

LET'S MEET OUR NEW LEADERSHIP

STUDENT DIVISION

In subsequent issues we'll find out more about Daisaku's and Wendy's visions for the student division. Seize the Day wanted to first get to know them as people. Here are two intimations by our national student division leaders.

By Daisaku Leslie:

Growing up I was always being left out of games. This made me feel like I was always behind. So I tried very hard to keep up, to be a part of something. This sometimes led me down the path of destruction. At a very young age, I got involved with the wrong crowd and started consuming drugs and alcohol. However, one day some YMD came over to my house and encouraged me to get involved with the practice and activities. The spirit that I really liked and seemed to hit home for me was the never-give up/win-no matter-what spirit. This spirit always kept me going.

When I embarked on my journey to accomplish the dream of attending Soka University, I had to seriously put this spirit into practice.

After failing twice to enter Soka, I determined to try again. This began my spiritual battle. In the end I was accepted to the graduate school and earned a master's degree in sociology.

Now I feel that it's time to put the never-give-up/win-no matter-what spirit to practice again. This time however I feel I am facing the toughest foe ever—myself. I will win over myself and once again experience the joy of human revolution.

By Wendy DeSouza:

A few nights ago, I was going through some boxes left over from “the move.”

After shuffling through a hodge-podge of packrat items—my old sticker collection from junior high, a Bill and Hillary Clinton paper doll book, and a gold-gilded Koran from Egypt—I stumbled across a booklet I had kept from elementary school. Classmates of mine each had contributed to this booklet by drawing a crayon picture and writing a short bio about me. Some comments were:

“Wendy does not stay in her seat very long.”

“I like Wendy. She has one sister and two moms. I think that that is funny.”

I won't mention the reputation I had in the kick-ball arena.

What struck me most was what I said about myself. At the end of my self-portrait, I wrote, “I like myself.”

I couldn't believe I said something so bold! It's almost shocking that something I felt quite naturally when I was 8 later became a frivolous idea as a teenager. The idea of making something of myself one day—let alone finishing college—was remote. My difficult yet glorious transformation from sleep depression to joyful engagement in the academic world was possible only because of my Buddhist practice and the SGI. This human revolution was excruciating. It still is!

But now I can see no better way to become happy.

BYAKUREN

By Stacey Humphries:

HELLO! Happy New Year! I have been practicing for 13 years. During my Byakuren experience of five years, I had the opportunity to be the assistant Byakuren chief when President Ikeda visited Los Angeles in 1996.

Immediately after I accepted this responsibility, many challenges came up. My apartment was robbed; I totaled my car; I was hospitalized with a kidney infection; my horse died and I hated my job. Needless to say, I was at rock bottom!

It was then, on July 3, 1996, that I went to Mrs. Hachiya, SGI vice women's leader, because I knew I had to challenge myself during this crucial time. She said: "Congratulations. Now that you've hit bottom, you have no place to go but up." She told me not to quit my job, but to become indispensable for kosen-rufu. "Now is the time to build spiritual and financial freedom so that you can do kosen-rufu on behalf of President Ikeda. NOW is the time to stand up." She also said that it was very significant that President Ikeda was in America on Mentor/ Disciple Day.

After reflecting, chanting and participating in the activities surrounding President Ikeda's visit with my whole heart, I created a new path for myself. This experience was a turning point in my life and over the next few months, my situation dramatically changed. But what I really was left with was the impression of my mentor sharing this Buddhism through his compassionate behavior. Now it is our turn to develop and do the same toward others.

After reading President Ikeda's New Year's message, I sincerely feel like he is talking directly to the Byakuren and giving us a vision on how to create this Century of Life. He writes: "With heads held high and with light and cheerful strides, let's move together along the grand path of peace and culture.... It is my hope that we can fight resolutely side by side in this life and win, cheerfully and bravely moving ever forward so that we may each achieve a great personal victory."

This is the Year of Youth — I am determined that as Byakuren we'll be the example in every endeavor. The Byakuren Group is an integral part of the young women's division. My personal determination is to work together with all the Byakuren and YWD members to prepare for May 3, 2001, by ensuring that each of our activities is a total success (beginning with the March 16 introductory meetings sponsored by the youth). This will be our first big opportunity to develop ourselves further and will set the tone for the whole year. It's the perfect equation of practicing for ourselves and practicing for others! How fortunate I feel to be working with such a capable group of young women.