

BEHIND THE SCENES GROUP

LET'S MAKE GIANT STRIDES IN 2001 NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM THE BYAKUREN LEADER HYON MOON, NEWLY APPOINTED SGI-USA BYAKUREN LEADER

Happy New Year, New Century and New Millennium!

The century of women is finally here! What better time than now to be in the Byakuren, fighting alongside our mentor, SGI President Ikeda, to protect the members. It is my hope that we can develop unshakable confidence in ourselves and a strong seeking spirit toward our mentor.

During the first Byakuren General Meeting, held in Japan in 1977, President Ikeda asked us to become “queens of good fortune who shoulder the future of the kosen-rufu movement, and pioneers who lead the way toward the great future of the SGI” (*SGI-USA Byakuren Manual*, p. 1). This has been his consistent encouragement to us since then. What incredible trust and expectation he has for us!

Let's stand up and boldly reply to our mentor by believing that we have in ourselves what it takes to accomplish our mission. In the past, I have doubted my own capabilities and whether I could fulfill my mentor's expectations of me. I now realize these doubts were my greatest enemy in accomplishing my dreams, an obstacle in becoming the happiest woman I can be. Once we can break through the limitations we put on ourselves, nothing is impossible.

Nichiren Daishonin promised: “Whether you chant the Buddha's name, recite the sutra, or merely offer flowers and incense, all your virtuous acts will implant benefits and roots of goodness in your life. With this conviction you should strive in faith” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4).

What we do as Byakuren members — such as cleaning the bathrooms or setting up meeting places before anyone else arrives — may go unnoticed by others. Please be assured, however, that your efforts have not gone unnoticed by the Gohonzon. Of course we will continue to face difficulties and tribulations — this is part of life. But, we can encourage and give one another hope, reminding ourselves that we will have total victory in the end.

I feel that this is not just the beginning of a new century or millennium, but a new beginning for each one of us. Rather than making small steps toward happiness, let's make giant strides! Through our total victory, let's prove the validity of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and the greatness of our mentor.

President Ikeda recently stated that we should “all stand up together and brightly declare our indomitable strength to the world” in the new century. By uniting together, let's show the power of the Byakuren by becoming the core of the young women's division.

I am determined to do my utmost to care for every single member, basing all my actions on the Goshō and daimoku. Always seeking my mentor's heart, I am also determined to become the brightest person with a smile that never leaves my face. Let's do it together!

**FULFILLING OUR GAJOKAI MISSION
NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM THE GAJOKAI LEADER
ERIC FREEDMAN, SGI-USA GAJOKAI LEADER**

Happy New Year!

To my fellow Gajokai members, I want to thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your amazing efforts last year in supporting the members from behind the scenes. As we have heard many times from our mentor, SGI President Ikeda, the greatest honor and fortune lies in a life that is truly lived for others. And that is exactly what you have been focused on all year. Congratulations!

The Gajokai has seen many achievements this past year, one of the largest being the triumphant gathering of the Gajokai, alongside the Soka Group and Byakuren members, at the second Youth Support Groups Conference last November at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. That was a new departure for the Gajokai entering 2001, which is designated as the “Year of Total Victory for the New Century.” Together we made the determination that we would “raise the bar” in our own lives, challenging not only living the spirit of Gajokai in our daily lives, but developing an even deeper bond with President Ikeda through the mentor–disciple relationship. We pledged to fight side-by-side, sharing this great Buddhism with our friends and fully engaging in the same battle as our mentor—the battle to help awaken people to Soka Spirit.

For the Gajokai, 2001 will mark a year of exciting growth and change. We will have a new nationwide Gajokai Manual, new guidelines for joining and continuing as a Gajokai member, a new uniform and significant involvement in our organization’s Soka Spirit and propagation efforts.

In order for all of us to continue challenging our growth and involvement in the basics of faith, all Gajokai members will be asked to take on the challenge of sponsoring one new member each year. If unable to do so, let’s support a new member’s development, for example, teaching him or her gongyo or assisting with study.

President Ikeda has said: “Whether or not someone succeeds in helping others take faith in the teachings of Buddhism, the simple fact that he or she practices is in itself most praiseworthy. If you can feel heartfelt joy in being able to expound the Law and share it with others, your blessings will increase still further. Joyfully engaging in propagation and other activities is the spirit of Buddhism.”

As Gajokai, we are the one’s who have pledged to fight behind the scenes to protect the members and our organization. There is no more direct way than to be involved in the Soka Spirit movement. I would ask that each Gajokai member become active in the Soka Spirit daimoku toso in your area. If your area does not have a weekly or monthly toso, then please start one! Be the driving force in your area, be the one who leads the toso and the Soka Spirit study meetings, the one who makes a difference in your local organization and community. This is the fighting spirit of the Gajokai! I am committed to do everything I can to lead these movements in my local area, as well as introduce at least one person this year to the SGI.

My fellow brothers of the Gajokai, together, let’s have amazing victories in our personal lives and in our respective areas. Let’s revolutionize our lives, becoming young men who lead the kosen-rufu movement in America and who will confidently and joyfully welcome President and Mrs. Ikeda back to the United States.

LET'S WALK THE WALK
NEW YEAR'S MESSAGE FROM THE SOKA GROUP LEADER
KEN NAKAGAWA, SGI-USA SOKA GROUP LEADER

Happy New Millennium to my Soka Group brothers! Let's make 2001 the year that we all walk the path of mentor and disciple. In order to walk the walk, we need to understand our mentor's heart. SGI President Ikeda is the original and eternal Soka Group member. Let's study and absorb President Ikeda's guidance, learning through his example as a youth supporting his mentor, Josei Toda. If we can walk this noble path throughout the year, then there is no question each and every one of us will savor total victory in our lives.

President Ikeda has stated: "Why have we, the SGI, achieved such remarkable development? Because we have wholeheartedly treasured each individual member as a child of the Buddha, in exact accord with the compassionate spirit of the Daishonin" (*Faith into Action*, p. 181).

This should be the underlying spirit of the Soka Group toward others and also one another. Soka Group is the training ground to fortify this compassionate spirit. I ask each Soka Group member to treasure one another with this spirit, as brothers who share the same mission. To the Soka Group veterans, please exemplify this compassionate spirit to the young men who will be joining us. With this spirit, we can form bonds of trust and respect. Young men will want to receive training in the Soka Group if they feel this spirit from its leaders. Let's make this an activity in which every young man who joins will seek out training with the utmost confidence that they will be a more capable person as a result.

To fortify the "compassionate spirit of the Daishonin" within our lives, let's each determine to sponsor one new member this year!

At the Youth Support Groups Conference this past November, Soka Group representatives determined together to support fully the Soka Spirit movement with the attitude that Soka Group and Soka Spirit are synonymous. Please seek out your local Soka Spirit leaders and let them know that you want to support their activities. I'm sure they will be very happy! Let's chant for total victory against injustice and study about Soka Spirit more than anyone else. If you know any Courageous Heart Group members, please ensure they are happy and safe; be their personal Soka Group member. And let's hold monthly Soka Group meetings to chant and study about Soka Spirit.

President Ikeda stated: "I am like a stake in the water. As long as the stake is firmly in place, the ship of the people tied to the stake can remain stalwart. Then, even on stormy days, everyone can rest assured. Meanwhile, as everyone enjoys their security, the stake, out of sight in the cold water, stands firmly to keep the ship in place" (July 2000 *Living Buddhism*, p. 40). I ask all the Soka Group members to be like the "stake" in supporting our upcoming SGI Family Youth Culture Festivals this year. Let's do whatever it takes from behind the scenes to ensure total victory in these festivals.

And then, let's meet back at the Florida Nature and Culture Center for the Youth Support Groups Conference at the end of this year, rejoicing in the total victory in our own lives. Uniting with our Young Men's Division General, Steve Mortan, Soka Group brothers, "Let's walk the walk!"