A Resilient Future

THE TOOLS TO THRIVE AMID DISRUPTION  Andrew Zolli
DISASTERS AND THE LANDSCAPE OF PUBLIC LOVE  Rebecca Solnit
BUILDING SUSTAINABLE SOCIETIES  Daisaku Ikeda
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The SGI Quarterly aims to highlight initiatives and perspectives on peace, education and culture and to provide information about the Soka Gakkai International’s activities around the world. The views expressed in the SGI Quarterly are not necessarily those of the SGI. The editorial team (see above) welcomes ideas and comments from readers. For permission to reprint material from this magazine, please contact info@sgiquarterly.org.
The concept of resilience may be interpreted differently depending on the field to which it is applied, whether engineering, emergency response, ecology, psychology, business or otherwise. Irrespective of the subtle differences that may exist in the various interpretations of resilience, the ability to maintain continuity and recover when plunged into changing circumstances is a common theme that resonates throughout them all.

The increasing frequency with which disasters and extreme weather events are now occurring on a global scale highlights just how important it is to strengthen the resilience of human societies through development and implementation of robust systems that ensure they are adequately prepared for, capable of effectively responding to and successfully recovering from any such impending threat.

However, as SGI President Daisaku Ikeda states, “If we are to realize the rich possibilities inherent in the concept of resilience, we will need to expand and recast our understanding of what it means. Resilience, in other words, should not be thought of as simply our capacity to prepare for and respond to threats. Rather, we should think of it in terms of realizing a hopeful future, rooted in people’s natural desire to work together toward common goals and to sense progress toward those goals in a tangible way. It should be seen as an integral aspect of humankind’s shared project to create the future—a project in which anyone anywhere can participate and which lays the solid foundations for a sustainable global society.”

This issue of the SGI Quarterly approaches the concept of resilience from this broader perspective, with real-life examples that provide valuable insight into how individuals, organizations and communities are capable of setting their differences aside in the interest of a common good to create a truly resilient future.
Andrew Zolli is a futures researcher, advisor and the author, together with Ann Marie Healy, of Resilience: Why Things Bounce Back. A central interest of his work has been how to harness the power of networks for shared discovery and collaboration, and for the past 12 years he has led PopTech, a community of global innovators collaborating on new approaches to global problems. He has also served as Fellow of the National Geographic Society. See www.andrewzolli.com.

**SGI Quarterly: What prompted you to pursue an active role in the field of resilience?**

**Andrew Zolli:** Resilience isn’t a singular field, but rather a lens through which we hope to understand and help systems, places, organizations, communities and people contend with a world that is becoming increasingly volatile.

There is an emerging dialogue about resilience among systems scientists, urbanists, social activists, environmentalists, neuroscientists, organizational theorists, world leaders and spiritual leaders, among many others. The common denominator of these many conversations is an increasing appreciation that we live in a world of connected and unpredictable change, much of it now caused or amplified by human beings. We urgently need new tools to enable living systems to persist, recover or even thrive amid disruption.

Much of this dialogue began to take root in the West in the first decade of the 21st century. A decade marked by global acts of terrorism, a global financial crisis and unwinnable wars tore at the veil of certainty and control that previously dominated among elites. The traditional advantages of size and power seemed to confer less protection than they once did.

In their place, a sense has been growing among leaders in many fields that the global challenges we face—for example, extreme weather events due to climate change or global acts of terror—are no longer risks we can avoid or simply mitigate, but realities we have to learn, often painfully, to
accommodate and adapt to. This is one of the most important conceptual shifts of our new century, and I was excited to play a part.

**SGIQ: What characteristics are essential to resilient systems, communities and individuals?**

**AZ:** Resilience is often maddeningly parochial—the things that enable one person or system to “persist, recover or even thrive amid disruption” may not work for another, or at another time or in another circumstance. Resilience must continuously be repurchased anew. And yet there are themes, patterns and principles.

All resilient living systems do four things concurrently. First, they build **regenerative capacity**—that is to say, they build the kinds of capacities that continually renew the system. In a community, this might be measured in terms of the creative capacity of its citizens, or its level of education or entrepreneurship. Building this kind of capacity is a slow and often invisible process, but it is essential because these are the kinds of capacities that are drawn on when things go wrong.

A second thing resilient systems and people do is **listen for change**. While not every surprise can be predicted, the very act of designing a system to listen for change is an essential capacity for resilience. This is not merely a matter of signal detection, but of creating a whole ecosystem of detection, analysis and understanding, and acting on such signals.

The third thing resilient systems and people do is **respond to disruption**. Interestingly, throughout our travels we find that the most resilient responses to a disruption are rarely predetermined and bureaucratic; rather, they are what we call **adhocatic**—improvised, creative and collaborative.

Finally, there is a fourth thing that resilient, living systems do, and that’s **learning and transformation**. In the aftermath of a disruption, the system learns to better gird itself against the risk to which it was exposed, or it is transformed so that it is no longer vulnerable to that risk at all.

In a resilient system, or community or person, all of these processes are happening, to larger and lesser degrees, **all the time**—and there are feedback loops between them, each informing the other. This is true of the cells and immunological system in your body; true about the psychology of resilient people; it’s true of the systems that drive a city.

The fact that these very different kinds of things have similar kinds of “verbs” makes it possible to learn from strategies in one domain and apply them in another. For example, a group of researchers at the Santa Fe Institute is learning to apply the lessons of biological metabolism to cities so that we can learn to take biological strategies for resilience and apply them in very different contexts.

**SGIQ: You write in your book: “Wherever we found strong social resilience, we also found strong communities.” What are some properties of social resilience?**

**AZ:** Without question, strong communities are essential to social resilience. Communities are the structures that give many people a sense of meaning, connection, purpose and agency. But the two most important resilience-factors they confer are **trust** and **social coherence**.

After Superstorm Sandy hit the northeastern United States, researchers found that in communities with the same levels of damage and resources, communities where residents reported trusting their neighbors rebounded more quickly than those that didn’t.

The second thing that communities confer is a sense of social coherence. In the aftermath of several terrible humanitarian disasters in areas like Sudan or Liberia, and outside institutions, networks, etc. We called these folks “translational leaders”—an idea we took from “translational medicine,” which itself is about turning theory into practice.

**SGIQ: Can you give some examples of efforts to build and strengthen community that have inspired you?**

**AZ:** In my research and travels, which have taken me from Haiti to South Africa to China and back again, there have been hundreds of examples. Here, I will mention just two:

If you were to take a stroll through the Lower Ninth Ward in New Orleans a few years after Hurricane Katrina, you would have seen something surprising. Look left, and you would see the busy efforts of people returning, rebuilding and recommitting to continuing their lives in a place where many had suffered unspeakable trauma, loss and grief. Look right, and you would see . . . nothing. No people, no rebuilding.

What was the difference? The difference in this case was the efforts of a woman...
named Pam Dashiell, an activist and community leader who wooed many to return from the post-storm diaspora. She has since passed away, but was a living embodiment of the ideas of translational leadership, and today many people are where they are because of her.

But communities do not have to be physical—under the right conditions, communities can emerge online that can also do mighty things. Here, I am reminded about discovering solutions. It’s about creating the right kinds of combinations of solutions.

And yet, you can’t merely throw very different experts into a room and command them to “Collaborate!” You have to create the time and space for people to begin to decode one another, to learn each other’s terminology and to produce their own new, hybrid insights.

In other words, you need to turn them from a disparate collection of experts into a “tribe” of people with different skills and expertise, but with shared values.

And so, we might ask, what makes a tribe? First, tribes are bound together by some basic shared observations, shared beliefs, and they need shared experiences and shared practices through which they can express them.

But to really catalyze collaboration, you also need less formal, open spaces and open time, in which people can develop trust, ask each other questions and generate and explore ideas naively without fearing they will look foolish. It requires a spirit of what the psychologist Rosamund Zander calls creative possibility.

We urgently need new tools to enable living systems to persist, recover or even thrive amid disruption.

of a legendary project called “Mission 4636,” which emerged in the hours after the terrible earthquake in Port-au-Prince in 2010. Almost spontaneously, a group of global collaborators came together, comprised of technologists, humanitarians and members of the Haitian diaspora, and together they built a platform that enabled Haitian citizens to text their urgent needs via their mobile phones and have those needs translated, geolocated and responded to in a matter of minutes. What made this collaboration work was a sense of common purpose, shared humanity, deep urgency, strong (but distributed) leadership, trust and an innovative spirit. Most of the people who worked together on this still haven’t met one another in the “real” world, yet together they served many thousands.

**SGIQ: What have been key lessons or principles in the work you have done to stimulate collaboration among innovators?**

**AZ:** The world of human endeavor is largely organized into “silos of excellence”—the experts in public health speak to other experts in public health; the experts in climate change speak to other experts in climate change, and so on. This “siloing” is a natural and important aspect of working on really hard problems.

However, many of the most important solutions to our global challenges lie at the intersections between these fields and approaches—they emerge when we take an insight from discipline A and combine it with a tool from discipline B and an approach from discipline C. Increasingly, solving huge problems is not merely about discovering solutions. It’s about creating the right kinds of combinations of solutions.

To keep such a spirit alive requires respect, humility and careful facilitation rooted in a sense of “servant leadership” from people in positions of authority.

**SGIQ: What direction do you see the field heading in the future?**

**AZ:** Today, the resilience dialogue is still just getting going, and so it is still exciting, early days. There is much more important conceptual work to be done ahead of us than has been accomplished to date.

And yet, there are dangers present. First, there’s a real risk that the resilience narrative will be subsumed by more parochial institutions that will reduce it to an insubstantial buzzword or proxy for their own day-to-day bureaucratic interests. That would be a shame—opportunities for openings in our language and organizational practices are rare, and we should use this one to think deeply about how to better serve the world.

Also, many institutions have been looking at resilience through the wrong end of a telescope—seeing it from miles above the clouds. And yet, when we see resilience, it’s often measured in far more local units—in the shift in the mindset and perspective of an individual, in a shift in empathy and compassion that leads to a shift in behavior. It’s my hope that this moment, in which the resilience dialogue is ascendant, can help return an appreciation for these “soft” factors to long-hardened institutions. The world will be much better for it.

People gather at a local restaurant in New York’s East Village during a power outage following Hurricane Sandy, October 30, 2012; trusting relationships between members of a community have been shown to increase resilience.
In disaster, civil society mostly succeeds and institutions mostly fail. At such times, you find out what's solid. Civil society is usually solid. The government is usually not. It fails in any number of ways—inadequate preparation, the hubris of thinking they can control what cannot be controlled, whether it's dangerous materials or complex systems or civil society. Often, it fails just because the crisis is bigger than its capacity. A city fire department can, for example, put out 10 or 20 fires at once. After an earthquake, you might have 100 or 300. The government is overwhelmed. The firefighters who matter at that moment are going to be you, your family, your neighbors.

The great disaster sociologist Chip Clarke argues, "As individuals, we have to assume that organizations will fail us... If we really want to prepare for disaster, we need to push resources down to the very local level... Command and control of disaster doesn't work. It never has. We need to disorganize for disaster."

Clarke means that disasters cannot be managed by people at the top. So many decisions need to be made so rapidly that they cannot all be referred to authority figures at a distance. Civil society often succeeds where institutions fail in the first minutes, hours and days. And often, people find in that newly visible, powerful civil society, a new sense of identity, belonging and possibility. Thus it is that disasters can be a little like revolutions, in the moment of rupture, where nothing is certain and everything is possible. This can be terrifying, as well as exhilarating. Disorganizing for disaster means that the organization happens at the grassroots level, as mutual aid between ordinary people, as improvisation. It can be very organized and very effective. But it comes from the bottom up, not the top down.

This is not an argument for disasters. I wish they never happened. But they happen. And when they do, they are terrible—the death, the loss, the destruction, the contamination. What is wonderful is the way people sometimes respond. And so one of the challenges disasters pose is, can we be those more altruistic, more free, more deeply connected people, those people who remember what matters and what does not, in ordinary times? Can we not go back to normal, but remain more engaged, more aware, more committed and less attached?

It was a disaster that made me begin to pay attention to disasters. At 5:17 pm on October 17, 1989, a magnitude 6.9 earthquake stopped everything in the San Francisco Bay Area. Electrical power failed. Everything was disrupted, including everyone's ordinary routines and routine thoughts. I was thrust into an intensified present where the people around me in the city mattered. Old problems, long-term futures, distant events, ceased to exist in our minds.

As the years went by, I noticed that people's faces often lit up when they talked about the earthquake. A friend told me with wonder nearly 20 years later how he had driven the seven miles to his home, and encountered someone at every single intersection directing traffic. They were volunteers. No one had organized them. They saw the need, and they filled it. In the rough Oakland neighborhood where the freeway collapsed, people spoke about how poor African-American men became the first rescuers, how an anarchist collective set up a kitchen to feed the rescuers before the Red Cross showed up. Other friends in a neighborhood that had no electricity for three or four days loved the way candlelit bars became community centers. Restaurants cooked their food that would perish and gave it away. And everyone talked to everyone else.

This is the essence of many disaster responses. Everyone talks to everyone else. The old divides no longer divide us. People step up out of their private lives into...
Angela Singh describes how international child rights organization Plan International is instituting programs to involve youth in disaster risk reduction.

As the white minivan winds down a narrow sandy road packed with potholes, signs leading to “tsunami evacuation routes” can be seen on every street corner. Welcome to Llorente, Eastern Samar, a Filipino municipality dedicated to reducing the risk of disasters. Venture deeper into the lush vegetation, and a plethora of tsunami escape routes can be seen. Cross the field where the water buffalos graze, and a steep set of steps will take you high up the hillside to a safety shelter.

For the community, it’s a place to seek refuge when the local river is at risk of flooding—an event the villagers feared when they heard Typhoon Haiyan was set to strike. “It ensures that vulnerable populations such as pregnant and nursing women, the elderly and young boys and girls are one step ahead of an impending disaster,” says Edwin Elegado, Disaster Risk Reduction Specialist for Plan International in the Philippines.

Luckily, Llorente was spared the most violent clutches of the worst of the super typhoon that ravaged neighboring municipalities on November 8, 2013. However, one-third of the village’s 400-strong population still decided to take these steps to safety, while others sought refuge in the local school.

“Plan has been supporting Llorente for 13 years,” says Edwin.
“They have a strong record in community-based disaster risk management. They are aware of the risks they face and have been taught how to prepare and act. They also understand what a storm surge is and the dangers it holds.”

Aside from the evacuation routes, Plan has also put in place flood markers and constructed a “safe school” strong enough to withstand a disaster as devastating as Typhoon Haiyan.

The Power of Young People

This small municipality also understands the power of young people, and now the youth are educating others on the importance of disaster risk reduction. “It’s important to build a culture of safety across generations,” says Edwin.

In the community that’s home to the safe school, a group of young people known as the Young Hearts Correspondents provide advance warning of storms so people can seek safety when a typhoon is about to hit.

Dayanara, 18, has been a Young Hearts Correspondent for several years and used to attend the safe school. She trains other children on how to prepare for disasters, creates short videos to spread awareness and holds disaster simulation training once a year, together with her fellow correspondents.

“When I heard about Typhoon Haiyan, I was at college in a nearby town. My training enabled me to help my classmates evacuate the school building and find a safe place to stay. Afterwards, they told me how grateful they were that I had explained the importance of disaster preparedness. When they saw the devastation, they realized how dangerous it could have been.”

Dayanara is grateful that she was able to move to a safe place, as the roof of her college was destroyed by the storm, while many of her friends lost everything.

Her fellow Young Hearts Correspondent, Cezar, 18, was at home in Llorente. “When I heard about the storm, I worked with the Emergency Rescue Team to tell the community to prepare and to evacuate to a safer place,” says Cezar.

The teenager didn’t stop there. Cezar worked with his dad to construct a hut in the hills where they could escape the flooding and remained calm so he could help others. “I am thankful that no lives were lost,” says Cezar, who puts this down to disaster preparedness. “Without training, the communities would not have known how to prepare for Typhoon Haiyan or where to evacuate to.”

Young Camelle, 15, is one of the newer members of the club, and she was in the safe school when she heard the news. “When we heard about the typhoon, my classmates and I had a meeting before deciding the best thing to do was go home, inform our families and prepare our belongings,” she says. “We packed up our clothes, made some food and went to the evacuation site.”

She is thankful she was able to put her training into practice.

This was a town that was able to get back on its feet after Typhoon Haiyan struck, and Llorente reported no casualties, even though their storm warning level was high. The town was also quick to lend a hand as their Emergency Response Team was the first one to reach the badly affected neighboring municipality of Hernani.

Angela Singh is the media officer for Asia and the Americas at Plan International. For more information, visit plan-international.org.
In light of the increasing incidence of disasters and extreme weather events in recent years, there has been growing stress on the importance of enhancing the resilience of human societies—preparing for threats, managing crises and facilitating recovery.

Resilience is, of course, a term originally derived from physics, describing the elasticity or ability of a material to return to its original form after having been subjected to an external stress. By analogy, resilience has come to be used in a wide range of fields to express the capacity of societies to recover from severe shocks, such as environmental destruction or economic crisis. In the case of natural disasters, improving resilience means enhancing the entire spectrum of capacities—from efforts to prevent and mitigate damage to measures that aid the afflicted and support the often long and laborious process of recovery.

To this end, policy and institutional responses—such as strengthening the seismic resistance of structures and renewing outdated infrastructure—are of course important. But the human element is also critical. As the American writers Andrew Zolli and Ann Marie Healy have written, “In our travels, wherever we found strong social resilience, we also found strong communities.”

We need to recognize the importance of fostering, on a day-to-day basis, the “social capital” of interconnection and networks among people living in a locality. More than anything, the will and vitality of the people living in the community are key.

Resilience is one of the topics in my ongoing dialogue with the peace researcher and activist Professor Kevin P. Clements. We agree that it is not enough to respond after the fact, as is often the case with natural disasters; it is necessary to effect a transformation of the very foundations of society, to move from a culture of war to a culture of peace, as has been called for by the United Nations.

If we are to realize the rich possibilities inherent in the concept of resilience, we will need to expand and recast our understanding of what it means. Resilience, in other words, should not be thought of as simply our capacity to prepare for and respond to threats. Rather, we should think of it in terms of realizing a hopeful future, rooted in people’s natural desire to work together toward common goals and to sense progress toward those goals in a tangible way. It should be seen as an integral aspect of humankind’s shared project to create the future—a project in which anyone anywhere can participate and which lays the solid foundations for a sustainable global society.

On the occasion of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), I emphasized that a renewed focus on humanity, reforming and opening up the inner capacities of our lives, is key to enabling effective change and empowerment on a global scale.

This is what we in the SGI call human revolution. Its focus is empowerment that brings forth the limitless possibilities of each individual. As such, the full significance
of human revolution is not realized while it remains confined to a change in the inner life. Rather, the courage and hope that arise from this inner change must enable people to face and break through even the most intractable realities, a process of value creation that ultimately transforms society. The steady accumulation of changes on the individual and community levels paves the path for humanity to surmount the global challenges we face. As research into the nature of resilience has advanced in recent years, the importance of a number of factors has come into clearer focus. Zolli and Healy, for example, describe their findings:

Resilient communities frequently relied . . . on informal networks, rooted in deep trust, to contend with and heal disruption. Efforts undertaken to impose resilience from above often fail, but when those same efforts are embedded authentically in the relationships that mediate people’s everyday lives, resilience can flourish.

The difficulty, however, is the continuing erosion of social capital—the interwoven fabric of human relationships. For it is this fabric that provides a necessary site for the fostering of networks rooted in the deep trust that mediates people’s everyday lives. It fulfills a crucial buffering function, without which individuals are directly exposed to the impacts of various threats and challenges that confront society as a whole. Absent this social capital, people are forced to face these threats in isolation—whether with despairing withdrawal or steely determination to prioritize personal welfare. The economic philosopher Serge Latouche has called for a more humane society (une société décente), one that will help restore the dignity of those who have been left behind in the midst of cutthroat economic competition. To this end, he stresses the importance of an ethics of conviviality, the simple taking of pleasure in each other’s company.

The Buddhist teachings contain a phrase that resonates with this concept: “Joy means delight shared by oneself and others.” The vision that we must place at the heart of contemporary society is one in which, through the sharing of joy, we create a world more noted for the warm light of dignity than the cold gleam of wealth, a world of empathy marked by the resolute refusal to abandon those who suffer most deeply.

Effecting this kind of fundamental change in society would be difficult under any circumstance, and it may seem virtually impossible in view of the increasingly attenuated bonds between people evident at all levels. To overcome this, I think we need to reaffirm our confidence in the true nature of human society. Perhaps no one expressed this more aptly than Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–68) as he struggled for the cause of human dignity:

We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny . . . We are made to live together . . .

The writer Rebecca Solnit, who has traveled to disaster sites throughout the world, cited the following conditions that make it more likely that people will engage in mutually supportive activities in the face of disaster: “You have to feel like part of a community, that you have a voice, agency, that you are able to participate.” These conditions are at the same time crucial to calling forth—both in times of crisis and its absence—the aspect of humanity that Dr. King described when he said that we are made to live together. And they are the conditions for creating an expanding solidarity of action toward the resolution of problems.

Human dignity does not shine in isolation. It comes to full brilliance through our efforts to cast a bridge connecting the opposing banks of self and other. In the teachings of Buddhism we find these words: “If you light a lantern for another, it will also brighten your own way.” Actions taken to illuminate the dignity of others inevitably generate the light that reveals our own highest aspects.

The Buddhist concept of “dependent origination” resonates with Dr. King’s call. However tenuous our connections may appear on the surface, this does not change the fact that the world is woven of the profound bonds and connections of one life to another. It is this that makes it at all times possible for us to take the kind of action that will generate ripples of positive impact across the full spectrum of our connections.

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A volunteer helps rebuild shelters for people following the January 2010 earthquake in Port-au-Prince, Haiti
Roots in the Community: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations

An interview with Sudhanshu S. Singh

Sudhanshu S. Singh is senior program officer for the Asia-Pacific region and humanitarian response at ACT Alliance, a coalition of churches and church-related organizations working internationally for sustainable change in the lives of people affected by poverty and injustice. Such work includes responding to humanitarian emergencies, disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs, emergency preparedness and post-emergency rehabilitation and reconstruction.

SGI Quarterly: What unique role do faith-based organizations (FBOs) play in DRR?
Sudhanshu S. Singh: FBOs have often been the only reliable roots remaining in crisis-hit areas—the mosque, the temple, the church being the only institutions people have faith in when faced with desperate situations. DRR means being prepared for desperate situations. The link is obvious and works in practice. Often, the pulpit is a good means by which to convey basic messages for DRR. A research report, in which ACT Alliance members collaborated, concluded that for many communities DRR is about organizing yourselves, extending your networks to other villages, to the provincial politicians. Then you acquire agency that empowers you to go for DRR measures you need. Religious leaders fulfill a mission in this. They mobilize people and help acquire agency. FBOs can help link to stakeholders at many levels—the head of the next village, the provincial politician who can influence DRR work, another nongovernmental organization that can assist.

SGIQ: What is ACT Alliance’s involvement in the promotion of DRR?
SS: DRR is a major crosscutting issue for us. We strongly recommend mainstreaming DRR features in all humanitarian responses and development programs. DRR is also a major advocacy focus.

The climate program of ACT Alliance has a strong DRR focus, and the DRR approach and methodology need little adaptation when applied to climate-driven, extreme weather disasters. For ACT Alliance, a major focus of climate change adaptation is building the resilience of traditional agricultural, pastoral and fishing livelihoods in the face of local climate change, including action for better natural resource management and governance in the face of climate change challenges. It starts with participatory learning together with vulnerable communities, looking at what changes to local climate have happened and are projected to happen. Projections and forecasting from climate models developed by national meteorological organizations are combined with local community knowledge and experience in order to create a picture of what the specific climate change risks are at a local level. This then forms a basis for action planning to counter or mitigate these risks to local livelihoods and natural resources.

SGIQ: What are the most significant challenges ACT Alliance faces in its DRR initiatives?
SS: There has been a significant increase in climatological, hydrological and meteorological hazardous events over the last 30 years. With unabated population and poverty growth, more people are forced to live in high-hazard zones. Climate change is another challenge. The worst effects can already be seen in poorer, developing nations. Rapid urbanization has given rise to megacities and informal settlements that house millions of people, many of whom live in conditions of extreme poverty. Most such settlements are built on flood plains, slopes liable to flash floods and landslides or in densely populated areas where fires can start and spread easily. Another challenge arises from the excessive focus on growth, which usually gets translated into increasingly more infrastructure creation, merely adding more risk and vulnerability factors. Finally, funding is an ongoing challenge.

SGIQ: What are the key elements for success in DRR?
SS: ACT Alliance believes DRR can only be effective through participatory and coordinated action by affected people, civil society organizations and governments. An integrated approach to DRR reduces vulnerability to hazards and strengthens coping mechanisms to respond and recover when a hazard strikes. An effective DRR framework includes risk assessment, knowledge development, public infrastructure and commitment and environmental management.

Learn more at www.actalliance.org.
Reflections on the Great East Japan Earthquake

By Taro Hashimoto

When the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake occurred, I was in Niigata Prefecture, on Japan’s west coast. We felt huge tremors to the point that it was difficult to remain standing. Later that day, we were informed that emergency food supplies and fuel for power generation stocked at our culture centers in the affected Tohoku area were nearly depleted. Also, the media reported that transportation routes from Tokyo to Tohoku were blocked.

Ten years ago, Niigata was also hit by a huge earthquake. We learned many lessons from that disaster. In light of Niigata’s geographical location, and based on past experience, we realized that actions taken in Niigata would be critical to the provision of timely aid and relief. We immediately contacted the local members of the Soka Gakkai in Niigata to garner their support.

The following day, the first truck loaded with fuel left Niigata at noon and by late afternoon, thanks to the kindness of our members, we had received 5,500 homemade rice balls, water, emergency food supplies, portable toilets and other relief goods. I departed Niigata around 8 pm that night on one of the trucks, arriving at the Soka Gakkai Tohoku Culture Center, a distance of over 600 kilometers, early in the morning of March 13.

I vividly recall how the faces of the survivors in Tohoku lit up with relief and joy when they saw us. They had evacuated to the culture center in desperation, with nothing but the clothes they were wearing, waiting in fear and bewilderment, not knowing what was going to happen next.

The Soka Gakkai subsequently established post-disaster recovery centers in some of the major affected cities. We dispatched members to cities who were healthcare professionals, as well as youth volunteers. Through our engagement with the local people, we realized the importance of mental and emotional recovery. For example, since the earthquake, there has been an increase in the number of children struggling to keep up at school.

On the other hand, reports show that where well-established local community networks exist, people are not only recovering rapidly, but have also experienced fewer incidences of mental health ailments such as posttraumatic stress disorder. Even if the government and the public sector implement programs to support recovery efforts in disaster-affected communities, it is no simple task to nurture social capital such as the aforementioned local networks, let alone provide mental and emotional care to survivors. We felt that faith-based organizations with local networks could fill that critical gap and began to plan activities to assist those requiring mental and emotional care.

These included free musical concerts, which will have taken place in every town in the disaster-stricken areas by next year; donations of some 7,000 books to 26 schools; and “Restoration Youth Speech Conference” events, in which young survivors are invited to share their experiences and hopes for the future. Many people commented that they were encouraged by such testimonials and were able to renew their pride in their hometowns.

We are also recording the experiences of survivors and sharing them with the public through the Soka Gakkai’s magazines and daily newspaper. We feel that these initiatives are boosting the spirits of survivors and contributing to the region’s recovery. They have reminded survivors of the inherent potential and power within their communities and within individuals to overcome the greatest of hardships.

Underlying our activities is our belief in the importance of empowering each individual and strengthening networks of solidarity to establish a sense of hope in the community. As SGI President Daisaku Ikeda notes, it is the human network of individuals interacting, treasuring and encouraging each other every day at the grassroots level that plays the key role in this.

Taro Hashimoto is the SGI youth division leader and lives in Tokyo, Japan. This article is based on a speech he delivered on March 20, 2014, at Kennesaw State University in Georgia, USA, at an international conference on humanitarian responses to crisis.
SGI Quarterly: How did you become involved in this field initially, and what was your motivation for establishing the Sustainable Environment Ecological Development Society (SEEDS)?

Manu Gupta: At an early stage of my career, working on research and action projects with my professor in college brought me face to face with communities affected by natural disasters. Backpacking as volunteers with humanitarian organizations carrying out relief work in disaster-affected communities made my classmate and me realize our mission to devote our own skills (as planners and architects) to providing long-term solutions for communities that help improve the quality of their lives and protect them from harm in future disasters.

The original motivation of forming SEEDS found a clear purpose only after the devastating earthquake that struck Gujarat in western India in 2001. Together with a small team, I worked with a village of 250 families to reconstruct their houses through a unique participatory process.

SGIQ: What are the primary aspects of disaster risk reduction (DRR) that SEEDS aims to address?

MG: SEEDS aims to reach out to the most vulnerable sections of local society when building in DRR measures. Making education the central approach, we focus on enabling people to recognize risks in their environment, identify suitable actions to reduce these and mobilize resources for prevention and mitigation. Our most successful programs on DRR have been with schools and school-going children, where school safety plans, assessments, preparedness training and evacuation drills have been introduced in some of the most seismically active regions in the Himalayas. SEEDS is also working with community institutions in rural areas that are prone to recurrent disasters to create resilience through local food banks, stable supplies of drinking water and sustainable livelihoods.

SGIQ: How do the initiatives led by SEEDS serve to enhance the resilience of the communities in which they are implemented?

MG: As an example, in a community in the western part of India, an arid region increasingly threatened by rain and flooding due to changing climate patterns, SEEDS worked with communities to improve their awareness of traditional house-building technologies that could insulate them against extreme heat and dust. Incorporating water-resistant features in traditional adobe architecture made them resistant to floods as well. Communities are now much more resilient to environmental changes without having to significantly alter their lifestyles. Part of the learning process involves getting the community together on common issues—to deliberate, reflect and identify solutions together. And when they see tangible results...
of their learning efforts, it brings them together. Indirectly, such social bonding to address a common problem contributes to building resilience.

**SGIQ: What has SEEDS done to promote information sharing among communities?**

**MG:** Timely, accurate and credible information can save lives. To the extent possible, SEEDS has relied on traditional sources of information among people and sought to improve them, adding custom-designed modules for knowledge sharing. In the southern coast of India, community-level village knowledge centers have been set up that provide short message service information on weather and sea-wave patterns to fishermen, cautioning them on any possible natural threats. In Myanmar and Pakistan, where access to the most vulnerable communities is limited by poor connectivity, mobile knowledge resource centers mounted on lorries and boats reach out to local communities, especially children, providing learning opportunities on DRR.

**SGIQ:** What are the key factors that ensure the success of any given initiative?  
**MG:** A critical factor in ensuring the success of any initiative is to not lose sight of its founding purpose. Taking up initiatives in disaster-vulnerable areas is not easy. From having to enable change in people's perceptions to ensuring tangible results, the challenges are innumerable. To stay firm on one's purpose and to be able to devote oneself to finding creative solutions for unprecedented challenges are what have ensured success in the past. Wading through such challenges, we have drawn on a larger team of individuals and partners to work for the common purpose. Developing genuine camaraderie with them through transparent leadership, mutual respect and shared purpose has contributed to scaling and replicating success.

**SGIQ: What unique contributions can organizations rooted in civil society make to achieve successful implementation of DRR measures?**  
**MG:** Development, if made sustainable, should inherently incorporate DRR. However, this is often not the case, primarily due to lack of awareness, or because public authorities hold a limited view that ignores consideration of possible risks created through development investments. For civil society-based organizations, it therefore becomes their primary purpose to facilitate learning where there are gaps in achieving sustainable development outcomes and hold authorities to account in case they fail to act on their duty to protect people's lives from disasters.

**SGIQ: In addition to your role as director of SEEDS, you are also the current chairperson of the Asian Disaster Reduction & Response Network (ADRRN). What is ADRRN?**  
**MG:** ADRRN was formed in 2002, bringing together national and local NGOs working on DRR and humanitarian response. The founding spirit was based on the felt need to build capacity and enhance the leadership role of southern-based NGOs in the region, which has been largely dominated by Western NGOs. Currently, much of ADRRN’s work focuses on building members’ capacity through workshops and learning initiatives. By identifying local knowledge and promoting recognition of its value by the scientific community, the network seeks to create political space at regional and national levels to enable efficient dialogue and represent the voices and concerns of communities at risk.

ADRRN works closely with the UN. Most recently, following Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines, ADRRN helped establish local NGO coordination centers for mapping out local needs and coordinating distribution of relief materials to areas where they were most needed. This experience presented a unique case wherein international, national and local humanitarian actors could work and coordinate among themselves. Similarly, after the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, ADRRN facilitated learning exchange among its members and with prominent universities in the region. Trained construction worker experts on earthquake-resistant housing from Nepal could travel to train their counterparts in Aceh, Indonesia. Transcending all barriers of culture, language and religion, people-to-people learning at the cutting-edge level provided a good example of what such networks can achieve.

**SGIQ: How does Buddhist philosophy influence your approach to your work?**  
**MG:** Buddhist philosophy has helped me recognize the fundamental dignity of life as the starting point of all endeavors. The work we undertake treats people as natural partners—be it for rebuilding after disasters or introducing an understanding of DRR. Mutual respect helps us learn and take action together. Each time I work in true partnership with people we are assisting in this way, I feel I have also gained a great deal from the work our organization has done with communities.

Each day when I start my work, I am filled with hope—a feeling that through my small actions, and joined by equally motivated colleagues in SEEDS, I can create the ripples of a much larger change in society.
Sudan is ethnically and linguistically diverse, embracing a mixture of Arabic and African cultures and influenced by the East. Sudan has experienced several armed conflicts, including a civil war that lasted over 20 years and resulted in the separation of the southern part of the country in 2011. Even after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2005 to officially end the war, new conflicts broke out in different areas, some of which are still ongoing.

Consequently, parts of the country are contaminated by landmines and unexploded ordnance (UXOs), which continue to pose a threat to people regardless of whether they are soldiers or civilians. They also hinder development and burden the country’s economy with costly demining operations and assistance to landmine victims.

As a female mine risk education (MRE) officer in Sudan, I work with women who are not only exposed to the risks of landmines and UXOs, but also deprived of basic human needs such as clean water, healthcare and education. I visit villages and schools in the areas at risk of landmines and UXOs and conduct educational sessions to raise awareness about the risks of landmines and how to minimize those risks.

Among the challenges of this work is a strict culture of gender separation in certain areas. In traditional and conservative communities, men and women occupy separate spaces; women are not allowed to enter men’s space and vice versa. Even though I am Sudanese, the strictness of this practice in certain communities was unfamiliar to me. Special procedures are required for us to even assess the impact of landmines on women and their needs for MRE. Only female MRE officers can access the female members of these communities; and to gain permission for this, we need to convince the male authorities that we can be trusted by fully complying with their gender code, including the way we dress, behave and talk.

Some women I have met strictly obey their community rule of never showing their faces to strangers. Also, women should not be seen in public places, including markets. Therefore, each time we visit these areas, we have to stock up with supplies at nearby towns before arriving in the target village so as to avoid having to go to the village market. This kind of precaution is important, as one of the national nongovernmental organizations that previously operated in the same area was once suspended by local leaders because the organization’s female officers went to the market.

Despite such challenges, I feel proud to be a woman involved in mine action efforts in Sudan precisely because only as a woman can I protect these women’s lives from landmines and UXOs. Furthermore, through our MRE activities, we involve these women in identifying their own risks and help them understand their rights to safety. Although this is a sensitive procedure—we need to address their concerns in culturally acceptable ways—it empowers them to find their own voices.

The circumstances under which women are placed and the roles they are expected to play differ from community to community. Some women play leading roles in their communities and have greater influence, while others are under various constraints.

The challenges of being a woman in a conservative community affected by landmines and UXOs are considerable. Nonetheless, women in these communities, especially mothers striving to provide a better future for their children, are strong. Meeting such women inspires me to work harder. I am determined to continue protecting the lives of Sudanese women and supporting them with their life struggles.
Students and teachers in Cam Le District, Da Nang, are all too familiar with the impact of disasters,” said Mr. Phi Chau, senior official of the Department of Education and Training (DOET) of Da Nang, Vietnam, as he officially opened the “We Paint to Act Against Climate Change” contest at Ngo Quyen Primary School in May 2014. The event was part of the Integrative Education for Urban Climate Resilience Project, which works toward developing and piloting integrative curricula for climate change education in all schools in Cam Le District.

The project aims to build the capacity of students, teachers and their families so that they can respond to immediate climate impacts and contribute actively to urban climate resilience as community members and professionals in the coming decades. These are deeply relevant concerns as Da Nang—a city in the central region of Vietnam—is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and extreme weather phenomena, such as floods, heat waves, saltwater intrusion, riverbank erosion, droughts and extreme cold fronts.

This three-year project, which began in 2012, is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation under the Asian Cities Climate Change Resilience Network program, with the Institute for Social and Environmental Transition-International, Vietnam (ISET-Vietnam), the Da Nang DOET and Da Nang Climate Change Coordination Office as key implementers.

In recent decades, Da Nang has experienced rapid urbanization, which—together with climate change—is threatening the city with serious compounding impacts. Students, the future generations of Da Nang, therefore need to be equipped with useful knowledge and skills related to climate change and urbanization in order to respond most effectively.

In Cam Le District, climate change, in combination with urbanization, has directly affected the education sector. Natural disasters damage schools, books, teaching equipment and supplies. Increased temperature combined with pollution accelerates the spreading of outbreaks such as dengue fever, malaria, sore eye and encephalitis, which children are most vulnerable to.

However, a key challenge of incorporating climate change into the school curriculum is that the curriculum is already very full. Based on a survey assessing the capacity and demands of education managers, teachers and students in Cam Le District, the project team—which includes teachers, education and climate experts—proposed that climate change content be integrated into existing education programs. These include both regular and extracurricular components of three subjects for two grades in each education level (primary, secondary and high school). The subjects at high school level, for example, are geography, biology and civic education. A key approach applied throughout this process is shared learning dialogue, which ensures that the opinions and ideas of students, teachers, families, local communities and experts are all taken into account.

Teachers identified teaching materials and training among their main needs, and when asked about introducing climate change content in extracurricular activities, students suggested activities such as field trips (e.g., picnicking, camping), presentations, contests (e.g., video clip making, drawing, debating and speech delivering, presenting thematic reports) and club activities on climate change.

The painting contests mentioned above, organized as extracurricular events, offer a way to raise public interest and concern around climate change. During these events, we were surprised at the level of eagerness and enthusiasm shown by students, and especially the details and stories they could convey through their drawings. This is a positive sign for the future of urban climate resilience in Da Nang.

As of June 2014, the integrative education program has been piloted in all schools of Cam Le District and is being further refined for replication.

Climate change is a global issue, but adaptation to it can only be done locally. At both micro and macro levels, Da Nang is making every effort to build capacity for its current and future generations in this regard.

Tho Nguyen (left) and Thanh Ngo (right) are, respectively, program officer and program assistant/communications officer for ISET-Vietnam. See i-s-e-t.org/about/international/vietnam.html.
Mobilizing for Peace in Kenya

By Rachel Brown

Sisi ni Amani Kenya (SNA-K) has pioneered new strategies to build local capacity for peacebuilding and civic engagement.

New technology is changing the way we communicate with each other, increasing the speed and geographical spread over which people can easily share information. This opens up important opportunities for innovative models and approaches to violence prevention. However, these technologies pose their own risks and challenges: they can be and have been used effectively by violent actors to incite and organize violence. Preceding and throughout Kenya’s 2007–8 postelection violence, mobile phones were used effectively by violent actors for the spread of rumors, hate speech, fear-mongering, calls for revenge attacks and the organization of weapons distribution. Traditional peace actors struggled to counter these information flows.

In 2010, I began the process of founding Sisi ni Amani Kenya [We Are Peace Kenya in Swahili]. Recognizing the important role of communication and perceptions in triggering violence, SNA-K pioneered an approach that sought to build a similar capacity for local peace actors in terms of reach, speed and impact of the text messaging medium.

This work embodied the principles of resilience defined by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda in his 2014 peace proposal as “realizing a hopeful future, rooted in people’s natural desire to work together toward common goals” by aiming to improve resistance to the tensions and triggers of violence and supporting the creation of a foundation for cooperation toward a better future.

SNA-K started with the belief that to create sustainable resilience to violent conflict at the local level, it is crucial to build on what already exists: the local networks, groups and individuals committed to preventing conflict and creating positive civic engagement. These groups, networks and individuals have the local knowledge, social capital and incentives to mitigate and respond to violence in their communities, but may lack specific skills or knowledge.

SNA-K took a participatory approach: facilitating local peace actors to analyze conflict dynamics and triggers and create a strategy that would allow them to compete with information encouraging violence. Focusing on mobile technology, SNA-K analyzed how information influenced behavior toward violence, and then developed tools and strategies to enable local peace activists to use this technology as or more effectively than violent actors.

Noting that information and rumors about violence spread quickly through forwarded text messages, the SNA-K team developed a program to rapidly reach high numbers of people within communities to counter these information flows. SNA-K built an SMS platform to which community members could subscribe and enter important demographic information such as their location, language preference, age and gender. SNA-K’s team of local peace actors was then able to target messages to thousands of subscribers based on these demographic factors.

Violent propaganda usually has a direct call to action and spreads fast. Peace messages can often be vague and do not spread as quickly. To make high-impact messages and create a brand that community members would listen to, trust and respect, SNA-K engaged top-class marketing expertise from Ogilvy & Mather, applying the same techniques used to sell products to sell peaceful behavior.

Combining local forums and events with door-to-door outreach by members of diverse community-based organizations such as peace groups, youth groups, women’s groups and...
religious groups, SNA-K reached more than 65,000 subscribers in 20 locations by the March 2013 Kenyan elections. Prior to the elections, SNA-K sent subscribers civic and voter education messages to guide them through the electoral process, including messages letting them know how to identify their correct polling station and which documents to bring with them.

Throughout the election period, SNA-K also monitored the situation on the ground through local networks and a phone-based reporting system and sent messages to quell rumors and mitigate tensions and violence. These messages aimed to intervene in triggers of violence and encourage community members to pause and think about the consequences of their actions. Rather than being prescriptive, the messages asked people to take into consideration factors they might not think about in the heat of the moment. All messages had a specific behavioral change goal—i.e., getting someone not to spread a rumor or to go home instead of staying in a group that was discussing engaging in violence.

**Tailored Messages**

To create high-impact messaging content, SNA-K’s team conducted focus groups with target demographic populations in which participants cocreated messages to intervene and prevent specific behaviors such as spreading rumors. The SNA-K team analyzed these messages, reframed them, vetted them for risk and created situation- and target audience-based message templates, as well as overall message guidelines. During the election cycle, these templates and guidelines formed the basis of the more than 680,000 messages SNA-K sent in the weeks surrounding the elections. Each message was prompted by specific information about on-the-ground events, monitored by SNA-K’s team and local partners.

In a multiple choice survey of 7,350 subscribers following the elections, 75 percent of respondents reported spending their own money to forward an SNA-K message at least once, and 55 percent reported having a conversation about an SNA-K message “often” or “very often.” In the same survey, 92 percent of respondents believed that the messages had a positive impact on preventing violence in their area.

A qualitative phone survey of subscribers offers further evidence of the impact of SNA-K during the elections. One interesting insight from these interviews was that several subscribers noted that the messages made them feel recognized, remembered and secure because someone was paying attention to their area; while others gave second- and firsthand accounts of youth planning to participate in violence being deterred because they received messages and thought it meant that someone was aware of the situation and they might get in trouble.

**Responses to the survey** included comments such as “People felt like they were being watched when the messages came in and they didn’t want to engage in violence” and “The messages made me relax even in the midst of the violence that was happening . . . it wasn’t a lot of violence but I still felt like someone was in control and watching and I knew things would be OK in the end after reading the message.”

SNA-K partners in various communities reported increased visibility and credibility from being associated with the platform and from working together under a common banner. Some reported receiving free rides on public transport because of their involvement with SNA-K, and many reported being stopped on the street and thanked for their work. This increased visibility and credibility of peace actors, while anecdotal, is important to note, as small numbers of people committed to violence are often more visible than larger numbers of people committed to peace.

SNA-K’s work in Kenya shows potential for the use of new technologies to counter information flows that lead to violence. It demonstrates that while new technology has the potential to influence behavior negatively, it can also be a powerful tool for social resilience. There is a need and an opportunity to learn more about what works and does not work, and to figure out ways to measure the impact of these interventions in order to adapt and improve them. Most importantly, new technology

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**Rachel Brown’s research** into violence prevention efforts in Kenya during a stay in that country led to her founding Sisi ni Amani Kenya with a group of Kenyan community peace activists. After integrating SNA-K’s model and programs into local NGOs, Rachel is now adapting and applying key lessons from the Kenyan experience in other contexts and is currently a Genocide Prevention Fellow at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum.
I began practicing Nichiren Buddhism when I was studying education. I was impressed by the idea that we can create value in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, and this became a focal point of my practice.

As I neared completion of my studies, I did an internship at a reformatory school for teenage girls in New York. The students, who came from a world of drugs, crime and prostitution, were extremely unruly, and the head of the department was a fierce and authoritarian woman. I wondered how I would be able to create value there. With the help of my Buddhist practice, I determined not to be intimidated by her, and focused on helping each of those young women find new meaning and hope in their lives.

After my return to Venezuela, I joined Radio Caracas Television (RCTV) as a program producer. I struggled to juggle everything—my time-consuming job, my family and my SGI activities—but I was determined again to create value in these new circumstances.

I was appointed executive producer of a children’s show that had the aim of celebrating creativity, human values, fantasy and hope. There were many times when the show was on the verge of being closed down due to other priorities, but I focused on the happiness of the children who watched the show and on continuing to make a positive contribution. We eventually made 120 episodes, a record for a children’s TV show in Venezuela.

I continued to work for many years at the station and develop new skills. Because of the rigors of the job, there were times when I was on the brink of resigning, but then this passage from Nichiren’s writings would come to mind: “The journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?”

Four years ago, when I was 57, we were suddenly taken off air. The company was forced to downsize, cutting more than 1,500 jobs. I was suddenly unemployed, uninsured and wondering, “So, what now?” The situation affected me deeply, but I chanted with a determination to continue fulfilling my purpose in life as someone who could contribute to the happiness of others.

Less than a month later, I was offered a position as a facilitator in a consulting firm, enhancing communication, leadership and creativity. Every time I moderated a workshop, I prayed that I could touch the heart of each participant, that I could make them feel they are valuable, confident individuals.

In October 2012, I received a chance-of-a-lifetime offer from a video production and dubbing company to fill the role of production manager, and in April 2014, I was appointed talent and communications manager—an opportunity to provide viewers from other continents access to constructive programming and to build continental bridges that give hope to the peoples of the Spanish-speaking world.

Looking back, I can see that all of my experiences are alive in the present; everything I have experienced until now has been meaningful.
Realizing My Potential to Create a Change

By Bhanu Sundra, India

Until the end of March 2013, I held a senior position with a multinational software company. The office environment was a nightmare, and my manager put me on a humiliating performance improvement plan. He snubbed me almost every day, creating circumstances that would force me to leave. I took to heart SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s guidance that “the key to breaking through adversity ultimately lies in wise action and one’s own humanity.” I went to work each day prepared to face hardship, confident about adding value to my company. I strengthened the company’s relationship with a number of customers, supported my team members and recovered a large payment owed by a customer the company had given up hope on.

During the last few days with the company, I realized that while working there, I had become contemptuous of my family’s business. In fact, I had been running away from it. Our business of manufacturing whiteboards was small and low-tech. With insufficient work facilities and poor caliber of the workforce, it had a weak turnover and had run into losses. I decided to take up these challenges and joined my father in the family business.

Buddhism teaches that “No worldly affairs of life or work are ever contrary to the true reality.” I determined to turn our business into a highly profitable operation, to become a model customer to our suppliers and favored client of our bank, and to help each employee realize their potential. I made some decisive changes, and we added new product lines and have entered new markets that will yield profits. As a result, I have won a customer whose current order for three months is half our sales turnover of last year, and my relationship with my father both at work and at home has improved tremendously.

By tackling these challenges in my work and engaging in SGI activities, I gained a new perspective on my ability to create happiness not only for myself but for those around me.

By tackling these challenges in my work and engaging in SGI activities, I gained a new perspective on my ability to create happiness not only for myself but for those around me. I began to focus on challenges in my family. As my two sons—Vinaiyak, who is 19, and Yash, who is 17—became more independent, they drifted apart from each other and from me and my wife, Richa. To transform our family dynamics, we went on a family weekend holiday. Richa and I made a pact that throughout the trip we would not nag our sons or show any irritation or annoyance toward their habits. And since, as Buddhism teaches, our thoughts and life-condition are reflected in our environment, our family bonded beautifully.

Another looming issue was the acrimonious relationship between my family and my uncle’s family. We live together in a joint property, and things had deteriorated to the point where we were considering selling our portion and moving away rather than dealing with the daily conflicts. I challenged to take the initiative and mustered up the courage to call my uncle and tell him I would love to have lunch with him just as I used to when I was a child. We met and spent a nice afternoon together. Since then, my father and uncle have gone out and had dinner together twice as brother to brother, something which would have been absolutely unthinkable a year ago. Although there are still issues to tackle, the situation has really changed.

President Ikeda writes that the key to our constant growth and development lies in the words yumyo shojin that appear in our daily recital of a portion of the Lotus Sutra. Yumyo means “bravely and vigorously” and shojin means to “exert oneself.” Having experienced for myself how a transformation within one’s attitude can create ripple effects of happiness, my determination and promise to myself is to strive to continuously challenge myself to be a source of positive change within my environment.
What was the extent of your involvement in relief efforts carried out during the aftermath of the February 2011 Christchurch Earthquake?

To monori Shibata: I volunteered to join the UC Student Volunteer Army, a student movement born from a Facebook page that was organized by students at the University of Canterbury. I spent days with 3,000 volunteers assisting local residents with non-lifesaving tasks, in particular, cleaning up soil liquefaction residue on the streets and gardens of the city.

Yu Ito: As collapsible water containers were delivered by SGI members from the North Island, we filled up the vessels with clean water and took them to as many people as we could. One elderly couple shed tears, as they had no idea how they were going to get water without a car. Also, many people were affected by soil liquefaction, so we went to their houses to clean up by shoveling and taking silt out to the road. It took about four to five hours for each house.

Also, my family opened up our house, and many people gathered there and encouraged each other. In addition, we made many rice balls with other SGI members and distributed them to those who were without power and water.

What was the most challenging situation you were faced with, and how were you able to overcome it?

To monori: The biggest challenge I faced was my own internal negativity—the sense of laziness or feeling that I alone wouldn’t make a difference to the relief efforts. What enabled me to overcome this was my daily practice and involvement in SGI activities to that day, which taught me the infinite possibility of one person and the importance of contributing to society.

Yu: Actually, my daughter was four months old when the earthquake hit, so it was really challenging to look after her and my four-year-old son, as well as to help and support people while our house was open. As time went on, I started to argue with my wife due to fatigue and stress. I sometimes totally lost sight of why we were helping people.

A passage from SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s writings helped me gain perspective and enabled my wife and me to overcome the situation.
He writes: “In light of the principle of the oneness of life and its environment, transforming the destiny of the place where we reside requires nothing more than transforming our own destiny through doing our human revolution.” This encouragement gave me hope and courage to continue to help others.

What insights did you gain?

Tomonori: I learned that everybody is willing and capable of doing something good for others. The sense of connectedness to people and to the wider community in the aftermath of the earthquake was so precious that I will never forget it. However, I also learned that people often don’t know how to contribute to others unless they are placed under such extraordinary circumstances where their tasks are clear, visible and straightforward. As an SGI member, I felt fortunate that we have a concrete practice that helps lead others to happiness. I was also moved that students at the University of Otago prepared and sent us packed lunches every day during our efforts.

Yu: Through the experience, I gained new appreciation of how Buddhist practice revitalizes our ability to help others. Without a strong life force supported by chanting, the more I helped others, the more tired I became. I also found that when my life force was strong, I could avoid falling into a complaining attitude.

In what ways did you apply your Buddhist practice?

Tomonori: I not only joined the UC Student Volunteer Army myself, but also encouraged other members and friends to get involved in relief activities. It was amazing to see how delighted and happy they looked when they were shoveling silt on the street with beads of perspiration on their faces. These activities instilled self-value in them, and through my attitude and action toward these relief efforts, I was able to gain their trust and understanding of the SGI.

Yu: Most people around me, such as my colleagues, friends and neighbors, knew that I was an SGI member and that I spent lots of time on activities. Therefore, when they came to my home to eat rice balls and saw me working together with other members to help others, we were able to demonstrate that we were really working for people and for peace.

Five days after the earthquake struck Haiti, three members of SGI-Dominican Republic, including myself, decided to travel to Haiti. We collaborated with an aid agency, acting as volunteer doctors, improvising outdoor clinics and helping out at shelters set up for earthquake victims.

One of the most challenging situations was one night when we had to get to a shelter located in the outskirts of the city with a few doctors and the staff of the aid agency. It was late, really unsafe, and a curfew had been issued. It was very dark because there was no power. We made it to the shelter, helped the victims there and returned safely to headquarters.

We witnessed the hell people were going through. They were shocked, walking around in a daze with no expression showing on their faces. Corpses were just lying amongst the rubble and in the main streets with only dirty sheets covering them. People and vehicles circled around them impassively. In the middle of such despair, we saw one or two men moving unclaimed bodies to a mass grave.

We also saw many children out in the open with no shelter. Their parents had gone looking for food from the aid centers. I decided to share some candy with them. But when I handed it out, the kids didn’t eat it; rather, they stored the candy in the folds of their T-shirts, knowing that that might be their only meal of the day.

I did my best to assist the injured and to encourage and comfort them. This is the bodhisattva spirit of caring for others that I strive to manifest in my life through my Buddhist practice.
Daisaku Ikeda: In the stress and anxiety of modern society, how can we learn to live more optimistically and hopefully? The time has come to ask ourselves how we can genuinely improve our psychological health in order to live more fully human lives. How can philosophy and psychology make a positive contribution in times like these? You have said, from the standpoint of practical philosophy, that Freud and the psychoanalysts undervalued the strong, positive aspects of human nature, focusing instead on our negative aspects and weaknesses. Your point is very important.

Dr. Martin Seligman, a famous advocate of positive psychology and a former president of the American Psychological Association, sees things similarly. When we once met in Tokyo, he told me: Optimism is hope. It is not the absence of suffering. It is not always being happy and fulfilled. It is the conviction that though one may fail or have a painful experience somewhere, sometime, one can take action to change things.

Lou Marinoff: Psychologists have discovered that optimism is a vital factor among shipwreck survivors, who are sometimes adrift on the ocean for days in open rafts, exposed to the elements and other hazards. Often they have inadequate food and water. Those who sustain a positive attitude and believe they will be rescued in time stand a better chance of surviving their ordeal than those who despair and give up hope.

This principle is true not only in drastic circumstances but also in daily life. We all know people who tend to emphasize the positive aspects of a given situation and others who tend to dwell on the negative ones. In ordinary situations, emphasizing the positive almost always brings better results than emphasizing the negative. In dire situations, it can spell the difference between life and death.

Ikeda: People react differently to the same circumstances according to their state of mind, and their lives then go in different directions. The way one sees and responds emotionally to the world depends upon one’s life-condition. From your extensive experience in philosophical counseling, I imagine that you must have seen this to be true.

Marinoff: Yes, my experience has repeatedly confirmed this. Mind-states are influenced by such factors as brain chemistry, selective memory, psychological conditioning, and self-conception. Yet we can ennoble our mind-states and engender good outcomes regardless of circumstances; by exercise of will power, for example, which is underutilized in the West.
Ikeda: If your mind shines, your life shines. Nichiren conveys this teaching from the Vimalakirti Sutra: “If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land.” The mind is truly amazing. We must try to orient it in a positive direction, toward a life that creates value, and that’s where practical philosophy can play a crucial role.

Marinoff: We may ask, in the well-known Western metaphor, is the cup half empty or half full? Pessimists typically regard it as half empty; optimists, as half full.

Ikeda: In the most challenging circumstances, an optimistic outlook can often alter reality and open the way to a brighter future.

Optimism is the faith that leads to achievement; nothing can be done without hope.

Marinoff: By looking for the good in people and in circumstances, we find it. By contrast, we can always find something to complain about in our imperfect world, but that ruins the moment by disregarding what is good.

Incorrigible Optimists
Ikeda: Helen Keller writes that “optimism is the faith that leads to achievement; nothing can be done without hope.” Mahatma Gandhi considered himself an incorrigible optimist. I think that many of the world’s great achievers have been optimists in the true sense. Whether world leaders, scholars, or ordinary citizens, the majority of the great individuals I have met are incorrigible optimists.

Marinoff: Keller, both deaf and blind at a time when people with physical disabilities were typically stigmatized and devalued, overcame not only her own challenges but also the handicapped perspectives held by her society.

Great spirits remain unbroken in the face of adversity. Even calamity serves only to strengthen their resolve.

Ikeda: I believe that true optimism is synonymous with absolute faith in human possibilities, unbending belief in our ability to conquer all hardships, and the courage to strive continuously to improve ourselves and the world around us. Buddhism teaches that it is the self that transforms reality and creates new value.

It also teaches the principle of changing poison into medicine—that when, through Buddhist practice based on the Mystic Law, one elevates one’s life-condition, one can change the “poison” of earthly desires and sufferings into “medicine”: something positive for one’s further personal growth and development. A firm belief in this principle, it seems to me, is the optimism that enables us to live to the fullest.

Marinoff: If we grant the all-important premise of free will, then insofar as thinking is habitual, negative interpretations of circumstances can be changed, over time and with some help, into positive ones.

Epictetus bequeathed us a pithy aphorism that has helped many people, including some of my clients, make cognitive breakthroughs into the realm of the positive: “Men are disturbed, not by Things, but by the Principles and Notions, which they form concerning things.” Is this not positive psychology plus positive philosophy in a nutshell?

Ikeda: Indeed. Changing one’s view of things is the first step in revolutionizing the brute facts. But we can always and immediately alter the views we take of them. This can make all the difference in the world.

Ikeda: Confronted as we are today with such huge problems as poverty, food shortages, environmental issues, and international conflicts, many people think it’s impossible for the individual to make a difference and have succumbed to a feeling of impotence. The fact is, however, that the only way forward for humanity is for each of us to conquer this sense of powerlessness, tap our innate potential to the fullest, and work together in solidarity. I believe an optimism rooted in a higher order of spirituality is the source of the power we need to achieve these things.

Marinoff: All people can make a significant difference for the better, especially when they align their positive energies with one another.
On April 24, the SGI sponsored a one-day interfaith symposium, “Making a Difference—Faith Communities and the Humanitarian Consequences of Nuclear Weapons,” at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington DC. Over 100 people from diverse faiths, including Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions, joined peace activists and experts to stress the moral imperative for nuclear weapons abolition.

In his opening speech, SGI Executive Director of Peace Affairs Hirotsugu Terasaki described the symposium as a significant follow-up to the Second Conference on the Humanitarian Impact of Nuclear Weapons that was held in Nayarit, Mexico, in February. He said that the aim of the event was “to help reenergize the voice of faith communities and explore ways to raise public awareness of the inhumane nature of nuclear weapons.”

Keynote speakers were Andrew Kanter, former president of Physicians for Social Responsibility, Daryl Kimball, executive director of the Arms Control Association, and, representing the US government, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Nuclear and Strategic Policy Anita Friedt, who said she appreciated the symposium’s unique perspective. At the symposium, representatives of 14 faith groups issued a joint statement pledging increased activism by religious communities toward nuclear weapons abolition. The statement reads, “The continued existence of nuclear weapons forces humankind to live in the shadow of apocalyptic destruction . . . The moral insights of our traditions teach us that this threat is unacceptable and must be eliminated.” (For the full statement, see www.sgi.org/assets/pdf/Joint-Faith-Statement-Antinukes.)

On April 29, Mr. Terasaki presented the joint statement to H.E. Ambassador Enrique Román-Morey of Peru, chair of the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2015 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference at the UN Headquarters in New York. He also presented the statement to UN High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Angela Kane on April 30.

As an official side event to the Third Session of the NPT Review Conference held at the UN from April 28 to May 9, the SGI co-organized a seminar on nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation education on May 2, which focused on both formal and informal education initiatives that have aimed to raise awareness of nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. It was co-organized together with the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies, Hibakusha Stories, Peace Boat US and International Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War, Costa Rica.

Faith-Based Organizations Building Resilience

On June 25, the SGI and ACT Alliance, an international coalition of churches working to uplift poor and marginalized people, co-organized a side event at the 6th Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction in Bangkok, Thailand. The conference, held from June 22 to 26, was organized by the Royal Thai Government and the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The side event was titled “The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Disaster Resilience,” and Soka Gakkai Youth Peace Conference Chair Nobuyuki Asai gave a presentation on the SGI’s disaster relief and recovery efforts. He spoke about how members’ extensive networks and knowledge of their communities are one of the strengths of the SGI organization and how this can help them effectively reach out to and provide relief to those who are in need when support from the local government is not yet available and when psychological support for recovery is required.

Participating faith-based organizations (FBOs) including the SGI, Caritas Asia (a Catholic-based organization) and ACT Alliance issued a statement recommending that disaster risk reduction strategies include coordinated efforts by FBOs, local governments and community organizations.

Prior to this, the SGI, ACT Alliance and Caritas Asia organized a Multi-Faith Based Network Consultation on Disaster Risk Reduction on June 22.
SGI-UK organized an evening of jazz, “Ode to the Human Spirit,” at London’s Kings Place on April 30 to mark UNESCO International Jazz Day 2014. The performance brought together an array of jazz talent, including US multireedist, composer and SGI-USA member Bennie Maupin, best known for his work on “Bitches Brew” with Miles Davis and “Head Hunters” with Herbie Hancock. The Human Revolution Orchestra, a specially formed big band comprising 26 UK jazz names, joined with guest performers in a selection of 14 pieces. Guests included American pianist Marc Cary and UK vocalists Liane Carroll and Randolph Matthews.

Sean Corby, SGI-UK member and artistic director of The Human Revolution Orchestra, described the orchestra as an “ecumenical ensemble, respecting our individual faiths and spirituality, including secular spirituality and, through music, expressing our desire to contribute to creating a better, more just society.”

SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and Herbie Hancock, SGI-USA member, UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue, chairman of the Thelonious Monk Institute and cochair of International Jazz Day, sent congratulatory messages to the participants at the event, which raised funds to support the work of UNICEF.

SGI-Philippines members participated in the 2014 International AIDS Candlelight Memorial organized by the Misamis Oriental-Cagayan de Oro AIDS Network on May 18. The event, “Let’s Keep the Light on HIV,” took place at the Misamis Oriental Provincial Capitol Grounds, Cagayan de Oro, Mindanao, and brought together government and civil society agencies to raise public awareness about AIDS and express support for those battling the illness.

The event included a parade, with the majority of participants wearing red T-shirts and holding candles to form a “human red ribbon.” The red ribbon is an internationally recognized symbol of awareness and support of those living with HIV and AIDS. Prayers for all those who have lost their lives due to HIV and AIDS were offered by representatives of various faith groups.

One SGI-Philippines member said, “This event was filled with learning and realization for me that the life of every person in our society is supremely important, whatever his or her background is, without discrimination.”


Keynote speaker María C. Novo Villaverde, UNESCO chair in Environmental Education and Sustainable Development and professor at the National University of Distance Education in Madrid, discussed what she believed to be the main cause of rapid environmental destruction: society’s unhealthy fixation on economic growth rather than quality of life.

At the symposium, representatives of SGI-Spain’s Education Department also organized a session on SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s 2012 environment proposal “For a Sustainable Global Society: Learning for Empowerment and Leadership.” In addition, Jorge Romea, chief of Environmental Services of the City Council of Rivas-Vaciamadrid, gave a report on the city’s activities promoting environmental conservation and sustainable development.

The exhibition “Seeds of Hope: Visions of Sustainability, Steps Toward Change,” jointly created by the SGI and Earth Charter International, was also on display.
What inspired you to pursue a career in the emergency services profession?

**Nobukazu Yoshida:** In a letter she wrote to me before she passed away, my mother encouraged me to pursue a career in whatever field I might choose, but one that would allow me to work for people. After reading that letter, I determined to work for people not only through my activities as a Buddhist, but also in society in general.

**Lee Sang-ho:** Although I had initially hoped to become a public servant with regular working hours, I ultimately chose the path of a firefighter. Once I actually started working, I began to appreciate the importance of being a firefighter who saves lives and protects property.

What does a typical day on the job consist of?

**Sang-ho:** Until August 2013, I held the position of emergency rescue team chief, working 12-hour shifts while attending to fire and rescue callout situations. After that, I was responsible for conducting mobilization and emergency rescue training for various disaster situations such as earthquakes, flooding and fires. It was challenging, but I was able to achieve the best results of all 14 participating fire stations in Gangwon Province. Since this January, I have worked for the personnel department in an administrative position.

**Nobukazu:** I work a 24-hour shift, during which I primarily spend my time attending to emergency callout situations. Other duties I have carried out to date include preparation of investigative documentation for the public prosecutor, the police and the courts, related to emergencies that were not of an accidental nature; I have served as a witness for autopsies; and I have conducted life-saving courses for the public at large, as well as at schools and universities.

What types of emergencies do you encounter in your work?

**Nobukazu:** I have been exposed to infectious diseases and poisonous substances, as well as people’s violent outbursts. I have also had women give birth in the ambulance.
“Nichiren Buddhism has served as the stimulus for me to reflect on the way in which I engage with everyone I encounter.”

What are the most challenging aspects of your job?
Nobukazu: If I’m called out to help someone who is on the brink of death or in shock, I have to keep them from falling into cardiopulmonary arrest and get them to a facility that provides advanced life support treatment. In order to prepare ourselves to respond quickly to any situation that may arise, we study, not only as individuals, but also as a team, such things as various pathological conditions, the effects of chemical and poisonous substances and electrocardiogram reading, and carry out training exercises that simulate various situations.

Sang-ho: Human relations and communication between colleagues are the most difficult issues, due to the constant stresses of the job. However, I keep to heart SGI President Daisaku Ikeda’s advice that all worries exist to open up our lives and that all difficulties function as “good friends” that transform our lives.

What do you consider to be the most rewarding aspect of your job?
Nobukazu: The most rewarding aspect of my job is when I receive a word of thanks from the individuals I have helped or their families.
Sang-ho: Saving someone’s life, or responding to an emergency call... It’s also incredibly rewarding when my trainees express their enthusiasm.

How do you train yourself to be mentally and physically prepared to respond to an emergency at a moment’s notice?
Sang-ho: In order to prepare myself physically, I participate in general emergency rescue training and emergency rescue callout training. To prepare myself mentally, I have received training on how to avoid posttraumatic stress disorder.
Nobukazu: The training I have received through SGI activities supports me mentally. I prepare myself physically by commuting to work by bicycle, a 25-kilometer ride each way, and by bicycling and walking to meet with SGI members at their homes on my days off.

How are you physically prepared to respond to an emergency at a moment’s notice?
Sang-ho: In a profession such as this in which death is always present, it is easy to fall victim to posttraumatic stress disorder. Most personnel remain on call with constantly elevated nerves, and it is common not to be able to get a good night’s sleep. I too struggled with nervous issues before I became a firefighter, but through my Buddhist practice, I have been able to lead a healthy life and feel joyful from day to day.

How do you apply your Buddhist practice to your work?
Sang-ho: A moment when I felt I really understood the Buddhist spirit of selflessness was when I struggled with all my might to rescue someone who was drowning in a river. Everything before my eyes was pitch-black, but somehow I managed to save their life.
Nobukazu: Being directly involved in matters of life and death, I have come to appreciate the things we tend to take for granted in our daily lives. This sense of appreciation grew even stronger when, in the aftermath of the March 11, 2011, Great East Japan Earthquake and tsunami, I was dispatched to the disaster-stricken areas as a member of an emergency rescue support team.

Nichiren Buddhism, which explains the cause-and-effect relationship of birth, aging, sickness and death, has served as the stimulus for me to reflect on the way in which I engage with everyone I encounter, and because my job throws me into the lives of people who are in the depths of despair, I am aware of just how important it is to have a strong life force. It is for this reason that I chant without fail at least one hour before going to work.

How has your Buddhist practice affected your approach to work?
Nobukazu: Each emergency rescue team is made up of three individuals. If even one member of the team loses heart, the team loses its ability to save lives. I am therefore conscious of just how important the roles of a sound faith and a correct philosophy are in this occupation. I view it as my mission to raise the level of my team and to be the one who transforms the spirits of those around me.
Sang-ho: In a profession such as this in which death is always present, it is easy to fall victim to posttraumatic stress disorder. Most personnel remain on call with constantly elevated nerves, and it is common not to be able to get a good night’s sleep. I too struggled with nervous issues before I became a firefighter, but through my Buddhist practice, I have been able to lead a healthy life and feel joyful from day to day.

I make it a point of always greeting my colleagues with a smile, and among my friends I have even been given the nickname “Doctor Happiness.” I’m always encouraged by the words of President Ikeda, that our lives are decided by the determinations we make and the actions we take at the most trying of times, that therein lies the true worth and greatness of human beings—it is during the most trying of times that a noble history is written and our lives expand.
E
deforts we make to reach our goals reveal
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In the parable of the phantom city and the
treasure land in the seventh chapter of the Lotus Sutra,
Shakyamuni Buddha addresses the difficulty and
importance of the journey or process of striving toward
enlightenment or Buddhahood.

The parable begins with a group of travelers who
have set out on a journey to reach a place where it is said
there are rare treasures. In order to reach this treasure
land, they must trek across an unfathomably long and
treacherous road. The group is guided by a wise leader
who is well acquainted with the terrain. However, after
traveling part of the way, they become exhausted and
fearful and want to turn back.

The wise leader, concerned that all their efforts thus
far would be in vain, uses his magical powers to conjure
up a magnificent city. He then says to
them, “Don’t be afraid! You must not
turn back, for now here is a great city
where you can stop, rest, and do just
as you please. If you enter this city
you will be completely at ease and
tranquil.”

Hearing this, the travelers muster
up their energy to press forward and
soon enter the city. Once the wise
leader sees that the people are rested
and no longer fearful, he makes the city
disappear and tells them, “The place where the treasure
is is close by. That great city was a mere phantom that I
conjured up so that you could rest.”

The phantom city represents the early provisional
teachings of the Buddha. These so-called “three vehicles”
teachings correspond to provisional or partial states
of spiritual development or awakening, in contrast
to the somewhat formidable goal of Buddhahood or
unsurpassed enlightenment taught in the Lotus Sutra.

The wise leader, who represents Shakyamuni, uses these
provisional teachings as a means of helping his disciples
move toward the treasure land—the one Buddha vehicle
or Buddhahood.

This parable awakens Shakyamuni’s disciples to
the fact that they have become satisfied with their own
shallow achievements so far. They recall their original
aspiration for unsurpassed enlightenment and are
inspired to continue striving in their development once
more. This aspiration is fundamentally inherent in the
lives of all people, an intrinsic aspect of our humanity. The
practice of Nichiren Buddhism awakens that aspiration
and generates the power to achieve it.

“Buddhahood seems like a goal; but it is not,” clarifies
SGI President Daisaku Ikeda. “It is a clear path. It is
hope itself—hope to advance eternally toward self-
improvement, greater fulfillment and increased peace of
mind and enjoyment in life.” In other words, the road to
the treasure land is in fact the treasure land itself. The
process is, in actuality, the end goal. Buddhahood does
not exist in some far-off place, but amidst the reality of
our daily efforts and struggles to expand our potential,
overcome obstacles and help lead others to happiness—
the same fundamental aspiration as the Buddha.

Like the travelers seeking the treasure land, many
of us, when pursuing a goal or a dream, become
deadlocked and experience the waning of our initial
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Like the travelers seeking the treasure land, many
of us, when pursuing a goal or a dream, become
deadlocked and experience the waning of our initial
passion and enthusiasm. Being satisfied with our
achievements thus far is like never leaving the phantom
city—an illusion of comfort that creates boundaries
which limit our potential. This is why it is crucial that we
find as much value and joy in the process of pursuing
our goals as in achieving them. Even if our goals alter
and change, by earnestly pursuing them, we embark on
a journey through which our growth and potential are
realized. As President Ikeda states, “Happiness is not
found in a tranquil life free of storms and tempests. Real
happiness is found in the struggles we undergo to realize
our goals, in our efforts to move forward.”

This is the fourth in a series
introducing the parables of the
Lotus Sutra.
A collection of English translations of 50 poems written by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda over the period 1945–2007 was recently published by I.B. Tauris. The poems in the collection were written on a wide range of subjects to recipients that include the greater SGI community, mothers and women, world leaders and authors and artists.

Spring Breezes

The sudden shower has passed, the spring breezes rustle.

Blossoms of the cherry-apple wake from sleep, one petal dancing.

By the rocks in the garden the shimmering heat waves rise.

On the surface of the pond a leaf boat glides quietly along.

I pray that the spring breezes of good fortune blow in the hearts of all.
The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide association of 93 constituent organizations with membership in 192 countries and territories. In the service of its members and of society at large, the SGI centers its activities on developing positive human potentialities for hope, courage and altruistic action. Rooted in the life-affirming philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism, members of the SGI share a commitment to the promotion of peace, culture and education. The scope and nature of the activities conducted in each country vary in accordance with the culture and characteristics of that society. They all grow, however, from a shared understanding of the inseparable linkages that exist between individual happiness and the peace and development of all humanity.

As a nongovernmental organization (NGO) with formal ties to the United Nations, the SGI is active in the fields of humanitarian relief and public education, with a focus on peace, sustainable development and human rights.