

EDITORIAL: Cure the Apathy Epidemic

It's up to today's youth to save America from imminent self-destruction, many people say. That's why so many volunteer organizations, including the SGI-USA, are focused now on nurturing youth — whether they call it mentoring programs, citizen service or, as we do, youth division activities.

In the SGI-USA, we're confident that the young people practicing this Buddhism are some of the best and brightest in our nation. Even so, some may wonder if it's wise to place such high expectations on youth — in our organization or our country.

After all, statistics suggest that young people are becoming increasingly apathetic. A recent survey by the Higher Education Research Institute at the University of California Los Angeles found that current college freshmen — the class of 2001 — care less about academics and politics than American students ever have. More than 30 percent are bored with school and skip classes. Only 26.7 percent are interested in the political process, this percentage only half what it was 30 years ago.

Apathetic, unconcerned, indifferent. It seems these words are unfortunately used more and more to characterize young people, and apparently there is evidence to back them up. (The *World Tribune* invites young people to write to us about apathy and how to cure it.)

But wait — maybe youth aren't the only apathetic ones here. Apathy is, after all, hardly something that can be quarantined to one age group or one demographic segment. It's perhaps convenient to pinpoint youth as apathetic, but it's a human condition, it's everyone's problem. And if it's on the rise among youth, we're all probably affected by it.

In one of SGI President Ikeda's "Discussions on Youth," he explained: "People tend to lack willpower. To take the path of least resistance is human nature. Outstanding individuals...have disciplined themselves to overcome their weaknesses, conquering apathy and inertia to become true victors in life."

This, indeed, is the challenge of our times, the challenge for us all. To conquer apathy in ourselves and others, we have to make a conscious effort to care. Care about our lives. Care about others' lives. Care about the future. Just care. And it's by revitalizing this sense of caring about everything in our world that we can ignite sparks of enthusiasm in others, whether we're in our 70s or we've just turned 17.

Do we feel that people nowadays have no appreciation? That they don't want to remember how far we've come and how far we have to go? That they just don't care?

Then we have to be the first ones to care. To not care only perpetuates the apathy we see. A revitalized sense of caring is what everyone needs to create a time when *apathetic* isn't such a popular word to describe youth — or anyone else. Then we can offer America a cure for the apathy epidemic.

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