 2001 *World Tribune*, p. 2).

With the long list of goals I am en-

tering with this year, I am realizing this as an important motto for me to keep in mind. Whether it is on the job, in my family or among my fellow SGI-USA members, an atmosphere of harmony is the source of joy and progress leading us to victory.

I am praying that every SGI-USA member, especially the men's division, achieve all of their personal goals for 2001 while finding more and more inspiration and refreshment from participating in SGI-USA activities.

In particular, I hope the men's division members can encourage each other to live healthy and fulfilling daily lives. Our continued good health is crucial to our ability to contribute to kosen-rufu. The actual proof of accomplishing our personal targets is an important and encouraging contribution we can each make to the many teams we are members of, at home, in the community and overall, for world peace.

Thank you again for all your sincere effort. **WT**



Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI

Tariq Hasan (left) visits with fellow members at the Florida Nature and Culture Center.

NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER MATILDA BUCK

# ADVANCE WITH FRESH RESOLVE

The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees, a lotus unfolding in a pond, sandalwood leaves unfurling on the Snow Mountains, or the moon beginning to rise" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1137).

How I love to read the "New Year's Goshō" at this time of year. Its hopeful, natural images inspire me to begin again, to think big, to make a clear determination.

Our SGI theme for this year is the "Year of Total Victory for the New Century." This is such a confident and encompassing resolution! The question is whether it will be just a slogan for us, or, starting today, will we make it our personal theme—the thing we return to throughout the year to remind us we have made a pledge for victory.

It is so easy to falter when we are disappointed, to fall into passivity or even bitterness. So I plan to make the "New Year's Goshō" the place I return to for encouragement toward my goals, remembering the fresh resolve I feel today.

In it, Nichiren Daishonin tells us that we have the power in our lives to achieve any victory. "We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes,



Photo by STEPHANIE SYDNEY

Matilda Buck and her husband, Carl, taking a break from gardening.

which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance," he writes. "Likewise, we do not see that the Buddha exists in our own hearts" (WND, 1137).

This is why SGI President Ikeda tells us that "we can instantly access the life-state of Buddhahood by chanting to the Gohonzon. We can move in an orbit in rhythm with the law of

the universe. And through the power of faith and the power of practice, we can freely tap our inner potential—we can draw out our ability to obtain financial security, our wisdom and intellect, our character and humanity, and the ability to direct our lives toward happiness. It depends on our determination, on our actions and on the

strength of our faith" (Dec. 15 *World Tribune*, p. 6).

This last sentence is so important. Today, on New Year's Day, we can make our determination one full of daring and earnestness. Then we can chant and take action—even if it's just a small act—toward our goals.

Doing this repeatedly through the year is how we can actively

build the strength of our faith. The willingness to stay open, to try again, to keep our hope up even if we find disappointment and setbacks—this willingness in practice builds faith.

In this quote, President Ikeda has given us a formula to achieve victory with three points: determination, action and continuing faith. Further, our individual and personal victories that we share with one another this year will prove the beauty and joy of our organization.

As the women's leader of SGI-USA, I have certain goals—a responsive, inclusive and thriving organization; that the injustice of the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood becomes clear; the success of Soka University of America; and, most importantly, that each member become profoundly happy, especially our young people. I also have personal and family goals.

The greatest way that we can welcome President and Mrs. Ikeda here in 2001 is with an atmosphere of joy and conviction in being victorious in our personal lives. I hope you will join me in sticking to our resolution to win that we have made this New Year's Day.

Each one of us knows best what total victory means in our own life. Let's be daring! Let's do it! **WT**

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## SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S DEC. 1 SPEECH

# More Happiness in the 'Year of Total Victory'

**SGI President Ikeda explains what 'Year of Total Victory,' this year's theme, is all about: 'We practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to win in life and to become happy.'**

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at a Soka Gakkai Malaysia Representatives Conference, held at the SGM Culture Center, Kuala Lumpur, Dec. 1, 2000.*

Malaysia, which is soaring valiantly toward the 21st century, shines with the light of unlimited hope. I am overjoyed to finally visit this young, dynamic country again after a gap of 12 years. It is the realization of a long-cherished dream. I am filled with deep emotion to be here, and I congratulate you with all my heart on the phenomenal development that Malaysia has undergone in this past decade.

You, the Soka Gakkai Malaysia members, for whom I have the greatest esteem and affection, have worked together with General Director Koe Teng Hong and Women's Leader Tan Lian Kim to become exemplary citizens of your respective communities and your country. As a result of your efforts, you have earned the trust of people in all areas of society, including the top echelons of government. The growth and activities of the youth, the protagonists of the new century, are also deserving of the highest praise.

In addition, centers of kosen-rufu have appeared one after another around the country. Such community centers are a crystallization of your noble sincerity and a symbol of your immense good fortune.

Before coming here today, I stopped by the construction site of the new SGM Grand Culture Center, which is scheduled for completion in February 2001. While I was there, I chanted daimoku for the construction work to proceed smoothly and for the center to become a wonderful base for activities dedicated to social contribution.

On one of the walls here in this room is a banner with next year's theme, "Year of Total Victory for the New Century." We practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism to win in life and to become happy. You, my friends in Malaysia, have won on all fronts. I applaud you wholeheartedly. Three cheers for SGM's resounding victory! Three cheers for your brilliant triumph!

On Nov. 29, I had the privilege of receiving an honorary degree of Doctor of Letters from the Universiti Putra Malaysia. I want before anything else to share this proud honor with all of you, my beloved SGM members.

The conferment ceremony was most dignified and solemn. And words cannot express my profound appreciation for the warm, heartfelt welcome of the university officials, faculty and students, whose sincerity and good wishes pervaded every moment of the ceremony.

It is also my humble pleasure to report that many people at the Universiti Putra Malaysia voiced genuine praise for the contributions that all the SGM members are making to society.

On Nov. 30, I met with Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad at the new Prime Minister's Office Complex in Putrajaya. It was our second meeting. We had a very meaningful discussion, centering on Malaysia and the world in the coming century.

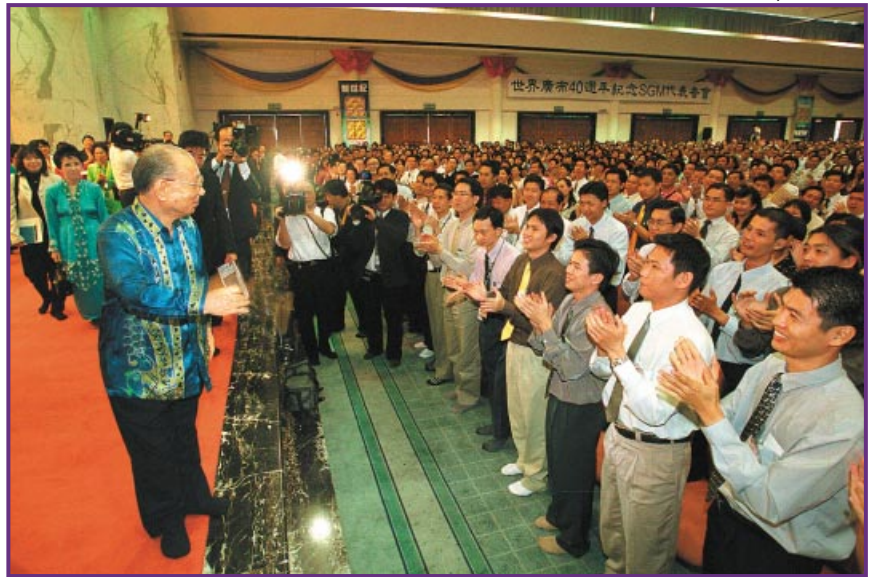
I also brought up the subject of the spectacular card stunt performed by 5,000 SGM members at the opening ceremony of the 16th Commonwealth Games in Kuala Lumpur in September 1998. Dr. Mahathir said he had been most impressed by that performance.

Each day of my stay in Malaysia has been one of creating golden pages of history with you. I owe everything to you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart.

**Only the good fortune we accumulate is indestructible.**

I want to share a Malaysian anecdote that dates back some two centuries.

A father was teaching his son languages. Day in, day out, they would study together. The boy was of an age when he wanted to be out playing with his friends and having fun. One day he had enough and shouted, "I'm sick of studying!" Maybe some of you have



SGI President Ikeda attends a representatives conference with 2,000 Soka Gakkai Malaysia members from throughout the country to commemorate 40 years of the movement for worldwide kosen-rufu, Dec. 1.

felt the same way.

His mother, however, did not fly off the handle and start scolding him. This is an important point. She proceeded to tell him gently and persuasively why it was important to study. "Even if we leave you an inheritance, if you are unlucky, it can vanish in an instance," she pointed out. "But sound knowledge and learning are not like that. They stay with you until you die."

This episode appears in *Abdullah's Story*, a Malay literary classic.

Abdullah is the boy's name. He lived up to his mother's expectations and went on to become a famous language teacher.

This mother's words are profound. They are words of wisdom and philosophy reflecting a deep understanding and insight, like our SGM women's division members have.

Money and material wealth can be fleeting when the fickle winds of fortune blow against us. In contrast, learning or skills that we have acquired and made a part of ourselves are lifelong treasures. For that reason, education is very important.

The Daishonin writes, "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851). But even these "superior" treasures of the body are not ever-

lasting. The treasures of the body alone cannot solve the fundamental sufferings of the human condition, which are characterized by the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness and death.

Where, then, can we find an indestructible treasure in life? What is it that has golden value across the three existences—past, present and future—and is never destroyed by even the cruelest fate? The Daishonin tells us clearly, "The treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all" (WND, 851).

Simply put, the treasures of the heart refer to the wealth and richness we build within us and, ultimately, the good fortune and benefit we obtain through faith.

When we live in accord with the eternal Law, our lives shine eternally throughout the three existences. When we devote ourselves wholeheartedly to accomplishing our mission for kosen-rufu, we develop a state of life as vast as the universe itself.

Only the good fortune we accumulate in our lives is indestructible. No one can take it away. No one can destroy it. That is why, as the Daishonin teaches, our heart is the most important thing.

Because you are making the highest possible good causes each day, you are all people of fabulous riches—millionaires of life—adorned with infi-

nite, immeasurable treasures of the heart.

**The 'saha' world is where we have to endure and persevere.**

The story of the mother and son was about the importance of making efforts in your youth. Only to the extent that you make efforts can you develop ability and strength. Only to the extent that you work hard can you polish yourself and grow. This is the law of cause and effect.

And we see this even more in our efforts for kosen-rufu: None of our hard work is ever wasted. The Daishonin writes: "Where there is unseen virtue, there will be visible reward" (WND, 907). "All your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life. With this conviction you should strive in faith" (WND, 4).

True victors in life work hard and forge within themselves an indestructible state of life. I hope my beloved Malaysian youth will be confident that all their exertions for the sake of the Law, for others' happiness, for the welfare of society, will make their lives sparkle with the golden light of character and of boundless good fortune and benefit.

In the course of a long life there are often times when things do not go the way we plan. And out in the real world,

Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

we are confronted with contradictions at every turn. In Buddhism, we speak of this existence as living in the strife-filled *saha* world. *Saha* means endurance.

Hence, the *saha* world is where we have to endure and persevere. That is why another name for the Buddha is “One Who Can Endure” (WND, 23).

If everything always goes smoothly, it leads to arrogance and paves the way to ultimate defeat in life. On the other hand, by enduring all kinds of sorrow and suffering, and triumphing over them, we can become truly strong. Such a life ultimately glows with happiness and victory.

**The important thing is to maintain faith like flowing water.**

I now want to touch a little on gongyo. There may be times when you cannot do a full morning or evening gongyo, because you are genuinely exhausted, ill or facing some other set of unavoidable circumstances. I think it is perfectly all right at such times if you just do, for instance, A and C gongyo and daimoku. Or even chant three daimoku. Even just one daimoku contains unfathomable benefit.

What matters is continuing and moving forward. The important thing is that you maintain continuous faith that flows unceasingly like water.

By the same token, I hope that you will warmly encourage and support others facing various hardships and problems, that you will watch over them with genuine concern and advance together with them.

No matter what happens, please never let go of the Mystic Law, please never leave the SGI. I say this because they form the railway track that leads to absolute happiness. If you get off the train midway, you cannot reach your destination. It is important not to veer from the fundamental path in life.

**Doing gongyo, our lives commune with the universe.**

Buddhism expounds that each human being is a microcosm—a miniature version of the universe itself. Modern science corroborates this view.

The Buddhist scriptures set forth in great detail how our body is like the universe in miniature. They liken our two eyes to the sun and the moon. The roundness of our head, to the vault of the heavens. And the hair on our head, to the stars.

In which case, I guess you could say, hair that falls out is like falling stars!

The scriptures further liken our eyebrows to the Big Dipper and our breath to the wind. The some 360 joints of our body are said to correspond to the days in a year. The warmth of our stomachs represents spring and summer, while the cold hardness of our backs represents winter and autumn. [The Daishonin cites Miao-lo’s *Annotation on the Great Concentration and Insight*: “The inhaling and exhaling of breath through the nose is like wind that wafts through the mountain and valleys; the inhaling and exhaling of breath through our mouth is like the winds that course through the open skies. Our eyes are like the sun and the moon; their opening and closing is like day and night. The hair on our heads is like the stars, our eyebrows are like the northern dipper. Our blood flow is like rivers and streams, and our bones are like gems and stones. Our skin and our flesh are like the earth and soil, and the fine hairs on our body are the grasses and forests that cover the earth” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 567).]

Gongyo is a ceremony in which the microcosm of our lives communes with the macrocosm of the universe. In gongyo each day, we recite the *jigage* verse section of the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra. The *jigage* section begins with the word *ji*, meaning self, in the passage *ji ga toku burrai* and ends with the word *shin*, meaning body, in the passage *soku joju busshin*. When we combine these first and last Chinese characters, they form the word *jishin*, meaning oneself. In a general sense, therefore, the *jigage* section extols our own incredible life force, which is eternal and precious beyond measure.

A certain scholar says: “We have entered the Internet age. But while information is important, it will not necessarily guarantee human happiness. Science and economics alone cannot bring people happiness. We have to look within ourselves, to delve into the essence of our existence as human beings. That is why today we need philosophy and spirituality, especially the humanism of Buddhism.”

If we believe in the Mystic Law and chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo, putting our lives in rhythm with the universal law, we can develop a self that is strong, rich and healthy, that radiates intellect and wisdom, that brims with happiness

throughout eternity.

Just as the Buddha is endowed with ten honorable titles expressing his or her power, wisdom, virtue and compassion, we, too, will come to be crowned with immense good fortune and benefit. We practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism to construct a brilliant palace of happiness in the depths of our lives.

**The path of Buddhist practice is found in the unity of practitioners.**

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister of independent India, makes the following observation: “Ashoka became an ardent Buddhist and tried his utmost to spread the *Dharma*. But there was no force or compulsion. It was only by winning men’s hearts that he sought to make converts.” [Ashoka was the first king to unify India. During the early years of his reign he was a tyrant, but later he converted to Buddhism and governed compassionately in accordance with Buddhist ideals.] Nehru’s words highlight the humanism of Buddhism, which is characterized by deep sincerity and integrity.

Our kosen-rufu movement is about spreading friendship, spreading trust, spreading happiness. Here in Malaysia you have a saying “Friendship is a bond as indivisible as a fingerprint and the flesh beneath it.” The friendship and unity evident among the SGM members are wonderful. Your sincere actions and your beautiful har-

mony and solidarity have drawn wide applause from Malaysian society. Furthermore, the members in each state of Malaysia are advancing confidently, joyfully and high-spiritedly, under respective themes such as “Unity and Continual Victory,” “Harmony and Unity” and “Eternal Victory.”

Shakyamuni called the assemblage of his followers “an invincible gathering” and taught that advancing together with good friends constitutes the entirety of Buddhist practice. The path of Buddhist practice and victory in life are found in the splendid unity of practitioners striving together in faith.

In contrast, when people impede the flow of kosen-rufu by being selfish, holding grudges against fellow members, disrupting the organization’s unity and denigrating SGI activities, they bring suffering upon themselves and destroy their lives from within. This is a strict, inescapable law of Buddhism.

I ask that all of you advance cheerfully and harmoniously under the leadership of General Director Koe, in whom I place the greatest trust. And just as Malaysia boasts the famous Petronas Twin Towers—the tallest building in the world today—I ask that you create a magnificent human castle boasting the world’s foremost unity.

**You will surely attain a lofty state of life.**

If you chant daimoku to the

Gohonzon, you will attain a lofty state of life that is like standing at the highest point in the universe and gazing serenely down upon all phenomena. Therefore, there is nothing to fear.

The Daishonin writes: “If the votary of the Lotus Sutra neither regresses in faith nor acts falsely, but places himself fully in the hands of the Lotus Sutra, practicing exactly as its golden words prescribe, then he will surely obtain supreme blessings in this lifetime, being safe from misfortune and prolonging his natural life span, to say nothing of his good fortune in his next existence. Our great wish for kosen-rufu will also then be fulfilled” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1357).

Twelve years ago, on my last visit, I embarked with all of you to finish laying the foundation for kosen-rufu by the end of the 20th century. So here in Malaysia once again today, let us together open the golden door to kosen-rufu in the 21st century.

I pray for Malaysia’s unending prosperity. And I pray with all my heart—and will continue to do so for as long as I live—for the good health and longevity of all the members of Malaysia, for each one of you to lead lives of unsurpassed happiness.

Please give my best regards to the members I could not meet today.

Long live Soka Gakkai Malaysia! **WT**

**NEW CHILDREN’S BOOKS DELAYED**

**C**ody Chants and the four-book set *I Like to Chant*, which are featured in the latest SGI-USA Mail Order Center catalogue, have been delayed. Due to printing and technical problems, these new titles from Treasure Tower Books will not be available until February 2001. We apologize for the inconvenience and appreciate your patience as we work to get you these exciting new children’s books as soon as possible. **WT**

**Do You Have ‘Way of Youth’ Stories?**

**P**eople are sharing all kinds of stories with us about *The Way of Youth*. The book is turning out to be a great way for teens to get encouragement about personal problems themselves and to share SGI President Ikeda’s philosophy with their friends. And the book isn’t just for teens—leaders have found it invaluable resource when giving guidance and parents use it as a starting point for discussions with their kids. We’d like to know your experience with *The Way of Youth* as:

- Teens
- Parents
- Teachers
- Youth counselors
- Aunts and uncles
- Men and women

We want to hear from you! Please send us a brief (100 words or less) story of your experience, along with your name, address, phone number and e-mail address. Please send to Middleway Press, 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401 or to [middlewaypress@sgi-usa.org](mailto:middlewaypress@sgi-usa.org) by Jan. 31.

Thanks for your support!

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S MESSAGE TO THE 6TH GRADUATING CLASS OF SOKA UNIVERSITY OF AMERICA, CALABASAS

# To Be Truly Wise

**'The truly wise is one who creates the highest value out of life,' SGI President Ikeda says, 'no matter what the circumstances or how daunting the adversity. That person struggles ever onward, foothold after foothold, head held high, with profound ideals firmly embraced in his or her heart, scaling the peaks of self-completion.'**

To all my beloved members of the 6th Graduating Class, who shall take flight into the dawn of a new century, a new era for humanity: Please accept my heartfelt felicitations on your challenge to complete this meaningful page in your youth. I congratulate you on your joyful new departure in life!

I also extend my wholehearted gratitude to Dr. Hazel Henderson, whom I hold in

great esteem, and the many distinguished guests who have so kindly joined us in celebrating this occasion, despite the manifold demands on their time.

Allow me, as the founder of this institution, to further express my deepest appreciation to Dean of the Graduate School Tomoko Takahashi and every member of the faculty. You have to this day warmly offered encouragement and direction to these graduates as though they were your own siblings, lavishing care and affection upon these young women and men of scholarship who willingly chose to pass through our gates of value creation.

And to all the families and friends of this graduating class, please accept my heartfelt congratulations as well.

Last month, I was granted the opportunity to attend a graduation ceremony in Singapore, one in which I was conferred a Doctor of Letters Honoris Causa from Australia's University of Sydney (see the Dec. 29, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 10). That occasion remains vivid in my mind. Chancellor Dame Leonie Kramer greeted her students, one after another, as she presented them their diplomas on stage, her love and caring for them evident as she inquired about the lives and

plans of each graduate, wishing every one a prosperous future. That scene profoundly moved me, seeing in those students the same boundless promise I see in all of you.

Although I am not present today to greet each member of the 6th Graduating Class in person, please know that wherever I may be, my heart is always with you. I shall always be praying for you, taking note from afar with great pride over the giant strides you make, the many successes you achieve.

Thoreau writes: "As for the comparative demand which men make on life, it is an important difference between two, that the one is satisfied with a level success, that his marks can all be hit by point-blank shots, but the other, however low and unsuccessful his life may be, constantly elevates his aim, though at a very slight angle to the horizon. I should much rather be the last man..."

The truly wise is one who creates the highest value out of life, no matter what the circumstances or how daunting the adversity. That person struggles ever onward, foothold after foothold, head held high, with profound ideals firmly embraced in his or her heart, scaling the peaks of self-completion.



Dr. Hazel Henderson, independent futurist, alternative economist and author, speaks at the graduation ceremony, Dec. 13.

I therefore urge you to ascend this majestic mountain of life, toward the most sublime goal of bettering oneself, society and humanity.

The focus of the 21st century will at last turn to education. It is a field that many Soka University of America graduates are devoting themselves to, a task that is truly worthy and noble.

I have had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with Dr. Henderson, who so kindly joins us for this ceremony, in which we exchanged views on the importance of education.

We agreed that if the 21st century is to be a time when all members of humanity live as global citizens, in harmony and in support of one another, a time when we all may manifest our boundless inner potential, then ordinary people must grow wiser and stronger. Therein lies the decisive key to the destiny of our species.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the founding father of value-creating education, clearly says that the purpose of his educational theories was to educate people so that they may, as unique individuals, contribute to the flowering of culture within society. He further observed that people can only begin to create real value in their lives when they live in an environment in which nature and society are

one, and all thrive in harmony.

To the 6th Graduating Class, whose members shall now proudly step out into the world from this institution, the cradle of humanistic and value-creating education: Hoist high the banner of these hallowed ideals! The outcome of our civilization in the 21st century rests upon your capable shoulders. I ask you to stand tall on the stage that you have chosen, basked in courage and success, the history of your lives to be forever free of regret.

I conclude my message with a passage from a poem that Dr. Henderson bequeathed in tribute to her mother: "This is true courage: To toil each day for others. This is true valor: To keep faith with the future, without compensation or recognition."

My young friends of Soka, may you be blessed with boundless glory! Blessed by ardent friendship! I close with these cherished thoughts for you.

Daisaku Ikeda  
Founder  
December 13, 2000



The 6th graduating class of Soka University of America, Calabasas, with Dean Tomoko Takahashi (center).

If you have any questions about your subscription to the *World Tribune* or *Living Buddhism* magazine, please call  
1-800-835-4558

EXPERIENCE — GIANLUCA D'IPOLITO, MIAMI

# MEDICAL RESEARCHER MAKES HIS MARK

By JIM DREIBACH  
FLORIDA BUREAU CHIEF

**‘By following SGI President Ikeda, reading the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, I developed the confidence in my life to attain happiness,’ says Gianluca D’ipolito.**



Photo by JIM DREIBACH

Gianluca D’ipolito in the laboratory at the University of Miami Medical School.

Mention the University of Miami and probably the first thing that comes to mind is its sports prowess. But it is also an intellectual powerhouse. Its medical school is one of the top teaching hospitals in the country, known for research in diabetes, spinal rehabilitation and other fields. One important program is the study of aging. That is where Gianluca D’ipolito, an SGI-USA member, has made his mark in medical research.

“Gianluca arrived here five years ago to pursue a post-doctoral program in bone formation and osteoporosis,” explained Dr. Paul Schiller, assistant professor of medicine, University of Miami and principal investigator for the Veteran’s Administration Hospital. “On his own, he developed a human model for bone development. Before, all models came from animals. Gianluca was instrumental in finding sources for these cells from human vertebrae of organ donors and donors in diabetes research. This model is recognized in medical learning around the world. Researchers come from everywhere to learn to use this model.”

High praise from his supervisor, yet Gianluca explains how he came to this position in his own humble, quiet way: “When I started practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in 1982 at age 19 in Florence, Italy, I was miserable. I was shy and got along poorly with others. My life was closed. I was also two years behind in high school. One of my early benefits was to aggressively work on completing my education. In Italy, examinations are

conducted orally. I started to seek out my teachers to take the exams that would enable me to finish school, instead of waiting for them to come to me.”

At the same time, Gianluca became involved in taking responsibility in the SGI Buddhist community in an area close to Florence. “I traveled every weekend to that area to encourage and support members,” he says. “The membership there grew to nearly a thousand, who are still active today.”

This intense involvement became the springboard for Gianluca’s life. He explains: “Everything I learned from my Buddhist practice told me to challenge myself. My biggest weakness was school, so I decided to go to the university and study biology, a field in which I was always interested. I also took a part time job, not to support myself since I was living at home, but just to have a little spending money. But working became an excuse for not studying hard.

“While I was going through the motions of challenging my life, I felt something was missing. My foundation was weak. I was attending classes, but not advancing. In Italy, attending school was a breeze, financially. But after attending the university for five years without showing any progress, I started to feel empty.

“Actually, I liked biology and I liked to study. Fundamentally, however, I lacked confidence. I thought I was incapable of completing my degree. Through my strong practice, I could encourage others, but I had no confidence in myself, in my innate Buddhahood. I could not make myself show actual proof. I felt

like a hypocrite.

“To break this deadlock, I went to receive guidance from the general director of the SGI-Italy, Mr. Kaneda. I don’t recall him ever being as strict with anyone as he was with me. In the back of my mind, my reason to go to see him was because I thought there was something wrong with my brain and that was why I could not finish school like everyone else. So I hoped when I went to see him, he would tell me, ‘Yeah, there is something wrong with your brain, you really are crazy.’ Instead, he told me: ‘If you are going to do something, then do it! If you are going to work, work. If you are going to study, then study. Because you are practicing Buddhism, however, the best thing for you to do is to do your best.’ It took just two or three minutes. When it was over, I was in anguish. I realized I had wasted a lot of time.

“I quit my job and started to study hard. Sometimes I would study 10 to 12 hours a day. Since my study skills were rusty, I had to work much harder at it. I became so serious, that all of my friends came over to study with me.”

As in high school, all university tests were oral. That put Gianluca on the spot. His answers had to ring with confidence and that, of course, challenged one of his biggest weaknesses. Also, because of his poor study habits he could only absorb the core material. Attaining any depth in the subject eluded him. When a professor asked a question that fell beyond his narrow focus, he choked.

“I had to take nearly every exam twice,” he says. “And

when I re-tested, I had to take the make up the following month. I was always running to complete my studies.”

Every day he studied the passage from “Reply to Kyo’o”: “Kyo’o’s misfortune will change into fortune. Muster your faith, and pray to this Gohonzon. Then what is there that cannot be achieved?” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 412).

“I read this passage over and over, while crying and chanting in front of the Gohonzon. But I never gave up.”

It was an uphill battle, but he finally managed to finish his Ph.D. degree in hematology within five years.

Once he finished his degree, the fortune from Gianluca’s efforts in study and Buddhist practice began to appear. For example, his doctoral thesis won a \$5,000 award for which it was supposed to be ineligible. It was created for medical doctors not biologists. The dean told him not to bother even applying for it since his field was excluded. However, at the last minute — half an hour before the deadline closed — school administrators told him to go for it. He presented everything on time.

“As I was submitting my dissertation, the secretary of the department was laughing,” he explains. “She told me I was the only one to submit a thesis for the award. I was a shoe-in.”

Fortune also intervened when he decided to pursue a post-graduate program to establish a specialty. Entry into one of the seven positions was determined by competitive exam. He took eighth place. “I wasn’t discouraged,” he says. “Based on my renewed confidence in completing my degree, I was sure something would change. Sure enough, one of the applicants did not accept the position. I was able to complete a four-year specialty in biochemistry.”

Upon graduating and attaining his specialty, Gianluca was preparing for his future. He recognized that jobs for biologists were few in Italy. However, his great dream was to go to America. Further pressing him to establish his career was his developing relationship with Silvana, his wife-to-be.

Help would come soon. “A good friend introduced me to a professor with contacts in the United States,” he remembers.

“When I explained my situation to her, she showed me a five-month-old job announcement at the University of Miami Medical School. She didn’t know if it was still open but she would send my Curriculum Vitae.

“People with whom I have discussed my being hired by the University of Miami Medical School think I have a relative on the board of directors or some special genius. It is virtually impossible to get hired from outside the program.

“On the surface, getting this job, in my field, was as simple as having a background in hematology and in working with bone marrow transplantation. I work in the Endocrinology Department where there is no one else with that specialty. I was able to develop a project in which I could apply my expertise in hematology to endocrinology. While getting the job appeared effortless, in reality it was the result of hard work and determined practice that I was able to gain the fortune to land the position.

“The essential thing this 10-year journey taught me was consistency — I consistently pushed myself harder and chanted all the way through until I won. At the beginning, everything seemed impossible. I couldn’t talk to anyone; I had no confidence. Yet today, I am able to work in such a fulfilling profession; not because I am great, or especially intelligent. By following SGI President Ikeda, reading the writings of Nichiren Daishonin and chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, I developed the confidence in my life to attain happiness.”

These kinds of changes in Gianluca’s character have won him the endorsement of the school’s administration. “I have a great deal of respect for Gianluca. We are very close,” says Dr. Schiller. “His working persona is high-spirited. He has also demonstrated the ability to turn unfavorable conditions into favorable ones. An unusual trait in a research environment, he is open in sharing his findings. Most researchers are very protective of their work for reasons of job security. Research advancements are often the basis for publishing and winning patents. Gianluca has a higher vision, however. He has a more universal vision of helping humanity as opposed to personal gain.” ■

## SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S DEC. 4 SPEECH

# How To Win in the New Century

The key to winning in the new century, SGI President Ikeda says, is 'winning over ourselves today, here and now — changing ourselves today, here and now.'

*SGI President Ikeda's speech at an SGI Hong Kong–Macau Executive Conference, held at the SGI-Hong Kong Grand Culture Center, Dec. 4, 2000.*

I thank all of you, my dear fellow members with whom I share many fond memories, for taking time out of your busy schedules to gather here like this today. I am absolutely delighted to have this opportunity to see you all again in this final year of the 20th century. The sight of your happy faces fills me with joy and fresh energy.

This visit to Hong Kong is my 20th. So this is also the 20th "life-to-life training session" I have attended here, allowing us together to create another meaningful page in the history of our Asian kosen-rufu movement.

As an expression of my deepest appreciation and respect for you, the Hong Kong members, I dedicate the following poem:

*On my 20th visit  
I give three cheers  
For Hong Kong kosen-rufu.*

The great Chinese writer Lu Xun observes, "It is true that we must live in order to evolve; that we might as well experience hardships in order to be free of all future suffering; and that we should fight in order to bring about reform."

I am confident that all of us are advancing undauntedly in our lives, our gaze fixed steadily on a future filled with hope.

The SGI, together with the members of Hong Kong and Macau, has begun its journey toward victory in the 21st century, leading the way for the rest of the world. Hong Kong and Macau are like winged steeds who have taken flight into the skies of the new century. You are overflowing with limitless energy and shining with tremendous hope.

My journey to realize the westward transmission of Buddhism, which Nichiren Dai-shonin prophesied, began here in Hong Kong on Jan. 28, 1961. Also, on my first trip to

China in May and June 1974—a visit dedicated to building a golden bridge of friendship between Japan and China—I traveled via Hong Kong to and from China.

Moreover, the Chinese University of Hong Kong was the first of the 73 universities with which Soka University enjoys academic and educational exchanges.

And the first Soka kindergarten to be established outside Japan was the Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten in 1992. It is a pioneering citadel of humanistic kindergarten education for the 21st century. Following your lead, Soka kindergartens have also been opened in Singapore and Malaysia. I visited these latter two kindergartens during this trip.

Today, I was delighted to be reunited with graduates of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd graduating classes of Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten. When I first met them—they were still cute kindergartners then—in May 1993, I wrote them a calligraphy with the words "Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten is my life," and "May you be good! May you have beautiful hearts!" I cannot tell you how happy I am that they have all grown into wonderful young people. I express my respect and gratitude for the efforts of Principal Wong So Yuk and all the other fine members of the kindergarten staff who have devoted themselves wholeheartedly to humanistic education.

**The key to fresh growth in the organization is sincerely caring for each member.**

Indeed, SGI-Hong Kong and SGI-Macau have served as ports of peace, culture and education for all of Asia—as a bright source of hope and the headwaters of eternal development. I hope you, the members of Hong Kong and Macau, will

Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS



SGI President Ikeda takes a commemorative photo with children of the 1st, 2nd and 3rd graduating classes of Hong Kong Soka Kindergarten, at the SGI-Hong Kong Grand Culture Center, Dec. 4.

continue to devote yourselves to that towering mission in the coming century.

One of the unforgettable pioneer members of the kosen-rufu movement in Hong Kong is Chow Tak Kwong. He was a noble pioneer who worked hard not only for his fellow members in Hong Kong but for members throughout Southeast Asia.

Every few days, Mr. Chow would send letters of encouragement to members scattered throughout Singapore, Malaysia and other parts of Asia. If there were any problems to deal with, he would send off letters every other day, sometimes even daily.

What incredible effort this must have taken on Mr. Chow's part! For in addition to being the central figure of kosen-rufu activities in Hong Kong, he was also the busy president of a trading company. And it was not rare for his letters to run to five or even 10 pages. This was in an age when it was uncommon to make international phone calls and way before the development of the Internet. Mr. Chow's continuous encouragement and support of his fellow members represented a tremendous effort on his part.

In one letter to the central figure of a certain area, he writes: "It is important to create frequent opportunities for

heart-to-heart dialogue with your members. Home visits are the only way to achieve this. By visiting members' homes to share guidance and offer encouragement, you can really speak freely with each other and grow close, establishing mutual trust. Saying this is easy, but putting it into practice is a challenge."

Mr. Chow always made a point of regularly visiting members at home, and this is the source of SGI-Hong Kong's strong foundation today.

The unchanging key to fresh growth is to sincerely care about each member and to take time to regularly engage in heart-to-heart dialogue with them and offer support and encouragement through home visits, personal guidance or some other form of contact.

**All our SGI activities are excellent for our health.**

We are approaching the Century of Women, and I hope the women's division members of SGI-Hong Kong and SGI-Macau will continue to advance with even greater youthful vitality and good health.

Today in Hong Kong, women over 50 make up some 14 percent of the population. As the age level rises, the ratio of women to men in the population increases.

The Chinese University of

Hong Kong recently held a symposium on improving the health of middle-aged and elderly women, at which a number of practical measures were presented. For example, women in the 50–70 age bracket should try to keep their weight down. They should eat plenty of fruit and vegetables, get enough calcium and restrict fat consumption to below 30 percent of their total daily calorie intake.

The symposium also stressed the importance of exercise and maintaining fitness and mobility, and the need to keep one's mind active to ward off the deterioration of mental functions. It further highlighted the negative impact of anxiety and depression, and the danger posed to the elderly by falls.

Through our daily SGI activities, we are always active and on the go, working for the sake of Buddhism, society and people's happiness. We also keep our minds active by studying and discussing Buddhist philosophy. And we keep our spirits up by encouraging and supporting one another. Clearly, all of our activities are excellent for our health! They help us live long, meaningful lives.

The sight of the harmonious, cheerful and energetic activities of the SGI-Hong Kong Many Treasures Group is wonderful proof of that.

**Someone who achieves self-mastery eventually changes history.**

Recently, the major Hong Kong publisher Cosmos Books has published a new Chinese edition of my dialogue with British historian Arnold Toynbee, *Choose Life*. The respected Chinese writer Jin Yong has kindly contributed a preface filled with sparkling gems of profound wisdom, and I want to take this opportunity to thank him sincerely.

What did Dr. Toynbee emphasize in our dialogue? One of his main themes was self-mastery.

Simply put, this means winning control over oneself, overcoming the small self that is dominated by narrow self-interest and awakening to the larger self that works for the good of all humanity. Dr. Toynbee, one of the greatest historians of the 20th century, believed with keen insight that self-mastery was vital to overcoming the crises facing humanity.

What he called for, in short, was nothing other than what we in the SGI refer to as human revolution — a fundamental transformation within the hearts and minds of human beings. Dr. Toynbee says, "The only way [for a human being] to improve [his karma] is for him to increase his self-mastery, and the struggle to master one's self is the personal action of an individual human being" (*Choose Life*, p. 350). The achievement of self-mastery by each individual will bring about momentous positive progress in society and eventually change the course of human history.

What is the key to winning in the new century? It all begins with winning over ourselves today, here and now — changing ourselves today, here and now. I hope you will remember this point.

**Buddhism never uses people as a means to an end.**

Faith is a source of limitless power.

Many religions have lost sight of their founder's intent, becoming tools of the powers that be and winding up exploited by corrupt clergy. They have even become the cause of conflict and war. But religion is originally meant to be the ground from which culture and civilization flourishes.

The Mystic Law is a source of happiness. Through faith in the Mystic Law, the strength to live, to grow, to win, to triumph over destiny,

wells forth from within us.

In the West, the word *culture* originates from the verb *cultivate*. Religion cultivates life. And a life that is richly cultivated blooms with a song of joy, a dance of celebration. That is true culture — a paean to humanity. We also see this joy in Buddhist art.

Buddhism does not use human beings as a means to an end. It teaches that human beings must courageously stand up, gain mastery over themselves and then share their joy with others. We of the SGI are walking this royal path.

Scientific advances are important. Government, economics and education are naturally important, too. But what is the most important and fundamental thing of all? It is life.

The transformation of an individual life is the foundation of everything. Shakyamuni taught us this. And so did the Daishonin.

He revealed the Law that pervades the cosmos and life. He left a way for all people to find happiness and peace, and lead lives filled with compassion and love. This unsurpassed law is the Mystic Law, and all of you who uphold it are treasures of this world.

The Buddhist law of cause and effect is strict. I want you all to be confident that those who dedicate their lives to the Mystic Law will be healthy, wealthy and beautiful, in body and mind, in lifetime after lifetime, and, as great leaders, contribute to society, winning people's praise and admiration, and enjoying lives of supreme fulfillment.

**The 21st century will be a time of human integrity.**

Harvard University Associate Professor Charles Hallisey has used my book *The Living Buddha* as a text in one of his classes on Buddhism. He has said that he finds the concept of human revolution to be a modern expression of the Chinese Buddhist teacher T'ien-t'ai's doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life — that a change in one person's mind, a change in one instant of life, leads to a change in all aspects of life.

Through all your efforts, especially the members of the community center maintenance group, the SGI-Hong Kong Grand Culture Center is beautifully adorned with bauhinia flowers — the symbol of Hong Kong — and many other lovely blooms. Even the moon tonight is unusually lovely.

In one of his letters celebrating the new year, the Daishonin writes: "Just as the flowers open up and bear fruit, just as the moon appears and invariably grows full, just as a lamp becomes brighter when oil is added, and just as plants and trees flourish with rain, so will human beings never fail to prosper when they make good causes" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1013)

Based on the law of cause and effect, all of you who are accumulating the greatest possible "good causes" through your kosen-rufu activities each day, are certain to enjoy infinite, immeasurable good fortune.

Shakyamuni says, "The scent of the virtuous does go

against the wind; the fragrance of righteousness perfumes all directions" (*The Dhammapada: Sayings of Buddha*, p. 22). In other words, the great flower of character and integrity wins out over every adverse wind and spreads the fragrance of humanity to all four quarters of the land. A person's faith is evident in the radiance of his or her character.

The 21st century will be a century of humanity, a century of human integrity. That is why I want you, the members of Hong Kong and Macau, to create gatherings of friendship and trust shared by beautiful "human flowers." Everyone — members and nonmembers alike — will feel delightfully refreshed and energized by your presence and inspired to work with you.

Recently, the Hong Kong men's division executive committee presented me with a giant seal inscribed with the words "Triumphant Champion of Worldwide Kosen-rufu in the 21st Century." It is my dearest wish that all the members of Hong Kong and Macau will strive to become just that — triumphant champions of worldwide kosen-rufu in the 21st century.

In conclusion, I present you with this poem:

*The Daishonin  
With boundless compassion  
Will embrace and protect  
Hong Kong  
Home of sincere followers.*

Please give my warmest regards to all the members I could not meet today. **WT**

**Happy New Year From the SGI-USA Publications Staff!**



Thank you for reading and contributing to our SGI-USA publications throughout 2000. We look forward to working with you and for you in 2001, the 'Year of Total Victory for the New Century.'



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Photo by GREGORY NAKASUIJI

# Spirit of the 'New Year's Gosho'

By JASON HENNINGER  
LOS ANGELES

To celebrate the new year is to delight in growth and renewal. We gather with friends and family to reflect on the year gone by and to set goals for the year to come. We pledge to quit smoking, read more often, exercise and so on. It is a day of optimism and hope. It is a celebration of spring, even in the heart of winter. Nichiren Daishonin writes, "A person who celebrates this day will accumulate virtue and be loved by all, just as the moon becomes full gradually, moving from west to east, and the sun shines more brightly, traveling from east to west" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1137).

In the Daishonin's time, the new year began closer to the physical beginning of spring.

Throughout the "New Year's Gosho" he speaks of lotus flowers blooming, cherry blossoms emerging, the movement of the moon and other springtime metaphors. However, there is much more to this letter than paying homage to the changing seasons. In this letter, written to a lay believer, the Daishonin outlines an essential aspect of Buddhist practice in the SGI.

To openly embrace responsibility for our own happiness is one of the fundamental principles of Buddhism. This is like the spirit of the new year. We do not gather together on New Year's Eve to blame things in the year past for our troubles. Instead we look to the coming year as an opportunity for change.

"Misfortune," the Daishonin states, "comes from one's mouth and ruins one, but fortune comes from one's heart and makes one worthy of respect" (WND, 1137). Likewise, the lotus emerges from the mud and the people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo awaken their Buddha nature.

We who practice the Daishonin's Buddhism know that we create our own fortune just as surely as we are responsible for our own suffering.

SGI President Ikeda has often said, "Buddhism is action." Buddhism, in a sense, does not wait for winter to end. It jumps right into spring. It is in a constant state of reform. Likewise, in our own hearts, in intimate relationships, in our families and in the SGI-USA, we are consistently growing.

It is easy to say: "I would be happy if only my spouse was not so lazy." "I wish my boss treated me better." "I would like my district if the meetings were not so boring." Everyone has problems and dislikes, but to remain idle is not Buddhism. If we merely sit by the sidelines and complain, we are not practicing with the spirit of the new year.

On the other hand if we sincerely chant for wisdom, openly engage those around us in dialogue and take action, we will surely overcome such minor difficulties. We can face all aspects of our daily lives

with pride instead of bitterness.

Occasionally, the problems we face in life can be repetitive and discouraging. We find ourselves confronting the same difficulty over and over with seemingly no change in sight. For example, one might desire to quit a destructive habit only to slip back into it, attempt after frustrating attempt. In such times it's easy to slide into the swamp of pessimism and apathy.

But we all know that no battle is won without the determination to win and not be defeated. The nature of New Year's Day, and the tradition of making resolutions, gives us an extra shot of optimism. Sometimes we need only a little more hope to keep us going.

We practice Buddhism so that we can always get back up and fight again. A persistent little voice inside emerges telling us that we are stronger than our most terrible struggles. As President Ikeda says: "There is no pessimism in Buddhism—not in the past, present, or future. There is only optimism" (*Faith Into Action*, p. 127). No one who

chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is ever permanently deadlocked or defeated. The Daishonin also says, "The sincerity of making offerings to the Lotus Sutra at the beginning of the New Year is like cherry blossoms blooming from trees..." (WND, 1137).

Rekindling optimism, confidence and courage in the face of difficulties is in a very real sense an offering of the Law displaying our inner beauty. Our happiness, in turn, can serve to support and encourage others for whom New Year's Day is just another day in a cycle of seemingly inescapable suffering.

In the coming year we have the option to triumph or to falter, to grow or to stagnate. We can challenge and overcome all obstacles through our strong practice of faith, or we can retreat and sink beneath our worries. We can show the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism or we can hide, timid and uninspired. We have this choice, not just at the dawn of Jan. 1, but at each moment of every day to come. **WT**