

## YOUTH STUDY OCTOBER 2000 FRIENDSHIP, COMPASSION & WORKING FOR CHANGE

*The following is the conclusion of a dialogue on the subject of friendship by three members of the SGI-USA Youth Study Committee: George Ross from the San Francisco Bay Area; Adam Gamble, who lives in Cape Cod, Mass.; and John Smith from the New Orleans area. Part one of this discussion can be found in the Sept.18 "Seize the Day" youth study page.*

**R**esponsibility for the prevalence of violence in our world today falls on society's leaders — on adults, including politicians, educators and people in the mass media. But nothing will change by simply criticizing them. It is up to you, the youth, to stand up with the determination to create a different society from now on. The important thing is that you begin to take nonviolent action, starting in your immediate environment.

What do you do, for instance, when you see a friend heading down the wrong path? If you really care about that friend, then you should stand by them. I hope you will be a good friend who not only listens attentively to what your friends have to say, but who can come out and tell them when needed: "What you're doing is wrong," or "Don't throw away your life." In the Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin cites the famous words: "If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 28).

### **Adam Gamble:**

As you may know, the SGI-affiliated Boston Research Center for the 21st Century recently published a book titled *Buddhist Peacework*. This book includes essays by 18 Buddhist leaders from different sects from around the world, including SGI President Ikeda, the Dalai Lama and Thich Nhat Hanh. The book presents different ways that Buddhist groups are working to improve their societies through taking concrete action in their respective communities.

I recently spoke with a professor who actually used this book in a university course on Buddhism. She said that some of her students were so inspired by this book that they started taking action to improve society themselves. She also added that for her, a key point is that Buddhism recognizes the interconnectedness of all things. I think that once we start to recognize just how deeply connected we are with others, even strangers, it becomes easy to feel compassion for them.

In *Buddhist Peacework*, President Ikeda writes, "The practice of Buddhism is based on compassion." He adds that "in Buddhism, compassion signifies the sublime endeavor to share the suffering of another from the stance of our common humanity and to create an expanding network of genuine friendship."

Before I started chanting, I would probably tell you that I understood these ideas. But the truth is that my understanding was only superficial and intellectual at best. Fortunately, my Buddhist practice has helped me to start to grasp these ideas with my heart. Seeing my fellow SGI members open their hearts to one another and to their friends and families has been so important to me.

**George Ross:**

Yes, I agree. It is amazing to see how courageous it is to open our lives and take the chance to have trust in another person.

I have studied the history of the Soka Gakkai in *The Human Revolution*, and in President Ikeda's essays reflecting on his experiences. While the meaningful bond of mentor and disciple is at the heart of our history, there have also been many occasions when people abused the organization, took advantage of other members or betrayed the trust placed in them.

I think often of how President Ikeda must have felt when he was betrayed by friends he had known for so many years. Despite this, he continues to encourage us to form bonds of friendships that will last lifetime after lifetime. Despite knowing the darkest qualities in human nature, he is not bitter, cynical or disheartened. Instead, President Ikeda continues to seek out friendship and dialogue. He has remained steadfast in his resolve to support and encourage peaceful dialogue among the youth of many countries throughout the world.

Sometimes I think of how impatient I have been with some of my friends and leaders when it seemed they were not willing to agree with me. But through the examples of many people in the SGI and the human revolution I have done in my activities to support our members, I have learned the importance of maintaining clear goals and expectations for myself. I have learned the importance of not only having good friends, but also being a good friend to others.

### **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

1. What does it mean to say that people's lives are connected? Do you believe this?
2. What do you think Nichiren Daishonin means when he writes, "If one befriends another person but lacks the mercy to correct him, one is in fact his enemy?"
3. Is peer pressure a strong influence in your life? In the lives of others around you?
4. Are there examples in your life of how people influenced others in a positive direction? Are there examples where one person, or a small group of people, made a positive difference in your school, community or family?