

Personal Reflections

A self-centered life lived solely in pursuit of one's own benefit and fortune is empty and base. A Bodhisattva of the Earth, in contrast, respects others and works for their happiness.¹ —SGI President Ikeda

I HAVE learned that our practice in the SGI doesn't just mean only introducing new people to the Gohonzon and the practice; it means moving from self-centeredness to active concern and caring for others.

A Buddhist teaching states: "If you light a lamp for another, your own way will be lit" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1598). This simple parable teaches us that by sincerely respecting the lives of others, by helping them develop in the fullness of their individuality, we illuminate the way to a brilliant mutual future.² —SGI President Ikeda

I have gained a deeper appreciation for all that I've learned in my practice and in the organization over nineteen years as an SGI member, especially since I began teaching in the Philadelphia public school system this past year. I realize that automatically going out of my way to encourage other teachers, even those more experienced than me, has become second nature to me. Taking action to lift someone's spirits up has been ingrained in my life and is a good habit I've developed through years of responsibility in the SGI-USA. To have this spirit now engraved in my actions is the greatest treasure for which I am deeply indebted to the SGI and to President Ikeda.

Regarding the American Renaissance, I've been mulling over in my mind something that President Ikeda mentions from time to time. In his 1987 poem "Arise, the Sun of the Century," he writes: "America! Oh Giant America!/ Anxiety deepens as the century draws to a close.... Beneath the banner of the dignity of man,/The bell heralds the arrival of a new renaissance...."³

"New renaissance," I wondered. What is he saying? In *The New Human Revolution* (vol. 5, pp. 36–37), he writes:

Religion, art and culture are inextricably bound. In ancient times, Buddhism also gave rise to a flourishing of great art and culture. As we continue to advance kosen-rufu, our great movement dedicated to cultivating the inner realm of people's lives, we are sure to see a brilliant new blossoming of art and culture based on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. How exciting it will be!

Also, in *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda tells us about an experience Shin'ichi Yamamoto has while viewing Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel:

Looking on the project as his personal mission, Michelangelo had doubtless worked with exuberance, depicting the brilliant cosmic vision in his heart while striving for a mode of expression that would be universal and lasting. It is impossible to calculate the number of people who have been drawn to Christianity through the works of this one artist. Understanding and appreciation for Buddhism's great Law of life will also spread to the extent that there are those who can express its message with creativity and skill. Shin'ichi prayed that many Michelangelos of the Mystic Law would appear among his fellow Soka Gakkai members.⁴

If movies are to the twentieth century what the Sistine Chapel was to the early sixteenth century, then I look forward to a future in which many Michelangelos of the Mystic Law will appear to create great movies. □

1. May 17, 1996, *World Tribune*, p. 16.
2. January 12, 1996, *World Tribune*, p. 9.
3. April 1987 *Seikyo Times*, p. 86.
4. *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 5, pp. 126–27.