



EXPERIENCE

Marion Ruiz advocates for her deaf and disabled daughter Melissa.

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Photo by GREGORY NAKASLUI



Houston members enjoy the opening of their relocated community center, Dec. 8, 2000.

NEW SGI-USA CENTERS OPEN

The first SGI-USA activity centers were opened recently in Kauai, Hawaii, and Austin, Texas. The new activity centers, more of which are set to open this year across the country, are intended for the use of smaller organizations.

In addition, a new community center opened in Orlando, Fla., and Houston members celebrated the opening of their relocated community center. Please see pages 6-7 for more on these historic events.

DIALOGUE OF HOPE

The Human Brain — A Complex Network

‘The more you use your brain, the stronger and more complex the communication network of your brain becomes,’ says SGI President Ikeda. ‘As a result, your responses become faster and more readily adaptable to changing situations.’

The conclusion of a discussion on the meaning of the word smart among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai junior high school division leaders Kenji Shiratsuchi (young men’s leader) and Keiko Maekawa (young women’s leader). Part 1 appeared in the Nov. 10, 2000, World Tribune.

SGI President Ikeda: Do not forget, there are plenty of people whom society regards as smart but who end up as criminals. How much more wonderful it is to become a genius at encouraging and inspiring others than to use your intelligence to harm society! How much more wise and smart that is!

I ask adults to have faith in young people and treat them with respect, with the conviction that “this youth is going to

make a great contribution to the world. He or she is going to accomplish much more than we ever did.”

Each and every one of you, our junior high students, is the hope of the 21st century. You are precious treasures of the future.

Keiko Maekawa: I think people’s expectations of us have a powerful influence. We should never label anyone as incapable. We leaders of junior high

and high school divisions must be careful about this, too.

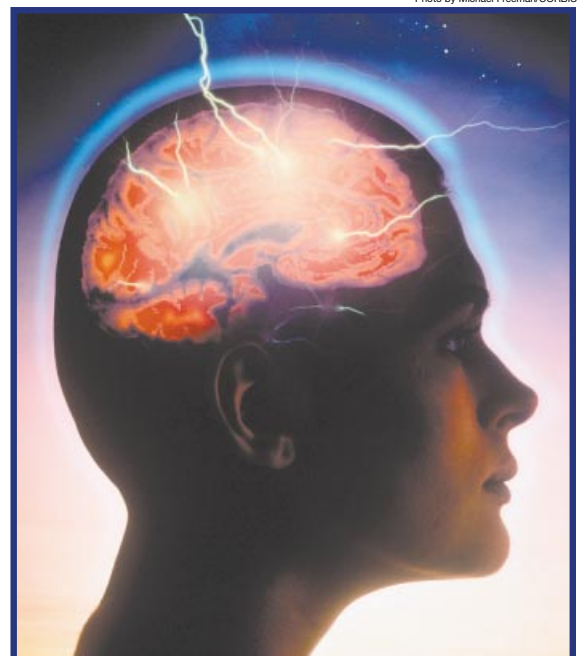
Kenji Shiratsuchi: An interesting experiment was conducted in the United States. As students moved up from one grade to the next, the new teachers were intentionally given a reverse evaluation of each student’s scholastic performance. In other words, the new teachers were told that the good students were bad and the bad students were good.

The experiment found that the students came to match the teachers’ expectations. The previously bad students became good students, and the previously good students became bad students.

You have already accomplished the impossible many times.

Ikeda: Self-confidence encourages us to expand our minds, that is for certain. Once,

Photo by Michael Freeman/CORBIS



PLEASE SEE DIALOGUE, 4

A computerized cross-section of a human brain emitting electrical charges.

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S DEC. 10 ENCOURAGEMENT

CREATING A NEW AGE

SGI President Ikeda says, 'I want you to create an age of which you can say, "Our age is the greatest ever!"'

SGI President Ikeda's encouragement at a Kansai Representatives Conference in Osaka, Japan, Dec. 10.

The age of youth is here at last. The role of young women is especially important. When the young women are active, it brings joy to all—the whole atmosphere is brightened. I want Kansai to become a model for the Century of Women.

I also hope that the men's and women's divisions will unite with the young men and women, doing their utmost to support, love, encourage and foster the youth.

Not advancing is regressing. When those who are senior in faith burn with a youthful fighting spirit, go about their activities cheerfully and energetically, and continue to learn and grow with a bright, positive spirit, their juniors also develop.

Taking advantage of others for one's own ends is a manifestation of the devilish nature within. Working wholeheartedly for the benefit of others, on the other hand, is the way of life of a Buddha.

Allow me to share the illuminating words of some famous thinkers. Indian poet Ra-

bindranath Tagore says, "What a delight it may be for you, and what a responsibility, this belonging to a period which is one of the greatest in the whole history of man!" I want you to create an age of which you can say, "Our age is the greatest ever!"

The philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau says: "I maintain that to feel the great goods he [man] must know the little ills. Such is his nature." "Of all the virtues, justice is the one that contributes most to the common good of men." True happiness lies in devoting our lives to justice and truth.

Rousseau also says, "If you do not also open your heart, others' hearts will always remain closed to you." It is not what others do but what we do. When we reach out to others with a spirit of generosity and unaffected sincerity, they will open their hearts to us as well.

I want also to share a quote from French writer Michel de Montaigne's *The Complete Essays*, which was one of my favorite books in my youth. As a matter of fact, there was a scene

in a movie I once saw that I will never forget. It was set during World War II, and there was a soldier—a young scholar—who was constantly abused and beaten by his superior officer. The young man always kept a book by his side—Montaigne's *The Complete Essays*.

Montaigne observes, "A man who is truly brave will always be brave on all occasions." We should not think that only our activities in the organization are important. The truly courageous are those who always shine with unsurpassed humanity, whether it be at home, in the workplace or in SGI activities.

One of the most famous writers of Russian literature, the Ukrainian-born Nikolay Gogol, says: "It is my body that is infirm, not my soul. On the contrary, everything in my soul is gaining in strength and firmness. And my body will grow stronger too." Even should we fall ill, there is nothing that can destroy our life-state of boundless good fortune. No matter what happens, we must never lose our fighting spirit.

The year 2001 will soon be here. The world is waiting for the humanism of the SGI. Let us continue to dance joyfully and vibrantly on the brilliant stage of kosen-rufu in the new century. **WT**

Revealing One's True Identity



By MARK KORAL
LOS ANGELES

After Shakyamuni's death, direct contact with the Buddha became impossible. And over time, as Shakyamuni began to be deified, what was described as the path of Buddhahood gradually began to depart from the path of the human being. The spirit to seek the eternal Law in the realm of daily life eventually disappeared, and Shakyamuni's enlightenment came to be thought of as beyond the grasp of ordinary human beings.

Nichiren Daishonin, who appeared about 2,000 years after Shakyamuni, at the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law—a defiled age rife with confusion, when Shakyamuni's teachings lose their power to lead people to enlightenment—proclaimed the essence of the Lotus Sutra as Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. By introducing the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, a way for any person to practice the Lotus Sutra, he was carrying out a great religious revolution, returning Buddhism to the human being.

Shakyamuni's contemporary disciples for the first 40 years of his teachings believed he had first attained the state of unsurpassed enlightenment in that lifetime at the age of 30, while seated under the Bodhi tree in India. However in the "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra, he reveals for the first time that he actually attained enlightenment in the inconceivably remote past.

With this startling revelation of his true identity as the Buddha of the remote past, he opened his disciple's eyes for the first time to the "eternal Law" to which he had awakened. In other words, he was pointing to the true aspect of life—that Buddhahood does not suddenly appear in our lives but has always existed inherently in our lives from time without beginning. The Daishonin says, "We repeat the cycle of birth and death secure upon the earth of our intrinsically enlightened nature" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 724).

With the inscription of the Gohonzon for all humankind, the Daishonin made concrete the eternal Law that is found in our own lives. By chanting the Mystic Law to the Gohonzon, our strong faith itself becomes the simultaneous cause and effect of Buddhahood in each moment of life. The great freedom to discover and express our true identity is ours. **WT**

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EXPERIENCE — MARION RUIZ, AMHERST, N.Y.

For the Sake of My Daughter

Marion Ruiz conquers every adversity to care for her daughter, Melissa, 21, who was born deaf and with multiple disabilities.

In 1979, when I was five months pregnant with my third daughter Melissa, I had a heart attack. Melissa's father left me, I lost my job, lost my home and moved from Syracuse to Buffalo, N.Y., with two beautiful daughters, Tammy, 13, and Sherry, 12, and a 2-year-old son, Brian. We moved in with my sister, Fran, who taught me about chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

One month after moving to Buffalo, Melissa was born four weeks premature and critically ill with a devastating virus. I was determined that my baby would live and overcome an impossible prognosis. The doctor had no hope that she would live and said if she did, she would be deaf, blind and a total "vegetable."

Melissa lived and kept developing against all odds. She walked at 4-and-a-half; started learning sign language at 5; and gradually learned how to dress, tie her shoes, write, draw and do simple math. All of these accomplishments were true victories. She overcame a heart condition, blindness at the age of 8, liver dysfunction and coordination problems. Her little life encouraged me so much.

This was a result of my dedicated practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism manifesting determinations and goals for her life, as well as my own. For 13 years, I challenged myself through faith, practice and study of Buddhism, with the support of the SGI-USA members in Buffalo. As a result, my determinations and dreams to have a happy family and remarry were slowly becoming a reality.

I married again and had two more sons.

In 1993, my second husband, Jim, had a job change that took us to Pennsylvania for one year and then to New Jersey.

On Halloween evening 1996, the phone rang. The director of residential services at the Trenton, N.J., State School for the Deaf, where my deaf and multi-disabled daughter, Melissa, was



Marion Ruiz with her daughter Melissa, 21.

attending school delivered devastating news. Melissa was in the nurse's quarters being examined for injuries inflicted on her by her caregiver. Two children witnessed this woman slapping Melissa across the face, punching her head and slapping her hands.

This news made my heart stop. It all started making sense about why Melissa's behavior had changed so much since school started. This was the beginning of an intense two-and-a-half-year battle that had to be won!

This phone call challenged my life in the deepest ways. From that time forward, every day was spent processing information through the school, social workers and doctors. Evaluations were done in Philadelphia with a specialist for the deaf to determine what happened to Melissa and how she could be helped to recover.

My Buddhist practice was my stabilizer and strength. Every morning I prayed and made a list of what needed to be accomplished that day. I had to win one day at a time.

We tried to take legal action, but there was no recourse because Melissa was unable to defend herself in court, and both Melissa and the caregiver were deaf.

I believe in the strictness of cause and effect, however, and that this woman was in Melissa's life as an effect from a cause Melissa had made in a previous existence.

Throughout my life, I felt victimized by my circumstances,

such as poverty, failed relationships, and a deep lack of confidence in myself. What happened to Melissa made me intolerant to being a victim any longer. I took responsibility for the situation and determined to change because I believe, as parents, our children live in the wake of our karma. I now realized that there are no victims in life.

Understanding life through a Buddhist perspective was my lifeline to sanity. The concept of karma gave me the strength to put my energies into creating value for Melissa, not revenge toward the woman who hurt her.

I chanted each day to have the strength and wisdom to care for her, love her and keep fighting the system. These words from "Reply to Kyo'o" became part of me: "Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 412). I truly felt my prayer was like the roar of a lion.

As time passed, however, all avenues of help turned into dead ends. As I was quickly learning, New Jersey did not have humanitarian services for someone with needs as complex as Melissa's. She required strict routine structure, constant supervision and stimulation, and intense emotional help to express what she was feeling, cope and move forward. I was unable to provide for these needs because she needed constant su-

pervision and I was caring for my young children, working and struggling with asthma.

The SGI-USA activities I attended encouraged me to never give up and were my opportunity to meet members, share Buddhism and receive guidance. I treasure the precious members and leaders in New Jersey, who encouraged me with their lives. It seemed when I was the most desperate, the phone would ring and someone would be reading to me from SGI President Ikeda's guidance or the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, or sharing an experience of how they won in their lives.

For the next six months, the events that occurred were like a bad dream. Melissa started acting out what happened to her and became unpredictable and violent. Seeing her act out this way was one of the most painful experiences because I deeply felt her frustration and her inability to express what this did to her. The pain I felt made me extremely determined to relieve Melissa of her suffering no matter what I had to do.

Melissa's condition worsened, and she became very sick. Tests revealed that she had Lyme disease, which affected her brain, causing Grand Mal seizures. She required emergency assistance and hospitalization for two weeks.

Two months later, Melissa was hospitalized again for one year due to her condition. In order to continue receiving care for her, I had to testify in court

nearly every month that I was trying to place her in a school or program. The State of New Jersey set a mandatory deadline for Melissa to have a school or program placement that met her needs or she would become a ward of the State, and we would no longer have any say in her life.

Eventually, the social workers gave up, so it was totally up to me. I searched throughout New Jersey, New York state, New York City and Pennsylvania for a school, but to no avail.

In June 1998, I called Buffalo's St. Mary's School for the Deaf, and they agreed to take Melissa. It was our last chance. We packed our family up in three weeks and moved back to Buffalo.

When we arrived in Buffalo, the school refused to admit her due to the severity of her emotional state. They wanted to evaluate her more. I continued my fight for her to go to school, get counseled and be accepted in a group home. I met with the director of group homes in the area and was told that it was impossible and could take between two to five years to get Melissa into a group home.

I chanted and demanded protection from the universe. Melissa received placement that helped stabilize and qualify her to get into St. Mary's School for the Deaf, as well as group home placement within six months.

All of my dreams were realized. Since Melissa's acceptance at SMSD, she has improved remarkably and will be graduating this June. She will begin working and earning a living for the first time in her life. Dr. Adams, the psychologist at the school, has been working with her. She has now learned how to express her feelings appropriately. She is happy, and a medical team here knew exactly how to treat her seizures. She does not have them anymore. Visiting with her is such a joy! She is beautiful and living and working to bring out her greatest potential.

This victory in Melissa's life was a true victory in my human revolution. In fighting and winning through this experience, I developed the absolute confidence that Nam-myoho-enge-kyo is my life itself. Now, with every goal I set, I know I have the power to make it a reality through my prayer. As I begin my 21st year of practice this month, I feel the deepest appreciation for Nichiren Daishonin, SGI President Ikeda and all the SGI members who have supported me. Most of all, I feel tremendous appreciation for Melissa for giving me the opportunity to strengthen my faith. **WT**

FROM DIALOGUE, I

my mentor, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda, explaining the difference between someone who is smart and someone who is not, took a piece of paper and drew a single line on it. "This is the difference — the difference between being above and below this thin line," he said.

What is the difference between being above or below the line? There could be many answers, but I think essentially it is the spirit of challenge and the desire to learn. "I'll try my best!" "I'll study hard!" If you have that spirit, you can count yourself smart, no matter what others think.

Maekawa: Still, I think there are some students who will remain unconvinced of that.

Ikeda: The truth is, you have already all accomplished the impossible time and time again, though you have forgotten it. If you do not know what I am talking about, ask your parents. They remember.

When you were born, you could not do anything, and look at what you can do now! The first time you laughed, the first time you stood up on your own, the first time you talked, the first time you sat down at a desk to study, the first time you read a textbook aloud in a big voice. Each of these was impossible, until you made them possible.

For instance, the student we spoke of earlier had the courage to write a letter and succeeded in eloquently conveying his problem to others (see the Nov. 10, 2000, *World Tribune*). This is an incredible achievement.

Such efforts are the result of your developing your mental abilities.

The cerebral cortex is said to have a staggering 14 billion cells. Each of those cells is connected to the others by nerve fibers, or "cords," creating a complex network.

But this network is not connected at birth. You connect the cells, you build the network, through your efforts. When you show a newborn infant a rattle, at first it stares at it. After a while, it looks at the rattle and smiles. Then it learns to reach for the rattle, then to hold it, then to play with it and rattle it. Finally, it grows bored with the rattle and will not even look at it anymore!

Maekawa: When we learn to do something new, it means our brains are growing.



A junior high school student plays the tuba at the Interlochen Academy for the Arts, Michigan.

Ikeda: That is right. The reason a child keeps on changing and evolving is because new cords in the brain reach out, linking cell to cell, like electric cords being plugged into power outlets.

The same is true of all of you. When you try hard to do something new, there is a moment when you say to yourself, "I did it!" Or when you study hard, and finally exclaim, "I got it!" These are the moments when your brain's cords are connected, so to speak.

Each time this happens, the pathways connecting your brain cells get fatter and stronger. The more you use your brain, the stronger and more complex the communication network of your brain becomes. As a result, your responses become faster and more readily adaptable to changing situations.

Shiratsuchi: That allows your brain to accurately process more complex information.

Your brain loves to learn and study.

Ikeda: What is the brain's greatest enemy? The thought "I cannot do it!" When you think you cannot do something, your brain puts on the brakes. When you give up, that negative thought interrupts your brain's attempt to make the all-important connection. Then you reach a dead end, and you never understand the thing you were trying to understand.

Shiratsuchi: That does not mean you are stupid. It is just that you are not giving your brain a chance to make the necessary connection.

Ikeda: The brain loves to learn. It loves to study. But when you decide "I cannot do it," you are limiting the potential of your brain.

Shiratsuchi: That means that people who say they were born dumb and use that as an excuse not to make any effort cause their brains to rust and fall into disuse. It is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Ikeda: If you look carefully at people who seem to be born smart, you will see that they are making an effort to learn, even if others do not always see it. When it comes down to it, a smart person is a person who does not give up, no matter what. When he finds something he does not understand, he does not let that stop him. He keeps pushing himself, determined to grasp it. A person with that mental strength is smart.

The same is true beyond school, in society. The person who does not try to escape from things he does not understand, who does not try to escape from difficulty, will always win in the end.

You are all training your minds and your spirits for that time.

Maekawa: When you run up against something you do not understand, you can either give up or keep trying.

Ikeda: The student who wrote the letter we were discussing earlier is worried that his classmates are leaving him behind. The very fact that he is worrying is important, I think. He is trying to move forward, and that is why he has run into a wall. A person who is not trying to

move ahead will not hit any obstacles. He does not worry about anything, and that is why he does not grow.

When you do not understand your classes, it is painful, it is hard. But that is the time to persevere and keep challenging yourself, not to escape.

The important thing is to start from what you can do. If possible, find one thing you are good at and start from there. The self-confidence that "I can do it if I try!" is the best medicine for improving your brain.

It can be sports, music or some extracurricular club activity. The human brain is built so that if you accomplish one thing, you will naturally adapt that ability to accomplish other things.

Be brave, and ask your teachers about what you do not understand. Ask them for advice on how you should study. If you cannot do it during class, do it during recess or after school.

You may feel embarrassed at first, but the other students will be impressed, even if they do not say so. Teachers like students who ask questions. They like them a lot better than students who just sit there and pretend to understand.

Maekawa: Even if you think you pretty much understand something, if you ask the teacher you may get a much better understanding and make surprising new discoveries.

Suffering and joy are always linked.

Ikeda: Study is hard, very hard. That is why it is so enjoyable when you finally understand what you are studying. Suffering and joy are linked. This is true in all things.

Your parents and teachers may get mad at me for what I am about to say, but I think that if you make your best effort and your grades still do not improve, that is OK. Because far more important than any short-term results is getting into the habit of trying your best, the habit of always putting in 100 percent — be it in your studies or whatever.

If you succeed in that, you will find yourself growing stronger and developing your ability. And you will eventually come to discover your mission in life.

The habit of always trying your hardest and doing your best is the shovel for mining the rich store of your potential as a human being. If you acquire the habit of persevering, you will succeed in the end — even if it takes time. The important thing is not to give up until you succeed.

And remember, studying is not a duty, it is a right. There are many children around the world who want to go to school but cannot.

Shiratsuchi: If you think of it as a duty, you become passive, and it becomes a burden.

Maekawa: If you think of it as a right, you become active, and it is fun.

The person who perseveres always wins in the end.

Ikeda: Anyway, during the years of junior high school, you will experience many things. The enjoyable things seem to flash by in an instant, and the unpleasant ones seem to drag on forever.

But when you look back, everything in these years will seem to have flown by as quickly as lightning. The important thing is to just hang in there. Please know that the person who perseveres will win in the end.

Never compare yourself to others. In the story of the tortoise and the hare, the reason why the tortoise won had nothing to do with the fact that the hare was his opponent. The tortoise just ran the race in his own way, without haste, at his own speed, doing his absolute best, without stopping, one step at a time. The person who wins in the end is like this.

I hope you will always say to yourself: "Today, I advanced one more step than I did yesterday. Tomorrow I will try to move forward a little further than I did today."

May you live each day of your life this way. **WT**

SGI TRAINING COURSE IMPRESSIONS

Twenty-two SGI-USA members and leaders attended a training course in Japan Nov. 7–15, 2000 to commemorate the Soka Gakkai's 70th anniversary. In total, 330 members from 55 countries and regions participated in many meetings, guidance opportunities and exchanges, receiving encouragement to last a lifetime.

Never Practice in Isolation

By CLAUDIA HEIMAN
BOSTON

'What I gained from this trip,' says Claudia Heiman, 'is the realization that we are all in this together.'

On the morning of Nov. 10, 2000, my third day in Japan, I woke up miserable, exhausted from jet lag and feeling like I was coming down with the flu. The high life-condition I had manifested earlier in the week, full of excitement at meeting members from all over the world, seeing SGI President Ikeda for the first time at the monthly Headquarters Leaders



Photos by LISA KIRK

my usual self-slander.

Here I was, finally in Japan, a dream of mine since the beginning of my seven-year practice, on the last training course of the 20th century, at the joyous occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai. How could I feel so heavy and out of rhythm with everyone and everything? How could I waste this precious opportunity?

After bursting into tears later that morning during a rehearsal of our SGI-USA musical presen-

Meeting, plus wonderful sightseeing around Tokyo, had completely evaporated. I immediately began

ation, "We Shall Overcome," I had a long conversation with two incredibly encouraging women, Mary Oberman of Brooklyn, N.Y., and Chern-Chern Chien of Columbus, Ohio. Chern-Chern spoke of an experience SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima shared at a meeting in Chicago, about his visit to Hawaii a few months before. During his visit, the lovely Hawaiian climate erupted into a terrible storm. Unique to this storm, however, was the fact that there was a brilliant rainbow right through the thunder and lightning. How could a rainbow emerge in such a tempest? Danny described that this phenomena was due to the power of the sun, which in the context of

our lives, is our prayer and determination. Even when obstacles rage around us like an electrical storm, if our prayer is strong enough, we can make a rainbow right in the middle of our harshest circumstances. The mess of the storm is not something we have to wait around to expiate. Rather, our obstacles are something we use and transform right now to leverage our Buddhahood from our lives.

I felt refreshed after our conversation and returned to my room to chant, with the raw determination that I would feel better and enjoy my experience in Japan, no matter what! I also realized that this transformation of my negativity was long overdue.

Just the day before, President Ikeda had said that although we face many problems and difficulties, the only thing that is important is our life condition. Whatever we decide on, we must do it and not look back. So I pushed myself through a half hour of daimoku, trying to raise my life-condition and bring the

sun out of my life. "When life is a storm, make a rainbow!" Each minute I chanted with this intensity, it felt like a year of karmic weight lifted.

From this, I experienced firsthand that effort does not give you hope, effort is hope. As a result, my day and week in Japan and my practice changed dramatically.

What I gained from this trip is the realization that every aspect of human revolution involves a win-or-lose struggle, and that we're all in this together. It's a fight to keep going, and it's a fight to open oneself to encouragement from others. SGI Vice Women's Leader Yumiko Hachiya told the SGI-USA women and young women: "We must never practice in isolation. We can only develop through interaction with other people."

Going on this training trip has convinced me of the power of our practice and the incredible mission of our beloved SGI. I am eternally grateful to our wonderful Soka family for the years of encouragement and support I have received. **WT**

A Transcendent Relationship

By MARY OBERMAN
BROOKLYN, N.Y.

Mary Oberman says, 'The mentor-disciple relationship enables us to achieve lofty, long-term objectives that can affect generations to come.'

I felt extremely fortunate to attend the November 2000 training course in Japan. I was eager to see how members from other countries practiced and to develop my understanding of Buddhism to better support the SGI-USA members back home in Brooklyn, N.Y. Besides wonderful guidance from SGI President Ikeda and top SGI leaders, I heard many awe-inspiring experiences of members struggling to spread Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism around the world.

One member, inspired by an anecdote that President Ikeda had written about Shakyamuni's disciple Purna, who asks permission from Shakyamuni to go to a country in the east to propagate Buddhism, left his secure home in Hungary several years ago and moved to Yugoslavia to spread



dured a harsh dictatorship and NATO bombings to do it.

An Indonesian member reported on his country's struggle with Nichiren Shoshu after the general director left the organization and joined High Priest Nikken Abe in attacking the SGI. When the SGI members in Indonesia were organized into a headquarters in 1992, the membership consisted of 30 people spread over the 3,000 miles of the islands that make up the Republic of Indonesia. The priesthood, at one point, convinced the government that the SGI was a communist organization and succeeded in having the organization's registration with the religious ministry canceled. We heard that police were bribed to disrupt Gakkai meetings. The members persevered, and now the Indonesian organization has 1,000 members with eight community centers.

I spoke to individuals from Africa, South America and southern Europe, who were

the Law. His desire to help others become happy by practicing Buddhism was so strong that he endured a harsh dictatorship and NATO bombings to do it.

struggling to spread this Buddhism in the midst of economic turmoil, as well as societal and political instability. Others were striving to establish an organization in their countries, building the membership and working to forge the external relationships in society necessary to gain acceptance.

These stories made me feel like a pampered poodle. In the face of such Herculean efforts, my difficulties seemed to melt away to nothing. It also became clear to me how crucial America's role is in the kosen-rufu movement. One member commented: "Other countries watch what America is doing. When President Ikeda is truly recognized in America, and when this Buddhism gains acceptance in the United States, it will help pave the way for the rest of us."

The fact is that the United States' power, prosperity and influence on the world is unmatched. It is a diverse and democratic country, with a culture more open to change than that of many older nations. It makes sense that we are in a unique position to take the lead for worldwide kosen-rufu.

This training course made it clear to me that the only way to continue to develop our move-

ment is by sticking close to President Ikeda. It was obvious that these overseas members had persevered and achieved remarkable results based on their connection to President Ikeda and the mentor-disciple relationship. In the United States, too, our success will hinge on the strength of the members' connection to President Ikeda.

The meaning of the mentor-disciple relationship crystallized for me when I saw a Soka University banner in first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi's handwriting. Although Soka University was established after his death, it was originally President Makiguchi's dream. What courage and vision Mr. Makiguchi had, to fight for a compassionate system of education in Japan at a time when schools were used primarily to produce loyal subjects to the emperor and the World War II military regime.

Believing in his mentor's dream, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda agreed that Makiguchi should publish his ideas and record them for posterity. But Makiguchi was too busy to draft a manuscript from start to finish and had time only to jot down notes whenever he had a few minutes to spare.

Toda collected all of Makiguchi's notes, arranging them by subject on tatami mats, and eventually compiled them. He then used the little money he had to publish them. Although neither man would live to see the establishment of Soka University and the Soka school system, their dreams would still be realized because of President Ikeda and the mentor-disciple relationship.

In the difficult years after World War II, President Toda told his followers that one day this Buddhism would be practiced by people all over the world. A youth from that time told us how much that dream had inspired them, although, based on their poverty and other difficulties, it seemed hard to believe. Though Toda never traveled outside of Japan, President Ikeda lived to actualize his mentor's dream. We now have SGI members in 163 countries and territories.

I am still chanting to understand what that I experienced means. I do know that I need to dream fearlessly, as our three presidents did, and work toward my goals, undeterred by how impossible they seem based on my immediate circumstances. And I want to incorporate President Ikeda's compassion and his vision for America deep in my life, so that I can work toward making that vision for peace a reality. **WT**

N E W S S G I - U S A

SGI Family Celebrates in Kauai

On Nov. 22, 2000, along with SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima, members on the island of Kauai opened the first-ever SGI-USA activity center.

The atmosphere of the opening was full of joy and appreciation. Three generations of SGI-USA members celebrated the culmination of decades of efforts to establish the organization on this paradise island.

"Even though currently there is only one small chapter on this

island," said Mr. Nagashima, "you are creating an organization based on the origin of the Soka Gakkai. Everyone here cares and works together."

During the celebration, there was an instrumental performance by a woman and two young men who played music from different movies such as *Titanic*. Several pioneer members also performed a traditional Japanese dance.

The event was filled with the *Ohana nui* (big family) spirit. **WT**

Photos by EUGENE HIRAHARA



Women celebrate the new activity center with a traditional Japanese dance.



Members enjoy the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the SGI-USA's first activity center on the island of Kauai, Nov. 22, 2000.

30 Years of Effort Realized in Austin

Photos by GREGORY NAKASUI



SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima (second from right) joins members in Austin, Texas, at the opening of their new activity center, Dec. 6, 2000.

On Dec. 6, 2000, the SGI-USA Austin Activity Center was officially opened. The opening featured two ceremonies, both with packed houses.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima explained that the new activity centers now opening are intended for the use of local organizations that are not yet able to support a full community center but whose members are still sincerely

working to advance the SGI's movement. In early 2000, the SGI-USA board of directors approved the opening of many such centers across the country.

The Austin members had been waiting to have a center to call their own for more than 30 years. The meetings were full of appreciation for the pioneers of the Austin organization and members' determinations to continue their efforts for *kosen-rufu*. **WT**



At the opening of the Austin Activity Center, local members celebrate more than 30 years of efforts for *kosen-rufu*.

C E N T E R S O P E N

Houston Opens Relocated Center

On Dec. 8 and 9, 2000, two meetings were held to commemorate the long awaited opening of the relocated SGI-USA Houston Community Center.

At the Dec. 8 meeting, the Houston Mayor's Office bestowed honorary citizenships on SGI President and Mrs. Ikeda, and proclaimed Dec. 8 to be Soka Gakkai International-USA Day.

The commemorative meetings included performances by

a pioneer chorus, a four-divisional chorus, the Boys and Girls Group and a group of women sharing a traditional Indian dance.

"Wow!" said SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima. "You are all so enthusiastic! I can really feel everyone's determination to unite with one another even more to create a great, harmonious SGI family here in Houston." **WT**



Members enjoy performances at a meeting commemorating the opening of the relocated Houston Community Center.



Photos by GREGORY NAKASUJI

Houston members officially open their relocated community center on Dec. 8, 2000, after an exhaustive search for the best possible facility.

Orlando Marks Milestone With New Center



Photo by GREGORY NAKASUJI

Orlando members commemorate the opening of their community center on Dec. 9, 2000.

By OLABISI FOWLER

ORLANDO, FLA., CORRESPONDENT

On Dec. 9, 2000, SGI-USA members throughout central and northern Florida gathered from as far away as Jacksonville, Tampa, Palm Coast, Daytona Beach, Cocoa Beach, south Florida and Sarasota to commemorate the official opening of the Orlando Community Center.

It was a joyous celebration after four years of struggle, patience and resolve that saw the members getting the best possible facility for their continued activities.

Interior designer Theresa Palmer described the ongoing ef-

fort to turn the former structure into the classic shape of a community center: "This year-long project has been a series of inner changes. I know I have to keep moving forward as all my efforts in SGI are reflected in my daily life."

One of the first Orlando-area members, Masae Worcester, gushed about the new center: "It's beautiful. I can't believe it. I am so happy!"

Beverly Remland, area women's leader, commented: "I feel this is truly a new beginning for Orlando, that there is a new sense of confidence about sharing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Our local organization feels more established." **WT**



Photo by NORIKO KAKUSHO

Members enjoy the opening of the Orlando Community Center.

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

Buddhism Is an Open Forum

‘An open forum for dialogue, where all can share their thoughts freely — this is the world of Buddhism,’ SGI President Ikeda writes in praise of SGI-Italy. ‘In contrast, authoritarianism that creates a closed, oppressive atmosphere cannot hope to deeply convince anyone of Buddhism’s greatness.’

It was 19 years ago, on May 28, 1981. I was on another long journey for world peace and kosen-rufu, and had just completed visits to the Soviet Union, West Germany, Bulgaria and Austria. On that May afternoon, my party and I disembarked at Pisa International Airport to make our way to Florence. It was my sixth trip to Italy, two decades after my first visit there, in 1961.

And it was two years after my 1979 resignation as third Soka Gakkai president. In Japan, I found myself in a situation where, because of the insidious schemes of a traitor and the impediments created by the envy-ridden priesthood, I was still unable to freely attend meetings, and this saddened many of our members.

My feeling was, however, that though my movement in Japan might be restricted, there was still a big, wide world waiting beyond its shores. I decided that I would stand up as SGI president and launch a fresh phase of kosen-rufu, making the entire world the focus of my activities.

I put that decision into action. And so it was that I visited the beautiful city of Florence — renowned birthplace of the Renaissance — and began my work of bringing a glorious new flower of kosen-rufu into bloom.

On the fourth day of my stay, May 31, a friendship and culture general meeting was held under sunny skies to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the kosen-rufu movement in Italy. The meeting took place in a lovely green field on the outskirts of Florence, city of poetry. Our members came from all over Italy, filled with exuberance and excitement.

To the strains of “O Sole Mio” (O, My Sun!), 80 members from Rome, 180 from Milan, 160 from Turin and 240 from Florence, as well as members from other cities and regions, poured into the grounds. The majority of them were in

their 20s. Members from the United Kingdom and France also joined us that day. The air was filled with youthful vitality and a bubbling enthusiasm to work for kosen-rufu toward the 21st century.

Youth! For me, these young people spelled the shining sun of hope!

In a discussion with Italian members the previous day, I had said, my heart filled with emotion: “When the sun rises, the earth is illuminated. Those who embrace the Buddhism of the sun, by their very presence in their families and their communities, bring happiness to all people, just as the sun brings its light to all the world.”

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For a long time, the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in Italy progressed slowly. It was people such as present SGI-Italy General Director Mitsuhiro Kaneda and Vice General Director Tadayasu Kanzaki who threw themselves earnestly into the challenge of breaking through the daunting obstacles that blocked the way forward.

Mr. Kaneda arrived in Italy from Japan in 1969, and the following year, at age 30, he was appointed the Italy Chapter leader. But the chapter was still so small that discussion meetings were held at only one venue in Rome. Almost all the members were Japanese, and Mr. Kaneda, the leader, could speak little Italian.

Though he worked hard to develop the Soka Gakkai movement in Italy for several years, no new members joined. Only the same small group of members gathered together month after month.

Sometimes, Mr. Kaneda felt that all his painstaking daily efforts were in vain — as futile as trying to empty the vast ocean with a tiny cup. However, after racking his brains long and hard over the problem, he reached the conclusion that the key lay in returning to the basics. In

other words, he had to first foster one person.

At the time, many young Italians were deeply disillusioned with society and politics, and were aimlessly drifting through life. The Italian Soka Gakkai members in those early days went out and engaged such young people in dialogue, patiently explaining to them the unerring life-compass to be found in the Daishonin’s philosophy and the way of inner transformation known as human revolution.

The members thoroughly supported those who decided to start practicing Buddhism. They carefully taught them the basics of faith, until they had established a consistent practice of gongyo and daimoku, regularly attended discussion meetings and gained a strong conviction in how the power of faith related to their daily lives and society.

The members’ devotion, their incredibly sincere and humanistic spirit to cherish and respect each person, inspired one Italian youth after another to stand up in faith. The astonishing positive growth of these young people, in turn, opened the eyes of their parents to Buddhism.

In this way, the Italian members put into practice a formula that has been articulated by the great Italian thinker Giuseppe Mazzini: The secret of strength lies in constancy and unity of effort.

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Q-and-A sessions have become a fine, well-known tradition of SGI-Italy.

In Q-and-A sessions, we can see the different perspectives people have toward life, religion and the meaning of happiness. By having to rise to the challenge of answering an onslaught of penetrating questions, the central figures in the organization also have the opportunity to humbly deepen their understanding of Buddhism.

An open forum for dialogue, where all can share their thoughts freely — this is the world of Buddhism. In contrast, authoritarianism that creates a closed, oppressive atmosphere — like that evidenced in Nichiren Shoshu — cannot hope to deeply convince anyone of Buddhism’s greatness.

Some six centuries ago, Coluccio Salutati, chancellor of



Local members welcome SGI President Ikeda at Milan Station, June 1981. ‘First, let’s aim for 20 years in the future!’ he encouraged the Italian youth.

Florence, wrote that it is a mistake to believe that the path to self-perfection lies in separating oneself from others, in turning one’s back on all attractions, in hiding away in a monastery far from human habitation. I agree completely.

We must go into the midst of the people! We must be involved with people’s lives! We must participate in the wide forum of dialogue! This is the way to be truly human! This is the spirit of the Renaissance, which broke the rusty chains binding humanity and extolled the joy of ordinary people’s lives.

In the early days of the kosen-rufu movement in Italy, a new, vibrant Renaissance of Life began to take place, born from earnest, heart-to-heart dialogue.

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During those nine golden days in Italy in 1981, I devoted almost all my time, from morning to night, to meeting and talking with my beloved fellow members. I held dozens of informal discussions and personal guidance sessions.

And I still remember fondly, as if it were yesterday, the walk I took through the streets of Florence one day with several young people, among them a number of students, who were brightly working toward the future. They showed me the home of the great Italian poet Dante and other noteworthy sights: the Piazza della Signoria and the Palazzo Vecchio; the two-story bridge, the Ponte Vecchio, spanning the Arno River; the Piazzale Michelangelo and the hills of Florence. Walking along the stone-paved streets and resting in the shade of the trees, we talked to our hearts’ content. We were comrades in faith. The future belonged to these youth — they were precious treasures that I wanted to cherish above all else.

Later, in Milan, thinking of the day I would crown them with the laurels of victory, I called out to the youth, the young champions of kosen-rufu of Italy: “First, let’s aim for 20 years in the future! Continuing in faith is vital, my young friends! Please never stray from the realm of Soka!”

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Eleven years later, in June 1992, when I made my seventh trip to Italy, those same young people were waiting for me. And the growth and development they had achieved were dazzling. I recognized them — that young man, that young woman! Each and every one was a brilliant living example of the greatness of the Mystic Law, of manifesting faith in society. It was clear that all had made great strides in human revolution, that all had become fine leaders of kosen-rufu.

They had built a force of young fellow members that was dozens of times larger than it had been on my last visit. In fact, in those 11 years, our membership in Italy had increased 50 times.

We now had an SGI Italy Culture Center, in a building once connected to the Medici family, the great patrons of the Italian Renaissance. This precious citadel, renowned in days past as a Palace of Wonderful Enjoyments, now resounded with the happy cheers of victory of the pioneers of the Renaissance of Life, who based their lives on the Mystic Law that brings true joy and ease.

The 20-year goal that the Italian youth and I pledged to strive for in 1981 is fast approaching. In Italy in October, with the year 2001 only a short time away, some 29,973 people attended discussion meetings in 2,600 lo-

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the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

'SECURING THE FOUNDATION'

VOLUME 8, CHAPTER 1, PARTS 17-18

The Soka Gakkai is officially recognized as a religious corporation in the United States, becoming the first Soka Gakkai organization overseas to gain such legal status.

Emotion filled Shin'ichi Yamamoto's voice as he concluded his speech at the Seniors Gathering: "There are young people who are old and older people who are young. The key to staying young is to possess a flexible mind that constantly strives for self-improvement. At the same time, how we live our final years determines our ultimate happiness in life. No matter how wonderful and happy our lives may have been in the past, nothing could be more tragic than ending up miserable, bitter and full of complaint.

"Happiness is not a matter of wealth, nor is it determined by social status or fame. Rather, our happiness is determined by whether we can live always with a sense of purpose and mission, regardless of our age.

"The fact that each of you, our seniors in life, has practiced faith wholeheartedly and is living each day in high spirits,

with tremendous energy and hope, is the greatest proof of the validity of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I close my remarks today with sincere prayers for your continued health and longevity."

The Seniors Gathering thus concluded.

Shin'ichi was scheduled next to meet with the Soka Gakkai directors at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters. Upon leaving the stage, however, he headed directly for the main entrance of the auditorium to greet and encourage the elderly members on their way out.

No one lives forever. Realizing that there were members present whom he might never have the chance to meet again, Shin'ichi seized the opportunity to speak with every person he could.

Grasping the hand of one elderly woman, he said: "Thank you for coming today. May I ask how old you are?"

"I'm 83," she replied. "I can't believe it! You look so young. Please take good care of yourself!"

Beautiful smiles lit the members' faces as they reached out to squeeze Shin'ichi's hand. Some were so happy that their eyes filled with tears.

Words are light. A single kind word can shine a ray of hope into a person's heart. Shin'ichi put all his energy into speaking with the members, showering them with words of inspiration, praise and courage.

Later that month, on May 24, the Soka Gakkai was officially recognized as a religious corporation in the United States, becoming the first Soka Gakkai organization overseas to gain such legal status. In accord with Shin'ichi's vision of the worldwide propagation of the Daishonin's teachings, a pioneering step had been taken—a solid foundation for the future of the Soka Gakkai in America had been secured.

The May Headquarters Leaders Meeting was held on the 25th at the Nihon University Auditorium in Ryogoku, Tokyo. New organizational units were established on a large scale. Two new headquarters were formed—the second Chubu Headquarters and Hyogo Headquarters—along with 29 general chapters and 69 chapters nationwide. Thus, the Soka Gakkai now consisted of 20 headquarters, 87 general chapters and 463 chapters.

All vice general directors, starting with General Director Koichi Harayama, were appointed as headquarters leaders. This meant that the top-ranking leaders would now stand at the forefront of the organization and take the lead in Soka Gakkai activities. Kazumasa Morikawa and Yukio Ishikawa were also appointed as new vice general directors.

Furthermore, an Institute of



Illustrations by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

Asian Culture was established in Kansai to parallel the Institute of Oriental Studies in Tokyo, and Yoshihiko Ohya was made its head.

President Yamamoto's decision to carry out such a major expansion of the organization came from his determination to begin a full-fledged stage of advancement in the spread of the Daishonin's Buddhism toward the seventh memorial (sixth anniversary) of Josei Toda's death on April 2, the following year. Shin'ichi keenly sensed that he must build a strong foundation for worldwide kosen-rufu during his lifetime. If he did not, the wonderful opportunity to teach others of the Daishonin's philosophy that now presented itself some 700 years after the time of the Daishonin would be lost forever. That is why he was resolved to forge ahead valiantly, using every ounce of his strength.

No one, not even the top leaders, knew of Shin'ichi's profound determination. They were simply astonished at the remarkable progress that had been made since he became president; some were even satisfied in thinking that the Soka Gakkai had grown large enough. Shin'ichi had

accepted the Daishonin's will for the widespread propagation of Buddhism as his personal mission and devoted his entire life to it, but a wide gap was starting to form between his attitude and that of the leaders who lacked such dedication.

As he surveyed the newly appointed leaders at the Headquarters Leaders Meeting, Shin'ichi vowed in his heart that he would raise them to become true comrades in faith who shared his commitment and awareness.

The success of kosen-rufu depends entirely on people. The Daishonin writes: "The Law does not spread by itself. Because the people spread it, both the people and the Law are worthy of respect" (*Goshu Zenshu*, p. 856).

Essential to the transmission of the Law are people of conviction who are selflessly dedicated to serving others while basing themselves entirely on that Law, not on self-centered desires. It requires people of integrity, justice, courage, sincerity, wisdom and firm resolve.

Daisaku Ikeda appears in the novel as Shin'ichi Yamamoto. The events take place in 1963.



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cations across the country—from the Alps in the north to the islands of the Mediterranean in the south. The members are now determined to break through the 30,000-attendance barrier next.

Action determines the value we create in life. Indeed, faith exists only in action. Faith is action.

The Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that our actions reflect our faith. And the immeasurable benefit we receive by im-

plementing this principle is just as the Daishonin describes in his writings.

Renaissance is a never-ending process. It is always striving for fresh growth. It is always looking toward the future.

The sun of the new century

is dawning! My beloved Italian friends, let us advance, singing a song of triumph of the human spirit in full voice, while drawing forth the inexhaustible spring of hope and joy from the vast earth of life that has existed from

time without beginning!

This essay was published in the "Thoughts on *The New Human Revolution*" series in the Oct. 17 *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper.

United Nations: Born From the Tragedy of War

A Record of My Life
by Daisaku Ikeda

'It is easy to criticize the United Nations as ineffective and redundant,' writes SGI President Ikeda. 'But it is essential to remember that the United Nations, born from the tragedy of two world wars, is the world's sole parliament of humankind.'

The autumn breeze blowing amid the skyscrapers also etched ripples into the surface of the Hudson River. The trees of Central Park spurred images of old Musashino [an area of western Tokyo once known for its natural beauty]. Standing in stark contrast to such living poetry, the national flags of countries worldwide encircling the parliament of humankind appeared somehow forlorn.

On Oct. 14, 1960, I visited the U.N. Headquarters in New York. The 15th U.N. General Assembly was in regular session, and I had the opportunity to observe both committee and plenary proceedings that day.

I was particularly impressed by the vibrant expressions worn by the representatives of the various African states present as they energetically moved about the lobby and the conference chamber. The countries of Africa, having only just gained their independence after a long period of colonial rule, were faced with many difficult problems in such areas as politics, economics, education and human rights. But many of the leaders I saw that day were youthful, brimming with fresh energy and the pride of having won their independence.

Images of then Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev standing at the podium waving his large arms and pounding the table as he harshly condemned the United States and the Western camp were broadcast from this General Assembly meeting throughout the world. The rebuttals of Western bloc representatives, who took Khrushchev's attack as an in-



President Kennedy meets with U.S. Army officials during the Cuban Missile Crisis of October–November 1962, which almost turned the Cold War into a world war.

tentional provocation, were also aired. That was two years before the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, which shook the entire world.

The supposedly easing tensions between the Eastern and Western blocs took a turn for the worse, and the icy storm of conflicting ideologies began to rage anew. Incensed by the mayhem that proceeded to engulf the session, the chairman pounded his gavel and declared a recess. In his fury, he struck the gavel with such force that it broke.

I visited the U.N. Headquarters the day after Khrushchev and his party returned to their country. At the time, I thought to myself: "The Cold War between East and West has grown volatile. But even though an end is not in sight, that day will surely come — no, that day *must* come, no matter what."

That was my first overseas trip. The Soka Gakkai had not yet been recognized internationally. It was only the beginning of our global activities. I was determined, nevertheless, to construct a people's movement for peace in order to see that dream realized.

Later, in conjunction with the SGI's inauguration in January 1975, we began promoting activities in support of the United Nations. I again visited the U.N. Headquarters that January to present a petition with 10 million signatures collected by the Soka Gakkai youth division calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. The sheets of signatures, which had been gathered at a time when people's memories of the nuclear

bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were fading, measured almost two-and-a-half inches thick per 10,000. Stacked all together, the 10 million signatures had a thickness of more than 216 feet. In bound form, they filled 1,144 volumes. At the United Nations, I directly presented three of these volumes to the secretary-general.

I have also submitted proposals on three separate occasions to special sessions of the U.N. General Assembly on Disarmament, which first convened in 1978. These include a proposal to the third special session submitted in June 1988 calling for the initiation of a "U.N. Decade of Peace and Disarmament" leading up to the 21st century, in order to heighten awareness of the issue of disarmament and ensure its realization.

I further proposed that a ministry of peace be set up in each country to foster a global current of popular opinion in favor of the movement. I am only a private citizen, but through voicing what I felt needed to be said, I hoped to give my support to the United Nations' efforts to reduce arms worldwide.

Many years have passed since my first visit to the U.N. Headquarters. The international body has at last begun to recognize the importance of nongovernmental organizations, which aim to advance the interests of humankind, going beyond the level of national interest. Things have changed to the extent that the U.N. top brass now listens to the suggestions of private citizens.

I have had the opportunity to

meet and hold dialogues with a number of U.N. secretary-generals. One of these was Dr. Javier Pérez de Cuellar, the fifth secretary-general, whose upright demeanor exudes genuine nobility and candor. When we met in Tokyo in November 1990, I recited a poem from his native Peru to provide him with a momentary respite from his exhausting duties. In response, this cultured individual immediately launched into a discussion of the beauty of Japanese haiku.

I have also met a number of times with Dr. Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the sixth secretary-general of the United Nations. He describes himself as having spent half of his life with a view of the Nile. He is a strong-willed, optimistic person. His bright eyes, which are forever smiling, must be a gift of that mighty river.

I met both former U.N. secretary-generals four times each.

Josei Toda held profound expectations for the United Nations.

In an interesting coincidence, my mentor Josei Toda's release from prison, on July 3, 1945, nearly coincided with the signing of the U.N. Charter, on June 26 the same year. Mr. Toda, who called for a global citizenship and who keenly sensed the need for organizations that transcend the framework of the state, held profound expectations for the United Nations. [At a youth division meeting in February 1952, Mr. Toda declared that the extension of his thought lay in the idea of global citizenship, a philosophy of universal human-

ism that transcends all distinctions of nationality, ethnicity and ideology.]

"The United Nations is the crystallization of the wisdom of the 20th century," he would state emphatically. "This stronghold of hope must be resolutely protected and cultivated toward the next century."

Mr. Toda had closely watched Japan as it withdrew from the League of Nations in 1933 and proceeded toward war. He had also experienced the loss of his mentor, first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who had died in prison after being incarcerated under Japan's Peace Preservation Law, which attempted to control people's thoughts, so the war effort could be carried out. His expectations of the United Nations were thus all the higher.

As a Buddhist, and in keeping with my mentor's instructions, I have consistently taken action to promote the United Nations as a central governing body for the world. Many of the intellectuals and world leaders with whom I have met over the years have also subscribed to this view.

These include André Malraux, the French thinker and activist who is said to have lived a hundred lives for all that he accomplished. During our discussions, his light-green eyes glistened sharply as he remarked, "The United Nations is a stage of specters." In his caustic way of expression, he was voicing his desire to see the United Nations working actively for world peace.

There was also Arnold J. Toynbee, whom I met at his Oakwood Court apartment complex in London. Everything at the time was bathed in the serene sunshine of May. We sat next to each other on the sofa in his guestroom. At one point, Dr. Toynbee slapped my knee and firmly stated: "The United Nations may still be incomplete in many areas, but it is our only hope for peace. The only way to unify and bring harmony to humankind is by supporting and fostering the United Nations through patience and tenacity."

And there was the American entrepreneur Armand Hammer, who was constantly crisscrossing the globe, working as a bridge between the United States and the Soviet Union. He spoke ardently of the need to ease tensions between East and West, and of his expectations for the United Nations. This

great individual of more than 90 years burned with intense passion.

It was cold out the evening we met and, being the native of Russia that he was, he joked that it was "a night that makes you want your samovar." I also remember a time early one summer when, during a stopover in the course of one of his overseas trips, Dr. Hammer chartered a helicopter from Tokyo Narita International Airport to pay me a visit at Soka University.

Protecting the United Nations is the correct path toward peace.

There are certainly many large hurdles yet to overcome. And it is easy to criticize the United Nations as ineffective and redundant. But it is essential to remember that the United Nations, born from the tragedy of two world wars, is the world's sole parliament of humankind.

In June 1999, I met with former U.N. under-secretary-general Yasushi Akashi, a long-time acquaintance. He is the first Japanese to become a U.N. official and also the first Japanese under-secretary-general. Mr. Akashi is also well known for his activities as head of the U.N. Transitional Authority in Cambodia. Having met him many times before, I can say that he is an international person who carries himself with a cool composure and inner fortitude characteristic of those from Akita Prefecture in northern Japan.

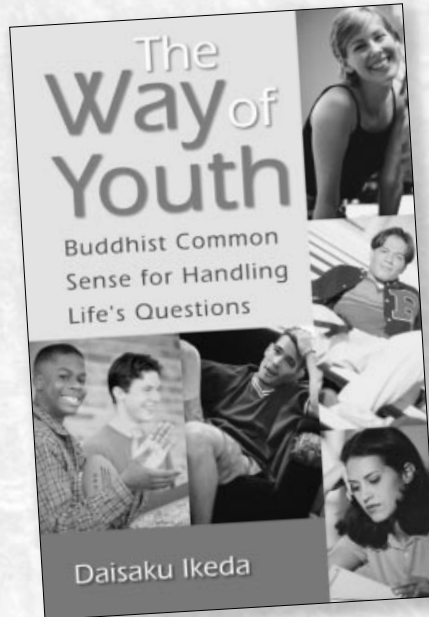
Based on his 40-year experience as an international civil servant, he stresses that the advantages and disadvantages of the United Nations should be measured with an "extra-long yardstick." There is no other international organization or country capable of handling global issues, he shares, adding that to reject the United Nations is as productive as "spitting at the sky."

I felt his comment that an "extra-long yardstick" should be used was most appropriate. It is important not to be caught up in immediate matters but to look at things with a long-term perspective.

When we look ahead with our eyes wide open, the path along which we need to advance comes naturally into view. I believe it vital to protect the United Nations at all costs and to promote its further development. This is the correct path toward peace.

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Raising Awareness in Milwaukee

Photos by RICHARD BUBLITZ

By **ANDREW GARFIELD**
MADISON, WIS., CORRESPONDENT

More than six months of behind-the-scenes efforts by SGI-USA members paid off with the showing of the Victory Over Violence exhibition in the main rotunda of the Milwaukee County Courthouse, Nov. 13-17, helping to raise awareness of violence in the community.

In addition to the VOV exhibition itself, which featured photomurals and a video provided by the Youth Peace Committee of SGI-USA, the event included an exhibition of artwork by children in the Milwaukee Public Schools and SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group members throughout Wisconsin. Two brightly colored displays of 1,000 origami cranes, folded and hung decoratively by women's division members, also drew compliments from passers-by.

The event culminated in a visit on the final day from Milwaukee Mayor John O. Norquist, who presented organizers with a proclamation designating Nov. 18, 2000, as SGI-USA Victory Over Violence Day. The proclamation lauds the contributions made by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda to peace and education, and recognizes the efforts of Milwaukee SGI-USA youth to create a peaceful society.

Wisconsin members staffing the event called the public response overwhelming, as they collected more than 1,700 signatures for the VOV



Milwaukee Mayor John O. Norquist presents SGI-USA members with a proclamation designating Nov. 18, 2000, as SGI-USA Victory Over Violence Day. (L-r) Michiko Holiday, Andrew Garfield, Janice Lambright, Mayor Norquist, Jackie Lee and Jean Kovac

pledge. Many of those who signed requested extra copies of the pledge bookmark and VOV button to give to friends and family. Taking three extra bookmarks, one woman remarked that she thought reading the pledge would positively inspire her chil-

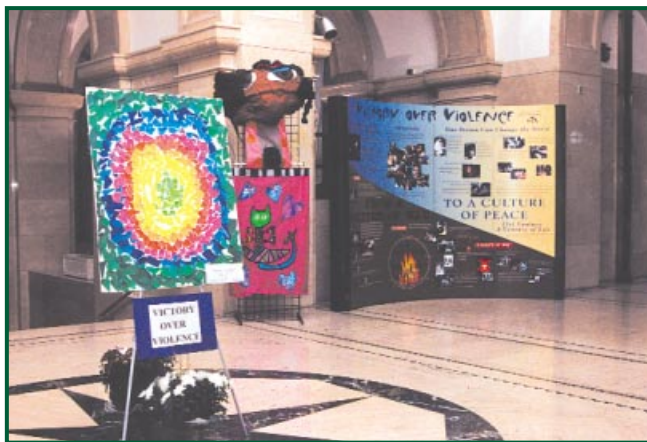
dren, who often encounter violence in their neighborhoods and schools.

Wisconsin Area Leader Jean Kovac commented: "This was our first effort to reach out to the community on such a large scale and all aspects of it were successful. Inviting people to

sign the VOV pledge, in particular, gave us a great opportunity to talk about the power of one person to change society."

The event also served as a holiday collection site for the donation of new, unwrapped "peaceful" toys for Sojourner Truth House, a Milwaukee-

area shelter for victims of domestic abuse. Barbara Kueny, development director of the shelter, said, "We support this effort to raise awareness of the devastating effects of violence, especially on children, who represent our future." WT



(Left) More than 1,700 people signed the Victory Over Violence pledge during the event. (Above) The Victory Over Violence exhibition was shown in the main rotunda of the Milwaukee County Courthouse, Nov. 13-17. (Right) The event included an exhibition of artwork by children in the Milwaukee Public Schools and SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group members throughout Wisconsin.

