

**NEW YORK MEMBERS RESPOND TO TRAGEDY WITH RENEWED
DETERMINATION
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SGI-USA members in New York are turning their turmoil into a new determination for peace. At a series of recent meetings with SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima, many members who experienced the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks firsthand and who have loved ones and friends still missing at the World Trade Center shared their feelings and received encouragement from the general director.

On Sept. 24, Mr. Nagashima met with a group of members who live and work closest to the Trade Center site. While feeling tremendous protection for having survived the catastrophe, these members also feel they saw the worst kind of evil manifest that day and are deeply changed by the event. Many witnessed the planes hitting the towers; the people jumping from the World Trade Center; the collapse of the buildings; and the chaos that ensued, with New Yorkers trampling one another to escape the site.

All of them said that their first reaction was immediately to start chanting for people's safety. Their greatest concern now is that what happened Sept. 11 could lead to war and the possibility of more terrorist attacks in America.

"That day, I never felt so heavy in my life," Miriam Soriano, who watched the tragedy from her 5-year-old daughter's school, adjacent to the Trade Center, admitted. "At the same time, I felt that we have to create world peace right here, where we are at. It begins with how we treat one another, what we say to another."

This was the feeling among the more than 800 district-and-up leaders who gathered Sept. 24 at the New York Culture Center for a leaders meeting with Mr. Nagashima, the first large-scale meeting to be held in Manhattan since the attack.

Ned Robinson, who worked for a company on the 77th and 78th floors of 2 World Trade Center, shared his experience with the leaders: When 1 World Trade Center was hit, he and some coworkers decided to leave the second tower. But when they reached the 50th floor, they heard an announcement that it was OK to go back to work. Fortunately, they decided to go downstairs anyhow for a cup of coffee, as Ned chanted quietly to himself. They were at about the 43rd floor when the second plane hit their tower; they were able to safely exit the building 20 minutes later. Ned went straight to the Culture Center, where he was very happy to see New Jersey Region Leader Ethan Gelbaum greeting the many members who had come to chant daimoku as soon as they heard the news.

Mr. Robinson said that this experience made him feel like "Nichiren Daishonin was shaking me, reminding me that every moment of our lives is so precious." He also reflected that "Peace is not just the absence of war. We have to fight diligently to create a peaceful society, just as SGI President Ikeda has been saying."

Dolores Velez, who used to pass through the World Trade Center twice a day on her commute, said that she was 10 minutes behind schedule on Sept. 11, having gone to vote that morning. When she got close to the Trade Center, she saw people running and screaming, and was witness to the second impact. She started chanting and running, deciding that somehow she would make it to the culture center. "I did some track that day!" she said. "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo kept me going."

Finally arriving at the culture center after taking a circuitous route, she was relieved to see the many members there. She was especially encouraged when Patricia Kasahara, the

Northeastern Zone women's leader, arrived after walking all the way from Queens to meet members at the culture center. Transportation had come to a standstill.

"Everywhere I go, I am sharing my experience," Ms. Velez said. "I have been a Buddhist for 30 years, and the great thing I have learned is that somehow we have a solution. We have an answer. We have learned in the SGI that after every great evil there is great good—we know how to keep moving on!" There was a great sense of joy in the Culture Center as Ms. Velez then led everyone in the SGI-USA song "What Can I Do?," which expresses the idea that one person of resolve can change the destiny of America for the better.

Mr. Nagashima shared his experience of visiting a member who lives very close to the Trade Center. He did gongyo from the member's apartment window, facing the site, for the more than 6,000 missing. "Visiting Ground Zero, I felt this incident may be the greatest turning point for America and the whole world, for all humankind," he said. "From this point, we can either create a path toward peace and construction or toward war and destruction. The terrorism that happened here on Sept. 11 can become the cause for humanity to unite toward peace beyond religion and beyond cultural and ethnic backgrounds."

He also paid homage to the two members of the New York Soka family who at press time are still missing: Robert Miller, who worked at the World Trade Center and is the husband of pioneer New Jersey member Mitoko Miller, and Vincent Kane, a fireman who had been attending SGI-USA activities in recent months as a guest. (National Public Radio on Sept. 16 incorrectly reported that 38 SGI-USA members are missing and has since broadcast a correction.)

"Peace is not a matter of theory for us anymore," Mr. Nagashima concluded. "I know we lost some of our best friends on Sept. 11. This tragedy is your tragedy and my tragedy, and now we know that we have to be the ones to make peace!"