

FRIENDSHIPS FOR PEACE: YOUTH

Youth gatherings were held nationwide to celebrate March 16, Kosen-rufu Day, a day of celebration of youth for the SGI organization. On this day in 1958, Josei Toda, the second president of the Soka Gakkai, held a meeting with 6,000 youth in Japan, passing to them the responsibility for securing lasting peace through the sharing of Buddhism. Over the last forty years, our organization has maintained its commitment to supporting youth in their Buddhist practice and awakening their sense of mission. Here, youth share their visions for the future. Here young people from around the nation share their dreams, hopes and visions for the future.

Anita Ampadu, 16, Columbus, Ohio: “My Buddhist activities help me a lot in my everyday life. I can usually take something that I learned at a meeting and apply what I’ve learned to school, work and other aspects of my life. If I’m doing a project at school I can usually look at something in the *World Tribune* and find something that relates to what I’m learning in school. I find this very often and I can usually better understand what I’m studying and also apply it when I have an obstacle.”

T.J. Johnson, 19, Pasadena, California: “Through the confidence that I gain from chanting, I am able to overcome all obstacles because of a valuable lesson I learned through my practice—always view obstacles not as deterrents but as opportunities to move forward and make even greater achievements. Success does not happen over night. Plan your goals with consistent effort and be willing to sacrifice to achieve them. People don’t plan to fail, they fail to plan. People usually give up too quickly, just about at the time when things start to get difficult. I have learned to stick with things to the end.”

Patricia Donze, 26, Columbia, Missouri: “What the youth of America value depends upon how they were raised. Many value material and monetary items because of their parents’ need to provide them with these items in order to pacify them. There seems to be a lack of value of individual feelings and respect. I feel that the values have changed over the years to be more of a materialistic nature. There are even times when they do not value their parents. The youth of today are unable to equate value to many items because they were handed the items without any struggle and therefore feel that everything should come this easily. They tend to take for granted the simple things in life, like the sun, the clean air or even their own families.”

Bryson Kido, 21, Cambridge, Massachusetts: “For me, the key has always been to make good on your word. To be respected, you must respect others. To be trusted, you must show that you are worthy of trust. For example, while in college, I have been working part time doing some computer work. Although the people around me are all very much older, they have never treated me like a kid.

Title: Friendships for Peace: Youth

Subject: Living Buddhism 05/98 v.2 n.5 p.44 LB9805p44

Author:

Keywords: Activities Features Friendships History Kosen-rufu March Organization Peace Youth

No one looks over my shoulder or checks to see that I'm working. Although I am paid far less than the going rate for this kind of work (computer-related consulting), I have been so fortunate to be in a supportive, nurturing environment. My superiors have very high expectations of my work. I am taking President Ikeda's guidance to heart, where he says you have to become an indispensable person at work."

Helena Miller, 14, Kaimuki, Hawaii: "When I was younger, I had a hard time expressing my thoughts and opinions. This lowered my self-esteem extremely. Then I was introduced to a satisfying change for the first time. I came to live with my grandmother, who has been a member of the SGI for over twenty-five years. She helped me with my communication skills. She also taught me how to express myself in an acceptable manner. I have learned how to build my confidence."

Dana Williamson, 25, Oakland, California: "My prayer to the Gohonzon is for East Bay Junior High division. What is important is for the members to make a connection to the Gohonzon so they become members of society and are no longer with their parents, they can have a victory. I would also like to develop junior high school members who are well versed in the Daishonin's Buddhism so they will be able to distinguish right from wrong."

Ulisse Gallo, 28, Chicago: "My vision for the youth division and SGI in the twenty-first century is one where the youth sponsor dialogues and seminars, based on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, on pertinent issues such as social justice, capital punishment, ethics and morality. I'd like to see scholarships created for youth who become staff members so that the organization can continue to attract capable, dedicated leaders. I see organized sporting activities and events such as basketball and softball where we participate with other youth in our communities. My conviction is that each leader learns to listen to each person's heart and truly supports each person's goals and dreams without bias."

Claudia Heiman, 27, Cambridge, Massachusetts: "President Ikeda talks about the heart as a skilled painter, that we should have a clear vision of our dreams in our hearts when we chant. When I paint my future, I see myself as a strong and happy person and great writer and filmmaker. My deepest desire is to create films that celebrate the joys and sorrows we all experience, which reach and inspire hope in the hearts of millions of people. I want to express my creative voice and develop into a humanistic artist. It's hard to keep this vision in the face of so many doubts and obstacles. Being young can be a bit overwhelming. I struggle in particular with a lack of confidence, but this is precisely why I chant and why I will never ever give up my Buddhist practice."

Jennifer Smith, 26, Goldsboro, North Carolina: "In the twenty-first century, the youth division will conquer irresponsibility and selfishness and realize why we are in this world. Presently we are educating ourselves, learning to become

leaders who will teach others the value of human life and world peace. Education is our catalyst for overcoming negative evils that may hinder us from obtaining our mission. Each individual makes a difference in the world; however, as a whole we can achieve great progress toward kosen-rufu. With strong determination, perseverance and confidence, we can lead everyone to peace and enlightenment for all eternity.”

Tony Geisler, 16, Wheaton, Maryland: “Toward the twenty-first century, I envision myself as a leader of the SGI taking on the responsibility toward creating a better organization and a better world. My leadership roles will develop me to be dependable and capable of defeating all obstacles in my daily life. I will bloom like the cherry blossom in the spring, and show through determination and hard work all goals may be accomplished. Through my toils I will build character and in the end, I will shine like the sun on a bright summer day.”

Sara Martin, 28, West Palm Beach, Florida: “Being a new member of only a few months, I was very impressed with the youth meeting. The part of the meeting that has stuck in my mind was a skit in which a talk show host interviewed two ‘babies’ who were born to parents practicing Buddhism. Of course, they were older in the skit, but they had such a confidence and hope you could tell that this philosophy is a great part of their lives. I really want that kind of confidence in my life. Since then, I feel inspired to chant more and capture the sense of mission for world peace in my own life. It’s encouraging me to become happier, and now I have a desire to strengthen my life. I took my boyfriend who doesn’t chant to the meeting, and he really liked it. I believe the goal of world peace can be accomplished not only through chanting but through the action of dialogue.”

Eva Folsom, 21, Kirkland, Washington: “Recently I began chanting more daimoku and doing gongyo more consistently. As I did so, the great lack of confidence I had in myself became more and more apparent to me. I could clearly see how much my hesitating manner was interfering with my ability to communicate and to make a difference in the lives of others. I began earnestly chanting to overcome my lack of confidence. An excerpt from a dialogue President Ikeda conducted with youth division leaders has been a great source of encouragement to me in this struggle. President Ikeda says: ‘You are just fine the way you are. You should let people get to know the real you, warts and all.’”

Marcia Weston, 34, Philadelphia: “President Ikeda is my role model. I’m most encouraged by his compassion for humanity and his ‘forge ahead to victory’ spirit. I experienced his compassion while attending a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center in March ‘97. During one of our seminars, the facilitator received a request from President Ikeda for all in attendance to receive cake and juice after the meeting. I was moved that although miles away, he took the time to show his concern for us. Furthermore, when I’m overwhelmed by daily life or feeling as though I lack the resolve to challenge my obstacles, I can always pick up a *World*

Tribune or *Living Buddhism* and find some guidance from President Ikeda that inspires me to forge ahead to victory.”

Justin Edge, 28, Kansas City, Missouri: “I’ve had to reconstruct my internal concept of what kosen-rufu is and how it will come about. Rather than some abstract concept, or noun, which will occur in the future by the hands of some ideal group or than being a state of being, it must become a state of action. For myself, this state of action stems from me and my practice in the NOW. As an organization, I feel that the SGI-USA is reiterating the value of individual action as the tool for achieving this end. There can be no collective ‘we’ without a revolutionized me.”

Michelle McClelland, 22, Lawrence, Kansas: “I believe youth division members must be able to speak out and express themselves as a way to show their happiness. They must feel comfortable at meetings and feel that they can relate to what is being said by the presenters. An interactive family-oriented meeting with adults and children studying Buddhism together and not separately will motivate children to want to attend, and participate in meetings and develop strong ties with friends. Activities such as reading the Gosho and articles about Buddhism must be presented at their level of understanding and in such a way that they can connect with the Gohonzon through their eyes and own personal experiences.”

Courtney Starr, 17, Raytown, Missouri: “What disturbs me the most in the world is time. It seems that the older you get, the more fragile time becomes. Time is a very delicate item and should be used, not wasted. People need to take advantage of the time they have now because someday it will be too late. If I could, I would add a couple more days to the weekends. These days would be for people to catch up on work and to spend more time with their families. People need to figure out the true meaning of time and how they can improve themselves by spending their time a little more wisely.”

Sheila McNerny, 28, Seattle (with mother, Diana, of San Francisco): “President Ikeda’s guidance to the youth division during the 1990s has made me take my own value and significance very seriously. As a young person, and a representative of the SGI, I have done my best in my work place and in school to fight injustice, and to create value in my daily life. I would not deny that I am young, often passionate or even too quick to respond emotionally to a difficult situation, but I would also argue that my Buddha nature is not associated with those aspects of my personality. Wisdom does not result directly from growing older. I have met deluded grandmothers and wise 5 year olds. President Ikeda observes that ‘The greatest wisdom in the Latter Day of the Law is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the ultimate Law of the universe, revealed by Nichiren Daishonin.’ The compassion of this Buddhism is that one does not have to wait to become wise, just as one does not have to wait to become happy!”

Sarah Armor, 16, Reynoldsburg, Ohio: “As a youth, I do feel trusted, respected and

valued because I feel that our elders look up to us to help better the world in the future. I feel that the youth of America value freedom and knowledge. I am making a difference in my family and at school by never giving up in what I believe in and by having strong faith in my practice. I always try to be the positive, uplifting person that everyone likes to be around and that everyone likes to look up to. I fight injustice in my life by chanting daimoku and doing gongyo every morning and evening and by having a positive, open mind toward situations in my life."

Hideaki Alex Kawano, 16, Palo Alto, California: "As a youth in the '90s and who is also gay, I go through lots of obstacles every day. However, this practice gives me hope and courage when I go into the public. I can always be myself regardless of what people say, or what clique I'm around. I have no peer pressure anymore since I have been chanting for self-confidence almost all my life. I try to get along with all kinds of people and their styles. We are all somehow connected in this great circle of life we live in. We have beautiful abilities to create happiness with everyone. We as the youth are the ones to shape the future for generations to come." □

Title: Friendships for Peace: Youth

Subject: Living Buddhism 05/98 v.2 n.5 p.44 LB9805p44

Author:

Keywords: Activities Features Friendships History Kosen-rufu March Organization Peace Youth