

GET REAL!
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This month's Get Real was extended to include Jomo's impression from the recent SGI Youth Training Course.

“Charged with new energy, / the wings of life itself/carry us confident and composed / into a majestic future. / Embraced by winds / pure and vigorous, / we fly into a new era, / resolutely transcending / the borders and limitations / of old past life.”

Daisaku Ikeda,
“*Soar — Into The Vast Skies of Freedom! Into The New Century!*”

By now most of us have read or at least heard the buzz about SGI President Ikeda's new poem to the American members. My first experience with the poem occurred soon after it was translated into English, during a telephone conference when I heard it read out loud. I have to admit that I've never been really good about reading into the meaning of literature and poetry, and have always found being able to fully appreciate President Ikeda's poems a bit challenging. This year I've also been struggling with chronic fatigue syndrome, an illness that constantly robs me of physical energy. So you can imagine how hard it was for me to concentrate on the poem while it was being read (especially after a full week of SGI activities and long days at work). I missed the deeper significance of the poem, and I honestly didn't feel that excited about it.

A few days later the mother of one of the High School students in my region called to share her feelings about the poem with me. I was amazed by how much she had been able to get from the poem. Somehow the words that had been difficult for me to appreciate had left a deep impression on her life. I realized that the only difference between our two readings of the poem was that her seeking spirit towards President Ikeda (and the mentor-disciple relationship in general) is deep and fierce, and that at times mine is relatively shallow.

I was reminded of the importance of reflecting on the strength of my seeking spirit. In the Goshu, Nichiren Daishonin encourages his disciples to seek out the Gohonzon as someone who's thirsty wants water, or a person longs for his/her lover. When we stop seeking out President Ikeda's guidance, the Goshu, or our fellow member's wisdom and insight, we stop wanting to grow as human beings, and we stop seeking out the Buddha inside ourselves. President Ikeda says that leaders in the SGI need to have the spirit to always learn from the members that they are supporting. In Buddhism, a mentor is simply someone who has mastered the process of developing and maintaining a life-long seeking spirit.

I also saw that the essence of the mentor-disciple relationship is about helping both individuals dream of possibilities that still don't exist. The disciple's earnestness and capability gives the mentor hope about the future. And the mentor, through his/her example and encouraging words, inspires the disciple to dream incredible dreams. I sensed that the mother of that High School student was excited about the

poem because it gave her hope about the undiscovered possibilities of her life.

President Ikeda often talks about the fond memories he has of the years he spent at “Toda University,” and of the dreams that arose from observing his mentor, second Soka Gakkai President Josie Toda in action. In one of his recent essays President Ikeda describes the casual encounter that gave birth to Soka University. He recounts how 50 years ago President Toda said to him: “Daisaku, let’s found a Soka University. It would be wonderful if we could realize this while I am still alive and well, but it may not be possible. If that should be the case, Daisaku, then I leave it to you” (Sept. 1 *World Tribune*, p. 3). This encounter occurred while President Toda’s business was in turmoil. Yet Toda’s words inspired his disciple to dream beyond their shared struggles.

The more I read the poem now, the more I see how much President Ikeda is really speaking to me through his words. Among other things, I believe that President Ikeda is asking me to dream of a Jomo that dwarfs the Jomo that I’ve been up until now. He is asking me to look past my present limitations and become an even brighter, more courageous, capable and happier man than I’ve ever envision in my wildest dreams.

Between now and May 3, 2001, we need to muster the determination to face all our limitations and move beyond them. By calling forth our creativity and imagination we can envision and actualize selves we thought would never emerge. The key is for us to continue to seek-out our mentor and to try to understand the real meaning of his words and actions.