

NOV. 18 COMMEMORATIVE DISCUSSION MEETINGS

Revitalizing America Through Dialogue

By **JAMIE LIPTAN**
STAFF WRITER

During the month of November, SGI-USA members throughout the country celebrated Nov. 18, the 71st anniversary of the Soka Gakkai's founding, at thousands of neighborhood gatherings.

Members of Lefferts-Wingate District in New York enjoyed a lively meeting with several guests, including New York State Senator Marty Markowitz, who is also the Brooklyn Borough president-elect. He presented the district with a certificate of recognition congratulating "Lefferts-Wingate District of SGI-USA in celebration of Founding Day."

Senator Markowitz shared that his most important experience growing up was learning how to interact and be friends with many different people. "If we are to have peace and live in tolerant co-existence with each other, then we should respect our neighbors as we do ourselves," he stated, echoing the meeting's theme of "Dialogue for Peace." "We should learn and understand our differences, our diversity, and strive to build trust among each other."

In Florida, the members of Palm Beach chapter also held an enthusiastic gathering centering on dialogue. It seemed like a long time had passed since the members held their first planning meeting, soon after the Sept. 11 tragedy. While the media was reporting that the majority of the terrorists had lived, worked and gone to flight schools in Palm Beach County, a local company was testing all of its employees for exposure to anthrax after an employee's death. "I knew we would have a wonderful meeting, but I couldn't envision it that night," remembers Anna Brewster.

But by focusing on the basics of Buddhist practice — faith, practice and study — the members created a source of deep encouragement for many. As Anita Raja said on her way out of the meeting: "Wow, I really needed to hear so much of what was said today. I am even more determined to strengthen my practice and make a difference in the world."

In his message to the commemorative meetings, SGI President Ikeda wrote: "Let's make our discussion meetings into forums for enjoyable dialogue grounded in true democracy and equality. Through such meetings, why don't we aim to create an expanding wave of happiness by giving deep inspiration and courage to as many friends as possible?"

"With the conviction that our SGI is the source of light that will dispel the darkness of today's society," he continued, "I ask that each one of you please become a star performer on the stage of kosen-rufu, in the drama of revitalizing America. I sincerely hope and pray that each of you will fully realize your personal mission for kosen-rufu in America, the land of freedom and equality."

—Ruby Hodge and Karen Zeller-Marsh contributed to this article.



Members of West District in Kansas City, Mo., enjoy their Nov. 18 commemorative discussion meeting, Nov. 11.



South Shore District members, from New York's Long Island area, commemorate the Soka Gakkai's founding.

Photo by CHERYL UTLEY

SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA'S NOV. 12 SPEECH — PART 2

OUR WORDS REVEAL WHO WE ARE

‘Words are decisive,’ SGI President Ikeda says. ‘Our words reveal our character, wisdom and attitude toward life.’

The conclusion of SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the 11th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, held at the Tokyo Toda Memorial Auditorium in Sugamo, Nov. 12.

The march “Old Comrades,” which the Soka Gloria Wind Orchestra just performed, was composed by a young member of a regiment band, Carl Teike [Germany’s greatest march composer]. He joined the regiment band when he was 19. Teike had been studying percussion and the French horn from the time he was 14, and after joining the regiment band he received training in composition from the bandleader.

Training is the key to growth. Teike was in his mid-20s when he composed this march with all his youthful passion.

Why did this march come to be named “Old Comrades?” Allow me to share this well-known story with you.

When Teike completed his composition, he showed it to the new regiment bandmaster—the previous bandmaster who had mentored him having left the regiment sometime earlier. Teike presented it with great pride and confidence, but the bandmaster, instead of praising it, denigrated Teike’s work and told him it was fit only to be thrown into the fire. This incident, unfortunately, led Teike to resign from the regiment band.

The bandmaster refused to recognize the young musician’s talent. He completely lacked the spirit to nurture the fresh, burgeoning potential of youth—a spirit that a person who is senior in years or experience ought to possess.

The young Teike had made a valiant effort in composing this piece. Surely, as his senior, the bandmaster should have had the generosity of spirit to acknowledge that effort and respond with sincerity.

I hope none of you will become this kind of mean-spirited person. And younger peo-



SGI President Ikeda encourages members visiting from 23 countries and territories at the 11th Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, Nov. 12.

ple should not allow themselves to be defeated by such ill-natured seniors, either.

Words are very important. Leaders in particular must be very careful about what they say. Words are decisive. As Nichiren Daishonin says, “The voice does the Buddha’s work” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 400). Our words reveal our character, wisdom and attitude toward life. Are you a leader who praises members who have worked hard for *kosen-rufu*, regardless of the result? Or are you an insensitive leader who says: “What? Is that the best you can do?”

Please remember that the growth of talented people and the development of our organization depend on the words of our leaders. If there is a leader who addresses members in a rude, insensitive manner, it is important that you point this out to him or her. And should you recognize this fault in yourself, I hope you will make an effort to correct it.

The spirit of fellowship is the fundamental spirit of the SGI.

Now, back to the story of the young Teike, whose work the bandmaster callously negated. When his fellow band mem-

bers, with whom he had shared joys and sorrows, learned of his imminent departure, they held a farewell party for him. They wanted to lift his spirits by reminding him that they were his friends and comrades.

And they all got out their instruments and played his new march for him. It was a dramatic premiere for Teike’s composition. What a wonderful spirit of fellowship!

This same spirit of fellowship—of care and concern for our fellow members—is the fundamental spirit of the SGI. Our organization has developed as it has today because of this spirit.

Teike must have been touched by their gesture. “Though others may not understand me, I have true friends!” he must have thought. “Wherever my life may lead me, I will always be with old friends who share my thoughts and feelings!” Deeply moved, Teike named his march “Old Comrades.”

This is the spirit behind the tune that the orchestra just played for us. Thank you once again!

No matter what anyone says, we should never leave the SGI family.

Teike did not stray from the path of music. While taking up employment as a policeman, he

continued to compose music in his spare time, following his chosen path with perseverance. The determination that no doubt drove him was “Whether people listen to my music or not, I do not care. This is the path that I have chosen to follow.”

Our attitude in faith should demonstrate the same kind of commitment. No matter what anyone says, or even if we encounter from time to time unpleasant individuals along the way, we must not leave the SGI, because the correct practice of the Daishonin’s Buddhism for the realization of *kosen-rufu* is found only in the SGI.

Teike sold his march “Old Comrades” to a music publisher for the ridiculously low sum of 25 German marks—the equivalent of one-tenth of the average working person’s monthly earnings at the time. But once it was published, it began to attract attention and eventually came to be played around the world.

The true value of great works or achievements is often only appreciated much later. I hope the members of the arts division will not forget this truth.

Teike, who came to be known as the “composer policeman,” left behind some 100 marches, engraving his name in the annals of music.

In life and in art, such things as short-term popularity and fame are all petty considerations. While of course it is important to make one’s best effort, there is no reason to be disappointed if there are no immediate results. The important thing is to become a stronger person and to grow as a human being.

Times change quickly, as do people’s hearts. This is especially the case in Japan, a society fraught with envy. We can never rely on others’ opinions of ourselves. That is why true vic-

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tory depends on us becoming people of genuine, solid ability.

All of us in the SGI are old friends of life, old friends across eternity, precious beyond measure and linked by bonds from the beginningless past. We have treasured this world of trust, friendship and fellowship.

How sad and pitiful it is to betray and leave this beautiful realm! Those who abandon their faith travel on a course to tragic defeat in life.

Let us ever advance together with our old friends, happily and vigorously, along the great path of ultimate peace and justice that is *kosen-rufu*!

Youth will build the future of our organization.

Today, Nov. 12, is Young Women's Day. Congratulations to all the young women!

It is the age of women.

I am presently engaged in a dialogue with the world-renowned futurist Dr. Hazel Henderson, which will be serialized in the monthly magazine *Ushio* under the title "Toward a Century of the Sun—Dialogue on the Philosophy of Global Citizenship," starting in January 2002.

Women, and especially the members of our young women's division, are the suns of hope for the 21st century. Let's all pray for the victory, success, and happiness of our sunny young women!

A week ago, Nov. 5, was Young Men's Day. Historically speaking, it was the day that the renowned Japanese educator and reformer Yoshida Shoin started his innovative private school, the Shoka Sonjuku, in a small, eight-tatami-mat classroom. The academy, where he personally gave instruction, was officially opened when construction work on the building that housed it was completed. This event took place in 1857, in the midst of a period of turmoil, as Japan began its transition from a closed feudal society to a nation open to the world.

At the time, Shoin was 27. That puts him in the age bracket of an SGI young men's division member. This 27-year-old leader educated individuals who would become the driving force of the revolution in Japan known as the Meiji Restoration [that took place in 1868].

Youth build the future. Youth are crucial.

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda often talked to us youth about Yoshida Shoin. The young educator's academy was hardly a luxurious facility. It was very simple—actually just a remodeled shed. The one-

room structure had a floor-space of only 142 square feet.

Shoin, who boarded together with his students in this small room, trained them vigorously. He never put on airs. He was always there with them—his disciples and comrades. The students found Shoin's training intense and demanding. The lessons were impressed deep into their beings.

When Shoin spoke of courageous individuals who laid down their lives for their beliefs, his voice shook with emotion, as if to say: "May you all be like this! May you all live lives like this!" This recalls the passionate spirit of Soka Gakkai leaders in the organization's early days. Only with such personal passion and commitment can leaders rouse their fellow members to action.

And when Shoin spoke of cowardly traitors, his expression grew ferocious, his voice rose, and his whole being veritably bristled with outrage. He stressed the importance of resolutely fighting against such treacherous individuals. In this way, he taught his disciples the fundamental path of humanity. This was what Shoin's school was like.

Wherever we dwell is the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.

What were the basic principles underlying his school? Many answers to this question could be discussed, but for today, because our time is limited, I want to focus on just one. And that was Shoin's belief that you must never feel inferior just because you are far from the bustling center of things, tucked away in a small country village. If you are striving earnestly where you are right now, that is the best, most exciting place in the world. [Though his school was located in the village of Matsumoto, far away from the capital of Edo (now Tokyo), Shoin was confident that future leaders of society would come from his school.]

Buddhism teaches that the supreme state of life is eternally inherent within us, and that wherever we dwell is in fact the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. The thinking of many great people comes close to the teachings of Buddhism. These people often articulate at least a part of Buddhism's message.

I hope that all of you will courageously advance with the firm resolve to make the place where you are right now shine brightly and to produce outstanding leaders from within your respective organizations.

When you do so, you will also develop your potential immensely. The SGI is what it is today because members have advanced with this spirit.

It is not our environment or circumstances but our inner resolve that is important. Do not allow yourself to be preoccupied or held back by considerations of educational background, wealth, fame or social position. Always advance in life based on faith, no matter what happens. That is the spirit of a Buddhist.

Shoin called out to his students to stand up against the anti-reform forces of the day with a spirit dedicated to truth and justice, and to carry out a revolution in Japan. He also had a message that I especially want to pass on to the young men: "One or two people of firm will are certain to emerge from this academy. If that number grows to five or eight people, and if each person teaches another 10, and those 10 in turn teach another hundred, their ranks will naturally swell to thousands and 10 thousands and eventually to millions."

The same is true of our actions to introduce the Daishonin's Buddhism to others.

The presence of genuine disciples is crucial in the advance of *kosen-rufu*.

Shoin was executed a little less than two years after he began teaching in his humble academy. But he had true disciples—disciples with a sense of purpose and commitment. Determined to vindicate their mentor, disciples of such towering caliber as Takasugi Shinsaku and Kusaka Genzui sprang to action, becoming a major force in the realization of the Meiji Restoration and the building of a new Japan.

The presence of genuine disciples is also crucial in the advance of *kosen-rufu*.

First Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi is on record as having said while in prison, "I have a great disciple by the name of Toda, so even if I die in prison, the Soka Gakkai is bound to develop throughout the world." In the mentor-disciple relationship of presidents Makiguchi and Toda, I discern the ultimate essence of humanity, of Buddhism and of history.

I will also never forget what President Toda said at one gathering of the young men's training group, the Suiko-kai: "The Meiji Restoration was accomplished by Shoin's disciples, who were fostered at the Shoka Sonjuku, a school that started out with just one small room. Similarly, in the Soka Gakkai, as long as there is a core of

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION MEETINGS

The Power of Words

From This Speech:

Words are very important. Leaders in particular must be very careful about what they say. Words are decisive. As Nichiren Daishonin says, "The voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 400). Our words reveal our character, wisdom and attitude toward life. Are you a leader who praises members who have worked hard for *kosen-rufu*, regardless of the result? Or are you an insensitive leader who says: "What? Is that the best you can do?" Please remember that the growth of talented people and the development of our organization depend on the words of our leaders. If there is a leader who addresses members in a rude, insensitive manner, it is important that you point this out to him or her. And should you recognize this fault in yourself, I hope you will make an effort to correct it.

1) SGI President Ikeda points out that words are decisive and quotes the Daishonin, who says, "The voice does the Buddha's work" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 400). Why do you think our choice of words is so important? Can you think of examples in your life of both value and anti-value that you created with the words you used? Can you find examples from the Daishonin's writings where victory or defeat resulted from what a person said?

2) President Ikeda asks: "Are you a leader who praises members who have worked hard for *kosen-rufu*, regardless of the result? Or are you an insensitive leader who says: 'What? Is that the best you can do?'" Do you try to think about your choice of words when speaking with others? If so, in what ways? What do you think causes words to become destructive? What do you think gives words the power to encourage the lives of others?

youth—no, even one single true disciple—we will be able to achieve *kosen-rufu*."

Who was that single disciple? Who has spread Buddhism throughout the world, with all his being, exactly as President Toda instructed? I am proud and honored to be that single disciple.

As a result, those who follow this genuine disciple are also genuine. I wish to declare this for the sake of future generations.

I urge the youth to carry on the rigorous spirit of mentor and disciple of the first three presidents of the Soka Gakkai. Those who do so will be ultimate victors in life. This is also the fundamental path for the SGI's ongoing success in the 21st century.

The portraits of our noble founding mentor and disciple, presidents Makiguchi and Toda, are smiling down and watching over this gathering that has assembled to celebrate the Day of the Soka Gakkai's Founding, Nov. 18. [Large portraits of both men adorn the Tokyo Toda Memorial Audito-

rium.] My thanks to the members of the Makiguchi and Toda families who have taken time from their busy schedules to join us today.

I had hoped to speak a little more with you today, but because of time restrictions and the fact that many of you have a long way to travel home, I will close now and continue at our next meeting. Thank you for your understanding.

We are at a change in the seasons, when many people find themselves more susceptible to illness. Please take care of your health. It will be getting colder now here in Japan, so please take special precautions in the morning and at night.

Also take care to get enough rest, and remember not to eat too much late at night!

Bring your meetings to an early close, get plenty of sleep so you can awaken refreshed, and use your time and energy wisely, so that you can lead healthy, balanced lives.

Thank you for your attention! Thank you! **MT**

SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS

Phoenix VOV Festival Shares Stage With World Series

By DIANA DECKER
PHOENIX CORRESPONDENT

Arizona Area's Family Youth Festival, "Victory Over Violence: Inspiring a Global Community," held in Patriots Square in downtown Phoenix, attracted more than 4,000 community residents, tourists and World Series fans on the afternoon of Nov. 4. That evening, two blocks down the street at Bank One Ballpark, the Arizona Diamondbacks defeated the New York Yankees, winning the World Series.

"Some didn't want Game 7 to happen, because it would cause traffic and parking problems," Denise Stinnett, festival steering committee member, said. "I did, because to accomplish the festival's theme, 'Inspiring a Global Community,' we needed the community to show up."

And they did show up, to enjoy the exhibitions and the



SGI-USA youth in Phoenix perform in their production 'Inspiring a Global Community,' Nov. 4.

entertainment. Boys and Girls Group members waved American flags leading the national anthem. The culturally diverse musical program showcased the talents of both members and their friends. The schedule included African, Japanese, Latin

and Hawaiian dances, the SGI Band featuring a violin solo by Jassy Nanini, a song by jazz vocalist Sherry Roberson, a modern dance accompanied by a solo by Maria Verdugo, a "Heroes of Peace" dramatization by members of the men's division,

giving an incredibly beautiful, poetic Tai Chi demonstration to new age music. SGI-USA member Gloria Ahmed, diagnosed with cancer a year ago, deeply touched the hearts of many who knew of her struggle as she directed singers offering

and a Cactus Chorus performance. A Caribbean steel drum featuring children and adults in magnificent costumes was also a hit.

Joseph, a Nigerian and a Muslim, seemed to move with the wind

a rendition of "Youth, Scale the Mountain of the 21st Century" a capella, in Japanese and then in English.

"The hip-hop dancers are the ones I am most proud of," Mrs. Stinnett said. "Twenty teens and preteens worked extremely hard, sacrificing their weekends for a month, practicing Saturday and Sunday. And they were fantastic."

The festival organizers offered many activities for boys and girls, from face painting to games and crafts, making sure that those who would eventually take over their roles in the future would enjoy the event.

"Arizona also had a youth summit this summer. So with only two months to put the festival together, we all learned a lot about communication," Denise said, "especially to be nicer to others and always express appreciation for what others do, never taking anyone for granted." **WT**

SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS

Tucson Members Break New Ground in Community Outreach

By JACQUELYN DROZDOFF
TUCSON, ARIZ., CORRESPONDENT

Oct. 5 and 6 was a renaissance of vibrant activity and passion exerted by the SGI-USA members of Tucson. Just months after having successfully held a youth summit at the University of Arizona, Tucson members propelled themselves to even higher levels of challenge and excellence. Months of dynamic planning were spent to formulate and plan for a two-day festival of dialogue, cultural performances, presentations, discussions and activities. The festival became a joint effort with the city of Tucson's annual Harambe Festival (meaning "coming together"), and served as the kick-off event of Tucson's "A Week Against Violence" community activities. This was a ground-breaking event, as SGI-USA members in Tucson had never conducted a community outreach festival on a large scale before.



Youth dancers celebrate their performance in Tucson, Ariz., Oct. 6

The Oct. 5 Victory Over Violence seminar was an exhilarating evening of dialogue and

learning. It began with a community potluck, where the ambiance was relaxed yet joyous

One was the Gandhi, King, Ikeda exhibition. The other was a touching and beautiful display

of student artwork depicting young people's perceptions of violence and peace in the world.

Oct. 6 was a day that began in obstacles and ended in triumph. Less than an hour before the outdoor festival of cultural performances and activities was to begin, the members were told to pack up everything and go inside due to a storm watch. Instead of getting downhearted, members energetically packed up the booths and set up many activities indoors. Once again, great passion was shown as performances began, by groups from both the community and the SGI-USA. In addition to folk singing and folklorico dancing by the community groups, a chorus of SGI-USA members sang. A women's division member performed a traditional Japanese fan dance, women's division members then rocked to Ricky Martin, the visiting Phoenix jazz band played and the youth dance division rocked the house. Later on the festival was moved once again outside and kicked off the Harambe Festival.

The weekend of events was a magnificent step for the SGI-USA members of Tucson to build integral relations with their community and to expand their lives in heartfelt efforts for kosen-rufu. **WT**

EXPERIENCE — KATHY PISCIONERI, KEW GARDENS, N.Y.

'World Peace' Has New Meaning for Me

I am an artist and the art teacher at P.S. 89 in Battery Park City, Manhattan, which is — was — right in the shadow of the World Trade Center.

On the morning of Sept. 11, I walked to our school with one of my favorite families in the school community while the mother and I chatted light-heartedly about our summers and our busy lives. It's incredible now to think that, only a few minutes later, from the eight-foot picture windows in my art classroom, I stood looking out at a jagged hole in the North Tower of the World Trade Center.

My student teacher and I rushed to our phones to call 911, but before we could even dial, scores of emergency vehicles arrived on the scene. We could clearly see the EMTs, firemen and police rushing toward the building. A media crowd immediately gathered in the baseball field next to our school and began filming what we then thought was a small plane or helicopter accident.

Meanwhile, we set out around the school to see what we could do — taking frightened children out of classrooms, comforting distraught parents, covering classroom windows so that the children (particularly our kindergarten students) would not be upset by the events outside. Eventually, as the situation worsened, we moved all the classes on the south and east sides of our school building to central locations in the gym and auditorium.

The rest became chaotic — parents tearing into the school screaming, roaming the halls shouting their children's names, pulling children out of classrooms and running out of the building, or just standing in stairwells weeping. Between 100 and 150 children were taken out of the building by parents in those first several minutes.

Then we heard loud, rumbling noises that are indescribable. I could see explosions outside and heard the roar of jet engines and screaming as the situation just three blocks away from us completely deteriorated into what looked to me like Armageddon. In one terrifying moment, the entire school building shook and the lights flickered (as the South Tower collapsed, I later learned).

A few seconds later we were



Photo by ROBERT PISCIONERI

given the order to evacuate, and our building was flooded with police. Perhaps the hardest thing I ever had to do in my life was to go into our gym and look into the eyes of the teachers — my friends — trying to say so many things without speaking. I could only tell them that they had to leave the building, to take the children, get out the north entrance of our building, and do it fast.

We were only told to head north. The entire school poured out onto the street class by class, young children being carried by teachers and paraprofessionals. We began to walk north slowly and ploddingly, joining a sea of refugees coming from farther downtown. Many people were covered in dust; all with dazed looks in their eyes. A few minutes later, a tremendous rumble stopped us in our tracks. We turned to look, and watched silently as the North Tower collapsed upon itself, floor after floor after floor, leaving a momentary patch of blue sky where it once stood.



A view of Ground Zero at the World Trade Center from the roof of P.S. 89.

In that moment, the neighborhood that I have worked in and loved for four years was reduced to rubble.

A tidal wave of smoke was coming toward us, and we turned back around as if we didn't see it and began to plod northward again. No one seemed able to hurry; I don't know why. That was the first moment that I consciously began to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo under my breath. I thought, "We cannot be trampled by the thousands of panicked people behind us!"

We had been completely cut off from any news, so we thought that New York, along with the entire country, was being bombed. I remember thinking, "Kathy, you're probably going to die today, but before that happens you need to help get these children to a safe place." It felt good to have a mission in the midst of all of that chaos and destruction, partly because it kept me from worrying about my own safety. I really appreciate that now!

Two miles away we turned to cross onto a side street, which meant getting 250 children and adults across a six-lane highway in between convoys of emergency vehicles screaming by at 90 mph. We ran the kids across in groups of about 30 or 40, fortunately all making it across safely. Moments later, we collapsed inside the gym of a nearby Greenwich Village school, P.S. 3. Some children sat shaking and quietly sobbing while the P.S. 3 staff brought us snacks and even

went out to the store to buy the children ice cream.

Six hours passed excruciatingly as we waited for parents to come and collect their children. Most arrived exhausted, red-faced and covered in dust, with bandanas around their mouths, after walking for miles trying to find their children. We saw many tearful reunions until almost every child was retrieved. (One or two went home with teachers and were reunited with their families the next day.) It was such incredible fortune that we were able to get every child out safely and to pull together as a school in order to do it. I was so proud to work at P.S.89 that day!

What followed is the incredibly difficult story of a school community torn apart at the seams. Most of our families lost their homes near the World Trade Center, and many others moved away soon after. Those who stayed were not only displaced but also completely distraught, and the entire staff was traumatized. Our school building was the headquarters for the New York City Office of Emergency Management for more than two months after the attack, and our school doubled up classes into a few extra rooms at P.S. 3, in addition to taking over their library with five of our classes. Fortunately, we eventually moved to a larger temporary space where we continue to strive for normalcy. That our school still exists is in itself an amazing thing.

This entire experience, which for me is still in the process of being resolved, has put everything into perspective in my life. I thought it was hard when my husband of 11 years left me for another woman a year and a half ago, but the last two months make our breakup look like a day at the park. During that painful

breakup, I learned to trust the Gohonzon in the face of all hardship, to not need to know immediately how things will be resolved or why they are happening, but to continue to chant with the conviction that I will turn poison into medicine. This is the Soka Gakkai spirit!

That struggle prepared me for this current one. Now I'm thinking these same things, only not just about my personal life but about my school community, my beloved city and our world. The term *world peace* has new meaning for me as I struggle to face the Gohonzon each day to pray for peace with the same conviction that I would pray for a breakthrough in my life. I use this spirit as I continue encouraging the people with whom I work and the children and parents in their distress and grief.

My greatest benefit from all of this is that I have been reintroduced to the concept of appreciation as I have not felt since the beginning of my Buddhist practice: appreciation for my life itself, for the honor of being a P.S. 89 teacher, for the open-hearted people who came together and cared for one another in New York (including the ones who gave us free massages!), for the school children from around the country who send us teddy bears, notes and supplies.

Most of all, I am filled with deep appreciation for this great organization of warriors for peace like none other existing in the world today. My joyful fellow SGI-USA members in New York make me want to do more and more to support and encourage others and to tell them about this great practice. I feel so strengthened and enlivened by this difficult experience, as if I can think clearly for the first time in several years. For me, this is the manifestation in my life of Nichiren Daishonin's teaching "When great evil occurs, great good follows" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1119).

Our next task is to make this a reality in our world, no matter what struggles we are asked to bear. I believe that we can do, and I am determined like never before to do whatever I can to make it happen.

Kathy Piscioneri can be reached at blakfish@netzero.net.

AN ESSAY BY SGI PRESIDENT IKEDA

DIALOGUE: THE GREAT PATH OF PEACE

Translated publications by SGI President Ikeda, including his dialogues with world figures, have now reached the 300 mark. 'I believe that dialogue is the great path of peace that fosters mutual understanding and empathy,' he writes, 'and brings both people and cultures closer together.'

Already Soka Gakkai is a world affair"—the greatest historian of the 20th century, Arnold J. Toynbee, contributed these words to the foreword of a book in 1972, some 30 years ago. That book was my first international publication, the first volume of the English translation of *The Human Revolution*.

In the same foreword, Dr. Toynbee went on to emphasize the universality of Nichiren Buddhism: "Nichiren held that Buddhism, as he conceived it, was a means of salvation for his fellow human beings everywhere. In working for the human revolution, Soka Gakkai is carrying out Nichiren's mandate."

The brilliance of the SGI as a universal religious movement, which Dr. Toynbee perceived, has now grown into a great light that is beginning to shine over the entire world.

This autumn, as if to celebrate the start of the second chapter of worldwide kosen-rufu, the number of my translated publications has exceeded the 300 mark—the 300th volume being the German edition of *The Way of Youth*. Back in 1990, the figure stood at 100. This means that my translated publications have tripled in just 11 years.

The renowned French writer Victor Hugo called out, "To speak, write, print, publish—therein lie...our identities; therein lie ever-expanding circles of intelligence in action; therein lie the sonorous waves of thought."

I cannot help but strongly feel that the vigorous pace of these translated publications represents the sonorous waves of Buddhist humanism reverberating throughout the world.

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My works that have been published in languages other than Japanese span a wide variety of genres, from the novels *The Human Revolution* and *The*

New Human Revolution to dialogues, poetry, essays, university addresses and children's stories. They have been published in some 29 European, Asian and African languages to date. I am profoundly grateful to all those who have assisted in the translation and publication of these works.

In particular, I want to express my gratitude to the staffs of these related departments in the Office of International Affairs at the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Tokyo: the International Publications Department and the Translation Department, as well as the SGI Newsletter Department that speedily translates my writings from the *Seikyo Shimbum*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper, and elsewhere, making them available to members around the world.

At present, my dialogue with Dr. Toynbee is in print in 24 languages, including Japanese. The hallowed Oxford University Press, with a history and tradition of 500 years, is the publisher of the English version, titled *Choose Life*.

On many occasions when I have met with the leaders of nations and other noted personalities from around the world, they have told of looking forward to meeting me as a result of reading my dialogue with Dr. Toynbee. People in the publishing world have frequently said that dialogues are generally not a success, but this dialogue has certainly proved the exception. I am sure this would delight Dr. Toynbee as well.

Since the publication of English version of *Choose Life* in 1976, many of my dialogues have been published in various languages. They include those with Dr. Aurelio Peccei, cofounder of the Club of Rome; Dr. Linus Pauling, father of modern chemistry; and former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

Recently, the Spanish edition of my dialogue with Dr. Cintio



SGI President Ikeda holds a dialogue with former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in Tokyo, Nov. 15.

Vitier of Cuba, about the life and thought of José Martí, the hero of Cuban independence, was published. And the French edition of my dialogue with Dr. René Simard, former rector of the University of Montreal, and Dr. Guy Bourgeault of the same university, has just been published under the title *Pour un nouvel art de vivre* (For a New Art of Living).

I am happy that I have been able to heighten and promote the value of dialogue around the globe, because I believe that dialogue is the great path of peace that fosters mutual understanding and empathy, and brings both people and cultures closer together.

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I can never forget the dedicated efforts of the translators who have contributed to this phenomenal rise in the number of my international publications.

The accomplished translator Richard Gage has worked diligently for many long years on English translations of *The Human Revolution* and my dialogues with leading thinkers of the world, including *Choose Life*.

Dr. Burton Watson, who produced the first English translation of the Chinese classic

Record of the Historian, has also been of tremendous service, translating my poetry collection *Songs from My Heart*, as well as *The Living Buddha* and several other works.

In December 1973, when I first met Dr. Watson, I asked him to do an English translation of Kumarajiva's Chinese version of the Lotus Sutra. The Lotus Sutra has been the most beloved Buddhist scripture of the peoples of East Asia for centuries, largely because of Kumarajiva's brilliant translation, which Nichiren Daishonin praised as "without error" (see *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 554).

How important translation is!

It was our first meeting, but I immediately perceived that Dr. Watson was the right person for this task, and I asked him to accept the challenge. Fortunately, he agreed, and from that time he began translating this work in earnest. Twenty years later, in the spring of 1993, the English translation of the Lotus Sutra was finally published.

Dr. Watson's translation does not employ old-fashioned, outdated English; he chose to use the living contemporary language instead. Smiling, he explained this decision: "It is important to find the words to

express what people are seeking above all. To do that, I have used familiar and easily comprehensible language."

I am also pleased to report that, due to the tireless efforts of Dr. Watson, an English translation of the essence of the Daishonin's Buddhism, the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," will soon be completed—an event auspiciously coinciding with the start of the Century of Life.

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Anti-apartheid activist and poet Oswald Mtshali in South Africa read a collection of essays translated by Dr. Watson, *Glass Children and Other Essays*, more than a decade ago. He was deeply moved by the book and introduced it, quoting me, in an essay he contributed to a magazine. Moreover, Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, in prison at the time, read that essay and came upon my words.

In addition, my books *Buddhism, the First Millennium* and *The Living Buddha* are used as textbooks at U.S. universities, including the University of Idaho and Harvard University.

Books create new friends and unknown comrades. The

New York Peace Concert Refreshes Members

By ROBERT TALIAFERRO
NORTHEASTERN ZONE BUREAU ADVISOR

Photo by MICHAEL ANTON



The New Jersey African drummers live up the Peace Concert, Dec. 1, at Martin Luther King High School.

The venue was Martin Luther King High School on the Upper West Side of New York City. The occasion: a "Peace Concert" sponsored by New York area SGI-USA youth members. The audience: guests, district representatives and SGI-USA members who have been working courageously behind the scenes bringing Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism to all.

On a balmy Dec. 1, greeted by friendly young members, more than 1,000 dedicated people gathered to hear what SGI President Ikeda called in his commemorative message "a beautiful performance of the harmony of peace aimed at a hope-filled future." He urged New Yorkers to take the power of the concert back home with them.

The SGI "Super Sounds" band that includes SGI-USA members Larry Coryell, Onaje Allan Gumbs, Shunzo Ono, Ralph Peterson, Buster Williams and Nester Torres, started the afternoon. They played several pieces written by the band members, including their contribution to the intent of the concert—Victory Over Violence—a blues num-

ber in honor of a young SGI-USA member shot by police.

Supported by inspired drummers, Nester Torres played a solo piece full of energy and verve that took the audience to a different level of involvement, prompting a standing ovation. New York SGI-USA member Duncan Sheik also sang several moving songs.

New Jersey members made many wonderful contributions, including a very soulful piece by a chorus of young women

led by two belting soul singers. Their song was a rousing yet serious plea for peace. The New Jersey African Drummers beat energy into the room with articulate syncopation. Then followed a chorus singing "I Believe I Can Fly," led by a woman who really sounded like she could.

Group after group performed songs that we had heard before, taking on whole new layers of meaning in light of the events of Sept. 11. Less than five miles

north of Ground Zero, these youth were boldly and courageously singing songs like John Lennon's "Imagine."

As this song was sung, youth stood tall. Other youth danced rhythmically and professionally, displaying tap, hip-hop and modern. A combined chorus of women and men belted out a very powerful rendition of "The Power of One." In a way, this was another theme of the activity. "The preparation for this production began at the in-

dividual level first," said stage manager Thia Calloway. "We were victorious in overcoming our personal challenges so that when we came together, we were as one unit with one goal."

The concert ended with all performers on stage singing "What Can I Do, America?" along with the audience. Paula Taylor remembers, "I had tears streaming down my face, and my guest, Noria, though sightless, was standing up swaying and smiling to the music."

Carolyn Thompson felt as though the concert "musically took us on a journey that lifted us from Ground Zero to a place where we could feel whole again. We could lighten up a little, rocked and cradled by the music." Paula Taylor concluded, "Watching this concert, I kept thinking what enormous courage these people displayed to overcome the fear and horror that has gripped New York since Sept. 11."

Another member concurred: "This was the SGI-USA at its best, courageously performing for the sake of compassionately encouraging others. President Ikeda can rest assured. Led by the youth, New York area members are continuing our recovery. We are standing tall."

—Paula Taylor and Carol Thompson
contributed to this article.

FROM ESSAY, 6

power of the printed word is tremendous. The reverberations of empathy and shared feeling it arouses can transcend national borders and the walls of

ethnic and ideological differences—indeed, they can span the chasms separating cultures and even the passage of time.

"The press, which brings daylight to the spirit, creates fraternity," declared Victor

Hugo. It is my wish that through my books, the hope of the humanistic philosophy of the SGI may be communicated ever more widely and deeply to the hearts of the people of the world and the youth of the future.

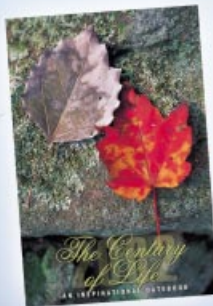
Praying that the waves of understanding cultivated in this way will be the seeds for the certain realization of a Century of Peace, we of the SGI will continue to write and speak today and tomorrow.

This essay was published in the "Thoughts on *The New Human Revolution*" series in the Nov. 7 *Seikyo Shimbun*, the Soka Gakkai's daily newspaper.

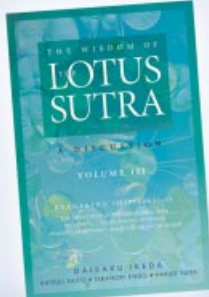
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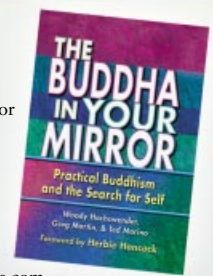
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the new HUMAN REVOLUTION

SGI President Ikeda's novelized history of the Soka Gakkai

'PURE STREAM'

VOLUME 8, CHAPTER 3, PARTS 33-36

'Mieko Numayama had a talent for getting people to like her. She was also good at taking care of others. She used these skills to surround herself with a group of admirers. She played favorites in all leadership appointments, building a faithful following and eventually an atmosphere in which no one dared oppose her.'

Koji Numayama had deceived several other Soka Gakkai members by the same method of borrowing money from them under false pretenses. A group leader had ended up lending him ¥1.65 million after Numayama told him that payments for the pilgrimage to the head temple and donations from members living in remote areas had not arrived. As the investigation proceeded, it became clear that his wife, Mieko, had also acted inappropriately. Exploiting her role as a central women's leader, she would make frequent trips to the chapter office presenting a variety of excuses in order to be reimbursed for such expenses

as her personal taxi fares. Mieko was extravagant and liked to show off. She always wore the most expensive clothes and would call a taxi for even minor shopping trips. Spendthrift that she was, she had indeed pushed her husband to borrow money, just as she had admitted to Yukiko Kishizaka, a young women's leader.

The Numayamas had joined the Soka Gakkai about a decade earlier. At the beginning, both of them participated eagerly in Soka Gakkai activities. They were soon appointed district leaders of their respective divisions. Their marital relationship, however, was



Illustrations by KENICHIRO UCHIDA

rocky, and they were always fighting. Mieko had a reputation as a flirt, and there were constant rumors about her involvement with other men. But Koji was clumsy with words, and he had no chance of holding his own in an argument with Mieko, who could talk her

way out of anything.

Members of their district were frequent witnesses to their arguments, and they were fed up with it. Even though they felt it best not to interfere in the marital problems of another couple, the consensus was that Mieko was to blame, and that Koji did not deserve the treatment he got.

One day, Mieko received guidance from second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda. After she laid out her husband's many faults, President Toda addressed her sternly: "You are the worst wife in the world. Don't you see that you are completely undermining your husband? Stop complaining about him and take a look at yourself!" President Toda saw right through her.

After that, it seemed to those around Mieko that she was seriously reflecting on her behavior. She and Koji later became chapter leaders, but then Mieko disappeared. She had run away with another man. Although she returned after a brief interval, it was decided that she should be relieved of her post as chapter women's leader.

siderable resistance, but because she showed remorse for her misdeeds and was now getting along well with her husband, it was decided to provide her with another opportunity. Another large reason was that there was not anyone else qualified to fill the position.

As an organization based on faith in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the Soka Gakkai first and foremost trusts and believes in people, and goodwill toward others is essential to its activities. Mieko was therefore given a second chance. If this had occurred in any other type of organization, where people are not so ready to give others the benefit of the doubt, she would never have been reinstated. But the Soka Gakkai was accepting and forgiving to the point of vulnerability. Negative influences therefore took advantage.

Mieko had a talent for getting people to like her. She was also good at taking care of others. She used these skills to surround herself with a group of admirers, and gradually created a warped relationship of boss and underlings in the local organization. She played favorites in all leadership appointments, building a faithful following and eventually an atmosphere in which no one



Some years later, Mieko was reinstated as chapter women's leader. Her appointment was met with con-

dared oppose her.

Mieko was merciless against anyone who did not agree with her. She would engage in an insidious campaign of harassment, attacking the person fiercely in front of everyone on the one hand and completely ignoring anything the person had to say on the other. She came to be known as "the dragon lady," and everyone feared her. Among her cohorts, there were some who, even if she called in the middle of the night saying, "I'm in the mood for some sushi," would drive around town looking for a sushi shop that was open and then deliver it to her.

The local organization was still producing results, however, so the senior leaders in Tokyo had no way of knowing what was actually going on. Still, Shin'ichi Yamamoto was very strict with Mieko. Whenever he met her at leaders gatherings, he would caution her, saying: "The role of leaders is to serve the members. You must never exploit the members for your own purposes."

On one occasion, General Director Koichi Harayama and the leader in charge of Mieko's region proposed to Shin'ichi that she be promoted. "Are you sure that's wise?" Shin'ichi asked.

In my opinion, yes," the leader in charge replied. "Mieko has a lot of energy and tremendous power."

"It's her character I'm worried about," Shin'ichi said. "The question is how deeply committed she is to her faith."

"She's a different person since she was relieved of her post and then reinstated as chapter women's leader," the leader continued. "She's making a real effort. Besides, there isn't anyone else qualified to fill the spot, and she and her husband have worked hard in the area since the early days. I think the members will agree with her appointment."

"Mr. Harayama, as general director, what do you think?" Shin'ichi asked.

"I agree," Harayama said.

Shin'ichi fixed his gaze on both men. "If this matter has been considered carefully by everyone and this is your conclusion, I won't object," he said. "But an error in the appointment of a leader could produce disastrous results. Please look after Mrs. Numayama and regularly offer her guidance."

In fostering top leaders, it is necessary to entrust them with a variety of responsibilities, including personnel matters.

There were, however, many cases in which Shin'ichi felt that the Soka Gakkai leaders' decisions were sure to result in problems. Yet if he made every decision, they would not grow into capable leaders. This was Shin'ichi's dilemma.

Fujiko Kakutani, a woman who worked at the local chapter office and had frequent contact with Mieko, was beginning to wonder about Mieko's casual attitude toward money and the fact that she seemed unable to distinguish between her personal expenditures and official Soka Gakkai business. Perhaps Mieko had sensed this, because one day she drew Kakutani aside and said: "As you know, I was dismissed from my post as chapter women's leader. That's why the members still don't completely trust me. But after my dismissal, I began my practice anew as a general member. I knew I had brought it all on myself, but it was still very difficult.

"Once I was relieved of my duties, the people who were close to me changed overnight. They began treating me so coldly. I desperately wanted to receive guidance, but when I showed up at a district leaders' meeting, they turned me away, saying I didn't belong there. I felt so sad and lonely. It was awful.

"I went home and sat down in front of the Gohonzon and chanted daimoku in tears. It

was all I could do."

Looking sorrowfully off into the distance, Mieko continued telling her story: "President Yamamoto never said a kind word to me, either—not even after I became chapter women's leader again. But I know he was watching me to see what I would do.

"Then, two years ago, I drove for hours to a town where President Yamamoto was going to give guidance, and I waited for a chance to speak to him. When I finally was able to, for the first time he praised my efforts. I was so happy. 'He understands all of my struggles. That's all that matters,' I thought. I decided then that whatever happened, I wouldn't let myself be defeated and I would follow President Yamamoto as a true disciple."

Tears glistened in Mieko's eyes. She looked at Kakutani again and said: "Ms. Kakutani, there are many complicated issues one must deal with as a leader, things that can't be talked about with others. Taking care of the members requires money. A lot of that ends up coming out of one's own pocket.

"I know there are people trying to get rid of me. But whatever anyone says, I want to devote my life to working for kosen-rufu alongside President Yamamoto. That's my determination."

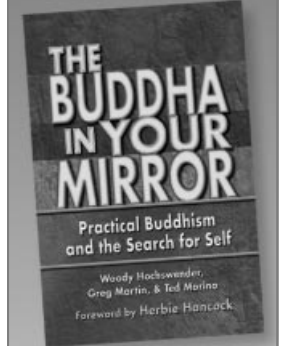
It was a very moving speech, but it was nothing more than Mieko's attempt to dispel Kakutani's doubts by putting on an act of purity and devotion to President Yamamoto. At the same time, carried away by her own words, Mieko may have unconsciously been justifying her own misdeeds to herself. This is the working of devilish functions in one's mind.

Kakutani did not buy Mieko's story. Why would someone who had "devoted her life to working for kosen-rufu with President Yamamoto" behave in such an irresponsible way? The way Mieko described it, right and wrong were completely backward, and she was some kind of tragic heroine.

The vice general director and other senior leaders carrying out the investigation met with each of the members who had lent money to Koji Numayama and asked them about the amounts of the loans and the methods that Numayama had used to obtain them. Mr. Numayama was then confronted, and the facts were confirmed. He admitted to every incident without exception. As the full story unfolded, it turned out that he had borrowed a total of more than ¥20 million from members.

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

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SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group Focus For 2002

For the Boys and Girls Group Members

As SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group members, you have worked hard to accomplish your goals. You contributed greatly to SGI-USA activities as well as activities in your school, community and family. You inspired everyone with your bright, shining smiles and your enthusiasm. Your energy, seeking minds and determination will help you win in everything you do. Please remember to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon and never, ever give up!

Let's keep in mind our five points for the SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group:

- 1) Study hard at school.
- 2) Try your best at gongyo and daimoku every day.
- 3) Cherish your friends!
- 4) Respect everyone in your family.
- 5) Believe in yourself. No matter what, never, ever give up on anything!

Thank you so much for your efforts! Please enjoy yourself as you take steps each day to accomplish your dreams during 2002.

For the SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group Representatives:

- 1) Let's continue to develop fun and informative activities for the children.

Let's nurture the children in every way possible, and support them in building lasting friendships! Many areas have developed age-appropriate activities to encourage and teach the children about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the SGI movement for peace, culture and education. Please make a good annual plan for the children's activities and submit that plan along with any budget requests to your local leadership so they can support your needs.

- 2) Let's involve our Boys and Girls Group members in their district activities.

One focus for activities in the SGI-USA is solidifying the district organization. By establishing a family atmosphere in our districts, everyone will be encouraged and feel comfortable in bringing family and friends.

- 3) Let's continue to teach the basics of the Daishonin's Buddhism to the children.

Study is an important element in our practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism. Please feel free to incorporate the study



Photo by KEVIN NUNN

SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima encourages Boys and Girls Group members in Los Angeles, Oct. 7.

suggestions listed at the end of this article into your study program for the children. Please remember our goal is to enhance the children's confidence in themselves and in their practice.

- 4) Let's encourage the parents of our "messengers of the future" to support and participate in our Boys and Girls Group activities and study efforts.

Let's take every opportunity to nurture our children in faith. SGI President Ikeda encourages us: "When this noble spirit is passed on from parent to child, the continuous flow of kosen-rufu will be assured. I stress this for the sake of the future."

- 5) Let's focus on "family-to-family" encouragement through home visits.

One of the five points for the Boys and Girls Group members is "to respect everyone in their family." Let's take action together with our children to encourage another family, too, thereby teaching our children the importance of one-to-one human dialogue.

- 6) Let's use the *Friends for Peace* section of the *World Tribune* as a source of encouragement for the Boys and Girls Group members.

Friends for Peace is the children's newsletter and we want to encourage participation of, by and for children.

- 7) Let's support the Raising Our Children Conference to be held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center from Aug. 15-18, 2002.

Let's actively promote this most valuable conference to all mothers, fathers, teachers, youth leaders and any members engaged in raising the children who will develop into the future

riod, there will be a chance to reinforce the topic through various methods: Buddhist concepts; children's books; biographies of famous people; craft activities; science projects; field trips; experiences from children or other members; hands-on projects and interactive games; community service activities; lessons from nature, etc. We will share ideas through *Friends for Peace* in the *World Tribune*.

Below are the topics with some examples of concepts and materials that may be used. Please contact your zone/region Boys and Girls Group representative for additional information.

January-March: What is happiness?

Buddhist Concepts: Relative vs. absolute happiness, human revolution, the Ten Worlds, the three treasures.

Picture Book to read: *Cody Chants*.

Study Passage: "More valuable than treasures in a storehouse are the treasures of the body, and the treasures of the heart are the most valuable of all. From the time you read this letter on, strive to accumulate the treasures of the heart!" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 851).

April-June: How can we face life's struggles with hope and courage?

Buddhist Concepts: Changing poison into medicine, power of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Picture Book to read: *The Cherry Tree* by Daisaku Ikeda.

Study Passage: "Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring" (WND, 536).

July-September: How can I make a difference in the world?

Buddhist Concepts: Bodhisattva; the practice for oneself and others; the oneness of life and its environment.

Study Passage: "If you light a lantern for another, it will also brighten your own way" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1598).

Study Material: *The Way of Youth*, pages 144-46, 157-61 and 166-78.

October-December: Dream and goals

Buddhist Concepts: Determination; earthly desires are enlightenment; believing in yourself and never giving up.

Study Passage: "The mighty warrior General Li Kuang, whose mother had been devoured by a tiger, shot an arrow at the stone he believed was the tiger. The arrow penetrated the stone all the way up to its feathers. But once he realized it was only a stone, he was unable to pierce it again. Later he came to be known as General Stone Tiger. This story applies to you" (WND, 953).

Suggested Topics for 2003:

- January-March:** Friendship/Relationships
- April-June:** Peace/Nonviolence
- July-September:** Cause and effect—what is karma and how do I change it?
- October-December:** Change/Human Revolution **WT**

COMING TO THE FNCC

Golden Stage Group Conference No. 1 (Japanese Language), Jan. 24-27, 2002

What is important in life? It is to continue struggling to the end. Those who continue struggling are great. There is no such thing as "retiring" in life. This is all the more true in the world of faith.

— SGI President Ikeda

You will not want to miss the first Golden Stage Group Conference of 2002! Come join fellow Japanese-speaking pioneers as we discuss our hopes for the 21st century.

Discussion themes include:

- 1) Maintaining good health and longevity
- 2) The importance of attending monthly discussion meetings
- 3) Our mottoes: "Lifelong seeking spirit." "Lifelong youthful spirit." "Lifelong serving spirit."

For more information: Please contact your region leader or your SGI-USA zone office for details on how to sign up for a conference. You may also visit the SGI-USA Web site at www.sgi-usa.org.

Women's Activity Guidelines for 2002

The following guidelines are intended to provide support in discussing and determining the best way to carry out women's activities in each zone.

Commemorative Meetings (February)

Please see the guidelines provided in the accompanying article on this page. Further support material will be presented in the Jan. 11, 2002, issue of *World Tribune*.

Planning Board

The planning board is intended in general to:

- Facilitate women's activities for the region.
- Provide support and assistance as needed for the region women's leader.

These functions may include administrative and secretarial assistance, serving as a conduit for the collective voice of the women's division membership (communicating needs, concerns and ideas), making proposals for activities and carrying out such proposals. At the same time, the planning board provides training for the par-

ticipants — an important step in raising the next generation of leaders.

Although each planning board operates according to the needs and resources of their region, the following are some points to consider:

- Establish diverse representative participation — for example, include members from a range of life experiences, ages, lengths of practice, organizational positions, skills, etc.
- Set a term limit. In many areas, this is two years.

Sophia Group

The Sophia Group, the women's study group established by SGI President Ikeda in May 1990, provides a supportive environment for women to expand their intellect (Sophia, in Greek, means skill, intelligence and wisdom). The purpose of the Sophia Group is to foster women with a deep understanding of and conviction in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the mission of the SGI.

Its goal is to empower its participants to take what they

learn and infuse their districts, communities, workplaces and homes with the Soka Spirit of justice and equality.

'Sophia 101'

In 2002, we propose launching a new phase for Sophia Group participants. Our intention is for every woman who wishes to have the opportunity to study the history of our kosen-rufu movement through a one-year study group called "Sophia 101." General guidelines include:

- Study of *The New Human Revolution*, volumes 1 and 2
- Small group size (4–12 women)
- Meet once a month
- Facilitated, preferably, by someone with previous Sophia Group experience.

'Sophia Advanced Group'

Many women have benefited from the camaraderie and motivated learning that are hallmarks of the Sophia Group and have expressed a keen desire to continue the learning process. We propose the formation of small study groups that would be free to choose from additional study material,

including *The New Human Revolution*, *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, *For the Sake of Peace*, *My Dear Friends in America*, or novels that President Ikeda has discussed in his speeches and essays.

Mothers/Parents of Young Children Group

Acknowledging that families come in all shapes and sizes, each zone is free to choose whether to have a Mothers Group, a Parents of Young Children Group, or both. This group provides support and encouragement in faith for parents of young children (ages newborn through 5), especially new parents, and to assist parents in fostering their children's budding faith.

Participants are encouraged to consider:

- Seeking encouragement from seniors in faith who have a long-term perspective on parenting.
- Inviting input from child development professionals.
- Developing a regular study curriculum. One suggestion is to read *Friends for Peace*, which usually appears in the

The SGI women's theme and guidelines continue to be:

Create a spiritual civilization in the 21st century based on our solidarity as women of the SGI.

- 1) **With strong faith, reveal one's true self.**
- 2) **As a world citizen, contribute to society.**
- 3) **With dialogue based on justice, expand the force for peace.**

first *World Tribune* issue of each month and includes study material for the Boys and Girls Group. Its topics are relevant to all ages, and it provides support for parents as they explain Buddhism to their children. Another possible source is the dialogue with President Ikeda, Matilda Buck and Ed Feasel that ran the July and August 2000 issues of *Living Buddhism*. **WT**

For the February 2002 Women's Commemorative Meetings

It is significant that the theme for 2002, The Year of Expanding Dialogue, comes on the heels of the Sept. 11 tragedy. In uncertain times, honest and open dialogue will spread hope, optimism and trust. It will help each person awaken to the treasure of life and make peace a reality. In this light, we would like to present the following guidelines and suggestions for the February 2002 women's commemorative meetings. These meetings celebrate the anniversary of the Feb. 27, 1990, women's meeting with President Ikeda, a day that subsequently became SGI-USA Women's Day.

• The purposes of our February 2002 meetings:

1) To reach out to all members, active and inactive.

2) To empower each woman to introduce one person to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 2002.

Using the entire month of February, we can "expand the force for peace" (as stated in our SGI women's theme in the box above) through our activities, highlighted by our annual commemorative meetings.

• The Five W's (and One H) of Planning
Who?

Each meeting group (whether group, district, chapter, area or region level) is free to choose whom to invite, whether all four divisions, or women and young women, or

the women's division members themselves.

What?

Each group will choose its own targets. By uniting for an organizational goal, each woman can challenge her personal goals.

When?

These commemorative meetings are more than a one-day event — they are a month-long celebration that involves planning, the event itself and follow-up.

Where?

The location will reflect the level at which each meeting is held: by group? district? chapter? combining with another? Keep in mind that small groups foster dialogue.

Why?

This is an opportunity for SGI-USA women to take action for peace, as we embrace a concrete method for self-transformation.

How?

Strong prayer to expand the force for peace based on individual happiness.

Make a clear plan — discuss well so that each woman feels involved and motivated.

Teamwork — everyone can contribute. No one should feel burdened.

Because an important focus is to introduce many people to the SGI through these meetings, we suggest doing an A-and-C gongyo.

• Suggested study and support materials are:

— The Jan. 11, 2002, *World*

Tribune, which will feature articles and experiences on propagation, peace movements and education, all in support of our February women's commemorative meetings.

— *My Dear Friends in America* (which includes "Buddhism Is the Clear Mirror That Reflects Our Lives" and "Thoughts on Education for Global Citizenship") by SGI President Ikeda.

— *For the Sake of Peace*, by President Ikeda.

Today, more than ever, we play vital and varied roles in every area of society that reflect the broad spectrum of our intelligence, strength and compassion. In February, our meetings will embrace that incredible variety. **WT**



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SGI-USA FAMILY YOUTH FESTIVALS

Celebrating Victory Over Violence Across Florida



From one end of the state to the other, 2,300 SGI-USA Florida members and friends celebrated Victory Over Violence through music, dance, drama and dialogue. Separated into their various locations, 300 youth planned, designed and produced celebrations that reflected the character of their area. The areas represented were Jacksonville, Orlando, Tampa, Palm Beach and Weston.

"We made a conscious decision to allow members to create their own activities to produce their Family Youth Festivals," said Becky Jacobs, Florida Region women's leader. "This way, activities will more easily connect with the local districts and continue into the future."

Each area also had its own struggles to produce a successful activity. The most important was to find and encourage youth to participate. It was not unusual for area leaders who announced the proposed festivals to turn around in their planning meetings and find not a single youth in the room. But many telephone calls, visits and kick-off activities later, plans began to emerge. Youth also emerged.

Not only did school age and up members become active in preparing their festivals but the event also uncovered a number of capable leaders who would become instrumental in making their activities towering achievements that would serve as powerful encouragement.

For example, in Suncoast Area, which covers most of South Florida's popular beaches, a young woman who had recently arrived from Italy became the focal point of the local festival, traveling regularly from the neighboring county to inspire the 30 participants. Some 200 people attended the event that emphasized the talents of the performers on stage at the Miami Dade Community College's International campus.

Ft. Lauderdale Area chose to make their festival a celebration of life with food, reggae, dance and joy. "The focus of our youth activities was to study Buddhism," explained Jeff Liu, young men's area leader. "Through preparing for the festival, many of our members had great experiences and gained a deeper understanding of why we practice Buddhism."

Meanwhile in Orlando, SGI-USA members took over Disney's House of Blues to produce the Orlando Area Family Youth Festival attended by 300 people. While jazz, original drama and dance entranced the audience, they were reminded about the impact of violence and the important message about dialogue the SGI is spreading to end it. Nissa Askins courageously told her story about her pain when her grandparents were murdered. She offered appreciation to all the members who supported her family throughout

her ordeal and sounded a call for action to declare victory over violence.

In Jacksonville, weeks of preparation resulted in performances, activities, food and fun at the Mandarin Community Club for an audience of nearly 300, including 69 guests. Down to the wire, a warm bowl of pork soup greeted participants as they made their final preparations and prayed to beat a 90 percent rain prediction. Their prayers answered, they began a joyous day of outdoor games and skits that illustrated the importance of overcoming the tendency toward violence.

The many festivals afforded an opportunity to interact with sympathetic organizations and activists in the community. A partnership with the Non-Violence Project attracted Hervey Marcelin, a motivational speaker, to several of the South Florida festivals. He spoke about his descent into violence and crime and how he was able to regain his orientation by connecting to what he referred to as the three screens of parental, teacher and community authority. Once in prison for his mistakes, today he is a husband and father, and engaged in speaking to school kids on how to avoid the same suffering.

At the Palm Beach Family Festival, UNICEF manned one of several organization booths and provided the keynote speaker, Dr. Ruth Selman, who is the American Montessori Society's representative to the United Nations. She spoke on the inspiring topic of "Creating a Culture of Peace." "I'm excited by the youth," she said. "It's important to work together and for families to want for all children what they would want for their own."

In Weston, performers debuted their creative abilities, with everyone taking breaks to play lawn games that illustrated principles of Buddhist practice.

Governmental officials were quick to recognize the value of these great events. Ileana-Ross Letinan, a U.S. congresswoman representing South Florida, wrote a letter applauding the SGI's efforts to overcome violence. A proclamation was issued to the Suncoast Area by the mayor of Miami. Florida Governor Jeb Bush recognized Tampa's Festival and the principles of eliminating violence that supported it.

Perhaps it was a coincidence that the final chapter of the Florida's Family Youth Festivals ended just three days before the New York Trade Center bombing, but there was no doubt that the foundation of a lasting youth organization was in place that could support peace, culture and education.

— P. Alecia Cox-Wilkins, Alonzo Davis, Jim Dreisbach, Carol Eyo, Olabisi Fowler, Susan Horwitz, Sharon Kaplan, Laurie Tanner, Shirley White and Jaki Young-Griffin contributed to this article.

