

## SGI YOUTH TRAINING COURSE IMPRESSIONS

### MONICA SOTO, SEATTLE

Forty-one SGI-USA youth representatives attended the 2001 SGI Youth Training Course Sept. 4-11 in Tokyo, Japan, joined by more than 400 other youth from 50 countries, including Ghana, Mexico and San Marino, the smallest and oldest republic in the world.

Each of the 41 U.S. youth members represented one year since SGI President Daisaku Ikeda made his historic first trip to the United States in 1960. On behalf of the U.S. members, the youth presented President Ikeda with a statue of a lion atop a marble platform, with a passage from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* engraved on it, "A cub sired by a lion king will become a lion king" (p. 323).

President Ikeda was presented with the SGI-USA youth flag. Upon receiving the gift, President Ikeda asked each country to design its own youth division flag, keeping one copy of the flag at home while sending another to Tokyo, where the flags would be displayed collectively at a future meeting.

The youth members attended two meetings with President Ikeda during the eight-day training course, including one in which he received The Knight of the Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of Saint Agatha, the highest award of the Republic of San Marino. They also attended numerous study and guidance sessions, with an emphasis on Soka Spirit, and exchange meetings with the members of districts in the Tokyo area.

The participants, each of whom pledged to shoulder kosen-rufu in the U.S., were en route to Los Angeles Sept. 11 when their plane was rerouted to Vancouver, Canada, and they learned of the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. The group remained in Vancouver for three days before driving to Los Angeles via bus. The participants then took flights home to their respective cities.

Upon leaving Vancouver, the U.S. participants learned that President Ikeda named them the "Ever-victorious Group."

### FOO MAY LEW, HONOLULU

There are so many precious experiences I gained from the recent training course in Japan. For me, participating in this trip was like entering the treasure tower, where I could grasp as many treasures as I needed in order to fulfill my mission in life and for kosen-rufu.

Even though the training course was short, we managed to visit many significant places such as Soka University, Makiguchi Memorial Hall, the Shinanomachi area, the International Friendship Hall and the Soka International Women's Center. While visiting these places, I sensed how fortunate I am to be able to meet and stand side by side with our great mentor, SGI President Ikeda, to fight for kosen-rufu. I was honored to receive the SGI gold pin from President Ikeda, which has made a mark on my life.

During the first meeting with President Ikeda at Makiguchi Memorial Hall, I was not able to absorb all his profound guidance in my heart. However, based on sincere daimoku the next morning, I was able understand his expectations of the youth division.

Another highlight of the training course was studying Nichiren Daishonin's writing, "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land" from a different perspective. After the lecture, the youth from the Pacific Zone had an opportunity to receive guidance from an SGI senior leader. Through his comprehensive explanation, I was able to recognize that the greatest evil is to lead people to suffering through self-serving actions. In order to protect the true Law of the Daishonin's Buddhism, I am determined to create friendships with members of Nichiren Shoshu.

Participating in this training course with 40 other youth members was my greatest fortune. Because of the tragedy that struck on Sept. 11, the day we were returning to the United States, I strongly believe all 41 of us have an enormous responsibility for the kosen-rufu movement in the U.S.

This unforgettable training course has made my conviction for kosen-rufu and shakubuku stronger than ever. In fact I believe the "Ever-victorious Group" has already begun the journey of making history for the second chapter of worldwide kosen-rufu.

I would like to share a passage from *The New Human Revolution* in which Shin'ichi Yamamoto states: "The key to establishing peace and prosperity in our world, as expressed here, lies in the human heart—in people's prayer for order and tranquility in society—and in each person establishing a solid self-identity through the process of human revolution" (vol. 4, p. 245.)

To the "Ever-victorious Group": I just can't wait to meet all of you again. Please take good care of yourselves.

### **KATHY REYNOLDS, SUNNYVALE, CALIF.**

I was so amazed to see members from parts of the world in which I had no idea people practiced Buddhism—countries like Ghana, Ivory Coast, Mexico and Austria, to name a few. In our fourth silent prayer of gongyo, we pray each day for the great desire of world peace to be fulfilled. While I was in Japan, I really felt that there was hope for this to come true.

On our way back from Japan, tragedy struck the U.S. Many of us did not know the reality that faced us at first, but we soon learned of the devastation back home. I had feelings of pain, sadness, worry and fear run through me. As I looked at my fellow Buddhists, I could see the same emotions in them, too, especially those who were from New York and Washington, D.C. All we could think was, "How could this have happened and why?" We felt this time was so important since we were just in Japan with other youth from around the world who were sharing stories of how they were fighting injustice and working toward peace.

While en route to the U.S., we received a message from President Ikeda. In his encouragement he referenced the letter from Nichiren Daishonin, "Great Evil and Great Good." The writing states: "Great events never have minor omens. When great evil occurs, great good follows. Since slander already exists in our land, the great correct Law will spread without fail. What could any of you have to lament?" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1119.)

We stayed in Canada for three days trying to get home. Many of us were unsure of how we were going to finally make it to our respective areas. I am so appreciative for the SGI organization. While in Canada, the members provided us with food. On one particular night, a young men's division member gave all of us shirts since we

had to leave our luggage on the plane. These members reached out to us with such sincere concern that I never felt alone or frightened. I realized that, in fighting evil, the action that one person takes for the good of another is the most important thing.

The idea that the inner reformation of an individual can have an influence on society is the core of this philosophy. I saw this on my trip: Young people standing up in society fighting for world peace and against injustice. Now there is even more reason to take action for myself and the world.

### **ANDY MATSUDA, CHICAGO**

Every aspect of this training course was an incredible learning experience for me. What impressed me most was the amount of care shown by SGI President Ikeda and the members in Japan. As soon as we stepped off the plane in Tokyo, women's division members waving SGI flags greeted us. Everywhere we went, we were enthusiastically welcomed in the same way. Every day, President Ikeda gave us encouragement and asked us to take care of our health. Through the actions of others, we were shown how important it is to spare no effort in taking care of the members.

During a Future Division and Doctor's Division general meeting, The Knight of the Grand Cross of the Equestrian Order of Saint Agatha, the highest award of the Republic of San Marino, was bestowed on President Ikeda. It was incredible for those future division members to witness President Ikeda receive such an award. I could see a sense of pride come over their faces. President Ikeda warmly encouraged them during the meeting, telling them to do their best in school and to listen to their parents. You could tell he was trying to etch this experience deep in their lives.

We repeatedly studied Soka Spirit. Some youth gave inspiring reports about how they had proven the justice of the SGI in their countries. It reminded me that the temple issue was not simply a dispute between the SGI and the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood, but a manifestation of the darkness that each of us challenges to overcome in our own lives. Little did I know that the same point would be underscored on our trip back to the U.S. on Sept. 11.

As our plane was diverted to Vancouver, B.C., we received bits of information about the tragic events back home. I could not believe it was really happening. After enjoying a training course where I felt so safe and cared for, I was suddenly thrust into a circumstance so terrible it defied imagination. Without regard for how or when we would get home, we immediately started chanting for the safety and peace of the people in the United States.

Everything we learned during the training course was tested by the very events that prevented us from returning home. We studied each day during the one week it took to return to our respective cities. We were constantly encouraged by messages from President Ikeda and by the care of the members that greeted us at every stop along the way. We realized that through our deeds and words we could give hope to those who are struggling to find meaning right now. We realized that the SGI youth will play a major role in changing the course of America and the world.

I am determined to try even harder to give hope to and care for those that are suffering and encourage them to do their human revolution. I am convinced that this is the way to ensure peace in America.