

## **FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR A GRAND DRAMA IS UNFOLDING WITHIN THE SGI-USA**

Greetings to the readers of *Living Buddhism*! Every November 18, we commemorate the founding of the Soka Gakkai. In fact, this year is the seventieth anniversary. Congratulations! In addition, this past October, we celebrated the fortieth anniversary of President Ikeda's first visit to the United States when he formed the first districts and chapter outside of Japan. I know that in every region of the country, members have exerted themselves in conducting meetings, festivals, performances, fairs and various other events in celebration of our anniversary. Your efforts for these activities, and for the past year, have been awe-inspiring. As general director, I cannot thank you enough, so instead I will respond by working even harder for the happiness of every member.

Because we are commemorating such auspicious occasions, and because we are in the midst of preparations to open Soka University, Aliso Viejo, I have been thinking about how organizations and institutions begin and develop. Last month, I wrote that the spirit at the time of the founding determines the direction in which an institution grows. Despite good intentions, many institutions lose sight of their original purpose. As some institutions grow, the people they were created to serve ultimately come to serve them.

As we honor our past accomplishments and enter a new century, I would like to affirm that the focus of our movement is the individual human being. Nichiren Daishonin didn't teach in order to create a religious organization; he taught in order to free people from their suffering. The SGI wasn't founded in order to build a vast organization. It was created to be a wellspring of individual development and social and cultural improvement. I feel I must stress again and again that our efforts for the happiness and growth of people are the beginning and end of our organization. The organization's growth, our efforts to educate people about peace and nonviolence, and our beautiful cultural activities—all come from this.

In the first installment of "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra," President Ikeda explained that the spirit of the Lotus Sutra is one of self-transformation. This, he said, is the starting point for our SGI activities and our Buddhist practice.

Wherever we are, it is necessary to begin with the revitalization of individual human beings. That is what we mean by the reformation of society and the world through human revolution. That is the teaching of the Lotus Sutra. And actions directed toward that end, I would like to stress, represent the wisdom of the Lotus Sutra" (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 11).

I know many of you have been studying President Ikeda's recent poem, "Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!" I have also been studying and speaking about this poem over and over again. A few months ago, I talked about the opening of this poem, and I would like to turn to the first stanza once again because I feel it reflects a profound truth about each of us. It is a message we should ponder deeply as we move into the new century.

The Bodhisattvas of the Earth  
have emerged!  
They have arisen!  
They have started to stir, to move! (*Songs for America*, p. 9)

I want to study this passage again because it refers to each of us and how we are leading our lives and to the eternal mission of the SGI.

I say this because we are the Bodhisattvas of the Earth. President Ikeda's passionate resolve for us to awaken to our mission is so apparent here!

At the same time, this awareness is at the very heart of our identity as an organization. In President Toda's historic essay "The History and Conviction of the Soka Gakkai," he wrote:

The Soka Gakkai's mission is weighty, and behind its inception there is profound significance....

From the day I was released from prison in July 1945, I could finally say in my heart to the late president: "Our lives are eternal. There is no beginning or end to them. I am now aware that we have all appeared in this world with the great mission to propagate the Lotus Sutra of the seven characters in the Latter Day of the Law. If I dare to define us with this conviction, I can say we are all Bodhisattvas of the Earth..."

This awareness gradually permeated the Soka Gakkai members, but the organization itself did not yet cast off its transient aspect and reveal its true entity. It was really up to each individual as to what it means. (*Seikyo Times*, August 1992, pp. 40–41)

That we are Bodhisattvas of the Earth is a conviction I believe many members hold. But for this to be the truth of our organization, each of us must live based on this conviction—not only within the organization, but also within our families, careers and communities. As President Toda says, for this to become reality, "it is really up to each individual."

In addition, I believe that this stanza is also in accord with a famous passage from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, in "The True Aspect of All Phenomena":

If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remote past. The sutra states, "Ever since the long distant past I have been teaching and converting this multitude." There should be no discrimination among those who propagate the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, be they men or women. Were they not Bodhisattvas of the Earth, they could not chant the daimoku. (WND, 385)

In thirteenth-century Japan, gender- and class-based hierarchies were accepted as natural. However, it was also a very homogeneous society, so the problem of racial or cultural discrimination was not a pressing issue. Therefore, while in this particular passage he refers to "no discrimination" in reference to gender, I believe members of the SGI must also "transcend all differences" in race, culture, sexuality, gender and political beliefs. Whatever appearance or identity we possess in this lifetime, in our own unique way, we all equally express the Law of the universe.

This is why, in the United States, at the end of a century wracked by warfare, racial tension, the struggle for equality and devastating poverty alongside unrivaled prosperity, we must affirm that this teaching offers a sound philosophical basis for reforming society. We must awaken to the call in President Ikeda's poem—to stir, to move, to take action where we are. And by so doing, we affirm our role as Bodhisattvas of the Earth to rejuvenate society and to inspire hope in others.

There are now seventy years of Soka Gakkai history. The organization for American

kosen-rufu is forty years old. As a religious movement we are still young. At the same time, we have emerged and developed during perhaps the most turbulent time in human history. We are young, but we have seen much.

Together, we are creating a great history of effort and accomplishment with our mentor. I am convinced that our wonderful history comprises the opening lines of a beautiful and grand drama yet to unfold. The past is merely a prelude! Please allow me to express my deepest appreciation to all of you for the work of the past, and the great work yet to come. Thank you all very much!

Daniel K. Nagashima  
SGI-USA General Director