

**PERSPECTIVE: The Olympics of the Heart**  
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**New York**

On April 16, at a Los Angeles hotel, a small group of SGI-USA members gather for an orientation before departing for the Spring Training Session in Japan. A writer from New Jersey, a systems analyst from New York, a space planner from Boston, a businessman from Chicago, a teacher from Arizona, a singer-songwriter from San Antonio, and the list goes on. A diverse group, but the spirit of people coming together to seek the Law charges the air with excitement.

SGI Vice President Danny Nagashima details SGI President Ikeda's vision for world peace in the 21st century, which entails raising a new generation. How, I wonder, is this to be accomplished?

Mr. Nagashima outlines President Ikeda's past achievements in education, including the establishment of Soka High Schools in 1961 and Soka University in 1971. Future plans include the Soka University of America campus in Aliso Viejo, Calif., scheduled to open in 2001.

Finally, he says something that answers my question: "Your trip to Japan at this time is very significant. Develop your heart, starting with understanding President Ikeda's heart." This is the education I am seeking, I think. An alignment of my heart with that of President Ikeda.

Some participants share what they want to bring back from the training session. The teacher wants to find a way to encourage her students. Tears trickle down her face as she speaks: "Our kids, they're killing themselves. They're killing one another. I've got to help them find a better life."

The singer-songwriter sings his song "Carry On." He belts out the first line, "Here we are, lions on the edge of eternity," and from that point on there is a bond, an understanding among us disciples of the Mystic Law, lions of the Middle Way, that deepens with every verse. We sing it together and end with the chorus:

*Carry on, carry on, carry on,  
We must lead everyone to the dawn.  
It won't be easy, we know the road ahead is long,  
But we're determined and we'll make it  
Just as long as we carry on.*

We arrive in Tokyo harried but are revived by President Ikeda's message welcoming his "precious fellow members." He refers to us in every message, in every speech, as his "precious fellow members" or his "fellow members from the infinite past." I pay particular attention. It is part of my education.

On April 18, at the Soka International Friendship Center, I am sitting with 235 members from 46 countries, including India, Britain, Canada, Taiwan, Cameroon and France. Headphones in place, I listen as an interpreter relays another message from President Ikeda: "The 21st century will be the century of women.... Women are bold pacifists." In my notebook, I underline this sentence three times.

This is the United Nations of the Spirit, I think, awash with joy and brimming with pride as a participant in this grand Olympics. The Olympics of the Spirit.

Each morning, SGI-USA members gather in the lobby of Tokyo's Keio Plaza Hotel to share impressions of the previous day's activities. One woman says: "President Ikeda keeps

telling us to make the members happy. The members at the exchange meetings treated us like royalty. They made me feel unequivocally accepted. Loved. I want to make my members feel that way. I want to make my family feel that way.”

I take reams of notes. Lectures. Speeches. Places. Every day is a prelude to the May 3 commemorative meeting at Makiguchi Memorial Hall with President Ikeda. There will be no notetaking, I am told. I realize President Ikeda doesn't rely on words alone — he conveys his message with his whole life.

I am seated so close to the stage that I can see his unabashed joy emanating from his life. Given the fact that the SGI is embroiled in the most historic battle against evil in the history of the True Law, I marvel at his joy. He banters with the audience as he weaves lighthearted humor through a heartfelt speech.

The first thing he talks about is courage. How important it is. Without my notebook, I seem to remember with my heart. Snippets of wisdom stuck there, in my heart, forever. For instance: laugh at your enemies; laugh at criticism; fear nothing. It doesn't matter what anybody does, what anybody says. Just keep going. The only complete sentence I can recall is this: “A truly great person can enjoy him- or herself under any circumstances.” Before the meeting ends, I pledge to become a truly great person.

What makes the strongest impression on me is what President Ikeda says about the youth division: “I'm not worried about anything because I have the youth division.” I can't describe his conviction when he utters these words. President Ikeda's consideration for them, his confidence in them, glows in their lives. I leave the meeting with a newfound understanding of the youth division.

On April 21, a long speech from President Ikeda is read to us at Soka International Friendship Center. The next day at our morning powwow, one man speaks up: “Everybody has their moment. That moment when they feel President Ikeda is personally encouraging them. Mine was when he said ‘Thank you, thank you, thank you’ at the end of his speech. I could feel how deeply he was bowing to us. How sincerely he respected the members.... That was my moment.”

On our final morning in Japan, I make this entry in my notebook: “Buddhism is the heart.... That's what I will give my members. That's what I will give the youth division. That's what they will carry into the 21st century.”

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