

FNCC IMPRESSION—CRAIG TACHIBANA, HONOLULU IMPRESSION OF THE SOKA SPIRIT CONFERENCE

The recent Soka Spirit Conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center was fabulous! A group diverse in both body and mind came from around the country seeking the Law; we immersed ourselves in Soka Spirit.

As I listened to the speakers, who all did an excellent job, the general concept that our mercy should extend beyond our organization and even into the depths of the hell of Nichiren Shoshu came to mind. I understood that our SGI members who left for the temple were, from the standpoint of mercy, still our SGI members!

As I sat reciting gongyo, I recalled the ceremony at Maki-guchi Memorial Hall in Japan where we chanted to the Gohonzon, which second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda requested for the sake of worldwide kosen-rufu. At that leadership conference devoted entirely to the temple issue in 1994, I was inspired to take action to share this spirit with the SGI members of Hawaii. And here I am in 2000, once again determined to be Soka Spirit!

As I chanted at the FNCC, I remembered Mr. Harry Hiram, SGI-USA's vice general director and first appointed district chief in Hawaii. He often said, "There is no such thing as going *taiten* (member who regresses in faith). Sooner or later they return to the organization." This conference helped me understand what he truly meant. Mr. Hiram embraced all people. He was truly, a "down to earth" Bodhisattva of the Earth. I realize now that it was his mercy and determination that allowed him to powerfully and confidently make such a statement.

One day at the community center in Honolulu, Mr. Hiram surprised me. He said, "Craig! Do your best!" I nodded in agreement. That was the last time I saw him. Mr. Hiram died in 1982 on the mainland carrying out his SGI duties—away from his beloved islands and those he embraced. The islands wept! I believe that Mr. Hiram embodied Soka Spirit long before this temple issue ever arose.

While at the FNCC, I realized that the Lotus Sutra contained the tears of all disciples. Tears of painful struggle! Tears of joyous celebration! Tears for the sake of the Law exude from each letter of the Lotus Sutra. Tears that were shed to guard, protect, uphold and propagate the Law. Now we would shed tears of Soka Spirit! I immediately wrote my determination to President Ikeda in a poem titled "Tears for a New Millennium":
Makiguchi ... / Toda ... / the tears of the Lotus Sutra, / tears of all members, / Gush into the lake at FNCC / Tears of amrita / the tears of joyful struggle, / from FNCC / tears of Soka Spirit, / like a tsunami, deluge Nikken Sect, / to purify our land!

Four days after returning to Hawaii, I ran into my former SGI member. We had not met for nearly 15 years. He joined the temple. He was my member then and in chanting, remains my member still. I am determined to bring him back!