

SGI YOUTH TRAINING COURSE 2000 **BOLDLY ADVANCING WITH THE SPIRIT OF MENTOR AND DISCIPLE**

By Wendy DeSouza, *SGI-USA Student Div. Leader*, and Steve Mortan, *SGI-USA High School Div. Leader*

It was the last SGI Training Course of the 20th century. Twenty-one youth representatives from around the country, including Puerto Rico, formed bonds with one another and with youth from around the world and deepened their bond with their mentor, SGI President Ikeda. Indeed the drama of obstacles leading up to the training course — health, financial, relationships, travel arrangement complications — was no less impacting on the character and resolve of each American youth.

President Ikeda's arrival message set the tone for the training course: "During your time in Japan, please earnestly study the Daishonin's Buddhism and the essence of the priesthood issue to your heart's content, while at the same time sharing your hopes and dreams for kosen-rufu with your fellow members from around the world, forging many wonderful, lifetime friendships."

For nine days, the youth devoured and digested guidance. It was a smorgasbord of faith-nourishment. The focal point of every activity was the mentor-disciple relationship. The American youth participated in activities which included large training meetings together with 250 other youth from 45 countries; a tour of the Soka University campus; the 49th Headquarters Leaders Meeting at Makiguchi Memorial Hall with President Ikeda; a Gosho lecture and Q-and-A session with Soka Gakkai Vice Study Department Leader Masaaki Morinaka; a meeting with Rev. Endo Ishida, who recently disassociated from Nichiren Shoshu; exchange meetings with members of the Kamakura region; group and individual guidance sessions; the 5th World Student Division Conference; and, finally, youth supported the greeting of President Ikeda's guest, the Israeli ambassador to Japan. In addition, many youth had interviews with the *Seikyo Shimbun* and other publications anxious to hear about youth activities in the United States.

During the course of this spiritual odyssey of self-reflection and realization, pearls of wisdom about the mentor-disciple relationship were shared. Mr. Morinaka shared that the Gosho inspires us to live true to the spirit of mentor and disciple. He also shared that Nichiren Daishonin never lowered the banner of kosen-rufu despite harsh persecution, and emphasized that what lay at the root of the Tatsunokuchi Persecution can be found in the following passage from "Letter From Sado": "When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teaching tries to destroy the correct teachings and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 302).

Youth from other countries shared their victories in the Soka Spirit movement. One outstanding report came from a Malaysian youth leader who reported that 23 youth who were practicing with the temple got involved in their youth culture festival. The chief Nichiren Shoshu priest visited these youth and tried to discourage their participation, saying that they would receive punishment for their participation in the festival. The youth did not listen to the priest, and from their amazing growth in faith, all of them joined the SGI after the festival. In addition, SGI-Malaysia

invited 800 temple members to the festival, and after seeing the greatness of the SGI — many for the first time in person — more than 400 temple members disassociated from the temple.

SGI Young Men's Leader Tamotsu Sugiyama stated that there is no greater time than now to struggle together with our mentor. He offered three points for youth:

- 1) Be a pioneer, blazing new trails for kosen-rufu,
- 2) Protect the SGI; it is youth who must struggle against the adversaries of kosen-rufu, and
- 3) Win respect and trust in society by showing actual proof

At the 5th World Student Division conference, SGI Vice President Hiromasa Ikeda likened the participants of the meeting to athletes competing in the Olympics, now being held in Australia. He mentioned that the Olympic athletes may be forgotten in 10 or 20 years, however, the SGI youth's efforts for kosen-rufu will never be forgotten. In addition, he stated that whether this meeting is historic depends on the actions of the participants present at the meeting. SGI General Director Eiichi Wada also shared encouragement, and offered one single phrase for the student division to inherit from President Ikeda: "Wisdom equals kosen-rufu."

At the 49th Headquarters Leaders Meeting, President Ikeda shared the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and the struggle for justice and human rights. At one point during the meeting, he asked the participants present if they knew how to sing the civil rights anthem "We Shall Overcome" and invited them to stand up and sing it together. President Ikeda created such a warm and spontaneous atmosphere. He mentioned that SGI-USA was growing at an astonishing pace. He also said that throughout the SGI-USA, members were holding 40th anniversary celebrations commemorating the beginning of American kosen-rufu. At that moment, he invited SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima up to the podium. Danny called out to the youth of the SGI-USA to struggle together with President Ikeda and to create a great organization in America with his heart. The youth shouted back in unison, "Yes!" The expectation for America was incredible.

The training course participants took every opportunity to grow so that they could share President Ikeda's spirit with their members and friends at home. A pledge was created from the labor and passion of each American participant. This pledge affirmed the participants' resolve to support the "three Soka's" in their local areas: Soka Care, Soka Spirit and Soka University (SUA). A firm resolve to make next year's eight zone celebrations shine was also part of the pledge. In front of the SGI participants, representative SGI-USA youth also made a pledge to support SUA, and thanked the audience for their support in finding capable youth to send to the university from their respective countries.

SOKA JUSTICE GROUP

President Ikeda named the following twenty-one youth training course participants Soka Justice Group.

Jason Berg	Nobuko Kobayashi
Dorney Burgdorf	Keli McHale
Hau'oli Busby	Steve Mortan
Jaideep Chitkara	Bonnie Nash
Myeong Chung	Sonja Taylor
Bobby Debozi	Wayne Thomas, Jr.
Wendy DeSouza	Jomo Thorne
Lydia Fort	Kazu Toda
James Herrmann	Jose Luis Vargas
Yoshiya Ieda	Sandy Wolf
David Ishii	