

Live the Vow

Message From SGI-USA
Women's Leader Linda Johnson

'I Must Live the Vow'

by Linda Johnson
SGI-USA Women's Leader

Happy New Year! 2010 is a significant year by any measure. It marks the 80th anniversary of the founding of the Soka Gakkai; the 50th anniversary of SGI President Ikeda's first trip to the United States to spread Nichiren Buddhism overseas; and the 35th anniversary of the establishment of the Soka Gakkai International. 2010 also commemorates the 20th anniversary of our mentor's pivotal "Clear Mirror" guidance to the women of the SGI-USA, which we have reprinted in these pages [see pp. E–H], as well as his establishment of SGI-USA Women's Day on Feb. 27, which is Mrs. Ikeda's birthday.

2010 is also the year in which we, the members of the SGI-USA, are determined to create unprecedented history by doubling the number of youth in order to construct a solid foundation for our organization. The youth are our future, and foster-



Linda Johnson

ing them right now is the only way to ensure that *kosen-rufu*—and our efforts to declare and spread widely the humanistic philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism—will continue unabated for the next 50 years, 100 years and beyond.

Our united, victorious efforts to find and foster capable youth will demonstrate to President Ikeda that he does not need to worry about American *kosen-*

rufu—that we are serious about treasuring and raising the next generation of peacemakers alongside him. It will also serve as our genuine invitation to him and Mrs. Ikeda to come home to the United States to celebrate our shared victory.

For me, the crucial question was how to actualize this goal of doubling the youth membership. I thought to myself: *This cannot be another goal that goes unrealized.* After seriously chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo about this issue, I came to the conclusion that our victory begins with me.

I decided that I must be willing to take full responsibility for realizing this goal. I decided that, every day, I would be the one to pray powerfully to do my human revolution, since change begins within. Nichiren Daishonin teaches us that, as we win over all of the myriad ways in which our fears, doubts and insecurities manifest inside, we empower our Buddha nature. The environment, which is

directly connected to our lives under the strict law of causality, reflects this change with tangible results.

Nichiren states this point with conviction, when he writes: "Buddhism teaches that, when the Buddha nature manifests itself from within, it will receive protection from without. This is one of its fundamental principles" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 848).

Here's what I've decided: Ultimately, I must live the vow. I must awaken to my mission to prove the power of the Mystic Law through the example of my life. I must perceive every challenge as an opportunity for me to deepen my own conviction in the limitless capability that exists within my life, as well as to prove it to others. Only when I win over my problems and adversities can I fulfill my mission.

Unless I forge my faith through challenging the realities of life, my Buddhist practice remains theoretical. I must prove to myself that my life is the Mystic Law and that I am a Buddha, and I must help others develop the same awareness. This awareness must penetrate my life at the cellular level versus remaining something that I only understand intellectually.

I must earnestly pray to meet youth yearning to hear about the Mystic Law and courageously challenge myself to share Buddhism with them when they come into my life. I must also awaken the faith of at least one youth who knows about Nichiren Buddhism but is not actively practicing at this time. I must get them involved in the "Rock the Era" meetings that the youth are holding every second and fourth Sunday across the nation.

Why do I feel such urgency? These are interesting times in which we live. One only has to watch the nightly news to see endless examples of how the three poisons—greed, anger and foolishness—are rampant in our society. Life is seldom regarded as a precious treasure. So many people are trapped by their circumstances, seized by a sense of powerlessness and hopelessness.

On Thanksgiving weekend, I was reminded of the great mission that each of us possesses in these times, when a member shared the following story with me: Two women went to visit a guest who had previously attended a discussion meeting.

When they arrived at his workplace, he asked, "How did you know?" The women had no idea what he was talking about. He then honestly told them that he had planned to kill himself that night after work, and he showed them the text messages he had composed on his cell phone to say goodbye to his loved ones. These women poured their lives into convincing him that, through practicing Nichiren Buddhism, he could overcome all of his sorrows.

Later that evening, at the women's behest, a group of young men and one men's leader drove more than an hour to visit this man at his home. He was surprised when they showed up around 11 o'clock. He asked them why they cared about someone they did not even know. Through heartfelt dialogue, the man decided to receive the Gohonzon and told them that he wanted to become like them—he wanted to genuinely care so much about others that he would help a stranger. He was immediately connected to a local district, and arrangements were made for someone to chant with him every morning and evening for one week. His change was so dramatic that one of his friends, who attended his enshrinement ceremony (which turned into an introduction to Buddhism meeting), went to another meeting and also received the Gohonzon.

Each of us has the key to transform any suffering into joy, any negativity into positivity. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo unlocks the limitless potential that resides within us and everyone around us. Now is the time for us to deepen our own conviction in this fact while helping others do the same, especially the youth. Now is the time for us to put our faith on the line and to practice as we have never practiced before. Now is the time for us to make prayer the foundation of our lives and to seek to do our human revolution.

Our mentor, President Ikeda, states: "The power of the Mystic Law to 'change poison into medicine' is absolute. The purpose of faith is to transform our karma and enjoy a life of unparalleled happiness.

"Prayer to the Gohonzon, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, is not abstract or theoretical. It is a burning inner flame to be victorious. If that flame of

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JONATHAN WILSON

Philadelphia

resolve blazes in our heart, the instant we chant, we have already won. It is, as the Daishonin declares, like 'a lantern lighting up a place that has been dark for a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand years' (WND-1, 923). This is the practice of human revolution that is accessible to all" (May 15 *World Tribune*, p. 5).

2010 must become the year in which every single one of us achieves unprecedented victories, both in our personal lives and in the organization. This is why the women's motto for next year is "Live the Vow."

With prayer and human revolution as our foundation, let's celebrate the women-led district discussion meetings in February (open to all) with the greatest attendance and the largest number of people who receive the Gohonzon and begin their own journey of human revolution. Let's ensure that every district welcomes at least one new member. In order to achieve this, let's continue our life-to-

life dialogue campaign in December, January and February, seeking to help every person awaken to the greatness of his or her own life.

Additionally, let's celebrate the 20th anniversary of the "Clear Mirror" guidance and SGI-USA Women's Day with a larger gathering of women that includes our younger sisters in faith. These gatherings will serve as a way for all of us to see old friends and enjoy some time together. To make this fun, faith-based and enjoyable for everyone, I would also like to suggest that the women who are taking

responsibility to plan the February district discussion meetings not be the ones who also plan the larger women's gatherings.

Please choose the size of the larger gathering, whether it is at the chapter, area or region level, according to what is most appropriate for your locale. Then, rather than focusing on decorations and food, please pour your hearts into making it a faith-based, joyful meeting that centers on two or three jaw-dropping experiences and bringing as many guests as possible (with an emphasis on youth). Nothing

reminds us of the power of faith more than a powerful experience. By having this gathering plenty of time before the February district discussion meetings, we will have time to follow up with guests and bring them back to the district meetings. Let's make February a month to remember.

Of course, our efforts to "Live the Vow" do not end in February. As women, let's continue to deepen our faith, while taking full responsibility to double the youth membership. Let's determine, "I will do this" and then engage in an all-out struggle to make it a

reality. Together, we must foster and raise many, many capable youth for the sake of a just and peaceful future. For that reason, let's ensure that the territorywide youth culture festivals being held throughout the United States in July are joyful gatherings that overflow with youth.

On this, the 20th anniversary of SGI-USA Women's Day, let's show President Ikeda that he can count on the women to advance American *kosen-rufu*. Let's create such unprecedented victories that he and Mrs. Ikeda return home to the United States. Let's make 2010 a year of no regrets.

President Ikeda writes: "The power of one genuinely committed individual can surpass that of a force of one million. When we change the 'single element of mind' and thus transform ourselves, our environment changes. And when our environment changes, the world changes" (April 17 *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Will you be that one person? **WT**

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