

TOWARD THE YOUTH-SPONSORED MARCH INTRODUCTORY MEETINGS LET'S FULLY ENTRUST THE YOUTH

**BY TARIQ HASAN
SGI-USA MEN'S LEADER**

Hello everyone! The year 2001 is here, and I am so optimistic about the events about to unfold this year. I want to talk specifically about the role the youth will play in our successes this year.

As the men's leader, of course, I want to see more men stand up for the sake of kosen-rufu. But I also know that many men, as with myself, want to see as many young people as possible emerge from our organization and take responsibility for kosen-rufu.

Last year, my three daughters each established her own Buddhist practice and were no longer practicing their "parents'" religion. Although they have been practicing since they were teenagers, they each decided to receive the Gohonzon. One of them said to me for the first time, "This Gohonzon really works," although she's been chanting and doing gongyo regularly for 10 years.

Two of them, with support from the men's and women's leaders, had taken some responsibility in their districts and chapters and, from fulfilling that responsibility, decided to stand up. I sincerely thank their local organizations for helping them to grow in their practice.

I believe this is the key: When we entrust the youth, they will respond and vibrantly practice based on their own convictions. We can all contribute to this great cause for raising future generations. SGI President Ikeda is already thinking about the third set of seven bells to start in 2051, and the youth of today will be passing the baton on to the next generation at that time.

For this reason, the SGI-USA national leaders have asked the men's and women's leaders across the country to fully entrust the youth to plan and lead the monthly discussion meetings in March as introductory meetings for guests.

Entrusting does not mean to stand back and watch, but rather to support from behind and ensure that the meetings will be a success while giving the youth great latitude and responsibility. They may have many creative ideas that we think are not right, but as long as they do not go against the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, then let's support them.

It can be hard to let someone else take responsibility when we can do it ourselves because of our experience. But now is the time to let thousands of youth blossom in our country. I feel this is the best way we can reply to President Ikeda's dreams for the United States.

**BY MATILDA BUCK
SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER**

March 16, 1958: What a scene that must have been, when thousands of young people met with Josei Toda. SGI President Daisaku Ikeda described those participants: "Their sights on the future, these young heroes had stood up like true seekers of the Way, like the champions of truth that they were.... Smiling as they stood shoulder to shoulder, their hearts were one. Nothing could destroy their sense of unity with their mentor..." (April

14, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

I believe he wasn't just describing a single group, he was describing every single one of us who celebrates March 16, Kosen-Rufu Day. The youth in 1958 were given a great gift; namely, responsibility for the kosen-rufu movement, the same gift each of us has received. The passion, energy and freshness of youth perpetually embody that leadership. You might say that we give that gift to the youth, again and again, every March 16.

President Ikeda, in his message for our February women's meetings, reminds us to give our "utmost in loving, training, raising and protecting" our youth. How fortunate for us that we can put this into action right away.

The SGI-USA youth are marking March 16 this year by making the March district meetings dynamic and lively introductions to Buddhism. Can you imagine the energizing power of hundreds of meetings spearheaded by the youth?

I hope the men and women in each district will support and spotlight the youth at these meetings. Let's team up with them, exploring what will best contribute to these events. What kind of meeting would they plan for their friends? What appeals to them? Let's implement their fresh, new ideas and help them to take the lead.

We can also reach out directly to young people whose parents practice, or the children of our co-workers and neighbors, and invite them to these youth-sponsored meetings. In districts where there are no young members, we can invite young people from other districts to participate. Remind them how special they are.

After all, no matter how you look at it, the youth around you are the leaders of your future. You can make a difference now. President Ikeda voices his expectation: "Youth, my life's treasure, who will shoulder the full responsibility for the twenty-first century! Stand up with me! Even if it's just one of you, stand up and be a lion!" (April 14, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8).

I hope the youth can look back on March 2001 as their turning point. Let's do all we can to support this moment.