

## Putting Art Into Our Lives

*As planning gets under way for the 1999 American culture festival and general meeting, General Director Zaitso offers some thoughts on the purpose and spirit of such special events hosted by the SGI-USA.*

As many of you may know, a culture festival and general meeting are being planned for the fall of 1999 in Los Angeles.

Many members have questions regarding the specifics, but since we're still in the early planning stages, there aren't any details I can offer. I would like to assure you, though, that regular updates will appear in future issues of the *World Tribune*.

My overall determination is that this event will prove to be spiritually enriching for each individual member of the SGI-USA, and will also create a profound sense of unity within our organization. Further, I'm determined that (through *all* of our endeavors) we will bathe American society in warm waves of joy.

Festivals and conventions are common in America, of course. The Republicans and Democrats hold political conventions every four years, for example. And we've all heard of religious rallies hosted by different groups.

There's value, I believe, in bringing people together to celebrate their most noble beliefs and to share a vision for the future.

Our upcoming festival promises to be something unique, something truly wonderful — but, as in all our activities, success or failure hinges on our faith and our sense of mission. With this in mind, I'd like to offer some thoughts regarding such cultural events.

• **Culture festivals are integral to the SGI's goal of securing world peace.** We all know that hatred and ignorance breed war. Culture and education, on the other hand, cause peace to grow. By *culture*, I don't mean anything snobbish or exclusionary. Rather, I mean a broad expression of our shared humanity.

President Ikeda once described culture as “an exquisite flower nurtured by the inner power of the human spirit.” And he has said that culture acts like a magnet, drawing people together, transcending ethnic, national and ideological differences. It could be said, then, that culture festivals are blossoms of joy and harmony — dress rehearsals for world peace, so to speak.

• **A culture festival is a means, not an end in itself.** In a recent installment of *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda states that the reason he originally proposed holding culture festivals “was because the arts must return to the people.... Without the participation and appreciation of the people, culture and art are empty, meaningless.... When humanity and the human spirit triumph, they lead to a brilliant cultural flowering and the appearance from among the people of truly great artworks.”

So, in one sense, a culture festival is a means for putting art into the lives of ordinary people. In another sense, such festivals are a means by which each participant can polish his or her life; it's an opportunity to challenge ourselves through faith, practice and study, using our bodies and minds.

If you've ever been on the field in a crowded stadium or on stage in a concert hall, you know that there's tremendous energy and excitement generated by a unified audience. In the same way, a culture festival builds unity, and makes us feel that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. We're each small eagles, so to speak, but the festival gives us a sense that together we're a huge, soaring eagle.

• **Culture festivals are pure expressions of joy, praise and mission.** Nichiren Daishonin wrote: “Bear in mind that the twenty-eight chapters of the Lotus Sutra contain only a few passages elucidating the truth, but a great many words of praise” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 203). It could be said that the Lotus Sutra praises life itself. Similarly, culture festivals are an opportunity for us to express the sheer joy of life.

Further, this expression of joy is part of our mission as practitioners of Buddhism. President Ikeda once explained that “while violence and war are threats to our existence, the arts express the joy of life. Wherever the correct Buddhist teachings spread, there will be jubilant poetry, song and dance. Joy is sublimated into art. As a result, wherever we who practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism go, splendid flowers of art will bloom. Our mission is to link people’s hearts with this blossoming of life’s joy and to create a beautiful garden of peace on earth.”

• **One question I hear frequently when such events are being planned is: Will SGI President Ikeda be there?** Recently, many members have asked me: “When will President Ikeda be coming to the United States? Will he come next year or the year after?” So I let them know that I do not currently have any schedule of President Ikeda coming. I remember I asked President Ikeda the same question a couple of years ago. I said, “Please come to the United States soon!”

He replied, “When you are ready, I’m ready.”

In other words, our challenge is to make the organization ready to welcome President Ikeda at any moment. We will make this happen through our expansion movement, our fight against the evil function of Nikken and his priesthood, by continually challenging our personal goals and dreams each day, and by helping each member to become happy and fulfilled.

I’m looking forward to the upcoming festival and am determined to work toward its success with all my heart.

**WT**