

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD TOGETHER

IT'S hard to believe, but here we are celebrating the New Year again. It seems like only yesterday that we saw the calendar change from '96 to '97 and now, in what seems like the blink of an eye, it's already 1998.

I recall days long past—of course I was a lot younger than I am now—when I would eagerly anticipate the beginning of a new year. It is the custom in Japan to exchange gifts on New Year's Day. And we kids could count on lots of them from our relatives, often in the form of money. I couldn't wait for the day to come. It seemed as if it took forever for a year to pass. I still remember how excited I would get! Ah, New Year's, I thought. The beginning of something new.

I still get excited around this time of year, but in a different way. Now I look forward to what new thing I can tackle, what I can achieve this year that I didn't in the year that just ended. But these days I have to move at a good pace to complete all the tasks I've outlined for myself, because as we all know, before you know it, it'll be 1999. That's why I've taken as my personal challenge to learn how to use these coming days and weeks and months as efficiently as possible.

On that note, I am reminded of the goals I set for our organization when I became general director in 1992. That, too, seems like it was only yesterday. I determined then that we would have 100,000 active, happy members. That we'd become acquainted with 1 million friends of the SGI-USA. And that we would completely eliminate the negative influence of the Nikken sect in the United States. Thanks to all of your great efforts, a lot of progress has been made toward realizing those goals. But, we're not there yet, which is why I've decided to refresh my determination and deepen my prayers so that when 2001 arrives, they'll all have been accomplished.

One of my first tasks for the year will be what I call "calendar revolution." I want to make sure I'm using my time as effectively and as efficiently as possible. From that standpoint, I am going to carefully scrutinize every meeting of an administrative nature to make sure I'm not having a meeting for something that could be handled in a memo or with a phone call. And when I find a meeting is necessary, to have an agenda so everyone taking the time to attend will know why we're meeting and what is expected to be accomplished. I can only imagine how much time I might be able to free up. Time I can use to serve the members.

SGI President Ikeda often says that he has no time to waste, that even a single moment is precious. When we can look at time in that way, we learn to conserve it—like water in the desert. You don't drink it all in a day. You certainly wouldn't mindlessly pour what might be the last bit into the desert sand. Thinking of the preciousness of time reminds me of Nichiren Daishonin's "Letter to Niike":

How swiftly the days pass! It makes us realize how short are the years we

Title: Crossing the Threshold Together

Subject: Living Buddhism 01/98 v.2 n.1 p.6 LB9801p06

Author: Fred M. Zaitso

Keywords: Commentary Crossing Daily Goals Guidance Life Publisher Threshold Together

have left. Friends enjoy the cherry blossoms together on spring mornings and then they are gone, carried away like the blossoms by the winds of impermanence, leaving nothing but their names. Although the blossoms have scattered, the cherry trees will bloom again with the coming of spring, but when will those people be reborn? The companions with whom we composed poems praising the moon on autumn evenings have vanished with the moon behind the shifting clouds. Only their mute images remain in our hearts. The moon has set behind the western mountains, yet we shall compose poetry under it again next autumn. But where are our companions who have passed away? Even when the approaching Tiger of Death roars, we do not hear. How many more days are left to the sheep bound for slaughter? (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 255)

If it sounds as if I am particularly concerned with time this year, you're quite right. You see, I am keenly aware that we are standing on the threshold of not only a new century, but of a new millennium. I am also mindful that we have the great good fortune to share this destiny with President Ikeda. Some people look at the changing of the millennium with superstition and fear. In fact, the beginning of our present millennium was the beginning of the Latter Day of the Law. Anticipating that time, people facing the year 1000 thought the world would end. But Buddhism, as it did then, dispels fear and gives hope. It is our responsibility to share the Buddhist view of hope with the world—our responsibility, our mission—but most of all, it is our privilege. With that, I bid you all great health and long life so that we can compose poetry under the autumn moon of the year 2001, as we step across the threshold into a new age together.

Fred M. Zaitso
SGI-USA General Director