



EXPERIENCE

Gary de Veyra
heals the
wounds of
abuse.

page 3

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SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S JAN. 29 SPEECH — PART 2

Become a Strong, Capable Person

'Please become the kind of person who will fight and win amid the harsh realities of society while always upholding and championing justice, and always developing your character,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'Please become a strong, capable person.'

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 2nd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Soka International Friendship Center in Sendagaya, Tokyo, Jan. 29.

Congratulations on today's meeting also being the Shikoku General Meeting! Our members in Shikoku, Japan, are making wonderful efforts on all fronts. I am confident that the foundation of our kosen-rufu movement in Shikoku is rock-solid.

It is important to win in all endeavors. Winning is a joy, a source of benefit and happiness. A person who is easily defeated does not have the

strength or capacity to make others happy. Please become the kind of person who will fight and win amid the harsh realities of society while always upholding and championing justice, and always developing your character. Please become a strong, capable person.

Shikoku has had remarkable success in promoting subscriptions for the *Seikyo Shimbun*,

PLEASE SEE SPEECH, 4



Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

The 2nd Headquarters Leaders Meeting is held at the Soka International Friendship Hall in Sendagaya, Tokyo, Jan. 29.

The Joy of 'Shakubuku'

By MATILDA BUCK
SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER

'What if he had hesitated?' asks Matilda Buck about the person who introduced her to Buddhism. 'I cannot imagine. I only know that I am so glad he didn't.'



Whatever we may call it—propagation, introducing others, *shakubuku*, spreading the Law—the act of sharing faith and practice with another per-

son is, for me, the greatest joy.

It may not start out that way, but if I can communicate my experience and the great value

of Buddhism to another human heart, I inevitably feel elevated. Surely it must be because I am bringing forth the world of Bodhisattva. Nichiren Daishonin left clear directions for us: "You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability even if it is only a single sentence or phrase" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386).

Cleve Ford—the man who introduced me to Buddhism 28 years ago—had only been practicing for six months. In a sense, he was still experimenting himself. But he felt some confidence in Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and some

sympathy toward the glib but troubled woman buying a dashiki in his African shop. What if he had hesitated? I cannot imagine. I only know that I am so glad he didn't.

I want to share part of a letter he recently wrote to me. It expresses the depth of the friendship, the bond, that was born that day when he said, "Have you ever heard about Nam-myoho-rence-kyo?"

My dear friend,

I'm sitting in front of my Gohonzon and reflecting on our years [off] friendship, a wonderful collage.... So clearly I see your smile when we first met. Your shyness at your first Buddhist meeting.

Pictures of you...and others in joyous laughter at the baby shower celebrating my youngest daughter's birth. She is now 22 and on her way to medical school. Do you remember her playing violin in [her high school] symphony orchestra? I still recall [your husband's] tearful response, "Why don't they talk more about these kids?"

Your tears and sadness at the death of my son. The flowers you'd leave at my office announcing your wedding anniversary [thanking me for introducing you to this practice that you say saved your marriage]. The chicken soup I'd leave at your front door when you had a cold....

How grateful I am that he kept inviting me to a meeting until I finally came. Even more

PLEASE SEE BUCK, 11

Brave and Vigorous Practice

Back to the Basics

By **GEOFF ROLDE**
SACRAMENTO REGION LEADER

Stretch it out, hold it, hold it. Lift those weights, one more rep, you can do it." It would be great to have a personal trainer to goad me into better physical condition and a healthy diet. I find it so hard to exercise consistently and much easier to skip the gym, drink coffee and dunk biscotti. That is why I am overweight and under-muscled.

And then there is elevating my life-condition and strengthening my determination to work for others' happiness—even more

arduous. This requires what the Lotus Sutra calls a brave and vigorous practice. Shakyamuni describes his continuous bodhisattva practice over many lifetimes in the "Expedient Means" chapter: "A Buddha has personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of religious practices. He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 23). This is actually Shakyamuni's encouragement to us to practice with the same spirit.

Deepening our faith, strengthening our daily practice and developing flexibility and patience with other people require hard work, but this is the brave and vigorous practice that Shakyamuni talked about. Visiting fel-

low members, attending meetings or even being positive with people at work, at the store, on the freeway—this is how we can make it real.

SGI President Ikeda has taught that unless we courageously challenge ourselves like this, with the spirit to accomplish more today than yesterday, we can never break the iron shackles of our destinies. The obstacles and devils that hold us back are ultimately within, and the real victory is winning over our own weaknesses and passivity.

Sub-zero self-esteem, depression, anger, greed, stupidity—these all come from inside us. In challenging ourselves to overcome inaction and to bravely exert ourselves for other people's happiness, we overcome all of these. And we

find that the life of the Buddha is indeed within.

Nichiren Daishonin set a great example for us by maintaining a brave and vigorous practice. He had confidence in himself, no matter the obstacles that came his way. The worse the obstacles, in fact, the braver and more vigorous his practice became.

When he was exiled to Sado Island, for instance, he wrote that "only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove one's real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood. Like Nichiren, for example. I say this not out of arrogance, but because I am deeply committed to the cor-

rect teaching" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 302). The "correct teaching" is brave and vigorous practice based on the Mystic Law. The benefit of practicing the correct teaching is developing "the heart of a lion," Buddhahood.

This is the great challenge of our practice. Those who excel in any field are those who come to love the challenge. When we engage our whole life and sincerity with the practice, we find that chanting, studying and lifting the spirits of others are a delight.

Practicing with this spirit of brave and vigorous exertion assures us unending growth. As President Ikeda has often said, the darkness of despair and anxiety will vanish from our hearts, and the light of hope will shine forth.

This spirit to courageously shine a light into our own darkness and the darkness around us is the true spirit of faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism. **W**

Confidence in Introducing Buddhism

WORDS To WIN By

By **GREG MARTIN**
ASSISTANT PUBLISHER

From "A Sage Perceives the Three Existences of Life," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 641-43.

My disciples, you should believe what I say and watch what happens. These things do not occur because I myself am respectable, but because the power of the Lotus Sutra is supreme. If I praise myself, people will think that I am boastful, but if I humble myself, they will despise the sutra. The taller the pine tree, the longer the wisteria vine hanging from it. The deeper the source, the longer the

stream. How fortunate, how joyful! In this impure land, I alone enjoy happiness and delight. (WND, p. 642)

"These things" in this passage refers to the fulfillment of prophecies Nichiren Daishonin made about foreign invasion and internal strife (see the Feb. 16 "Words To Win By"). "These things" did not happen because the Daishonin had paranormal abilities to make them come true. The point is that he had fully awakened to the workings of the Mystic Law, and he could clearly see the effects that were sure to follow for the causes Japan had made.

The Daishonin explains this in quoting from T'ien-t'ai's Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra: "Since the Law is wonderful, the person is worthy of respect; since the person is worthy of respect, the land is sacred" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1097).

The oneness of person and Law is a crucial concept in this Buddhism that encourages us to study and practice with the "same mind as Nichiren." On the one hand, we can learn from the example he set with his life, and on the other we can deepen our understanding that we, too, manifest the Law at the core of our lives.

Simply put, we can also embody the relationship of the oneness of person and Law. By embracing the Gohonzon, the concrete manifestation of this principle, we can bring forth the same state of life as the Buddha.

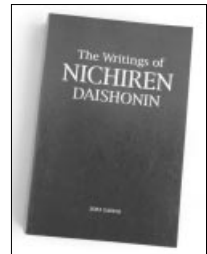
It is further strengthened through our efforts to share this Buddhism with others. Of course, common sense should guide our efforts—we should never think that because we have the Gohonzon, we are superior to others. With the pure intention to help others find the true happiness that is their birthright, we can speak with great confidence about our faith, just as the Daishonin did.

The happiness that the Daishonin speaks of in this passage—"How fortunate, how joyful!"—is the wonderful state of life that naturally develops as we realize our immense good fortune in being able to practice and share Buddhism at this time. By tapping into life's deepest "source," Buddhahood, the "stream" of our daily lives becomes ever richer and full of meaning.

And others can see this as we overcome problems and develop meaningful relationships with many people. As we speak with conviction about Buddhism to our friends, our lives continue to expand, leading more and more people to the truth.

In short, the compassionate act of sharing Buddhism is the

source feeding a never-ending spring. And from this spring, the stream of benefit and good fortune flows continuously into the future. As we share Buddhism to the best of our ability, we actualize the oneness of person and Law. When the Daishonin says, "In this impure land, I alone enjoy happiness and delight," he is calling us to join him in the happiness and delight of spreading Buddhism to all humanity. **W**



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EXPERIENCE — GARY DE VEYRA, LOS ANGELES

Healing Family Wounds

Through his Buddhist practice, Gary de Veyra helps his family heal the wounds of abuse.

I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism on July 10, 1988, at the age of 17. Since then, at the start of every year, I write down my goals and from time to time, I return to them and happily check them off as "mission accomplished." One of these goals has been to create a stronger, closer relationship with my family.

This past October, I had the opportunity to support the SGI-USA Southern California Zone meeting at the Los Angeles Convention Center. I assisted two young men who had what I thought was a crazy idea to chant three hours a day for the success of the meeting. "Do these guys have a life?!" I thought. I had not chanted that much in years, and I remembered how hard it was then. Reluctantly, I went through the motion of chanting this much every day both for the success of the meeting and my own personal goals. Besides, I was on vacation for a week, and what better time to challenge myself and catch up on some daimoku!

Three weeks after the meeting, which was a success, I received a phone call from my sister, Jennifer. She asked me if I could come over to her place. Annoyed, I asked her why. She broke down in tears and said, "I just need my brother right now." Apparently, she also called my parents, and we all drove to my sister's place hurriedly.

When my sister opened the door, she looked as if she just walked through miles of desert; she was completely exhausted. That's when I noticed her arm covered in blood. It looked like a big cheese grater had been dragged over her wrists several times.

Immediately, my parents and I attended to my sister's injuries. She yelled at us not to call the hospital and to sit down and listen to what she had to say. That evening, my sister poured out everything about her life that we didn't know; some horrific things that I would never wish on anyone.

Apparently, Jennifer had been grappling with her past



Photo by MARTIN COHEN

Gary de Veyra is using his Buddhist practice to help his family transform its past.

and felt she was losing control. Up until this point, the only other people she confided in were her therapist, her fiancé and our brother. She would not tell anyone else because she feared the family would reject her. And as for the self-mutilation, she did her best to hide it from us by always wearing long-sleeve shirts whenever she visited or at family gatherings.

In the course of the evening, a very deep and personal wound opened up in me — some things experienced with my other siblings from a long time ago. When we were little kids in the Philippines, our nannies and sometimes even our grandmother emotionally and physically abused us. Our beatings were not for discipline; we annoyed them. We were kids, and we annoyed them.

To this day, we don't know why they had to resort to hitting us, whether repeatedly on our heads with a closed fist, or several times across the face or beating us with a broom handle. At times they would humiliate us in front of our friends by stripping us down bare naked and locking us out of the house. The kids in the neighborhood would just laugh at us. But we didn't make it easy for them; we were usually dragged outside kicking and screaming.

That night, I kept my sister

company until the wee hours of the morning. At some point, she even had me count all the slash marks on her wrist. After 50, I lost count — maybe because there were too many, maybe because my eyes were filled with too many tears.

The very next day, I took the day off from work, emotionally and physically drained. I chanted with my fiancée. That evening, hearing about what happened to our sister Jennifer, my eldest sister, Valerie, drove down from Santa Barbara and met with me, my brother and our parents. We told our parents everything about the abuse we suffered during our childhood, and my brother told us more about Jennifer's horrific experiences when she was a teenager. I have never seen my father cry so much in his life. In fact, he didn't just cry, he wept. He could not believe how such terrible things could happen to his children. It was a big family therapy session, and we all aired our dirty laundry.

I thought to myself: "Wow! This is what came out of my prayer! This is our opportunity to become closer as a family!" I felt like I could start sharing anything with my family. (Of course, now my mom and dad know how much marijuana, LSD and everything else I took when I was a teenager.) That evening was full of tears, full of

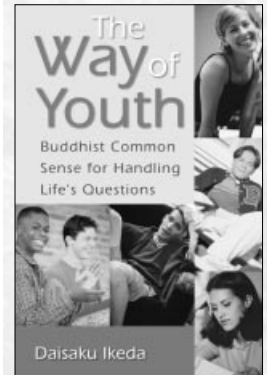
hugs, full of laughs and full of love with my family. It was the first time in my life that I told my brother I loved him. Now every time I see my family, I always tell them that I love them, something I never used to do.

My siblings and I had done our best to overcome our painful childhood. My sister Valerie had developed a mean streak, which she is now dealing with; my brother Lib forgot quite a bit of what happened to us as a way to deal with it; my sister Jennifer completely broke down and was diagnosed with clinical depression. As for me, I told my family that I never forgot any of what happened to us. I told them I was able to overcome the past through my practice of Buddhism. With simple conviction I said, "That's why I am a Buddhist, that's why I chant!"

I realize how fortunate I am to have the Gohonzon and to be practicing Buddhism, because otherwise things could have turned out much, much worse than they did. I believe that through my Buddhist practice, I touched my sister's life and helped our family deal with a past we were either ignoring, denying or didn't see. Through my prayer, my family is stronger than ever before. I cannot say that this mission is accomplished, but we are well on our way. **WT**

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Daisaku Ikeda



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—Arun Gandhi, Founding Director of the M.K. Gandhi Institute for Nonviolence



APPLYING BUDDHISM TO DAILY LIFE

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FROM SPEECH, I

the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper. For five years in a row, Shikoku has increased the number of subscriptions.

At the end of last year, our Shikoku organization crowned the 20th century with a truly magnificent achievement—the *Seikyo Shimbun's* circulation in Shikoku exceeded those of such top national dailies as *Yomiuri*, *Asahi* and *Mainichi*. Shikoku is truly No. 1 in Japan when it comes to promoting our organizational newspaper.

Josei Toda, second Soka Gakkai president, always took the lead.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda first shared his vision of publishing a newspaper in August 1950. This was in the midst of great hardship for my mentor. His business was in serious trouble, and he was being attacked from all sides. I alone stood by him.

In these circumstances, Mr. Toda felt impelled to take some

action to ensure the development of kosen-rufu into the distant future. Two days after his business was declared bankrupt, on Aug. 24, 1950—which was the anniversary of my embracing faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism—Mr. Toda said to me: "For an organization to have a newspaper of its own is an incredible asset. The Soka Gakkai ought to have its own newspaper, too, as soon as possible. Daisaku, please put your mind to work on it." This is how the *Seikyo Shimbun* was born—from a mentor-disciple exchange between Mr. Toda and myself.

In December of that year, over a meal at a cheap restaurant near Shimbashi Railway Station in Tokyo, Mr. Toda and I began to get into the specifics of the newspaper. Mr. Toda declared: "From here on, we have entered the age of mass media. Let's boldly open the way for kosen-rufu by using the power of the press."

And in February 1951, he said: "It's time for us to launch a paper. I'll be president, and you be vice president!" Mr. Toda al-

ways took the lead. He was a true warrior, a kosen-rufu fighter. [The first issue of the *Seikyo Shimbun* was published on April 20, 1951. It started out as a two-page broadsheet, published once every 10 days, with a run of 5,000 copies. In his diary entry on March 17, 1951, President Ikeda wrote, "Sincerely resolved to develop it into the greatest newspaper in Japan—no, in the world" (*A Youthful Diary*, p. 99). It was also President Toda's cherished wish for people throughout Japan to read the *Seikyo Shimbun*. Today, it has a circulation of 5.5 million copies. This April 20 will mark its 50th anniversary.]

We live in a world where irresponsible media reports are rampant. We have to refute defamatory and destructive "reporting" with reasoned arguments based on truth and justice. This is as true now as it was then—this is an unchanging reality.

Nichiren Daishonin can see all our efforts for kosen-rufu.

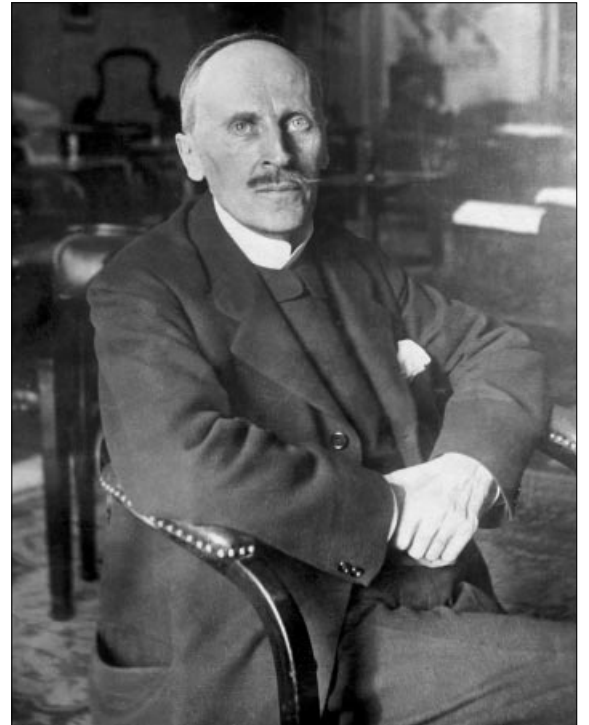
Shikoku's advance is leading the way for the 21st century. January's "small group" women's division general meetings in Shikoku spread a wave of friendship in the community, with a total of more than 500,000 members and guests participating. I heartily thank the Shikoku women for their tremendous efforts.

The Daishonin observes all your noble efforts for kosen-rufu, even if unseen or unrecognized by others.

The Shikoku young women's division's campaign to engage friends in dialogue has reached more than 55,000 people this month, a wonderful achievement. The Shikoku young men's division, meanwhile, has increased the number of members active in the organization by 3,000 this month. This is splendid.

Shikoku's student division also achieved outstanding results last year—with its young women ranking No. 1 in Japan in propagation and the young men ranking No. 1 for the highest average result scored in the nationwide student division study exam. The efforts and growth of the Shikoku youth are phenomenal, an example for all. The Shikoku members have also made remarkable strides in their Soka Spirit and temple disassociation activities. [In January alone, more than 170 temple members in Shikoku disassociated from Nichiren Shoshu. Over the past decade, more than 7,000 people in Shikoku have left the temple organization.]

I applaud with all my heart



Romain Rolland celebrates his 60th birthday in 1926. He said that 'he who does not hate evil cannot love good...'

the efforts of our fellow members in Shikoku, who have fought earnestly, no matter how remote or challenging the area.

Our Shikoku members have also been making steady efforts to promote friendship in their local communities and to contribute to society in meaningful, practical ways. As a sign of how highly valued these activities are, I have, as your representative, received a number of significant awards from public bodies in Shikoku. All of this is the result of your struggles and your great capability. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

Next year, a new Soka Gakkai cemetery, the Shikoku Memorial Park, will open. That is wonderful.

This year will be 20 years since the beloved Soka Gakkai song "Song of Crimson" ("Kurenai no Uta") was born here in Shikoku. It was a little more than two years after I had stepped down as Soka Gakkai president and had come to Shikoku to launch a fresh offensive together with the Shikoku members. Over the years, we have striven hard together to forge today's great path to worldwide kosen-rufu. It all started in Shikoku.

In January 1980, a thousand members from Shikoku came to see me in Yokohama, traveling all the way from Shikoku by ferry. This, too, is an episode

that will shine eternally in the annals of kosen-rufu.

Together, the Shikoku members and I have written a history of justice, left behind a history of struggle and blazed a history of triumph. This I wish to state clearly for the record.

I want our Shikoku members to lead the way in joyously ringing the bells of victory in the 21st century—until one area after another follows, and the bells of victory ring out in every corner of the land.

On Jan. 22, 1955, Mr. Toda visited the city of Kochi, Shikoku, for the first time. I accompanied him. Mr. Toda held a Q-and-A session, and one of the Kochi members asked, "What about the Soka Gakkai having its own schools?"

Mr. Toda smiled and said: "Don't worry. The Soka Gakkai will have its own schools before too long. We are committed to establishing an integrated school system from kindergarten through the university level. We will build the best schools in Japan!"

As my mentor's disciple, I fulfilled all the promises Mr. Toda made that day to those immensely capable Shikoku members. And it is my greatest joy to report this to you today.

On May 3 this year, on the other side of the Pacific from Kochi, Soka University of

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

Bringing About Good

From This Speech:

It is vital that we fight against evil. When we do, we become a force for good. When we do not, we become a party to evil. Moreover, if we do not fight evil or injustice, no great benefit will be forthcoming in our lives. The Daishonin writes of benefit (Jpn *kudoku*), "Ku [of *kudoku*] means to extinguish evil, while *doku* refers to the virtue one acquires by bringing about good" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762). To eliminate the impurities in one's life and allow one's pure spirit to emerge—this is benefit. We obtain this benefit by denouncing and rebuking evil and injustice. Let us fight! So that good prevails!

- 1) What do you think SGI President Ikeda means by saying "it is vital that we fight against evil"? What is the evil that we are fighting against? And how can we best fight against it?
- 2) How do we become a "party to evil" by not fighting against it?
- 3) Why do you think Nichiren Daishonin viewed benefit as extinguishing evil and bringing about good? Why is extinguishing evil a benefit? How does extinguishing evil bring about good? And what kind of good does it bring about?
- 4) Have you had your own experience of extinguishing evil and bringing about good?
- 5) Why does President Ikeda use language like "denouncing and rebuking evil and injustice"? Why do you think he feels so strongly about this? How would you explain this spirit to someone who is not familiar with what President Ikeda is talking about? How do you apply this spirit to your own practice?

PLEASE SEE SPEECH, 5

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA ZONE BOYS AND GIRLS GROUP MEETING

'I Will Do Kosen-Rufu'

By RON BAIRD

SAN FRANCISCO BUREAU CHIEF

The 1st SGI-USA Northern California Zone Boys and Girls Group General Meeting was held Jan. 28 at the San Francisco Culture Center. Boys and Girls Group members Miellette McFarlane and Zack Douglas led gongyo and then warmly welcomed everyone.

San Francisco's Mystic Flava dance troupe performed and led the children in some dance warm-up moves. The meeting's theme — "With Sensei I Will Do Kosen-rufu" — was introduced. It was explained that kosen-rufu could be expressed as doing your best in school, trying hard to do gongyo and chant every day, cherishing and appreciating your friends, helping or studying with them and respecting your entire family, especially your parents.



A quilt depicting the Ten Worlds by the Redwood Coast Region boys and girls.

Next, a portion of a video with SGI President Ikeda interacting with the Soka Kindergarten students was shown. The children from Sil-

icon Valley Region responded to President Ikeda's recent poem, "Soar — Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" and presented their own version of the song "This Land Is Your Land."

Sacramento Region was next and led a song called "Victory." Amelia Gonzales shared her experience of falling from a tree, damaging her kidney, and then her determination to chant, get well and come home. She had to endure a lot, and she won.

A children's group of magicians from San Francisco and Crystal Springs entertained the crowd, and then East Bay Region performed a great skit from the play *The Mule and The Farmer*.

Last year, the Redwood Coast Region boys and girls studied the Ten Worlds and made a quilt. Each of the worlds is depicted on it, and they share the quilt from fam-



Boys and Girls Group members Miellette McFarlane and Zack Douglas lead gongyo at the Northern California Zone Boys and Girls Group General Meeting, held Jan. 28.

ily to family, one month at a time. At the meeting, the children explained each of the Ten Worlds.

Some children from San Francisco then taught the audience a new song called "We Say Yes."

"The success of this meeting was a result of all of the support received from all the divisions," said Roberta Templeman, "from all levels within the organization, all pulling together. It was a family effort, and on Super Bowl Sunday!" **WT**

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S FEB. 9 ENCOURAGEMENT

Our Goals Show Who We Are

'Our true worth is found in the goals to which we aspire,' says SGI President Ikeda. 'That is why the heart is what matters most.'

The evening of Feb. 9, SGI President Ikeda made the following points at a conference attended

by men's division representatives at the Shinano Culture Center in Shinjuku, Tokyo:

- For what purpose do we live our lives? What achievements will we leave behind? Our true worth is found in the goals to which we aspire. That is why the heart is what matters most.
- Kosen-rufu is a lofty spiritual struggle. It is the great

path that leads to world peace. Those who work wholeheartedly for kosen-rufu, nobly giving of themselves, leave behind a great achievement that, together with their lives, will shine in history for all eternity.

- The outcome of our lives is determined by the final chapter. The period from age 60 onward, in particular, is a time of

golden harvest. Our rich experience enables us to forge and create 10 years of history in a single year.

- If we blaze brilliantly to the very end like a beautiful crimson sunset, passionately committed to kosen-rufu and the welfare of our fellow members, we can build a self that is endowed with eternal good fortune and benefit. **WT**

FROM SPEECH, 4

America, Aliso Viejo, in Orange Country, Calif., will at last be dedicated. In the future, I want to invite Shikoku representatives to visit the new campus.

To strong people, the bitter winds of adversity feel like spring breezes.

The great French writer Romain Rolland was born on this day, Jan. 29, 135 years ago, in 1866. He was five years older than first Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, who was born in 1871.

I present the following words from Rolland to you, in com-

memoration of today's meeting: "It was not only peace that we needed but the strength to face the assaults of destiny that assailed us. The foremost energy, the source of all, was faith." The source of spiritual strength is faith. Faith is the ultimate strength in life.

Rolland also wrote: "Ah, how good it is to be strong! How good it is to suffer when a man is strong!" Again, faith is spiritual strength — a wellspring of power and energy for living our lives strongly. Weak faith is not true faith.

To strong people, even the bitter winds of adversity can feel like a joyous spring breeze.

To weak people, every problem or obstacle is a source of hellish suffering. And seeing things that way is giving in to defeat.

I hope you will always advance with composure, fighting against injustice and evil for the sake of your friends and fellow members, and for the sake of kosen-rufu. And I hope that you will have the spirit to enjoy even the hardships and problems you may encounter along the way.

Rolland cried: "Bring on the struggle! It can only make my life better." This is the Soka Gakkai spirit.

He also declared: "He who does not hate evil cannot love

good...." This is the same spirit as Mr. Makiguchi's. It resonates with the teachings of Buddhism. You will often find that the words of the world's great thinkers embody the essence of Buddhism.

It is vital that we fight against evil. When we do, we become a force for good. When we do not, we become a party to evil. Moreover, if we do not fight evil or injustice, no great benefit will be forthcoming in our lives. The Daishonin writes of benefit (Jpn *kudoku*), "*Ku* [of *kudoku*] means to extinguish evil, while *doku* refers to the virtue one acquires by bringing about good" (*Gosho*

Zenshu, p. 762). To eliminate the impurities in one's life and allow one's pure spirit to emerge — this is benefit. We obtain this benefit by denouncing and rebuking evil and injustice. Let us fight! So that good prevails!

This year again, I am determined to blaze new trails for kosen-rufu, with all of Japan and the entire world as my stage. I am fervently praying each day for your good health, longevity and victory in all things. Take care!

Thank you for traveling such long distances to be here today. I appreciate all your efforts.

See you again soon! **WT**

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DIALOGUE OF HOPE

How To Develop a True Friendship

Courtesy of SEIKYO PRESS

‘Friendship is not simply a matter of the other person liking you and caring about your welfare,’ explains SGI President Ikeda. ‘Nor is true friendship conditional, lasting only as long as the other person does not betray you or let you down. It is your concern and feelings for the other person that make a friendship.’

A discussion on making friends 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).

Keiko Maekawa: This time, we’ll talk about the problem of making friends. I have a question from a junior high school student in Tokyo. She writes: “I had a hard time making friends when I was in elementary school. I decided that I would finally make friends when I went to junior high, but from the very first day I haven’t had any luck. And on top of that, I had a fight with my best friend in elementary school, and we still aren’t talking. Now she’s here at the same junior high, and that makes me uncomfortable. I just can’t stand it, every day is so awful.”

I think many students worry whether they’ll be able to make friends in a new environment.

Kenji Shiratsuchi: When I started junior high, I was really worried, too. There were so many new people, and I didn’t know if I’d be able to make friends. I was shy around others, so I wasn’t able to make many friends all through junior high, even during my second and third year.

Maekawa: Friendships are one of the things students are thinking about most at the start of each school year. Everyone is praying that they’ll be able to make good friends and get nice teachers.

The better the person you become, the better the friends you will find.

SGI President Ikeda: I see. I think it’s true to some extent that teenagers feel that their friends are more important and closer to them than their parents and teachers.

A person who has many friends is fortunate. A person who can say, “I have great

friends” is lucky indeed. Those who possess true friends, people who really understand them and would never let them down, have something more precious than money, fame, or status. Their lives are rich and filled with treasure.

But there’s no need to worry if you don’t have such friends yet. You should try to relax. When you tell yourself, “I have to make friends,” you put pressure on yourself and you make yourself feel bad. Just be you. Think, “I’ll find the right friends eventually,” or “Real friends are worth the wait.” Then concentrate on developing yourself into a fine person. The better the person you become yourself, the better the friends you will someday find.

Shiratsuchi: Whenever I ask junior high school students whom they talk to about their problems, they always say, “My friends.” But they also keep things from each other. It’s hard to be a true friend.

Maekawa: That’s true. Girls, in particular, seem to form cliques in junior high. I think many girls belong to such a group during those years. They tend to be anxious and insecure about being on their own. I was the same when I was in junior high. Some girls carry it so far that they won’t even go to the bathroom alone. Others won’t eat lunch by themselves; if there’s no one around to eat with, they take their packed lunch back home uneaten. But in spite of this tendency to hang out in cliques, the friendships formed within them aren’t always very deep.

Ikeda: There are many kinds and degrees of friendship. Some friendships end with the



SGI President Ikeda meets students at the Soka Schools, Jan. 18.

school year. Some last all through junior high, and some last a lifetime. Some who claim to have lots of friends have only shallow friendships. Some have only one friend, but that friendship is very deep and lasting.

Still, there’s no need to rank your friendships and say this one is good and that one is not. It’s important to treasure all kinds of friendship. Please try to be sincere and genuine in each one. That’s the main point of being a good friend: to be sincere and unchanging in your friendship.

Your attitude is important — not the other person’s.

Maekawa: I’d like to share a story. It’s about me, so I’m a little embarrassed, but maybe it will help someone. When I was in junior high, I was in a group with five or six other girls. One day, one of the girls broke a school rule, and another girl in our group told the teacher. The group decided to snub the one who had “snitched” by not talking to her.

The girl who told the teacher happened to be my best friend, but I knew that if I didn’t ignore her, too, the group would turn on me next. So the following day I didn’t talk to her all day. When she said “Good morning” or tried to talk to me, I refused to say anything back. She

was so hurt that she looked like she was going to cry.

When I got home and told my mom about it, she exploded. “The girl who broke the rule might not have liked being told on, but your friend was only trying to do the right thing. Why are you punishing her?” I knew my mother was right, and that night I chanted daimoku for my friend for about an hour.

The next day at school, I immediately apologized to her and we made up. The others in the group may have looked on me as a traitor, but I decided that I was this girl’s friend even if the others in the group decided to ignore me as well.

After we graduated, the group ties gradually weakened, but I am still friends with the girl I apologized to and made up with.

Ikeda: What a wonderful story! Thank you. Your mother is to be commended.

I think you have given us a hint about the secret of true friendship. And that is that friendship depends upon you. It is your attitude that is important, not the other person’s. Friendship is not simply a matter of the other person liking you and caring about your welfare. Nor is true friendship conditional, lasting only as long as the other person does not betray

you or let you down. It is *your* concern and feelings for the other person that make a friendship. Friendship is never betraying a friend, even if he or she should betray you. Being friends with someone while they’re experiencing good times but deserting them when they experience hard times cannot be called true friendship. Genuine friends have the courage to stick by a friend in even the worst situation, when everyone else has turned against him or her.

Shiratsuchi: Friendship means staying true to a friend even when you’ve had an argument and maybe aren’t speaking for a while.

Ikeda: This brings us right back to the question of the student who wrote the letter we were discussing earlier. Even though she had a fight with her elementary school friend, I would encourage her to go over and say hello, putting the past behind her. It would be a good idea if she could convey somehow that she still regards the girl as her friend.

Friends are like a mirror. If you greet a friend, eventually they will greet you in return. You may not make up right away, but your sincerity will be reflected in the other person’s

Photo by KIRK CONDYLES

life, as if in a mirror. You can't make new friends if you are always passive and waiting for the other person to make the first move.

Maekawa: After all, the other person may be thinking, "I'm willing to be friends again if she is," and just waiting for something from you.

It is hard, however, to find the courage to strike up a conversation with someone you don't really know.

Ikeda: Courage is something you have to summon. Everyone has that courage inside them. It's just sitting there dormant, hidden away. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, courage surges forth in our hearts.

Try speaking to just one person a day. For instance, when you arrive at school, say "Good morning" to someone. They may be surprised, and they may not answer you or they may ignore you. But that's not your problem, that's theirs. You had the courage to say something, so you're the winner. If those you greet treat you coldly, then they're the ones making bad causes.

I'm sure you know the famous fable in which the Sun and the North Wind compete to see who is more powerful by trying to get a traveler to take off his coat. The North Wind blows coldly with all its might, but this only makes the traveler clutch his coat more tightly around him. Then the Sun smiles down, its bright rays warming the traveler and causing him to relax and take off his coat.

The same is true of relations with others. Here, persuading the traveler to take off his coat corresponds to getting a person to open his or her heart. It is important that you be like the Sun. The Sun always shines down on the Earth, sending us its warmth and light even when it's cloudy and rainy. It is constant and unchanging. I hope you, too, will always have such a big heart.

Shiratsuchi: What we have to do is shine!

True friends are independent — and respect your independence.

Ikeda: The Japanese word for friend, *tomu*, used to be written with a more complex Chinese character made up of symbols representing two hands, one on top of the other. What this was supposed to signify was that friends are people who share the same goals and interests and join hands to help each other

achieve them.

You are most likely to make friends when you have shared goals, such as winning a game or studying hard toward a profession where you can help others and contribute to society. Self-centered, egoistic people find it hard to sustain friendships.

Actually, the best and truest friendships are usually those formed between two self-reliant and independent-minded people who have the strength to survive on their own. They resemble a bamboo grove. Each bamboo stem grows independently, rising straight and strong to the sky. They do not lean on each other or prop each other up. But if you look below ground, a dense network of roots connects all these individual stems. People are the same. We each have the strength to be independent and live on our own, but we are linked to others by our hearts. That's friendship.

True friends, therefore, are not dependent on others, nor are they jealous of their friends or try to monopolize them; they are independent and respect their friends' independence.

Maekawa: Yes, some people feel sad when they see their best friend talking to others. They feel as if their friend has been stolen from them.

Ikeda: Anyone can be superficially friendly. First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi used to say that there are three kinds of friendship: inferior, ordinary and superior. Inferior friendship refers to friendship that is based on money or material gain. Ordinary friendship refers to casual relationships in which people get along well and help each other out—for instance, recommending a friend for a job. But superior friendship, really caring for your friends, means you are concerned enough about their welfare to be willing to confront them about negative and destructive aspects of their lives and try to help them remove the causes for unhappiness they are making.

I hope you will all form superior friendships—friendships that transcend passing feelings of like and dislike. Superior friendship is wishing the best for your friends with all your heart and striving to grow and walk together with them on the path of justice and truth.

Ultimately, the only friendships that last are those you have with people who are right for you. That is another way in which friends are like a mirror.

There's an old saying, "If you want to know a person's character, look at his friends."

If you make friends with corrupt and malicious people, you will be dragged down with them.

The friendships of youth are as pure as a mountain stream. When you grow up, it's harder to make real friendships. People sometimes pretend to be friends out of self-interest or desire for profit, or put on a mask and feign friendship without sharing their true feelings.

The Japanese, in particular, don't have many friends outside Japan. I think it may be because they don't have any unwavering moral principles or beliefs to which they are committed, so others don't trust them.

World peace starts with friendship.

Shiratsuchi: I agree. That's what's so amazing about the vast number of friends you have made around the world.

Ikeda: Friends are a great treasure. Having reached my 70s, I can tell you how true that is. And world peace starts with friendship.



Performers at the Northeastern Zone Kickoff, Jan. 28.

I know our junior high school students have all heard of Mikhail Gorbachev. He used to be president of the Soviet Union, and I have met and talked with him many times. The place where he grew up was home not only to ethnic Russians but to people of many other ethnic groups as well. Radio broadcasts were in five languages, he told me. He had many non-Russian friends. They had different customs and ways of thinking.

What was the key to getting along with them? Not to rush things, and to have respect and consideration for others. If you reach out to others with respect, they will become trusted friends. But if you are disre-

spectful to others, they will become lifelong enemies. Gorbachev learned these important lessons as a boy, he says.

This is true everywhere. There are all kinds of people, with different personalities and ways of thinking. It can cause you problems and suffering. But when that happens, just think to yourself, "I am learning an important lesson about life." Learning is not just about getting good grades in school.

A tiny, newborn baby fish must swim, tossing in the ocean waves to become big and strong. The same is true of us. We become strong by forging ourselves in the ocean of human relations. **WT**

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AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

The Atsuhara Persecution: Disciples Join the Struggle

'The Atsuhara Persecution is the story of great disciples coming forth to fight in the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple,' explains SGI President Ikeda. 'Up to that time, Nichiren Daishonin alone had borne the brunt of the persecution.'

In 1979, as the last of the Seven Bells of the 20th century was drawing to a close, we greeted May 3—a day that should have been one of the most joyous of celebrations—with the Soka Gakkai facing persecution for the sake of the Law. This persecution was perpetrated by corrupt priests, just as Nichiren Daishonin had predicted when he said: "An immeasurably great multitude of monks...will gather and denounce the votary [of the Lotus Sutra] to the ruler of the country, causing him to be banished and ruined" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 892).

It was a contest between a corrupt, tradition-bound religious authority in league with the ruling powers, and a new, invigorating force for truth and justice rooted in the lives of the people. Throughout history, whenever there has been a religious revolution, this pattern has been evident. Resentful of any burgeoning popular movement, the old powers devise a host of plots and schemes to suppress it. This was true during Shakyamuni's lifetime, and even more so during the Daishonin's life.

The tumultuous time before and after my resignation as Soka Gakkai president threw many of our members into confusion and doubt. Given this situation, I looked to the history of the Atsuhara Persecution as a guide. The three martyrs of Atsuhara were beheaded in 1279. It was truly a mystic coinci-

dence that the priesthood's cruel persecution of the Soka Gakkai, a "spiritual beheading," should have begun exactly 700 years later.

♦♦♦♦

In "The Selection of the Time," the Daishonin warns, "It is the priests themselves...who will destroy the Buddha's teachings" (WND, 577). Corrupt priests also caused the Atsuhara Persecution. Temples of the Tendai School of that time, which should have been doing their utmost to protect and transmit the true teachings of Buddhism, had turned into dens of intrigue.

The spirit of the Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai, founder of the T'ien-t'ai school in China, and of the Great Teacher Dengyo, founder of the T'ien-t'ai (Jpn Tendai) school in Japan, had been lost, and the top positions at influential temples were occupied by the scions of the aristocracy.

Temples had ceased to be places of pure religious practice, degenerating into empty institutions where the "authority of the robe" was used to control and dominate the people.

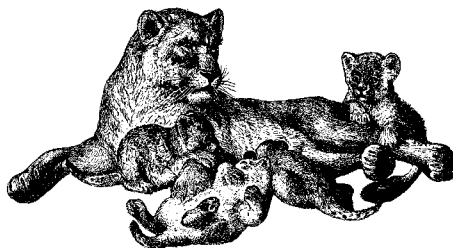
The high-ranking priests of leading Tendai school temples in the Fuji District of Suruga Province [now part of Shizuoka Prefecture, where the village of Atsuhara was located] were all hopelessly corrupt. This was the case in such temples as Jisso-ji, which the Daishonin visited to do research in its sutra library; Shijuku-in, where Nikko Shonin had studied and practiced as a boy; and Ryusen-ji [in Atsuhara Village itself, where the persecution of the Daishonin's followers took place].

A young Nikko Shonin rigorously criticized the transgressions of these priests. This is the spirit of Nikko Shonin, who founded the head temple Taiseki-ji, and the spirit of the Soka Gakkai. That is why during the World War II, our first president, Tsunetsaburo Makiguchi, sharply rebuked the priesthood for its betrayal of the Daishonin's

teachings. He declared: "Of all the Nichiren schools today, Nichiren Shoshu is the one that most resembles the Tendai school of the Daishonin's day."

♦♦♦♦

While Nikko Shonin devotedly served and supported the Daishonin in Izu and Kamakura, he remained registered as a priest of Shijuku-in and used that temple as a base to convert other Tendai priests. In 1268, when he was 23 years old, Nikko Shonin boldly presented a 51-article petition to the military government, outlining the transgressions of Jisso-ji's chief priest.



According to Nikko Shonin's petition, the chief priest neglected to make repairs to the temple buildings, including the main hall and the sutra library, even when they were severely damaged. The actions of Nichiren Shoshu, which capriciously destroys priceless architectural works constructed with the sincere donations of pure-hearted believers, are even more reprehensible than this.

Another article of the petition accused the chief priest of chopping down a venerable cherry tree on the temple grounds. Nikko Shonin criticized the chief priest for wantonly cutting down a single tree. Realizing from this history how dearly Nikko Shonin must have loved cherry trees, I donated countless cherry saplings to be planted at the head temple to beautify its grounds. Nichiren Shoshu has since brutally cut down those cherry trees.

Nikko Shonin also strictly rebuked the chief priest of Jisso-ji for licentious behavior, citing him as entertaining prostitutes at his private quarters and gen-

erally leading a dissolute life. How far worse it is when the high priest of an entire Buddhist school has actually been found by a court of law to have engaged the services of a prostitute! This deplorable situation is unprecedented in the history of Buddhism.

♦♦♦♦

Gyochi, the deputy chief priest of Ryusen-ji and the central figure behind the Atsuhara Persecution, was a member of the powerful Hojo family and wielded his authority with impunity. He was guilty of all manner of evil deeds and transgressions against the priestly code of the day: appropriating the prestigious temple's assets for his own personal use, hunting deer and other wild game, and poisoning the fish in the temple's pond and selling them for profit.

He became deputy chief priest because of his powerful family connections, but he was really a villain whose behavior went beyond all bounds of decency and common sense. Ryusen-ji was occupied by what the Daishonin had aptly termed "an animal dressed in priestly robes" (WND, 760).

♦♦♦♦

After the Daishonin retired to Mount Minobu, Nikko Shonin became increasingly active in propagating the Daishonin's teachings in the Fuji District, gradually building a strong force of followers of the Mystic Law. Not only did three priests at Ryusen-ji—Nisshu, Nichiben, and Nichizen—convert to the Daishonin's teaching one after another, but many of the farmers of Atsuhara Village, where Ryusen-ji was located, also followed suit. Gyochi and other high-ranking priests in the area perceived this as a serious threat to their power. Exploiting their religious authority, they lived lavishly on the offerings they received from local samurai families. The growth of the

Daishonin's followers, who upheld the supremacy of the Lotus Sutra, jeopardized the authority and with it the livelihood of these "Law-devouring hungry spirits" (WND, 191).

Gyochi responded by forming an "anti-Lotus alliance" in the area to contain the activities of the Daishonin's followers. Joining forces with the regional representatives of the ruling Hojo clan, the officials of the Shimogata Manor Administrative Office, he began his persecution. Together, Gyochi and his cohorts denounced the local followers of the Daishonin who upheld the Lotus Sutra, calling them "non-Buddhists" and "heretics." They demanded that they recite the Nembutsu [the name of the Buddha Amida, the practice of the Pure Land School of Buddhism]—an unbelievable contradiction, considering that Gyochi and the other priests were all supposed to uphold the teachings of the Tendai School, which is based on the Lotus Sutra.

How similar this is to the perversion of the corrupt and jealous priests of Nichiren Shoshu in recent years, who, though they call themselves the Daishonin's followers, disparage the idea that faith should be directly connected to the Daishonin and based on his writings.

♦♦♦♦

The Soka Gakkai song, "The Three Martyrs of Atsuhara," goes:

In these latter days, the water is muddy:

The confusion in Buddhism is like tangled strands of hemp,

And bitterness and futility fill people's hearts.

Among the farmers of Atsuhara Village

Were brave young men who deplored this.

Their names were Jinshiro of Atsuhara

And his younger brothers Yagoro and Yarakuro.

Though it had been but a short time

Since they embarked on the path of faith,

They advanced with pure-hearted youthful ardor

To propagate the teachings. Their lives a glorious paean to the Law.

These three brothers, leaders of the Atsuhara farmers who embraced the Mystic Law, had only become the Daishonin's followers in about 1278. Today,

PLEASE SEE ESSAY, 11

the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

Illustrations by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

'SECURING THE FOUNDATION'

VOLUME 8, CHAPTER 1, PARTS 29-30

'Yes, Amami is far from Tokyo, but the hearts of our Amami members are closest to mine. They are with me,' Shin'ichi Yamamoto says. 'There are leaders who work at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, but whose hearts are very distant from mine.'

Even on the ship, there was no time for Shin'ichi Yamamoto to rest. After greeting the ship's captain and taking a brief tour of the engine room, he met with the local leaders on board and discussed plans for expanding kosen-rufu on the Amami Islands.

The twilight hue of the sea was soon overtaken by the veil of night, and stars filled the sky. The faint outline of an island became visible far in the distance. It was Amami Oshima. It would be another two hours, though, before they docked at Naze, the island's main city.

Shin'ichi turned to the leaders accompanying him from Tokyo and said: "Has your seasickness subsided? I hope so, because there's no getting off the ship just yet! Actually, the same can be said of kosen-rufu and of faith. Once we've set sail, no matter what storm may hit, there's no turning back." He spoke these words casually, but he felt them deeply.

The *Akebonomaru* landed at Naze around 10:00 p.m. The dock was crowded with members waiting to greet Shin'ichi. When he stepped onto the deck and waved, a great welcoming roar

erupted from the crowd. Even though the members had heard that President Yamamoto would be visiting the island, many did not actually believe it until they saw him with their own eyes.

Just prior to Shin'ichi's departure from Kagoshima, the sea had been rough due to the effects of Typhoon No. 4, and the regular passenger ships scheduled from Kagoshima had been canceled. There was concern that airline flights would also be delayed or canceled. When they saw that President Yamamoto had really come, the members could not contain their joy.

"Thank you, everyone, thank you!" Shin'ichi shouted again and again, responding to the warm welcome.

Shin'ichi and his party were driven to the newly completed Amami Oshima Community Center. It was a chalk-white, two-story building made of reinforced concrete, with a large, 70-tatami mat meeting room on the ground floor, and was the first Soka Gakkai center in the Amami group of islands. The completion ceremony for the new building was scheduled for the following day.

After arriving at the center



and chanting daimoku three times, the leaders traveling with Shin'ichi stretched out their legs and made themselves comfortable. The journey had worn them out.

General Director Koichi Harayama muttered, "Amami is so far! And the rocking of the ship really got to me." Hearing this, Shin'ichi quickly remarked: "We've finally made it to Amami. Having come this far, I'm determined to really accomplish something. While we're here, let's put out five years worth of effort to secure the development of our movement in Amami!"

Shin'ichi's rousing words transformed the spirits of the leaders accompanying him. Vice General Director Yukio Ishikawa said: "It certainly would be a waste if we made the long trip here to Amami and didn't put out our best effort. I'm going to pour my life into giving guidance on faith to our members here."

Shin'ichi smiled and replied: "Ishikawa, let's not think of it as giving guidance; instead let's learn all we can about faith from the members here in Amami. Every month, the local chapter men's and women's division leaders travel all the way to Tokyo from these remote islands to attend the Headquarters leaders meeting. The entire trip takes

them a whole week. During that time, they have to put their work on hold, and their absence must be hard on their families.

"They also travel from island to island to encourage and support their fellow members, giving their all to forge a way for the spread of Buddhism. They could not have accomplished what they have without making sacrifices in their private lives. Each and every one of them has made tremendous contributions to our movement.

"Just because one leader has a higher position within the organization than another doesn't mean his faith is necessarily stronger or that he is more important. I'm sure you are all better at talking and you probably know more about Buddhist principles, but that in itself doesn't amount to faith.

"What matters is what you have actually done for the sake of kosen-rufu. How many people have you enabled to practice, how much have you inspired your fellow members to take action, to what extent have you taken action yourself and how much blood, sweat and tears have you put into your efforts?"

"Yes, Amami is far from Tokyo, but the hearts of our Amami members are closest to mine. They are with me. There are leaders who work at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, but whose hearts are very distant from

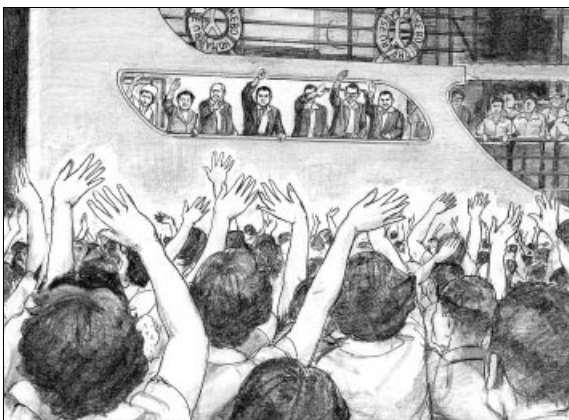
mine. When it comes to the heart, it's not where you are that counts.

"I brought you all here to Amami because I wanted you to have contact with our Amami members and see what true faith, true struggle and true effort are."

Looking around the room at each of his companions, Shin'ichi continued: "I would like to propose that we establish a general chapter here in the Amami Islands. 'Amami is a place with a painful past. It has suffered various kinds of cruel oppression. During the Edo Period, it was subject to the harsh rule of the Satsuma clan. After the war, it endured a period of U.S. military rule. To transform that bitter karma, to make Amami strong and independent, I want to establish a general chapter here, even though the membership is still quite small. This is the conclusion I have reached after long, hard consideration. Let's talk about ideas for the organization and leadership of the general chapter.'

The discussions began, with Shin'ichi taking the lead. It was nearly 11:00 at night, but Shin'ichi's internal "engine" for advancing kosen-rufu in Amami had begun to roar.

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



A Most Important Time for Youth (and All of Us!)

is the place where each of us, no matter our age, grows the most. In helping the youth put these meetings together — and especially in bringing our guests — we in the men's and women's divisions can join the youth in becoming the real creators of the future."

We often say that the SGI-USA youth *will be* the leaders of the future, as we try to help them store up leadership qualities for later use. At the same time, though, they *already are* leaders of the future. As the Daishonin quotes from the Contemplation of the Mind-Ground Sutra, "If you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 279). If you want to see America's future, look at the causes that the SGI-USA youth are making right now — this month and this year. And the causes that all of us are making as the SGI-USA family. **WT**

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EDITORIAL

By **JEFF FARR**
MANAGING EDITOR

Youth-sponsored introductory meetings this month will allow many young people to take on more responsibility in the SGI-USA.

We sometimes forget how fast times are changing. I was reminded of this reading former U.S. president Jimmy Carter's new memoir, *An Hour Before Daylight*: He describes growing up in an America that probably — *hopefully* — seems alien to most young people today. There was still



no end in sight to the Great Depression. And racial segregation was a largely unquestioned norm.

When you think about it, isn't it amazing that this world Carter describes was the reality only 70 or so years ago? In the grand scheme of things, that was not long ago. Huge changes have rapidly occurred in our country — we Americans seem to be forever speeding ahead.

Which makes me wonder what our country will be like 70 or 100 years from now. My imagination can go either way, to be honest: things getting better and better or, conversely, going completely downhill.

But I am certain that if our organization keeps moving

ahead at this most important time of change, every aspect of American life will come to see unending improvement.

Speaking about the second Seven Bells — the SGI's activities in the first half of the 21st century — SGI President Ikeda recently emphasized that "the first seven years of the 21st century will be extremely important in determining the direction of the far distant future. In particular, 2001 will be a decisive year for the Soka Gakkai" (Feb. 2 *World Tribune*, p. 6).

This year must be decisive, then, for the SGI-USA youth, who have started work on a series of large-scale Family Youth Festivals to be held this summer. Through these festivals and their activities in neighborhood districts, the youth are solidifying their practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and learning how best to introduce it to their friends.

Every March, in commemoration of March 16, Kosenrufu Day, the SGI-USA holds special events that allow young people to make profound causes for the future. March 16, 1958, was the day that second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda passed on the responsibility for establishing Buddhist ideals in world society to the youth of the day, including his young disciple, Daisaku Ikeda. The SGI-USA's youth activities every March continue to carry the same meaning.

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima shared with me that this month's youth-sponsored introductory meetings at the district level are a chance for "everyone to get involved with the youth. The district is the happiest kind of family, one where everybody accepts one another and helps one another grow. Ultimately, the district

Leadership Appointments

NORTHEASTERN ZONE

Paula Miksic
Vice Women's Leader

Kathleen Olesky
Vice Women's Leader

Ethan Gelbaum
Vice Men's Leader

Steve Potoff
Vice Men's Leader

John Kasahara
Student Division Leader

BROOKLYN, QUEENS, LONG ISLAND REGION

Nancy Francis
Vice Women's Leader

Cecilia Tso
Vice Women's Leader

Donna Walker-Kuhne
Vice Women's Leader

Joan White
Vice Women's Leader

Kazu Toda
Vice Young Men's Leader

Tanya Bastone
Junior High/High School Leader

NEW ENGLAND REGION

Elizabeth Eppsteiner
Women's Leader

NEW JERSEY REGION

Harry Montegudo
Vice Leader

Nobuko Hrdina
Vice Women's Leader

Jason Berg
Young Men's Leader

Masao Shimamura
Junior High/High School Leader

NEW YORK EAST REGION

David Dalessandro
Region Leader

Marjorie Joffe
Vice Women's Leader

Ellane Kolens
Vice Women's Leader

Tony Kolens
Men's Leader

NEW YORK WEST REGION

Larry Singer
Region Leader

Valerie Kurita
Women's Leader

Pat Vega
Vice Women's Leader

Hiro Nozuka
Men's Leader

Puiyan Ng
Junior High/High School Leader

JOIN THE CLASS OF 2002 AT SUA, CALABASAS

Now in its seventh year, Soka University of America's graduate school in Calabasas, Calif., is accepting applications for its master's degree program in second and foreign language education for the 2001-02 academic year.

Individuals seeking admission to the MA program must hold a bachelor's degree with a minimum grade-point average (GPA) of 2.7 or B- on a four-point scale. Applicants whose native language is not English are required to submit

a Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) with a minimum score of 600 (on a paper-based test) or 250 (on a computer-based test) and a Test of Written English (TWE) with a minimum score of 5.0.

Applications for the 2001-02 academic year are due by April 30. For more information, contact the Graduate Admissions Office at 26800 West Mulholland Highway, Calabasas, CA 9102. Telephone (818) 878-8717, e-mail: grad_admissions@soka.edu.

FROM BUCK, I

than that, how grateful I am that he stuck with me. When I decided after a few months that the practice was too demanding, he didn't walk away. He introduced me to people who could answer my questions, and he called to read excerpts from the *World Tribune*. He was patient, gently but confidently saying, "Why don't you share this practice with your friends?" I did, and my life took off.

Once again, I am experiencing that same exhilarating take-off. Last month, two of my good friends received the Gohonzon. Joan, more than two decades ago, was one of the first people I introduced to Buddhism. She practiced in difficult circumstances then, and eventually the opposition in her surroundings was so strong that she returned the Gohonzon to me. I felt such regret. We remained in touch, and last year, saw each other several times and had wonderful open-hearted talks. She came to several meetings with me, and I prayed that she would want to practice again. One day, she called to say she had decided to begin again.

We repeatedly tried to attend Gohonzon-conferral ceremonies in her area, but some conflict always came up. Danny Nagashima, our SGI-USA general director, heard the story and said, "Why don't we bring the Gohonzon to her?" So simple!

But wait, the plot thickens. I also told Danny about my friend Yolanda, who has come to many meetings. Her 12-year-old granddaughter has been attending SGI-USA youth activities in her neighborhood and has written many letters to SGI President Ikeda sharing her dreams for the future. Yolanda even has a small space set aside in her bedroom to chant. She brought her whole family to the Southern California Zone Joy2K meeting and Latin festi-

val last fall, and has been subscribing to the *World Tribune* for several years now.

When I was at home recuperating from an injury in January, Yolanda told me that she had been chanting every day for my health while I was in the hospital. I was shocked to realize that, right under my nose, this entire family had been practicing. I asked Yolanda if she would like to receive the Gohonzon and have an altar of her own. She was elated!

Soon after, we conducted Gohonzon-conferral ceremonies at my house for both Joan and Yolanda. We all shared in their great joy. I believe both of these women were at a spiritual turning point, seeking and openhearted. If we had made them wait for a designated conferral ceremony, we might have lost that moment.

I am always moved by our general director's compassion and wisdom for people. He saw past the formality of a scheduled conferral ceremony to the true intent of *shakubuku* — bringing the source of eternal happiness to one person at his or her crucial moment of life. That is a great lesson for us all.

Here's my thinking: Our membership guidelines are here to support us. Most of the time, they work well to ensure that each new member is well cared for and serious in his or her commitment to practice Buddhism. But there may arise unique situations in which things need to be dealt with flexibly. In any case, we should always keep our eyes on the real goal and find the best solution for everyone.

As I write this, Joan is planning to pick me up for our women's meeting. Yolanda is bringing four guests to her women's meeting. In the car with Joan and me will be my physical therapist, who has been so impressed by the rapid recovery of my injury and by the members she has met at my



Matilda Buck (left) and Cleve Ford (right) in 1972, when they first became friends in faith.

house that she wants to know all about Buddhism. She may not begin to practice immediately — that's not the point. Although the ideal result is that another person embraces the Gohonzon, the point, as I see it, is to open the door to the SGI, to share all that we have to offer. That is the source of joy I feel in sharing this practice with others.

I am feeling bolder these days. I am not shy about encouraging others to try chanting and see what it can do for them. I am so grateful that Cleve Ford was bold 28 years ago.

We finished up our wonderful women's meetings last month. By all reports, they were creative, inspiring and well attended. There were many guests at these meetings, too. I believe these gatherings are building a momentum of propagation and the joy that accompanies it. We can carry the spirit of our women's meetings into smaller gatherings for women who may have been unable to attend. Why not include our new guests? For the upcoming March district meetings, our youth will be taking responsibility. What a perfect event to bring our guests to. Who wouldn't be encouraged to see

young people engaged in this movement of peace?

President Ikeda once shared second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's description of propagation (I just love this one!): "It is important to share Buddhism with a spirit of compassion. It's almost like being in love." President Toda certainly has a way of putting things! When people are in love, they go all out. They waste many sheets of stationery writing and rewriting letters. They stay up all night thinking about the words they will use to invite the other person out on their next day off. If everything goes well, they might decide to get married. However, unlike marriage sometimes, *shakubuku* will never cause one to have regrets" (February 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 28).

Shakubuku causes us to feel great joy and, to me, it is the greatest action to be taking toward May 3, 2001. We have grown and learned so much in these last few years. I believe that not only are we ready to welcome and care for our new members, the world is ready for us.

Now is the time. Let's open the doors! **WT**

of faith of "not begrudging one's life" taught in the Lotus Sutra.

This event led the Daishonin to decide that the time had come to inscribe the Dai-Gohonzon for the sake of all humanity into the infinite future.



The Atsuhara Persecution is the story of great disciples coming forth to fight in the spirit of the oneness of mentor and disciple. Up to that time, the Daishonin alone had borne the brunt of the persecution. In the Goshu, he writes: "If they were people who understood their obliga-

tions or were capable of reason, then out of two blows that fall on me, they would receive one in my stead" (WND, 828).

The Atsuhara Persecution was a momentous struggle in which the Daishonin's disciples for the first time stood up to take on those blows.

To be continued

This essay was published in the "Thoughts on *The New Human Revolution*" series in the Feb. 6 *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper.

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FROM ESSAY, 8

in the area that was once known as Atsuhara, our noble and valiant members of the Fuji Justice Sub-prefecture of the Soka Gakkai organization in Shizuoka Prefecture are exerting themselves energetically for the sake of kosen-rufu.

Jinshiro and his brothers were said to be accomplished in both learning and the military arts, brave men of integrity and intrepid spirit who were trusted and looked up to by people in their community. Their conversion had a big im-

act on those around them.

"Do not fear the powerful" (*Goshu Zenshu*, p. 177).

"Each of you should summon up the courage of a lion king and never succumb to threats from anyone" (WND, 997).

"Be prepared for the worst. Do not expect good times, but take the bad times for granted" (see WND, 998).

Genuine disciples who would respond to the words of the Daishonin, even at the risk of their lives, at last appeared among the common people. These heroes of the ordinary people courageously demonstrated the spirit

SOKA SPIRIT CONFERENCE HELD IN PHILADELPHIA

BY CLAUDE LOMDEN, LAVERNE LANDER AND MIMI SHARP
PHILADELPHIA CORRESPONDENTS

The Philadelphia Region Soka Spirit Conference, held Jan. 12-14 at the Philadelphia Community Center, was the first conference of its type held at the region level in the United States. Its purpose was to enable Philadelphia Region members to better understand the issues regarding Nichiren Shoshu and the SGI.

The word *conference* tends to sound formal, which this gathering was not. It was like a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center, with a relaxed and congenial atmosphere. Dozens of SGI-USA members attended the conference for round-table discussions or lectures to better understand the Soka Spirit.

SGI-USA Soka Spirit Youth Leader Jeff Farr and Vice Study Department Leader Shin Yatomi traveled from Los Angeles to lecture and facilitate large-scale discussions. There were always two activities occurring at the same time. For example, on Friday night, while Jeff met with chapter, area and

region leaders for a discussion, Shin gave a presentation for the Soka Spirit leaders on the "Encouraging Devotion" chapter of the Lotus Sutra and the concept of the three powerful enemies.

"Because Nichiren Daishonin was empowering the people, he was persecuted," said Shin during his lecture. "The authorities couldn't understand him. The members of the SGI have inherited this mission from the Daishonin."

"Soka Spirit is an education movement," said Jeff at a meeting with youth. "We can gain tremendous benefit by facing this problem. One purpose of Soka Spirit is to deepen our understanding of Buddhism."

Many left the conference feeling refreshed, having returned to the basics of Buddhism through dialogue and presentations. There was a sense of genuine equality among the leaders, general members and even a few guests who attended. It was a different kind of learning experience, in which study, encouragement and camaraderie were mingled together.

"This was a dream come true," said Mid-Atlantic Zone Soka Spirit Leader Rita Marlo. "It was a breakthrough oppor-



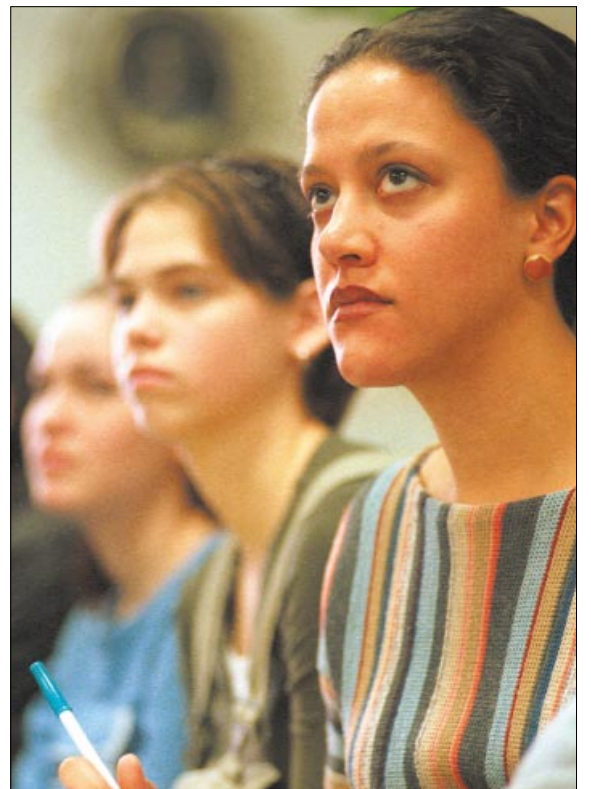
Photos by JONATHAN WILSON

SGI-USA Soka Spirit Youth Leader Jeff Farr answers questions at the Philadelphia Region Soka Spirit Conference, held Jan. 12-14.

tunity for Philadelphia members to refresh their spirit and deepen their understanding of what the Daishonin's Buddhism is truly about." **WT**



Q-and-A sessions are a highlight of the conference.



Youth listen to one another's determinations about Soka Spirit.