

## **IMPRESSIONS FROM THE SGI YOUTH TRAINING COURSE**

### **DEVOTING ONESELF FOR THE HAPPINESS OF OTHERS BY JASON BERG, BLOOMFIELD, N.J.**

Last week, I had the opportunity to attend the SGI Youth Training Course in Japan, which was attended by 250 young people from 45 countries. I was struck by the seriousness of these youth, the depth of their conviction and their love for SGI President Ikeda. At times, I felt totally overwhelmed by the magnitude of what we were engaged in. But I was constantly surrounded by young people who were truly seeking President Ikeda. Their fierce determination to fight side by side with our mentor inspired and pushed me to keep going.

As I am writing these words, I am still struggling to understand my experience in Japan. It is the picture in my mind's eye of these gallant comrades in faith that gives me strength.

To me, the main theme of the training course was mentor-disciple. In fact, it felt as if President Ikeda himself was determined to personally train each one of us in this regard. As soon as we arrived in Japan, we received a message from him. Throughout the trip, he sent messages to us and presented us with many gifts!

I was deeply moved by President Ikeda's consideration and his determination to raise us to be his successors. In my heart, I resolved to reply in some way.

While we were in Japan, it was so clear how much President Ikeda is focusing on America. To be honest, the feeling I came away with is that the SGI-USA is like the favorite child of a doting father. We are receiving all the best training, being given all the best resources and being sent all the greatest encouragement. The question is, what are we going to do with all of this? Do we sit back and become spoiled, or do we gallantly stride forward?

One great example of what to do comes from the lives of John F. Kennedy and his brother Robert. They grew up in a life of privilege and could have simply taken it easy and enjoyed themselves. Instead, they put everything they had into working for the people. Ultimately, they even gave their lives for the sake of the people.

It is with this spirit that I, too, am determined to advance. I am fully confident that the greatest happiness to be found in life is to devote oneself to the happiness of others based on the Mystic Law. I will give my life to helping prepare America to greet President Ikeda on May 3, 2001, and advance with our mentor toward worldwide kosen-rufu.

### **I CHOSE THIS EXISTENCE BY LYDIA FORT, NEW YORK**

Every moment of every day, from the formal training sessions to those one-on-one encounters with new friends, presented me with an opportunity to transform and train my life. Needless to say, this experience has been a major turning point in my life.

Being in SGI President Ikeda's rhythm and environment had a profound effect on me. I felt the true power and glimpsed the awesome purpose of our SGI organization to transform the world by creating a new civilization built on a true humanistic

Title: Impressions from the SGI Youth Training Course

Subject: World Tribune 10/06/00 n.3314 p.B SD001006pB FNCC

Author:

Keywords: Course Experiences FNCC Impressions Seize Training Tribune World Youth

philosophy. I learned the essence of how to chant and study in order to connect my life to Nichiren Daishonin and President Ikeda.

Most importantly, I learned what a rare and wondrous thing it is to have been born at this time — I chose this existence. I chose to be born an African American woman and face sexism and racism. I chose to be born in New York City (how more *mappo* could you get?), in which to do shakubuku (the propagation of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism). I chose to be born at this time and in this country so that I could participate in the birth of the Aliso Viejo campus of Soka University of America, and fight in the Soka Spirit movement. I chose to be born now so that I could carry out my pledge to fulfill President Ikeda's vision for the 21st century. What a splendid thing!

In that way, I learned what a precious treasure my life and all of our lives are. Never again will I lament my circumstances or doubt what I or anyone has to offer. All that I can do is fight against the negative tendencies of doubt and inertia in my life.

I met so many incredible young comrades in faith who inspired me tremendously. I feel so fortunate to have met them because I know that all over the world there are courageous bodhisattvas who, in conjunction with grappling with their own individual struggles, are all dedicated to fighting for world peace in their own unique ways. And that together, we will ensure that the impossible dream of world peace will become a reality!

### **BECOMING A GENUINE DISCIPLE BY YOSHIYA IEDA, DETROIT**

It is my great fortune to have been able to attend the SGI youth training course this time. I am sure it will be one of the best memories of my life, and I am determined to make it so. Thanks to my mentor, SGI President Ikeda, and many of my great comrades, I was very encouraged, learned many important lessons and realized what was lacking in my faith.

Every moment during the training course was unforgettable. I am glad that I can share my experience with you through our youth paper. Since space is limited, however, I would like to write about what inspired me the most.

On Sept. 11, I had the fortune of welcoming the ambassador of Israel to Japan together with President Ikeda. That was the first opportunity to see my mentor's efforts directly with my own eyes. He is truly a fighter. He is, with all his might, creating friendships with each person in front of him. When President Ikeda said to the ambassador, "I am a Buddhist. Therefore, I will protect you!" I felt I saw the essence of Buddhism. I said to myself, "This is my mentor. This is his fight. This is how he has been advancing kosen-rufu." President Ikeda once said that kosen-rufu is the process of helping and encouraging one person. This was exactly what he was doing — connecting the world through friendship. President Ikeda then held the ambassador's arm, shook hands and gazed at his eyes. I could not suppress my tears. My heart was full of respect and appreciation for President Ikeda, and joy to have a mentor like him.

Now, I am determined to keep the pledges I made to my mentor, more strongly than ever. I will fulfill them no matter what may happen, and I believe I can become a genuine disciple. To be President Ikeda's true disciple — this is the goal of my life.

Title: Impressions from the SGI Youth Training Course

Subject: World Tribune 10/06/00 n.3314 p.B SD001006pB FNCC

Author:

Keywords: Course Experiences FNCC Impressions Seize Training Tribune World Youth

On the night before we left Japan, I got the following encouragement from one of President Ikeda's staff. I would like to share it with you because I found it very encouraging. He said, "It does not matter whether or not we are capable at this moment. The most important thing is whether or not we are determined and how we will fight from today. And this is what President Ikeda is counting on."

### **DEVELOPING THE HEART OF A LION KING BY BONNIE NASH, DENVER**

In the fall of 1997, I was one of the youth selected to go on the youth training course in Japan. Although I tried my best, I wasn't able to attend because of financial reasons. I was disappointed then, but in retrospect, I could see that I was not ready to go. Had I gone, I would not have gotten out of the training course what I did this time.

For a long time, I practiced to have good circumstances without realizing it. I thought my practice was strong and considered myself a disciple of SGI President Ikeda's. However, I would be shaken when faced by obstacles. I did not realize until recently that this made me a cowardly person. Because of my attitude to avoid difficult circumstances, President Ikeda could not count on me, and therefore, I was not truly his disciple.

It was when I attended the young women's conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center this past June that I became aware of this underlying attitude in my life. Before I decided to go, my life was pretty good, I was engaged to a wonderful person and had recently graduated from college. My life was ahead of me. However when I decided to attend the FNCC conference, something happened that turned my life upside down. When I came back from the FNCC is when I recognized this tendency in myself.

When I heard of the opportunity to go to Japan I decided to challenge this aspect in my life. Also there were many youth in our Region who were struggling. I wanted to attend to conquer my fear and to help the youth be victorious in their lives. I encountered many obstacles including those I encountered in 1997, but I did not retreat.

When I finally arrived in Japan I could hardly believe I was there. To be honest, many things happened that I still need to digest, but one thing that sticks out in my mind is a lecture that was given on "Letter from Sado." Nichiren Daishonin states: "When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with a heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 302).

It was through this training course and President Ikeda's guidance I realized I had to advance with the heart of a lion king and not simply seek out good or comfortable circumstances. Like a lion king in the jungle, I should never fear what lies ahead. Instead, I should pounce on any obstacle that may arise and be proud to fight alongside my mentor toward a lofty goal of leading everyone to a life with a heart of a lion king. I know that President Ikeda is counting on me, and on the rest of us, to develop this kind of heart.

When I returned, I realized it was a training course for my life and the real training began when I got home. President Ikeda has said that the most respect-worthy of all are those that fight for the Law.

I still am grappling with what it means to fuse one's life with one's mentor. However, I am confident in that my life and the lives of those who fight alongside President Ikeda will experience boundless fortune beyond what one may accumulate if one only seeks good circumstances. I am determined to develop and help others develop this heart of a lion so that President Ikeda can count on us to lead the way to worldwide kosen-rufu.