

MAKING A DIFFERENCE

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I recently attended a planning meeting at the SGI-USA Los Angeles Friendship Center. A young woman offered the opinion that regardless of how we commemorate May 3, 2001, we will all eventually face the same old challenge — how to inspire youth and give them hope. A switch flipped in my soul. I looked at my friend Daisaku Leslie and said to myself: “No! Things must change.”

While attending a meeting at Daisaku’s house, I noticed he was counting the days until May 3, 2001. At that time, it was around 594 days. Recently, I visited a young men’s chapter leader. He had a countdown calendar, inspired by Daisaku. “We all influence one another,” I thought. I am going to make sure this young woman feels that we, the SGI-USA, have changed. Something must change

History repeats itself when people do not learn and change themselves first. After the meeting, I told Daisaku we had to change something, make a difference. He told me there were exactly 100 days left until May 3. We agreed to begin a M.A.D. Daimoku (“Make A Difference” daimoku) campaign. Each Wednesday night until May 3, we made the determination to chant one hour of M.A.D. daimoku. Our idea is simple: those who win in life fight the hardest. We will meet the next Wednesday after our youth activities. We will make a difference.

The next day, I chanted and realized we needed to begin right away. I called Daisaku and we agreed to meet at the LAFC. By evening, my life condition was in the gutter. While on my way there, I remembered again how much we all need SGI activities. Without the motivation to respond to SGI President Ikeda’s example and hear that young woman’s call for change, would I have gotten myself out of my funk? I doubt it.

After five minutes of chanting, my life condition improved and I thought of many things. One of my leaders encouraged me by saying that chanting for victory in the Soka Spirit issue is about forging one’s own fighting spirit. I thought of my mentor who has helped me in my career—he has produced over 1,000 episodes of television, directed 15 feature films and raised more successful stars, writers and producers than almost anyone in history. He is a grandfather and at the age of 65, he still works 7 days a week, and works harder than almost anyone I have ever met. How dare I let my life-condition and determination falter? My life has barely begun!

My life-condition improves and my perspective evolves. Instead of dwelling on where I am not, I appreciate that which I have accomplished.

I remember that those who fail the most win the most in the end. Ted Williams, the greatest hitter ever, failed six out of ten times in his greatest season. However, every time he stepped up to the plate, he believed that he would succeed.

I started to chant for the members in my area—that they have courage, make good causes, study, win in their lives and that they are happy. I want President Ikeda to go to sleep at night confident that there is a planet full of enthusiastic, confident, young global citizens.

The Gohonzon is a mirror for seeing one’s mind clearly. I chant and I think about where does the negativity in my life dwell? In my heart and mind? How are negative forces a manifestation of me?”

In his poem, “Sun of *Jiyu* Over a New Land,” President Ikeda stated that in order to win, “first we must break the hard shell of the lesser self.” How do I do that? Who cares! I must do it! I will do it. I am doing it with daimoku!

Daisaku and I finished chanting and agreed to meet the next Wednesday. We adopted a motto for our M.A.D. Daimoku campaign based on a recent installment of President Ikeda’s “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra”:

“Without putting our lives into creating something from nothing, we cannot know genuine faith. The intense challenge to create value — to change loss into gain, bad into good, and baseness into beauty; this is the spirit of Soka. This is faith” (December 2000 *Living Buddhism*, p. 33).