

**CELEBRATING MAY 3, 2001
FROM SGI-USA YOUTH LEADER JAMES HERRMANN
A LIFE WITHOUT REGRET**

‘In the future, as my life comes to its final stage,’ says SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann, ‘I want to be sure I can say with confidence that there was not a single thing I wanted to accomplish that I did not try.’

When I first heard about May 3, 2001, I was in the SGI-USA Boys and Girls Group (then called Junior Pioneers). We were asked to think about how old we would be. I figured out I would be 33. I remember thinking 33 was such an old age, even wondering if I would be alive then.

We were challenged to think about what we would be doing May 3, 2001, and I remember it was so difficult for me to envision the next day, let alone that many years in the future. So my first impression of May 3, 2001, was wondering how SGI President Ikeda could be thinking that far into the future.

While growing up participating in SGI activities, May 3, 2001, was consistently emphasized. As I became older, and through my youth activities, I’ve learned to have a vision for the future. Needless to say, that’s not something I’m always able to maintain. Rather, it’s something I continue to develop through my activities.

Back when I was in the Boys and Girls Group, we always talked about creating world peace. I thought that by May 3, 2001, our work would be finished, that it would be a time of bliss. World peace would be attained by then, and there would be no more violence, no more war, no more racism. It would be a time, I thought, when President Ikeda would go up on a platform and declare: “OK, we did it! World peace is now accomplished.”

Creating world peace, I’ve since realized, is a process. Kosen-rufu is something we have to continue to work for—not something we achieve but something we are always moving toward.

It is through this process that we really grow and learn to care for others. When I was younger, I wasn’t a very compassionate person. I was a self-centered child and young adult. President Ikeda’s guidance and my efforts to introduce others to Buddhism have enabled me to become a better human being and, in fact, develop the ability to truly care for others.

May 3, 2001, I feel, must be a turning point for the youth of SGI-USA. This is our time to stand up, with the men’s and women’s division’s consistent support, to truly understand President Ikeda’s vision for the future. It is a time for us to develop a direct connection with our mentor, where each of us is working toward the realization of our shared dream of peace.

This is also the day in 1960 when President Ikeda was inaugurated as the third Soka Gakkai president and took full responsibility for kosen-rufu. When we look at the development of the SGI over the last 41 years, we can clearly see the expansion of Buddhism to every corner of the globe. I can’t help but think that the next set of Seven Bells will see our generation—the current youth of SGI-USA—taking that same initiative as President Ikeda did in 1960 and broadening the path he has opened.

I’ve had the fortune to attend some dialogues President Ikeda has held with great scholars and world leaders, who all refer to him as the one person who is truly leading the

peace movement in the 21st century.

I remember being at a meeting in Japan with President Ikeda and Lawrence Carter, dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College, who is a friend of the SGI. Dean Carter said that President Ikeda, more than anyone else, was the embodiment of the teachings of Jesus Christ, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. This really struck me, and it began to sink in that great people throughout the world are praising President Ikeda's efforts.

Of these four world leaders Dean Carter mentioned, only President Ikeda is still living. At that time, I felt so fortunate to be young, to be practicing Buddhism together with President Ikeda, and have the opportunity to devote my life to spreading this great teaching.

As we look at this year's youth activities, everything is focused on the expansion of our movement. In our March meetings, we are gathering several thousand members and guests in an effort to spread Buddhism throughout society. Also this year, we have seven youth conferences at the Florida Nature and Culture, as well as several SGI Family Youth Culture Festivals being held throughout the SGI-USA with the goal of gathering 100,000 members and friends. I strongly feel that these activities, led by the youth, are the stepping stones for us to take the initiative for kosen-rufu — on our own, without being told to do so.

In the 1980s — when the organization was very focused on propagation — I remember we took time to write our goals toward May 3, 2001. I was in my late teens at the time, and simply writing my goals helped me see that, through activities in the Boys and Girls Group and later the young men's division, my life had really expanded and I had developed the ability to dream. I understood the importance of having a long-range vision.

I have to be honest, though; many of the goals I put on that piece of paper have not come to fruition. But I am happy — in fact, I'm probably more happy than if I had attained those things. At the time I made those goals, I dreamed about being rich, about being a doctor, about doing many different things.

Although I'm not rich or a doctor, I find tremendous joy and happiness in what I am doing in the SGI for peace. I've come to realize that my happiness is not based on my social status or the amount of wealth I accumulate. Rather, joy actually comes from within me. I've experienced that joy emerge from my faith, practice and study, and from naturally sharing this Buddhism with others.

When I think about the end of the second Seven Bells, I know that I will be entering the twilight of my life. In 2050, I'll be 82 years old. My grandchildren will probably be in the forefront of the youth division, leading activities for peace, and it brings me great joy to dream about that.

My determination is that this May 3, I will be able to personally take responsibility for kosen-rufu, just as my mentor did 41 years ago. I don't want to have any regrets.

In my experience working in the medical field, I talked with many people who were about to die or were terminally ill. Although many of them had lots of regrets, they only regretted those things they never attempted. What they did made them who they were.

In the future, as my life comes to its final stage, I want to be sure I can say with confidence that there was not a single thing I wanted to accomplish that I did not try. Together, let's live with no regrets, pursuing the vision we share with President Ikeda with every ounce of energy we possess.