

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR CROWN THE NEW YEAR WITH JOYOUS VICTORY

Greetings and Happy New Year to all the readers of *Living Buddhism!*

The year 2000 was exciting because all of you were determined to close the twentieth century and greet the new millennium with victories in your personal lives as well as in SGI-USA activities. Thank you so much and congratulations!

I have been reporting to SGI President Ikeda about our activities and he has repeatedly expressed his high hopes for us. He feels the United States has an important role to play in world peace. He told me that America has now entered the era of the true teaching—the widespread propagation of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. He also expressed that in his messages and poems to us last year. The time has come for us to display our great talents and abilities. As he said in his poem, “Soar—Into the Vast Skies of Freedom! Into the New Century!” “The Bodhisattvas of the Earth have started to stir, to move!”

I believe these words mean we have come to a deeper understanding of our mission—a mission that includes the great contributions each of us can make to the organization and to society at large. There is no America other than its people: “America” means each of us. As we reveal our true abilities, overcome difficulties and strive to create happy families and more peaceful communities, America will realize its great potential.

I am truly amazed at the idealism of SGI-USA members. Each person is grappling with real-world issues and life-and-death matters. In the midst of these struggles, each person cherishes great dreams and works altruistically for the happiness of others.

I traveled all over the country last year and met many of you. I also participated in various activities from large-scale cultural events to small and intimate discussion meetings. As I witnessed the culmination of your hard work and spoke with you, I felt more deeply than ever that we are producing a grand human drama of transforming suffering into joy and compassionate action to help our friends. This is the drama of human revolution.

The twentieth century has been described as the bloodiest and most violent century in human history. SGI members are confident, however, that the highest creative potential of humanity will be expressed in the new century. The SGI has proclaimed the twenty-first century to be the Century of Life. For the past 40 years, we have been working to set the stage and make all the preparations. The curtain is about to rise.

The heroes—the lead actors—are each one of you. From this perspective, all our efforts and all our difficulties become meaningful. We can concretely change lives of suffering into lives of joy; we can change a century of war into a century of peace.

The SGI has adopted the theme for 2001: The Year of Total Victory for the New Century. Total victory means showing the benefit of our faith in every aspect of our lives—in our professional lives, our families, and our relationships. I hope you are convinced that challenging yourself to accomplish your goals is the very best cause you can make toward victory in the new millennium.

We have been saying for many years that 2001 is the year when 100,000 voices will join in singing “Ode to Joy.” Beethoven wrote this song while going through personal struggles. It was first performed on May 7, 1824, and it was revolutionary in the musical world at the time. The critics did not appreciate what he was trying to do, but the people embraced his work enthusiastically. Written at the end of his career, it is said that Beethoven was

completely deaf by the time of the first performance of the song. He could not hear the cries and shouts of “Bravo” from the audience.

Through his long struggle, Beethoven revealed the triumph of the human heart. He opened up a new stage not only for himself, but for the development of music and culture. His hardships produced profound joy that was expressed in his music. Therefore, “Ode to Joy” is not just a song; it is a symbol of victory and human effort misunderstood by many but ultimately embraced by the people.

How exciting! This year will only happen one time. I hope that each of us, as a lead actor for kosen-rufu, will fully use the stage of our lives and create our own drama, our own history, our own accomplishments. I hope each of us can sing “Ode to Joy” as our anthem, as proof of our victory.

So far, I have had the honor of serving as your general director for one year. I want to express my humble appreciation for your efforts in faith. Without your continued support, we would have no SGI-USA. I want to convey my sincerest determination to work even harder with you to build the new century with our mentor.

Once again, congratulations and Happy New Year!

Daniel K. Nagashima
SGI-USA General Director