

Support Activities Are Opportunities for Youth To Grow

Youth division leaders of Seattle Joint Territory with “behind-the-scenes” responsibilities gathered recently to discuss how to create happiness through their activities. The participants were: Donna Keller (vice young women’s division chief), Rachel Woo (Byakuren chief), Susan Ishii (Byakuren vice chief), Yuji Hayano (Soka Group chief), Warren Edmonson (Soka Group vice chief) and Paul Houle (Gajokai chief).

WT: Thank you all for joining us here today. In Seattle, we have been studying SGI President Ikeda’s speech at the 21st SGI General Meeting held at the Florida Nature and Culture Center on June 23, 1996 (*SGI President Ikeda’s Addresses in the United States*, pp. 100–118). Here President Ikeda says that humanity has been looking for the means to create happiness for ages. He gives several examples of the fragility of relative happiness and then he goes on to talk about the means for creating absolute happiness.

Rachel: President Ikeda said we should try to be positive all the time, viewing all situations in a positive light. Sometimes while working behind the scenes we face negativity in one form or another, but I think the point is how to view things optimistically. President Ikeda said that strength, wisdom and cheerfulness lead to happiness.

Of course, he also said that being optimistic does not mean being foolish or gullible or allowing people to take advantage of one’s good nature.

I think this means we should strive to have the wisdom to move things in a positive direction by seeing things in the best light. That’s my personal challenge. Buddhism teaches that we all have tremendous potential inside. It also teaches us that by manifesting that potential and polishing our character through SGI activities, we can create happiness for ourselves and those around us.

Yuji: I have the same kind of struggle in my Soka Group responsibilities. I must ask myself: “How much can I challenge myself to ensure a successful Soka Group movement? How prepared am I for this activity, down to the smallest detail?” This is the spirit I hope we in the Soka Group can share.

Warren: I agree. Only by challenging ourselves can we build compassion for others. In the same speech, President Ikeda said: “Leaders must not intimidate or exhaust others. They must be tolerant and have a warm approachability that makes people feel relaxed and comfortable.

“Not only are those who possess a heart as wide as the ocean happy themselves, but all those around them are happy, too” (ibid., p. 106).

Donna: The young women’s division organization provides opportunities for young women to practice Buddhism together as a peer group and to be good influences on each other. At the same time, though, part of our training in the youth division is to contribute passion and creativity to our district activities.

A young man who is somewhat shy came to his district meeting recently and opened up honestly about the struggle he was facing. Many people in the room, members and guests, responded to his sincerity by offering warm encouragement and sharing their experiences. I think youth division members have the ability to bring that kind of warmth and humanity to

our district meetings.

WT: A passage from *The New Human Revolution* reads: “I would like the youth to serve as the driving force in our discussion meetings and warmly embrace their fellow members with their youthful and vibrant spirit. The youth are the hope and the life of the district” (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 2, p. 29).

Paul: This gets back to Yuji’s point. The Gosho says that if you befriend a person yet lack the mercy to correct them when they are wrong, you are functioning more like an enemy than a friend. Our challenge is to deeply understand what that means and how to apply that to our everyday situations. This comes back to building compassion by challenging ourselves through our activities.

I felt that was the theme of President Ikeda’s entire visit to the United States last year. We have to deeply understand the suffering of others and help them to alleviate that suffering. The whole purpose of the SGI might be said to be relieving the suffering of one person.

At the 21st SGI General Meeting, President Ikeda also said that the first condition for happiness is fulfillment. Even if we are very busy, if we are filled with a tremendous sense of accomplishment we can build happiness on that.

On another occasion, President Ikeda said: “Whatever your field, a half-hearted attitude won’t do.... When young people make truly dedicated efforts — almost as if punishing themselves — their true brilliance will shine forth” (Sept. 13, 1996, *World Tribune*). We can definitely learn from this spirit. I hope no one is punishing themselves, though!

Warren: We are all going to be in the “senior” division some day. That’s an unavoidable truth. Then we can always look at each other and say, “In our youth, we struggled together for kosen-rufu.”

I believe I can only attain that kind of deep fulfillment if I constantly ask myself: “How much conviction do I have to work for kosen-rufu? How cheerful do I look to other people?” I hold these questions up to myself like a mirror.

Susan: I think you need tolerance and compassion, but you also need courage to fulfill your responsibilities. As a Byakuren member, I have a responsibility to fulfill. Sometimes I think, “Oh, I’m so tired,” but I try not to let myself off the hook so easily. I don’t think I’m helping anyone if I take it easy. I don’t think I can help anyone develop their courage and confidence that way. I want to help people get up in the morning — even if it’s on the weekend — and be at their meeting place on time! That may sound like a small matter, but being on time is extremely important.

WT: At the 21st SGI General Meeting, President Ikeda also said that “a life based on faith is a life of unsurpassed happiness” (*SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s Addresses in the United States*, p. 107).

Rachel: When you work behind the scenes during an SGI activity, your priorities are the people’s happiness, security, and comfort. I need a lot of daimoku to keep that frame of mind! Look at President Ikeda’s example: He is constantly on the move, traveling for the sake of others’ happiness.

He is the same age as my mom. She is retired and enjoying her life. But President Ikeda never gives up fighting.

Title: Support Activities are Opportunities for Youth to Grow
Subject: World Tribune 02/21/97 n.3127 p.14 WT970221p14
Author:
Keywords: Activities Byakuren Divisional Group Grow News Opportunities Organization Roundtable Soka Support Youth

People come to our activity centers in all different life-conditions. As a Byakuren member, I have to prepare thoroughly ahead of time for a successful activity. That way, I can move beyond my little world and really care about other people. This is what “unsurpassed happiness” means, I think: chanting a lot of daimoku and polishing your character through activities. Going beyond your limits.

Yuji: I think it’s very important to have a life-condition such that you can enjoy other people’s happiness. President Ikeda is one of the happiest people around because he really enjoys other people’s happiness. If you have the capacity to care for 10 people, then your happiness can increase 10 times! I think that is the bodhisattva spirit and the spirit of working behind the scenes.

Also, by developing this spirit we can create tremendous momentum toward improving our district discussion meetings. I think all of us agree on the importance of having a great district planning meeting. But even if you have a great plan, someone has to make sure that the plan is accomplished. This may mean contacting the master of ceremonies, or the people who are scheduled to give presentations, or the district leaders or whomever. All those things must be considered. And they all boil down to one thing: thorough communication.

I think that youth division members should have the spirit to take on this responsibility without being asked. Our youth division activities are our training for our four-divisional activities.

Susan: It’s really true that just a single person’s smile can brighten up an entire room and bring a feeling of warmth to everyone there. Each person, in his or her own way, possesses that capability. As Byakuren members, we are always reminded how important it is to smile. Sometimes smiling is hard if you’re in a bad mood! But a simple smile can bring so much encouragement to another person.

Donna: When I think of people working behind the scenes, I often think of the earthquake in the Kansai area in Japan and how quickly the Soka Gakkai youth division members there took action to provide relief. The key is taking action. I prefer to think in terms of “manifesting Buddhahood through action” rather than “attaining Buddhahood,” which sounds unreachable to me.

Paul: The first two conditions for happiness that President Ikeda lists in his speech are fulfillment and having a profound philosophy. I think in part he is talking about doing our daily practice of gongyo and dai moku, as we strive to continuously elevate our life-conditions and build conviction based upon faith.

Last month the Soka and Gajokai groups in our joint territory kicked off a study campaign centering on President Ikeda’s *Lectures on the “Expedient Means” and “Life Span” Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*. I feel this is a wonderful opportunity for all Soka Group and Gajokai members to deepen their understanding of this Buddhism.

Every morning I recite gongyo, but what does it really mean? Through these lectures, President Ikeda fully reveals the deep humanity inherent in Buddhism. We are challenging ourselves to undertake this study campaign and it’s very difficult! But I feel that the long-term result will be that our daily practice of gongyo will be much more profound, that we will be able to, on a daily basis, elevate our life-conditions — which is a requirement for us to do these kinds of behind-the-scenes activities.

Warren: Also at the 21st SGI General Meeting, President Ikeda quoted from “The

Problem to Be Pondered Night and Day”: “Do not spend this life in vain and regret it for 10,000 years to come” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 173). The same Gosho says earlier that Nichiren’s disciples should cut “short their sleep by night” and curtail “their leisure by day” (ibid.). In the postscript to this letter, the Daishonin says, “I hope all those who seek the truth will gather in one place and listen to this letter” (ibid.).

Paul: We are holding “study prep” sessions at our Soka Group and Gajokai meetings geared toward our district discussion meetings. The idea is that we study material together and then go back to our districts with what we’ve learned and give some sort of brief study presentation. This, of course, implies that we take some sort of initiative at our district planning meetings to volunteer.

We have to communicate with the men’s and women’s division leaders so that they can help incorporate this contribution from the youth into each district meeting. As President Ikeda said, “Youth are the hope and the life of the district.”

WT

Title: Support Activities are Opportunities for Youth to Grow
Subject: World Tribune 02/21/97 n.3127 p.14 WT970221p14
Author:
Keywords: Activities Byakuren Divisional Group Grow News Opportunities Organization Roundtable Soka Support Youth