

# World TRIBUNE

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### EXPERIENCE

**Ajay Malhotra  
overcomes  
illness and  
shows actual  
proof.**

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SGI-USA NOV. 18 COMMEMORATIVE DISCUSSION MEETINGS UNDERWAY

# TOWARD A VICTORIOUS FINISH IN 2001

By **JAMIE LIPTAN**  
STAFF WRITER

Throughout the world this November, millions of people will commemorate Nov. 18, the date in 1930 that marks the beginning of the SGI's movement for the peace and happiness of all humanity. In the SGI-USA, members and friends are gathering at thousands of Nov. 18 Commemorative Discussion Meetings and reconfirming their commitment to work together for kosen-rufu.

"Each Nov. 18, we have the opportunity to return to the founding spirit of the SGI," says SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima, "which is to share the wisdom and compassion that we develop with the life-changing philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with those who are suffering.

"I know there are many guests attending these commemorative meetings," he

continued, "and our courage in helping them begin their Buddhist practice will not only help them revolutionize their lives, but will become the cause for overcoming whatever obstacles we ourselves may face."

Looking toward the end of the year and each district challenging the goal of welcoming at least two new members, Mr. Nagashima expressed his hope that "the members of the men's and women's divisions can teach a new generation the immense joy of propagation that we learned from our seniors in faith. Now is the time for us to reach out to those who are suffering by sharing the precious gem of the Mystic Law."

*The World Tribune wants to hear about your district's Nov. 18 Commemorative Discussion Meeting. Please contact your zone bureau chief for more details (see staff box on page 11 for contact information).*



Photo by JIMMY MORGAN

The members of Toluca Lake District in Southern California, along with SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima (front left), hold their Nov. 18 Commemorative Discussion Meeting, Nov. 3.

# AMERICA'S TREASURE: OUR DISTRICTS

## A Message FROM MATILDA

By **MATILDA BUCK**  
SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER



The treasure of America — right now — is our SGI-USA districts."

It was Sept. 12, and I was talking with Richard Miksic, a longtime SGI-USA leader in New York. His voice was fractured by emotion.

He witnessed firsthand what it meant to have a neighborhood group where people care for one another. Because of the relationships woven within each district, within 24 hours of the

collapse of the World Trade Center towers, all but two SGI-USA members in all of New York had been accounted for and had a place to go for comfort and shared understanding.

Our district meetings have become a place where people can bring their apprehensions,

their feelings, their questions and discuss them in the light of Buddhist practice. At a time when many of us may feel overwhelmed by the harsh global realities and possibilities, the district is where we can truly act locally. It is where we support one another and renew our hope and determination based on Buddhism. How fortunate we are that, right now, in our own homes, we have a method of practice — chanting to the Gohonzon — that brings out our deepest inner strength. When we fortify our lives this way, we suffer less from fear and benefit more in confidence and optimism. We gain a strong sense of control over our own lives and compassion for the lives of others.

Doesn't it make sense that if a significant number of people

are bringing forth their humanity and compassion that our world can change? No — that it *must* change.

This is the mission of the district: to help sustain and nurture the faith of members by providing the care, the activities, the forum in which we can find our true identity and function as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. As Nichiren Daishonin writes in "The Four Debts of Gratitude": "Both the treasure of the Buddha and the treasure of the Law are invariably perpetuated by the Order [the community of believers]. To illustrate, without firewood, there can be no fire, and if there is no earth, trees and plants cannot grow. Likewise, even though Buddhism existed, without the members of the Order who studied it and passed it on, it would

never have been transmitted throughout the two thousand years of the Former and Middle Days into the Latter Day of the Law" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 44–45).

Recently, SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima talked about the precious mission of our districts, quoting from the Gosho "Great Evil and Great Good," which states: "Great events never have minor omens. When great evil occurs, great good follows" (WND, 1119).

"When we view the horrific events commencing on Sept. 11 in this context," the general director said, "that is, as a point of great change for humanity — and when we determine that great good will follow, we

PLEASE SEE MATILDA, 11

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

# Valuing People First and Foremost

**‘The key to victory lies in uncovering fresh talent within the organization and pooling their abilities,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘The word “organization” tends to bring to mind an image of a monolithic, impersonal structure. However, in the Soka Gakkai, people are valued first and foremost.’**



The members of New Century District meet at SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck's house, Nov. 1, for their Nov. 18 Commemorative Discussion Meeting.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “If the spirit of many in body but one in mind prevails among the people, they will achieve all their goals, whereas if one in body but different in mind, they can achieve nothing remarkable” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 618). This is a famous passage, radiant with an unchanging principle that holds true for all affairs, in all ages and lands.

The Soka Gakkai is a living, dynamic organization working to carry out kosen-rufu, to realize peace for all humanity and happiness for the entire world. There has never been, nor ever will be, an organization with a more sublime mission.

There are no days off in this noble struggle for the Law. The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of valiant champions of the Buddha, who are always forging ahead energetically and intrepidly over mountain after mountain of arduous challenges.

In order to initiate another great advance, we need a revitalized leadership lineup brimming with fresh vigor and determination.

In Japan, the young men's division, student division, and future division have all embarked on a fresh, lively start with an array of new leaders. And our women's and young women's divisions, too, spearheading our drive toward a Century of Women, have begun to move forward with their

characteristic exuberance.

In addition, new appointments have been made to the recently created position of Soka Gakkai vice general director. Many new leadership appointments have also been made at the ward, prefecture, general prefecture and region levels around the country. Currently, efforts are under way to appoint new leaders to the frontline headquarters, chapter and district levels of the organization.

At this time of fresh departure, unity is crucial. The great Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore wrote, “Those who cannot work harmoniously with their fellow human beings lose their true ability.” We cannot succeed, as the poet says, without unity. Let us completely unite our hearts, our prayers and our efforts!

Given the diverse array of positions in our organization, different leaders will be called on to play different roles. Some may be in the spotlight, while others work behind the scenes.

However, we are all praiseworthy champions of Buddhism who have emerged from the earth to spread the Mystic Law. Whether president or group leader, we are all equal as fellow members of the Soka Gakkai, dedicated to

the cause of kosen-rufu.

Leadership positions within the Soka Gakkai are positions of responsibility. They are the emblems of courageous individuals who have voluntarily taken on the mission of expanding kosen-rufu and who battle against powerful negative forces to resolutely protect their fellow members.

Therefore, our Soka Gakkai activities—giving us the opportunity to take on leadership and responsibility for our movement—represent a noble means of Buddhist practice by which we can carry out our human revolution.



One day, I was with my mentor, Josei Toda, in the “president's office” at the old Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Nishi-Kanda, Tokyo. Though at the time the Headquarters did not have an officially designated president's office, I referred to the spot from where Mr. Toda usually led activities for kosen-rufu by that name. [From 1946–53, the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, which was located on the second floor of the same Nishi-Kanda building that housed President Toda's business offices, was comprised of just two small rooms.]

Anyway, on that particular occasion, President Toda asked me, “Daisaku, would you take on the position of Kamata Chapter advisor and get things seriously moving there?”

On observing the low monthly figures for new membership, he decided that the time had come to put me in the forefront of activities. He appointed me to a chapter leadership position in Kamata, in Tokyo's Ota Ward.

This was in January 1952. Some nine months had passed since President Toda's inauguration as second Soka Gakkai president and, contrary to his expectations, membership growth had slowed—or, rather, one could say, completely stagnated.

“Now is the time to make a breakthrough! Now I will open the way to victory!” With this spirit, I decisively rose into action, making it my mission to fulfill my mentor's expectations.

When taking on a new position, the first three months are decisive. Results are determined by the energy exerted at the start of any endeavor.

I recall the kick-off held at a community hall in Unoki, Ota Ward, just after my appointment in Kamata Chapter. We pledged there to advance like a mighty wave. I first of all

proposed to the frontline leaders that we set a concrete goal: to increase our membership by two new households per unit during the month of February.

The first step in any challenge is to set clear goals. If the goals are vague, people will find them difficult to relate to and take on as a personal challenge. Consequently, they will not make serious efforts to realize those goals.

At the same time, it is important not to impose goals on others. Goals must be presented in such a way that everyone can accept them and be enthusiastic about realizing them.

To that end, the central figure must have the firm resolve to take personal responsibility to achieve the intended target, even if he or she has to do it alone. The passion and enthusiasm emanating from such leaders inspires others to give their all for kosen-rufu.



We had just reorganized the Soka Gakkai into chapters, districts, groups and units, in descending order of size. The unit was at the very front line of the organization, corresponding to what we in Japan now call the block level.

President Toda wanted to give the frontline leaders confidence and a sense of personal responsibility; I, too, was convinced that this was crucial for the Soka Gakkai's development.

I wanted the nearly 100 unit



**The SGI-USA's Weekly Newspaper**

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leaders in Kamata Chapter to take the starring roles and to be victorious. Instead of one person advancing a hundred steps, a hundred people would advance one step forward. I prayed earnestly and worked tirelessly within the chapter, determined that not even one unit would fall to the wayside, that each member would experience benefit in faith.

The key to victory lies in uncovering fresh talent within the organization and pooling their abilities. The word *organization* tends to bring to mind an image of a monolithic, impersonal structure. However, in the Soka Gakkai, people are valued first and foremost.

All the leaders in Kamata Chapter—including group and district leaders—participated in unit-level activities. Discussion meetings were also held on the unit level, because this allowed for warmer, more personal encounters. In these smaller settings, it was possible to properly address individual problems and concerns through one-on-one dialogue.

Each person who was inspired with fresh resolve at these unit-level meetings rose up courageously to propagate the Law.



Merely ordering people about will not inspire them to action. This is even more so

I had resolved to take full responsibility for reaching our goal. I felt sure that if I became a good example, the members would appreciate my efforts and place their trust in me.

I stood up resolutely, as befitting a youth and a disciple of President Toda, and wholeheartedly exerted myself: “Watch me! Just watch my actions!” The Daishonin writes, “You need not seek far for an example” (WND, 614). It is our own example of personal struggle—not somebody else’s—that produces sympathy and understanding in those around us.



As a chapter advisor, I worked closely together with Kamata Chapter Leader Takashi Koizumi toward realizing President Toda’s vision. The position of chapter advisor was a support role, much like that of a vice leadership position today.

In that capacity, it was my function to assist the chapter leader, based on the same

shared ideals and objectives. I strove with the spirit “I will support the chapter leader, so that we become the best chapter in Japan!” I made every effort to forge myself into a model chapter advisor.

As an ancient philosopher said, it is not the position that ennobles a person, but a person who ennobles the position. In other words, it is not the position that makes a person shine; it is the person who makes the position shine.

To think that an organizational position makes one important is a sign of authoritarianism. That is the behavior of someone who swaggers about cloaked in borrowed authority. Ultimately, this attitude only degrades the position’s value.

A month later, the results from our February campaign were presented. Kamata Chapter came in at No. 1, with 201 new member households!

Until that time, most chapters were unable to achieve even 100 new member households in a month. We had totally broken through that barrier and created a tremendous victory. We had achieved our unprecedented goal of introducing two new households per unit. Everyone was astonished.

No matter how difficult or painful the challenges along the way, once the goal is achieved, everything is transformed into joy and satisfaction.

Everyone was radiant with happiness and delight. Some unit leaders literally danced for joy. Nothing could have made me happier.

While I have written many times before on this February Campaign—the 50th anniversary of which we will mark next year—I have taken the liberty of doing so once again, in view of its significance in the history of our movement.



The German writer Johann Wolfgang von Goethe wrote that as human beings our “first task is to be active.” To all of you, the noble leaders of kosen-rufu, I say, “Let us take action!”

Having adorned the first page of the 21st century with total victory, please continue to boldly write a history of personal growth and wonderful benefit in faith!

This essay was published in the “Thoughts on *The New Human Revolution*” series in the Oct. 4 *Seikyo Shim-bun*, the Soka Gakkai’s daily newspaper.

**We are all praiseworthy champions of Buddhism who have emerged from the earth to spread the Mystic Law. Whether president or group leader, we are all equal as fellow members of the Soka Gakkai, dedicated to the cause of kosen-rufu.**

considering that people are emotional beings. If people feel put-upon and act only out of a sense of obligation, they are not going to display their true power.

When I took on my leadership responsibilities in Kamata, I was only 24. How was I going to inspire everyone to take action with genuine enthusiasm and purpose? I would do it through my own actions, through my own sweat and hard work, through producing actual results.

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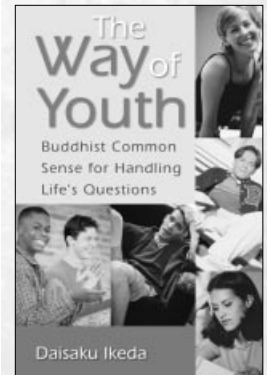
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## The Way of Youth

Buddhist Common Sense for Handling Life's Questions

Daisaku Ikeda



Based on the popular “Discussions on Youth” series in the *World Tribune*, *The Way of Youth* brings together President Ikeda’s responses to the questions of today’s young people. Edited for a general audience, the book offers insights into a variety of issues of concern to today’s young people, including how to build confidence and character, learning to live with and respect both yourself and others, finding true happiness, dealing with peer pressure and how to contribute to a positive, free and peaceful society. The book is sure to appeal to teens and their parents of all faiths. 0-9674697-0-8, Paperback, \$14.95

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APPLYING BUDDHISM TO DAILY LIFE

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# A Call for Peace: Our Global Ethics Agenda

BOSTON RESEARCH CENTER  
FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Everyone associated with the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century shares the shock and grief of millions of others in the wake of the tragic events of Sept. 11. In the aftermath, each human face and each personal story has reminded us of the critical importance of building cultures of peace to counteract and, one day, transform the culture of violence and war that is so prevalent in our world today.

Since 1993, the BRC has worked to build bridges and create dialogue among peace-seeking people from many cultures and religious perspectives. We will continue to do that work, albeit with an even stronger sense of conviction.

As our founder, Daisaku Ikeda, said in his public remarks following these events: "There are a number of short-term measures that may be implemented to combat violence and terrorism, but the only viable and fundamental long-term solution is education. There is no other alternative but to educate people on the loftiest humanitarian val-



Virginia Straus, executive director of the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, lectures on SGI President Ikeda's book 'For the Sake of Peace' at the SGI-USA's New York Culture Center, Oct. 20.

ues and views of life in order to establish a foundation of peace and stability for humankind in these times of tumultuous change. What we must strive to bring about is a century upholding the dignity of life, a century predicated upon humanistic education" (Sept. 28 *World Tribune*, p.1).

As we move ahead with our

global ethics agenda that focuses on education, women's leadership for peace and the Earth Charter, we invite you to join us as we listen and learn from each other. It is our deep hope that the horror of the Sept. 11 assault will cause all of us to reaffirm our commitment to peace in our own hearts and reach out to others around

us in this spirit. This peace is the only lasting one. As the Earth Charter suggests in its 16th principle, a culture of tolerance, nonviolence and peace ultimately rests upon "the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth and the larger whole of which all are a part." **WT**

## BRC Web Site Provides Perspectives on Terrorism and Nonviolence

The urgent need for dialogue in the aftermath of Sept. 11 calls for the ideas and perspectives of many people. To fulfill this need, the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century had developed a new page on its Web site in the "Resources" section titled "Perspectives on Terrorism and Nonviolence."

On this page you will find numerous links in reverse chronological order to commentaries, essays, letters and opinions on how the world might respond to the "new kind of war with a new kind of peace movement," in the words of BRC Executive Director Virginia Straus. New commentaries will be added weekly as the BRC follows the day-to-day developments of the world crisis.

Please check out [www.brc21.org](http://www.brc21.org) today and use this resource in your own conversations, meetings and social interactions.

## SPEAKING OUT FOR PEACE

By LEAH STENSON  
PORTLAND, ORE.

On Oct. 8, an anti-war editorial that I wrote was published in *The Oregonian*, Oregon's major newspaper. The article, including my photograph, was a column and a half in length and ran side by side with an article by Michael Kelly, the editor of the *National Journal*, who maintained that pacifism is "intellectually dishonest, elitist and hypocritical." The title of my article, given by *The Oregonian*, was "Pacifism 2001: What is it?" An illustration loomed large in the middle of the page: a dove with an olive branch in its beak, head bowed by the weight of sand pouring out of an hourglass suggested that time was running out on peace.

In the days following the publication of my article, *The Oregonian* ran several letters that expressed the authors' consternation and dismay that anyone would even think of suggesting a nonviolent reso-

lution to the current crisis.

Although there were no letters printed in support of my editorial, I received a flood of phone calls to my home and to the Oregon Peace Institute, where I work, expressing support and appreciation. One person drove 45 minutes to visit OPI and to speak with me and another brought tears to my eyes in commending me for my courage in making my unpopular view so public. I was deeply moved by all these people—friends as well as strangers—who were so quick to offer support and encouragement.

Although at first I was dismayed that there was not a stronger voice for peace in the press, I was very pleased that *The Oregonian* even published my editorial at all, since it was receiving over 1,000 letters a week at that point. I was elated to have gotten out the message about how the media and politicians are feeding us false dichotomies—between good and evil, justice and injustice and terrorism and civilization.

I echoed SGI President Ikeda's message that killing is not the answer, and that the solution to the problem of terrorism lies in dialogue and learning the lessons of nonviolent conflict resolution.

It is only natural that very few people understand peaceful resolution of conflict or its importance, since it has never been a mainstream concept. Shortly after Sept. 11, I was talking to a group of young adults and their teachers about conflict resolution. Later, one of the teachers came by OPI to explain how difficult it is for him to help the students understand the concepts I was talking about in relation to the current crisis. He pointed out that not only did the students' parents espouse the mainstream belief in military action, but that the media was only serving to reinforce this belief.

This helped me realize that publishing an editorial such as mine was something akin to spreading an understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Bud-

dhist. It may have been the first time that many Oregonians heard a pacifist's view. The fact that my article could even find its way into print and run alongside a major columnist gave pacifism credibility.

Being criticized in the press was an honor. It was a minor persecution befalling a practi-

tioner of the Lotus Sutra. I was proud to be able to raise my voice for peace. I know that my deceased father, an idealist and a pacifist, as well as President Ikeda, would be proud of me.

Leah Stenson is a practicing Buddhist and managing director of Oregon Peace Institute.

In this issue, we begin a series called "A New Era of Dialogue" in response to our readers' expressed interest and our commitment to providing Buddhist solutions to the issues we face. This series will feature commentaries and experiences that address, both thoughtfully and inspirationally, the current crises of terrorism and war humanity faces. The views expressed are solely the authors' and do not necessarily represent those of the *World Tribune* or the SGI-USA.

We invite SGI-USA members and friends of the SGI to share your stories, no more than 1,000 words in length, of ways you are creating "a new era of dialogue" at home, in your activities and in your communities.

When sending us your story, please include your name, address, phone number(s) and email address.

**By mail:** World Tribune, "A New Era of Dialogue," 606 Wilshire Blvd., Santa Monica, CA 90401

**By email:** [WT@sgi-usa.org](mailto:WT@sgi-usa.org). In the subject, type: "A New Era of Dialogue"

**By fax:** (310) 260-8910. Address it to "A New Era of Dialogue"

Please note: We are not accepting poetry, polemics and those views inconsistent with the Buddhist principles and values articulated in the SGI Charter. We reserve the right to edit submissions for clarity and length.

EXPERIENCE — AJAY MALHOTRA, OVERLAND PARK, KAN.

# READY FOR THE NEXT VICTORY

After overcoming a major illness, Ajay Malhotra shows actual proof in his work and determines to raise capable youth.

Soon after I began my practice of Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism in 1993, I had a facial paralysis attack called Bells Palsy, which led to the complete deformation of my face. At the time, I was living in India and my doctors were skeptical of my recovery, but because of my Buddhist practice I knew that I would win. And even though I was not able to open my mouth properly to speak, I determined to chant my way through it. I increased my daimoku while lying in bed and slowly but surely, the paralysis subsided. The benefit was not in simply recovering, but in my determination not to give up under any circumstances.

One of my next goals was to pass the exams to become a certified public accountant. In preparation, I studied 12 to 15 hours a day. Because of my recent paralysis, I was not able



Ajay Malhotra is determined to be the most trustworthy employee at work.

to sit for long periods of time, yet I was determined to challenge this obstacle with my practice. At home, my parents objected to my Buddhist practice. I began doing morning gongyo when my family was still sleeping and evening gongyo after everyone had

fallen asleep. All the while, I based my struggle on the following guidance from SGI President Ikeda: "Youth means grappling with all kinds of problems. It means resolving, in spite of all difficulties, to push aside the dark clouds of despair and advance toward the sun, toward hope. This strength is the hallmark of youth" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 1, p. 15).

A turning point came when I attended a Youth Division Training Course in 1996. There was a change in my attitude in faith and the meaning of the words *actual proof* to that of *mission*. I learned, and began to appreciate, the importance of practicing for the happiness of others. On the last day of the training course, I found out that I had passed all of my exams and that I was among a very few young adults in India to pass CPA exams at age 21, four years earlier than is typical.

From that moment on, I began doing morning and evening gongyo in the presence of my parents. I was realizing that my mission was not simply to have successes in my career, but to bring every person in my life closer to the Gohonzon. I started visiting other SGI members, driving a scooter from one part of Delhi to another, and chanting with the members

everywhere I could. I also began taking responsibility for SGI meetings and activities.

However, the opposition from my parents continued to increase. The only way I was able to continue my practice was by chanting vigorous daimoku, studying and challenging myself in the forefront of every activity. I was determined to take complete responsibility for my family karma and started exerting myself even more. This struggle brought a positive change within me and, rather than begrudging my faith, I started appreciating the Gohonzon for all of my hardships and for the circumstances allowing me to change my karma.

During this period, I asked my parents for permission to go to an SGI training course in Japan, but they said no. Though I was hurt and somewhat discouraged, this situation encouraged me to show actual proof of this practice to my parents.

Through my determination and efforts at work, I was offered a job in one of the world's largest companies and given the opportunity to visit the United States for four months. I was beginning to show my parents the power of the Gohonzon. They no longer asked me to quit my practice, but instead began respecting it. In

fact, while I was away, they took special care of my altar by cleaning it on a daily basis.

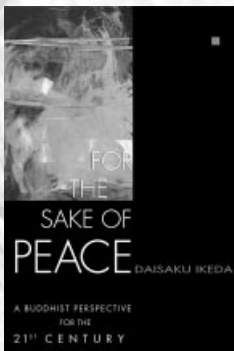
After my return from the United States, work became extremely hectic. I spent 18 to 20 hours a day in the office. I would go to work at 10:00 a.m. and return home at 5:00 a.m. the next day. Sometimes I did not return home for two days. No matter how tired I was, I was consistent in doing morning and evening gongyo and praying to eradicate the negative influence of the Nichiren Shoshu movement in India. Most importantly, I always appreciated the Gohonzon. Though these circumstances were tough, I never allowed myself to give up.

In my own way, I was determined to be an ambassador of President Ikeda in my office. I was determined to become the most trustworthy employee of my company and rise in my career. Again, because of my determination and continual efforts, I was nominated as the best team leader. Five months later, I was promoted to manager and became the youngest person in the company to hold this position. Most recently, my company appointed me to work on special projects in the United States when normally, such projects are given to individuals with more seniority. This was the actual proof I was looking for, to prove the greatness of this practice by becoming trusted at my workplace.

Based on recent encouragement and reflecting on my many experiences, I know that I must repay my debt of gratitude to the Gohonzon. I am now determined to: 1) advance on a daily basis in faith, practice, and study; 2) fight against evil until the last moment of my life; 3) challenge myself for the happiness of all the members; 4) rise in my career to continually show actual proof of the power of the Gohonzon to society; and 5) to raise 10 capable youth division members in the Kansas City Area by the end of 2001 to make the Year of Total Victory a reality.

President Ikeda once wrote, "When you make kosen-rufu your life's objective and pray to excel at your work in order to show proof of the goal's validity, you will be opening the way for your own victory and good fortune" (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 60). I am determined to show actual proof in the form of having an excellent career, not to just be successful, but to bring members and my parents closer to the Gohonzon. **W**

## NEW FROM MIDDLEWAY PRESS



Based on more than 20 years of peace proposals and university lectures, *For the Sake of Peace* expresses SGI President Ikeda's passionate yet practical vision of the way to achieve peace in the new millennium.

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- The Path of Global Awareness
- The Path of Disarmament

"Any individual who has questioned whether he or she could actually make a difference should read this book, become inspired and walk the path of peace."

—David Krieger, President, Nuclear Age Peace Foundation



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SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S SEPT. 6 MESSAGE

# Where Hope for the Future Begins

**'We create hope,' SGI President Ikeda says. 'For hope exists inside of us. Faith is boundless hope.'**

*SGI President Ikeda's message to a nationwide prefecture leaders conference, held at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters, Shinanomachi, Tokyo, Sept. 6.*

**T**hank you for gathering from throughout the country for this prefecture leaders conference. My heartfelt congratulations to the members across Japan, including the youth, on their fresh, hope-filled departure.

*Sharing suffering and joy  
Over the present and the future,  
Our bond  
Is most profound.*

Fifty years ago, second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda composed this poem for me. As Soka Gakkai members, we share the sufferings and joys of the struggle for kosen-rufu over past, present and future, transcending life and death. I sincerely applaud and eternally praise your efforts and wonderful achievements.

Nichiren Daishonin wrote to a follower whose husband had passed away: "When he was alive, he was a Buddha in life, and now he is a Buddha in death. He is a Buddha in both life and death" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 456). The lives of those who strive in accord with the Mystic Law, who struggle on behalf of the Mystic Law and who are devoted to the Mystic Law even in death merge with the life of the Daishonin and the world of Buddhahood pervading the universe.

Such people experience joy in both life and death. And their journey over the three existences of past, present and future is free of fear and sorrow.

**Freedom, hope, and eternal happiness are found in those who uphold correct philosophy.**

What is a correct way of life? What is a life of value? Let us look to the wisdom of past philosophers for answers to these questions.



SGI-USA youth perform in 'Rev It Up,' part of the SGI-USA Northern California Family Youth Festival, Aug. 19.

The American thinker John Dewey suggested that human beings innately possess an inexhaustible strength to pursue love, compassion, justice, equality and freedom. And the famous Russian author Leo Tolstoy declared, "One ought to learn and acquire the joy of doing good."

The Roman orator Cicero warned, "The great majority of people...when they fall prey to ambition for either military or civil authority, are carried away by it so completely that they quite lose sight of the claims of justice."

I also recall that Plutarch, the Greek biographer known for his work *Parallel Lives*, said of the Roman politician Camillus, "He had achieved far greater actions in war along with them [the people] than in politics with the patricians."

What is most important? The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus declared, "My friend, you must serve philosophy, for then you will be given true freedom." Freedom, hope and eternal happiness are found in those who uphold a correct philosophy.

The Ukrainian poet Lesya Ukrainka sang: "That's right! Even in sorrow, I will never forget verse. Even on gloomy nights, I will gently smile. Where there is no hope, I will find hope. I will live! Sadness, be gone. Be gone with you."

We create hope. For hope exists inside of us. Faith is

boundless hope.

**Persecutions that befall the votary of the Lotus Sutra originate from envy.**

Why do persecutions befall the votary of the Lotus Sutra, a champion of ultimate truth and justice? It is because of envy.

The Daishonin addresses this in "The Actions of the Votary of the Lotus Sutra": "Because venison is tasty, the deer is hunted and killed; because oil can be obtained from the turtle, the turtle loses its life. If a woman is beautiful, there will be many who envy her. The ruler of a nation has much to fear from other nations, and the life of a man with great wealth is constantly in danger. One who abides by the Lotus Sutra will inevitably attain Buddhahood. Therefore, the devil king of the sixth heaven, the lord of this three-fold world, will become intensely jealous of anyone who abides by the sutra. This devil king, we are told, attaches himself like a plague demon to people in a way that cannot be detected by the eye. Thereafter, like persons who gradually become drunk on fine old wine, rulers, fathers and mothers, wives and children gradually become possessed by him and are filled with jealousy toward the votary of the Lotus Sutra. And that is precisely the situation we face today in the world around us"

(WND, 779).

People are envied for their beauty, talent or good fortune. Or because they are happy or just. Even the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law was envied.

Actually, it is precisely because he was the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law that the Daishonin was so resented and persecuted. But he endured everything and left behind the great teaching of ultimate happiness and peace for all humankind.

**We must continually strive to develop ourselves, regardless of what others do or say.**

One cause of the terrible persecutions that befell Shakyamuni was the envy of Devadatta. [He was a disciple of Shakyamuni who later turned against his mentor. His future enlightenment, however, is predicted in the "Devadatta" chapter of the Lotus Sutra.] The Daishonin described Devadatta as "a man who cared deeply about fame and personal profit" (WND, 342), who was "driven by...intense jealousy" (WND, 342). President Toda was also strict when he described Devadatta's true nature as that of jealousy, particularly of the kind often seen in men.

In "Letter to Horen," the Daishonin said: "All heavenly and human beings looked

up to him [Shakyamuni] with admiration, and the four kinds of believers honored and revered him. Devadatta, however, did not command such respect from others, so he began to consider whether there was not some way he could gain worldly fame that would surpass that of the Buddha" (WND, 506).

The machinations of the cunning Devadatta succeeded for awhile. He managed to dupe the people to such a degree that they believed him to be far greater than Shakyamuni. As his arrogance swelled, Devadatta attempted to kill Shakyamuni. He also conspired to usurp the offerings made to Shakyamuni and to take control of the Buddhist Order. In addition, he befriended King Ajatashatru [the most powerful ruler in India at that time], and together they committed acts of the worst treachery. In the end, Devadatta fell into hell for his terrible offenses.

The Daishonin described the arrogance and presumption of the priest Ryokan of Gokuraku-ji temple [who made false accusations against the Daishonin and plotted to have him executed] in light of the sutra. He said that although Ryokan was revered as a priest who upheld the precepts, he was in fact slovenly and self-indulgent. He further described Ryokan as a person consumed by selfish desires, envy, erro-

neous views and licentious behavior, and he declared that these tendencies summed up Ryokan's true nature (see *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 350).

The Daishonin also stated, "The priests of the Hinayana schools of the Dharma Analysis Treasury, Establishment of Truth, and Precepts will be the flames of anger that burn with jealous hatred of the Mahayana schools" (WND, 578). He warned that the "flames of jealousy" burning in people's hearts threaten to destroy the true Law.

Envy is the reverse side of arrogance. In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin cited a passage from Miao-lo's *Annotations on Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra* that states, "'Inability to self-reflect' means an inflated sense of self-importance" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 718).

We must continually strive to develop ourselves, regardless of what other people do or say. Unfortunately, jealous and arrogant people lack the modesty to do this.

**Lies can easily destroy the beautiful bonds that link people.**

Mahatma Gandhi wrote: "The way of peace is the way of truth. Truthfulness is even more important than peacefulness. Indeed, lying is the mother of violence."

Lies and slander destroy the beautiful bonds that link people. They undermine the healthy growth of society. Spreading lies is a favorite ploy of the envious.

Scandalous rumors about Shakyamuni were also circulated widely. At the instigation of fellow Brahmans, a woman publicly slandered him by placing a pot underneath her robe and claiming that she was carrying his child. This act, known as the Slander of Chincha, was a most despicable lie intended to invite shame and disgrace upon a person of true honor and integrity.

Rumors that the Daishonin was a "monk who transgresses" were also spread. [The Daishonin wrote, "Though I have neither wife nor child, I am known throughout the country as a monk who transgresses the code of conduct" (WND, 42).] Malicious rumors and slander were behind the persecution of the Daishonin.

In "Rebuttal of the Claims by Gyobin," he wrote: "Nichiren has suffered wounds and as many as several hundred of his disciples have been killed. This is entirely due to the great lies

spread by Ryokan, Nen'a, Doa and other [priests who are revered as] sages" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 182).

The Daishonin also clearly indicated that women who were deceived by erroneous teachings had made false allegations against him to powerful figures. He said of these women: "Because they look upon Nichiren, who is trying to save them, as a deadly enemy, these women all join together to slander him to the ruler of the country, so that, after having been exiled to the province of Izu, he was also exiled to the province of Sado" (WND, 932).

The pattern of persecution against the Soka Gakkai has been the same. This is testimony that we are carrying on the Daishonin's legacy.

In another of his writings, the Daishonin stated: "Although the age in which the Buddha lived was certainly a defiled one, the five impurities had only just begun to manifest themselves; in addition, the devil stood in awe of the Buddha's powers. Yet, even in a time when the people's greed, anger, foolishness, and false views were still not rampant, a group of brahmans of the Bamboo Staff school killed the Venerable Maudgalyayana, who was known as the foremost in transcendental powers; and King Ajatashatru, by releasing a mad elephant, threatened the life of the only one in all the threefold world who is worthy of honor. Devadatta killed the nun Utpalavarna, who had attained the state of *arhat*; and the Venerable Kokalika spread evil rumors about Shariputra, who was renowned as the foremost in wisdom. How much worse things became in the world as the five impurities steadily increased! And now, in the latter age, hatred and jealousy toward those who believe even slightly in the Lotus Sutra will be all the more terrible. Thus the Lotus Sutra states, 'Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?' When I read this passage for the first time, I did

not think that the situation would be as bad as it predicts. Now I am struck by the unflinching accuracy of the Buddha's words, especially in light of my present circumstances [in exile]" (WND, 42).

It is because we are resolutely advancing kosen-rufu in accord with the Lotus Sutra and the Daishonin's writings that we have been the target of jealousy, envy and slander. Facing persecution is proof that we are upholding the highest cause of good.

The Daishonin thought of Japan as a land "filled with jealousy" (WND, 873). The Soka Gakkai, which is engaging its struggle for good in this "land of jealousy," has been hailed by many of the world's leading thinkers, who under-

stand and support its cause. The two islands of Iki and Tsushima. Those persons who have spoken slanderously of me will in time chant in the same way; and everyone from the ruler on down to the multitude of common people will, as described in the 'Supernatural Powers' chapter of the Lotus Sutra, chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo with a single voice" (WND, 672).

These words are unchanging. Kosen-rufu can definitely be achieved. Now is the time to realize dynamic advancement.

Life is a struggle. Buddhism is a struggle. Only by surmounting great suffering can we appreciate life's depth and joy.

That is why we must continue to move forward. We must take action. This is what the philosophers of the world teach.

The French philosopher Alain [Emile August Chartier] said, "Every good action is in itself beautiful and shines on a man's face." Indeed, a

person of action is beautiful.

The British author Emily Bronte wrote, "With the humble I will be; / Haughty men are nought to me." Let us advance with the same spirit.

The Czech philosopher-statesman T. G. Masaryk was revered as a mentor by President Vaclav Havel of the Czech Republic and Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, father of whom I had the opportunity to conduct dialogues with. Masaryk said, "Our democracy must consist of ceaseless reformation, ceaseless revolution; it must be revolution of the mind and heart." Revolution of the mind and the heart—in other words, human revolution—will create a new age of the people.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the towering leader of the Civil Rights Movement, solemnly declared, "An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity."

The insights of the Indian poet Rabindranath Tagore are also thought provoking. He

said, "The most important lesson that man can learn from his life is not that there is pain in this world, but that it depends upon him to turn it into good account, that it is possible for him to transmute it into joy."

Lastly, the Ukrainian poet Ukrainka sang, "Oh Words, I wanted to cultivate you like a flash of lightning, like a sharp sword.... Fight! Cut! Crush! Oh Words, don't smolder, but burst into flame."

I hope you will face and overcome all the challenges you encounter and dedicate yourselves to taking action and engaging others in dialogue toward the realization of kosen-rufu, the great hope of humanity.

**Each day, let us cheerfully meet with our fellow members, who are working so hard.**

The 21st century is a century of life, a century of health.

This is the time of year when exhaustion from the hot summer months catches up with us. Please take care to get sufficient rest and restore your energy.

The "Life Span" chapter of the Lotus Sutra that we recite each morning and evening contains the line "[Such is the power of my wisdom] that its sagacious beams shine without measure. This life span of countless kalpas [I gained as the result of lengthy practice]" (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 231). With this conviction, I hope you will live long and enjoy good health as you cause wisdom and vitality to well forth from your lives and guide the rising tide of kosen-rufu ever forward.

Each day, let us cheerfully meet with and encourage our fellow members, who are working so hard for kosen-rufu. Let us foster capable successors, who will carry on our struggle. And let us vigorously enact a drama of continuous expansion.

Please convey my warmest regards to the noble members in your respective areas.

Let's carry on resolutely and with dauntless composure! **WT**

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**Life is a struggle. Buddhism is a struggle. Only by surmounting great suffering can we appreciate life's depth and joy. That is why we must continue to move forward. We must take action. This is what the philosophers of the world teach.**

# the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

## 'PURE STREAM'

VOLUME 8, CHAPTER 3, PARTS 13-16

*'No one can avoid death. At the same time, life is eternal. It is good to live a long life, but even more important is what one has done in life, whether one has carried out one's mission.'*

August, known in the Soka Gakkai as "the month of training," began with the second nationwide meeting of the Education Department at the Taito Gymnasium in Tokyo on Aug. 1. At this meeting, Hisao Seki, a vice general director and culture bureau leader, was appointed the new department head, replacing Katsu Kiyohara.

The annual summer training course began on Aug. 3 at the head temple. This year it was expected that 20,000 members from all divisions throughout Japan would participate in the course, which was to be conducted in four sessions over

nine days through Aug. 11. In addition to his responsibilities in overseeing the course, President Shin'ichi Yamamoto led Q-and-A sessions, wholeheartedly encouraging the members in each group.

On the evening of Aug. 11, the last day of the training course, Vice General Director Seiichiro Haruki and Director and South America General Chapter Leader Hiroshi Yamagiwa departed from Tokyo's Haneda Airport for Argentina.

They were the first of the leaders to embark on overseas guidance trips that summer. After a layover in Vancouver, British Columbia, they were to

fly to Argentina, after which they would visit Paraguay, Brazil, Peru and Bolivia. In all these countries, they would meet with members to offer guidance and encouragement. They were scheduled to return to Japan on Aug. 29.

Hisao Seki and others would leave for North America on Aug. 15 and return on the 27th. Vice General Director and Southeast Asia General Chapter Leader Kazumasa Morikawa and others would then depart on Aug. 17 and return on the 25th. The regional summer guidance tours that had been conducted around Japan since the early years of the Soka Gakkai were now taking place on a global scale.

Before departing for South America, Haruki and Yamagiwa, who had been in charge of some of the sessions during the summer training course, went to see Shin'ichi. After confirming that they were going to pass through Mexico, Shin'ichi said: "I will never forget that just before second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda died, he told me happily

that he dreamt he had visited Mexico. He said that everyone there was waiting, that they were seeking the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin. He said he wanted to go there, to go everywhere for kosen-rufu.

"I want you two to go to South America with the strong awareness that you are going in President Toda's stead. Wherever I go, I always act with that in mind. I ask myself, 'What would President Toda do in my place? How would he approach this challenge?' I also always ask myself if President Toda would be pleased with what I am doing. That has allowed me to give my best and to have courage. That, to me, is how to live the way of mentor and disciple."

Shin'ichi continued: "If I could, I would like to go to Mexico, Argentina and Peru myself. I would like to visit every country in the world and encourage everyone I meet with all my might. But I just do not have the time right now. So you are going in my place, too. Since you are making this trip, you must pour your all into encouraging and guiding the members. It would be a disservice to them to do anything less." After this, Haruki and Yamagiwa left for South America with renewed determination.

During the summer training course, Shin'ichi met a number of times with the leaders who were being sent abroad to discuss in detail the development of Soka Gakkai organizations around the world. He wanted to firmly establish the organization in each country and prepare the way for future growth and development. These plans were officially announced after they had been dis-

cussed with the leaders in those countries during the summer guidance tours.

The most important new development was the creation of the first headquarters organization outside Japan, the Europe and All America Headquarters, with Nagayasu Masaki as its head. In the United States, America General Chapter was divided into two, forming the America West and America East general chapters. The new Europe and All America Headquarters thus consisted of four general chapters: two in the United States, one in South America, and one in Europe.

In the United States, chapters were established in San Diego, Colorado and Kentucky. A group was also formed in Canada.

In South America, Paraguay Chapter was created and Brazil Chapter was split into three, the two new chapters being São Paulo West and São Paulo North. Including the already existing Brazil, Peru and Bolivia chapters, South America now had six chapters. In addition, a district was formed in Argentina and a group in Mexico.

In Southeast Asia, Jakarta Chapter was established in Indonesia and Manila Chapter in the Philippines, and districts were set up in Singapore and in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. The foundation of kosen-rufu was being steadily built around the world.

On Aug. 14, after the summer training course, Shin'ichi visited Hokuriku to attend the funeral of Toyama Chapter Leader Toshiharu Takamatsu, which had been organized by Toyama Chapter. He had died on July 31 while returning home by overnight train from the Chubu No. 2 Headquarters Leaders Meeting in Nagano, which Shin'ichi had attended.

At the Chubu No. 2 Headquarters Leaders Meeting, Toshiharu Takamatsu joined other chapter leaders in joyfully leading the singing of Soka Gakkai songs. His movements were especially vigorous that night. When the meeting finished, Takamatsu caught up with Shin'ichi as he entered a reception room, and said with a smile, "Sensei, it's been a long

Illustrations by KENICHIRO UCHIDA



time since we have met!”

“Yes! How good to see you! When are you returning to Toyama?”

“I am going back on the train tonight with the others,” Takamatsu replied.

“I see. Well, please have a safe journey back. By the way, in commemoration of today’s meeting, I would like to present you with one of President Toda’s poems that I have copied out by hand.” Shin’ichi handed the calligraphy to Takamatsu.

*Believe in the Buddha,  
The treasure of the universe,  
And as a Buddha’s child,  
Enjoy protection  
Without fail.*

Takamatsu’s eyes brightened as he read the poem. “Thank you!” he exclaimed. “I am deeply encouraged!”

Takamatsu had joined the Soka Gakkai in 1955. He was a good-natured and simple man. At one point he managed a welding shop, but his trusting nature often led him to be taken advantage of, which did not fare well for business. Eventually he fell so deeply into debt that his house was confiscated. He and his wife and their six children moved into a small shack, and from there into one cramped row house after another. But all the while, he remained earnest in his faith.

The family was destitute and Takamatsu’s wife, Shizuko, was forced to make frequent visits to the local pawnshop just to make

ends meet. But they both kept their spirits up and continued to work hard for kosen-rufu.

In September 1960, when Toyama Chapter was established, Takamatsu was appointed chapter leader and Shizuko, chapter women’s division leader. Eventually their financial situation took a turn for the better. Then, in the spring of 1963, urged by his friends and neighbors, Takamatsu ran for the local city council and won.

On the train back from the leaders meeting, Takamatsu walked through the cars encouraging his fellow members. He continued giving personal guidance late into the night, and then he fell asleep in his seat.

As the morning dawned, he seemed to be sleeping soundly. But when the person in the seat in front tried to wake him, saying, “We will be in Toyama soon,” Takamatsu did not answer.

Shizuko also tried to wake him but in vain. He had stopped breathing. It



was a peaceful death. He seemed to be smiling.

When Shin’ichi learned of Takamatsu’s death, he immediately telephoned the family. Shizuko answered, and from her description of Takamatsu’s appearance, Shin’ichi knew that Takamatsu had attained Buddhahood. Shizuko said with a steady voice: “I am fine. Please do not worry. I am more concerned about the

other members....”

She had lost her loving husband, and she must have been wracked with grief, but she was concerned about her fellow members. Her strength and dignity moved Shin’ichi. He promised he would visit Toyama soon. On Aug. 14, he went to attend Mr. Takamatsu’s funeral ceremony.

Takamatsu was only 53 when he died, young compared to the average life expectancy in Japan. However, no one can avoid death. At the same time, life is eternal. It is good to live a long life, but even more important is what one has done in life, whether one has carried out one’s mission. That is why Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “Life is limited; we must not begrudge it. What we should ultimately aspire to is the Buddha land” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 214).

Takamatsu had made kosen-rufu his personal goal and taught numerous others the way to genuine

happiness. At the same time, he had helped raise many capable people. He had fulfilled his mission as a Bodhisattva of the Earth in this life and departed for Eagle Peak. The many others he had nurtured would now inherit and carry on his dream.

Those who devote their lives to working for kosen-rufu will attain Buddhahood without fail, just as the Daishonin’s writings promise. Shin’ichi believed that Takamatsu would be reborn immediately and that by the arrival of the 21st century, he would be a courageous youthful leader in the Soka Gakkai.

At the funeral, Shin’ichi warmly encouraged all of the family members. He knew that by living happy lives from this point on, they would show proof of Takamatsu’s attainment of Buddhahood.

When the services were over, Shin’ichi attended the Hokuriku General Chapter Leaders Meeting held in the Toyama Civic Hall. Hokuriku General Chapter had just been established in May of that year, and this was the first leaders meeting of the new general chapter to be attended by Shin’ichi. The meeting began with Shin’ichi’s arrival shortly before 2:00 in the afternoon.

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



# Questions From the Second Generation

## Q&A ON FAITH

By TED MORINO  
EDITOR IN CHIEF



**Q** I am a so-called “fortune baby,” a second-generation SGI-USA member who was born into this practice. I am struggling to develop a sense of determination to practice Buddhism for myself. Any advice?

**A** Since I myself am not a “fortune baby,” I don’t think I can understand exactly how SGI-USA members of the second or third generation feel. With that said, I want to first mention that we are living in a new era in which there are many second and even third generation youth who were born into the practice of

Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in our basically Judeo-Christian society. It’s amazing to see how much they are positively influenced by the life-affirming philosophy of Buddhism from the beginning of their existence in this world.

I have interviewed several members whose parents were already Buddhist when they were born. Some of these youth are fully determined to use this practice to become victors in life with a deep sense of gratitude to their parents for their faith, while others are still un-

clear about the necessity of practicing to the Gohonzon.

In this article, I would like to address the latter group of members who may be questioning the need for Buddhist faith and practice. Some common responses from them were: “I do gongyo, because if I do it, my parents are happy”; “I think I know the greatness of faith, but I don’t feel like sitting in front of the Gohonzon”; “When I am seriously worried about something, I know I have to go to the Gohonzon”; “When I chant, I have more questions than answers”; “Everybody says I had better practice hard, but I can’t blindly accept this faith”; “I can’t make a determination, even though I have been told in the SGI that determination is what counts”; “I still don’t understand why I have to chant”; and, “When I see how my parents are, I don’t feel like following suit.”

When my own brother introduced me to this practice, I didn’t have any clue as to what I was getting into. But fortu-

nately I was soon surrounded by strong SGI members my own age. I also began to harbor a strong desire to attend a particular university near my hometown in Japan. This powerful desire motivated me to seriously chant and test the power of faith in the Gohonzon. Most importantly at some point after I joined the SGI, I chose to practice this Buddhism myself. So, my true journey of faith started with this desire of mine to attend a certain university, not on the day I joined the SGI.

When I view the issues you, the second- or third-generation members, have expressed, I can say that I believe the true beginning of your faith will start when you truly want to give Buddhist practice a sincere and serious try. This challenge from the Daishonin echoed in my heart when I decided for myself to practice his Buddhism: “I say to you, my disciples, try practicing as the Lotus Sutra teaches, exerting yourselves without begrudging your lives! Test the truth of Buddhism

now.” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 583–84).

Developing solid faith in the Mystic Law — and thereby in our innate Buddha nature — is everybody’s challenge regardless of our background and the circumstances of how we were raised. Speaking about the treasure of faith, President Ikeda states: “When your determination changes, everything will begin to move in the direction you desire. The moment you resolve to be victorious, every nerve and fiber in your being will immediately orient itself toward your success. On the other hand, if you think, ‘This is never going to work out,’ then at that instant every cell in your being will be deflated and give up the fight. Then everything really will move in the direction of failure” (*Faith Into Action*, pp. 108–09).

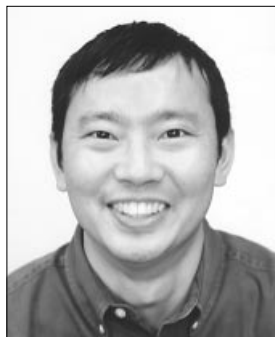
In the final analysis, faith, self-confidence and happiness are not things we can inherit from somebody, but something we tenaciously build within our lives through our own efforts. **WT**

# The Ceremony in the Air

## Back to the Basics

By SHIN YATOMI

SGI-USA VICE STUDY DEPARTMENT LEADER



**W**e may think of the Lotus Sutra as a three-act play, enacted upon the stage of the universe, in the theatre of life — Shakyamuni’s as well as ours. In this grand drama of life and cosmos, the actors number from several hundreds of thousands to several millions and even more. They are Buddhas, bodhisattvas, ordinary men and women, monks and nuns, heavenly deities, mythic beings, and even the persons and beings previously considered irrevocably evil — to represent the “ten worlds” or all possible states of existence inherent within our lives.

For this large and diverse crowd, the main character Shakyamuni starts his preaching on Eagle Peak from the “Introduction” (1st) chapter to “The Teacher of the Law” (10th)

chapter. This may be thought of as the first act. The second act starts with the emergence of a gigantic treasure tower from the earth and its elevation into midair along with the entire assembly. This second act is called the Ceremony in the Air, which spans from “The Emergence of the Treasure Tower” (11th) chapter to the “Entrustment” (22nd) chapter. Returning again to Eagle Peak, the third act begins from the “Former Affairs of the Bodhisattva Medicine King” (23rd) chapter to the concluding “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” (28th) chapter.

This structure of the sutra is sometimes called “the three assemblies in two places.” There are also plays within the play. These are the stories in Shakyamuni’s preaching as well as the accounts given by various other characters that are set throughout the universe and extend from the remote past before Shakyamuni’s birth to the distant future beyond his death. The drama transcends both space and time.

Of the sutra’s three “acts,” the Daishonin places particular emphasis on the second, that is, the Ceremony in the Air. The Gohonzon, which is the embodiment of the Daishonin’s ultimate teaching, employs the Ceremony in the Air as a conceptual motif. He explains: “This Gohonzon was revealed in the last eight years of the fifty that the Buddha preached in this world, and in this period of eight years, in eight chapters [of the Lotus Sutra], from the ‘Emerging from the Earth’ chapter through the ‘Entrustment’ chapter” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 831). He often compares the Gohonzon itself to the treasure tower,

which is the central imagery in the Ceremony in the Air: “Faith like yours is so extremely rare that I will inscribe the treasure tower especially for you.... You and your wife should worship this treasure tower privately” (WND, 300). Regarding the treasure tower, the Daishonin also writes: “The daimoku of the Lotus Sutra is the treasure tower, and the treasure tower is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.... Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful” (WND, 299).

In light of the Daishonin’s teaching, the Ceremony in the Air and the treasure tower in particular may be viewed as a metaphor for the emergence of our innate Buddhahood. The size of the tower, which is said to be one-third to one-half of the Earth, is intended to express the enormous strength and expansiveness of our inner life, and the magnificent appearance of the tower, which is adorned with the seven kinds of gems, to indicate the brilliance of our inner beauty often buried beneath delusion. All the diverse groups of living beings lifted in midair symbolize all our life-conditions, including hellish suffering and despair,

elevated and transformed to work for our genuine happiness and freedom. The raised assembly may also be symbolic of an elevated perspective that enables us to see all of humanity within us and thereby transcend the differences separating our lives from others.

Commenting on the meaning of the Ceremony in the Air, the Daishonin states, “The ‘place’ where Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and dwell in faith corresponds to the passage ‘reside in the air.’ In other words, they reside in the Ceremony in the Air” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 740). The Ceremony in the Air is neither a historical event nor merely a fantasy out of an ancient Buddhist text. The ceremony is the possibility present in all people to bring forth the supreme power of compassion and wisdom from within; it is a sublime drama that we can enact at any time through our prayer to the Gohonzon. No matter what difficulties we may be experiencing, with confident prayer that our lives are endowed with the wellspring of joy and hope, we can transform even the most tragic episode of our lives into a victory to inspire both ourselves and others. This is what it means to be at the Ceremony in the Air. **WT**

FROM MATILDA, I

cannot sit idly by and wait for it to be mystically bestowed. Rather, we can and must make great effort to ensure that great good will follow."

To me, this "great effort" is to spread the Daishonin's Buddhism. Specifically, we can focus on our November meetings, planning wonderful meetings that will embrace many people, that will capture people's deepest desire for personal and global peace—meetings that will offer clear and inspiring proof of the greatness of the Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI organization. We should reach out as never before to all our active members and to friends who have become inactive. Especially, let's talk with the many guests and newcomers we have met in the past.

Often, when I go to district meetings, I meet newcomers who are trying to chant every day, reading about Buddhism and coming to meetings, but they have not yet received the Gohonzon. I believe almost every district has people who are waiting to be asked.

When we unite in our prayers that these new people can begin their practice in the SGI-USA, we will be transforming America. SGI President Ikeda has said: "The first thing is to pray. From the moment we begin to pray, things start moving. The darker the night, the closer the dawn. From the moment we chant daimoku with a deep and powerful resolve, the sun begins to rise in our hearts" (*For Today and Tomorrow*, p. 249).

Our national focus for the end of this year—which is less than two months away—is to help each district reach the goal of welcoming two new Gohonzon members for the year.

What a difference it makes to wake up to the Gohonzon in your own home, to come home at night and be able to chant about your day. When these precious people enjoy this support, this resource—this is the basis to create world peace. I know of one November meeting where a new member will receive the Gohonzon during the meeting, and the members

plan to celebrate with a cake afterward to honor this great event. I believe each member in this district will be invested in caring for this new practitioner. That is a crucial ingredient: committed sponsors for each beginner. How proud the members will be!

The SGI-USA membership guidelines ask for three months of practice before receiving the Gohonzon, but that does not mean the applicant must perform perfect daily gongyo or attend weekly meetings. These guidelines are to ensure that each new member is serious in his or her desire to practice, that the new member knows what to expect and that the organization is serious in its commitment to support a new practitioner. We should be aware of each person's circumstances and do all we can to help him or her begin in earnest.

Do you remember our SGI theme for 2001? It is the Year of Total Victory for the New Century. I have talked with many members this year. Some feel personally victorious and others do not. In the time that remains in 2001, let's make a concentrated effort to create a victory for each district in mak-

ing this goal: two new practitioners who can enshrine the Gohonzon in their own homes.

What about our personal goals? It is by taking the action of the Bodhisattvas of the Earth, by helping others to practice, that we bring forth the greatest power in our own lives. In the Goshu "On the Treasure Tower," the Daishonin writes: "You may think you offered gifts to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself. You, yourself, are a Thus Come One who is originally enlightened and endowed with the three bodies. You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction" (WND, 299). I believe our actions to help others will give us the momentum to achieve our personal victories.

As President Ikeda writes: "Let us make each day and each year one of growth and fresh, exciting possibilities. One important way to do this is by meeting with our fellow members, speaking with and encouraging as many people as we can. Our spirits are lifted when we do so; we are invigorated and rejuvenated. Limitless benefit and good fortune

adorn those who cherish the members above all, who, rather than meeting the famous or powerful, would happily meet sincere members" (July 4, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

Recently, General Director Nagashima referred to a conversation with President Ikeda, who spoke about how important it is right now to exert ourselves for world peace. When we make that kind of altruistic effort, he said, many issues may emerge—internal and external—but as we confront them, we can develop great strength—our greater self comes forth. Everything we do for Buddhism benefits us personally.

It is important that we carry out our activities without bearing grudges and without any sense of sacrifice. Negativity causes us to lose momentum. Everything we willingly do for kosen-rufu benefits us in the long run—that is the nature of faith. I believe if we take this guidance to heart right now, at this crucial time, and put our prayers and action into our district activities and into helping people begin their practice with the Gohonzon, we can do two major things: Awaken our own lives as we move closer to our

goals, and significantly influence humanity's future. The two are never exclusive.

In closing, I want to share again four points that Soka Gakkai Vice President Yasunori Takemoto made concerning the ingredients of victory:

- Determine to use the current challenge to become someone who does not doubt the Gohonzon, no matter what is happening.
- Determine that we have the karma to experience whatever situation we may find ourselves in, and that it is our mission to achieve a transformation.
- Determine to do *shakubuku*; to act as a Bodhisattva of the Earth.
- Determine to keep a strong spirit; to not let negative feelings or information overwhelm us; to see any setback as a manageable event and not the total picture of our lives.

How wonderful that we have the Gohonzon! How wonderful that we can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to it! How wonderful that we can tell others of this practice!

How wonderful that we can win! **WT**

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# Florida Nature and Culture Center 2002 Schedule of Conferences

January 24-27	Golden Stage Group Conference #1 (Japanese Language)
February 7-10	Arts Division Conference #1
February 14-17	Courageous Heart Group (Soka Spirit) Conference
February 21-24	Stage Crew Conference
March 7-10	Spanish/Portuguese Language Conference #1
March 14-17	Korean Language Conference #1
March 21-24	Chinese Language Conference #1
April 4-7	To Be Determined
April 11-14	Golden Stage Group Conference #2 (Japanese Language)
April 17-21	Women's Leadership Conference (Open to all women's division members)
May 2-5	Mentor and Disciple Relationship Conference
May 9-12	Leadership Development Conference
May 16-19	Healing Arts & Legal Division Conference
May 30-June 2	Diversity Conference
June 6-9	Study Conference #1
June 13-16	Men's Conference #1
June 20-23	Educator's Division Conference
June 27-30	Young Men's Conference
July 11-14	Young Women's Conference
July 18-21	Youth Performing Groups Conference
August 1-4	Student Division Conference
August 8-11	Jr. High/High School Divisions Conference
August 15-18	Raising Our Children Conference
August 22-25	Men's Conference #2
September 5-8	Korean Language Conference #2
September 12-15	Japanese Language Conference
September 19-22	Third Southeast Asian Conference
October 3-6	Spanish/Portuguese Language Conference #2
October 10-13	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Conference
October 17-20	Chinese Language Conference #2
October 24-27	Women's Conference
November 7-10	Study Conference #2
November 14-17	Culture Department Conference
November 21-24	Byakuren, Soka Group and Gajokai (BSG) Conference
December 5-8	Arts Division Conference #2
December 12-15	Golden Stage Group Conference #3 (English & Japanese Language)

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