Living Oceans

FISHING FOR THE FUTURE  Carl Safina
A CENSUS OF OCEAN LIFE  Jesse H. Ausubel
ALONE WITH THE SEA  Roz Savage
**FEATURE**

1. Living Oceans
   By Fabien Cousteau

2. The Embracing Sea
   By Fabien Cousteau

3. World Ocean Facts

4. Fishing for the Future
   Interview with Carl Safina

5. A Census of Ocean Life:
   On the Difficulty and Joy of Seeing
   What Is Near and Far
   By Jesse H. Ausubel

6. The Oceans and Human Life
   By Shoji Saito

7. Building a Bridge
   By Anitha Sharma

8. Alone with the Sea
   From an interview with Roz Savage

9. If You Go Down to the Beach Today...
   Interview with Edo Heinrich-Sanchez

**PEOPLE**

16. Conserving the Benguela's Abundance
    By Barbara Paterson

17. Creating Stability
    By Elizabeth Penioso Pernites

**PEACE PROPOSAL**

18. Steps Toward a Nuclear-free World
    By Daisaku Ikeda

**AROUND THE WORLD**

20. Action for Nuclear Abolition; Art Exhibitions in Malaysia; Faith and Development in Southeast Asia; Ikeda Center’s Dialogue Forum on John Dewey; Haiti Relief Efforts; At the Parliament of the World’s Religions
    Plus news in brief from South Africa, Canada, Guam, USA, Singapore, Macau, Japan and Italy

**HISTORY OF THE SOKA GAKKAI**

24. Part 2

**ON VOCATION**

26. Taken by the Sea

**BUDDHISM IN DAILY LIFE**

28. The Three Obstacles and Four Devils
As a metaphor for travel and trade, for the unknown and abundance, the oceans still hold an element of mystery, longing or fear for most of us. But as we become more aware of the effect we have on the environment, our understanding of our relationship with the oceans is changing.

The oceans are a vital element of our life-support system on Earth, regulating our climate by absorbing heat from the sun and playing an essential part in the rain and carbon cycles. Preserving the health of the oceans is central to our own health and that of a healthy planet. We like to think of the oceans as a limitless source of abundance, but the saying “there are plenty more fish in the sea” is now in question, because the fish that many of us enjoy are fished to near extinction: cod, plaice, tuna and haddock are severely declining through overfishing.

All rivers flow into the same ocean that connects us all. Man-made pollution ends up in the sea, causing acidification, which in turn affects the coral reefs and mangroves, which are a natural barrier to protect shorelines from extreme weather. Plastics and toxic pollutants are ingested by marine animals and return to us in the food chain.

We can still say that less is known about the depths of the oceans than is known about the moon’s surface. But the more we shine a light on the unfathomable deep, the more we realize the extent of the natural richness we could lose through lack of care for the oceans. In recent years, people from around the world have started to take action to ensure the survival of this vital resource, creating networks of individuals united by a common purpose. This issue of the newly redesigned SGI Quarterly looks at how their efforts and ours can help preserve the riches of the oceans for future generations.
We should call our planet Ocean. A small orb floating in the endless darkness of space, it is a beacon of life in the otherwise forbidding cold of the endless universe. Against all odds, it is also the petri dish from which all life known to us springs.

Without water, our planet would be just one of billions of lifeless rocks floating endlessly in the vastness of the inky black void. Even statisticians revel in the improbability that it exists at all, with such a rich abundance of life, much less that we as a species survive on its surface. Yet, despite the maze of improbability, we have somehow found our way to where we are today. Humans were enchanted by the sea even before the Greek poet Homer wrote his epic tale of ocean adventure, The Odyssey. It is this fascination that has driven us to delve into this foreign realm in search of answers, but the sea has always been reluctant to give up its secrets easily. Even with the monumental achievements of past explorers, scientists and oceanographers, we have barely ventured through its surface.

It is estimated that over 90 percent of the world’s biodiversity resides in its oceans. From the heartbeat-like pulsing of the jellyfish to the life-and-death battle between an octopus and a mantis shrimp, discoveries await us at every turn. And for every mystery solved, a dozen more present themselves. These are certainly exciting times as we dive into the planet’s final frontier. Aided by new technology, we can now explore beyond the 2 percent or so of the oceans that previous generations observed. But even with the advent of modern technology it will take several more generations to achieve a knowledge base similar to the one we have about the land.

No matter how remote we feel we are from the oceans, every act each one of us takes in our everyday lives affects our planet’s water cycle and in return affects us. All the water that falls on land, from the highest peaks to the flattest plains, ends up draining into the oceans. And although this has happened for countless millions of years, the growing ecological footprint of our species in the last century has affected the cycle in profound ways. From fertilizer overuse in landlocked areas, which creates life-choking algal blooms thousands of kilometers away, to everyday plastic items washing up in even the most remote areas of the globe, our actions affect the health of this, our sole life-support system.

This statement is not here to make us feel that we are doomed by our actions, but rather to illustrate that through improved knowledge of the ocean system and its inhabitants we can become impassioned to work toward curing our planet’s faltering health. By taking simple steps, such as paying a little more attention to our daily routines, each one of us can have a significant positive impact on the future of our planet and on the world our children will inherit. In short, it would be much healthier for us to learn to dance nature’s waltz than to try to change the music.
What You Can Do

1. Respect local guidelines to protect the environment on the beach.
2. Use public transport rather than a car.
3. Volunteer and organize beach cleanups, pick up litter, manage and recycle waste.
5. Choose goods that have traveled less, buy reusable shopping bags.
6. When you buy or sell seafood in shops or restaurants, check the species is not endangered and if it was caught or farmed in a sustainable way. Choose restaurants promoting sustainable practices and species.
7. Sign an ocean pledge online and encourage your friends to do the same.
8. Support the creation and maintenance of marine parks and reserves.
9. Promote and organize events or share information at work, school or in your community to focus on the oceans’ role in our lives. Join World Ocean Day on June 8.

For more information, see the World Ocean Network’s Ocean Info Pack.
Visit www.worldoceannetwork.org/
Fishing for the Future

Interview with Carl Safina

Author and marine biologist Carl Safina has been described as an “ecologist with the soul of a poet.” His advocacy helped bring the conservation of ocean fish to public attention long before recent alarm bells began to be sounded on this issue—it is estimated that today 80 percent of fisheries worldwide are fully exploited or overexploited, and an international group of ecologists and economists warned in 2006 that the world will run out of seafood by 2048 if declines in marine species continue at current rates.

Safina’s several books include *Song for the Blue Ocean* (1998, New York Times Editors’ Choice) and *Voyage of the Turtle* (2006, New York Times Editors’ Choice). *The View From Lazy Point: A Natural Year in an Unnatural World* will be published this year. He is president and cofounder of the Blue Ocean Institute (www.blueocean.org) which uses science, art and literature to inspire a closer relationship with the sea. He is a MacArthur Fellow and a professor at the School of Marine and Atmospheric Sciences at Stony Brook University in New York, USA, where the Blue Ocean Institute’s science office is based.
SGI Quarterly: How did you first become aware of the peril the ocean was in?

Carl Safina: I have enjoyed recreational fishing since I was a child. I grew up and stayed in the same area, and because of my fishing I noticed broad, long-term declines in many desirable species. I became aware of it because I saw it. When there were a lot of tuna, I was thrilled to catch them, and to eat them. We can respect these creatures at different levels, but the ultimate disrespect is to kill them faster than they can replace themselves. All I ask is that we limit our use just enough so that we can keep using. That is so little to ask, and so inclusive of any legitimate desire; we can and must all demand it. It’s true that some fishing methods are inherently destructive—such as blasting reefs to stun fish: those methods are mostly banned, but are widely used illegally because of poor enforcement.

Dragnets that harm the bottom should be restricted to certain areas and banned in many areas. Another way of thinking about this is that what matters most is not how an animal like a fish is caught and killed; what matters most is the rate at which they are killed.

SGIQ: How can scientists, fishermen, the food industry and government work together to sustain endangered and valuable species?

CS: It’s no problem for scientists, fishermen, government and the food industry to work together. Look how easy it is whenever the scientists and government are trying to help find more fish or give subsidies. That is the history of fisheries management, people working hand in glove. The problem begins when people’s objectives diverge, which is a recent development. Government exists, in my opinion, to protect broad public interests from narrow personal interests; the future of many versus the greed of a few. However, greed does not like being restrained. It’s the short-term desires of a small number versus the long-term needs of a large number of people.

Humanity is taking too many resources at the expense of the next generation. The answer is both ethical and regulatory. Somehow the next generation must be able to speak up and prevail. The more crowded the world and the more that corporations influence politicians, the more difficult this is.

SGIQ: Do you see any signs of changes in fishing policy toward sustainable fishing following your and other people’s efforts to raise public awareness on this issue?

CS: There is a lot more discussion and policy activity than before. Certainly, there are improved fishing policies in the United States compared to 20 years ago. Many populations of whales are increasing from near-extinction, and in the Atlantic, sea turtles are recovering too. But in many places around the world, fishing pressure is still much too high, and fish populations are declining.

SGIQ: How could we fish more sustainably and ensure sustainable livelihoods for people whose lives rely on fisheries?

CS: Where there is enforcement, laws can limit catch and regulate the landings of individual boats. Where enforcement is scarcer, closing areas may be easier because it is easier to tell if a boat is in a closed area than it is to check catches and engage in complicated monitoring, but those areas still need monitoring and enforcement. In poor areas, communities can police areas they’ve set aside to produce more fish. In poor, crowded areas with little enforcement, the combination makes sustainability difficult, as too much poverty brings too much pressure. Bringing in local communities and educating them can help, and in a few places these efforts are succeeding to different degrees. As with many things, the poor are most trapped in a worsening situation. Even in developed areas, that tension between short-term demands and long-term viability makes this difficult in practice.

SGIQ: What can we as ordinary people do to keep seas and oceans healthy?

CS: At the Blue Ocean Institute we advocate learning about and moving to more sustainable forms of seafood. We are connected to the ocean in many different ways, but one obvious way we affect the ocean is through the sea creatures we eat. We can all try to make our choices help by choosing sustainable seafood. We can make it a topic of conversation. We can write letters to editors, or comment on blogs when news stories about fisheries appear. We can join conservation groups and help support the effort to move toward more sustainable use of the world.
In the late 1990s, leading marine scientists shared their concerns that humanity’s understanding of what lives in the oceans lagged far behind our desire and need to know. Some emphasized the question, “What lives?” in its most elementary form. They pointed to the opportunity for discoveries about the diversity of life in the vast global ocean. For example, ichthyologists (marine scientists who study fish) identified about 15,000 marine fish species but believed about 5,000 more awaited discovery. The age of exploration in the oceans was by no means over.

Others asked, “What lives where?” They highlighted establishing a baseline of known occurrences of marine life and then plotted a strategy for drawing reliable maps of likely distributions.

Still others asked, “How much of each lives?” They pointed to the changing abundance of species and the need for improved management based on a sound foundation of knowledge. They warned of exploitation of continental slopes and sea mounts and pointed to contentious debates about the abundance of even supposedly well-known cod, tuna and salmon species.

Happily, the diverse scientists converged on a strategy, a worldwide Census to assess and explain the diversity, distribution and abundance of marine life. The founders organized the Census of Marine Life.

The Census has counted more than 17,000 species in the frigid, sunless ocean depths below 1,000 meters, a region long viewed as devoid of life. 

Top left: A tiny copepod from 5,000 meters below. 
Main photo: At 2,750 meters an odd transparent sea cucumber, Enypniastes, creeps forward on its many tentacles at about 2 cm per minute while sweeping detritus-rich sediment into its mouth.  
Bottom left: “New” Dumbo octopod, Grimpoteuthis sp.
Life around three grand questions: What did live in the oceans? What does live in the oceans? What will live in the oceans? They agreed to report in the year 2010 what humanity knows about the oceans, what we do not yet know but could learn, and what will still be very hard to learn or is even unknowable.

The founders of the Census recognized that comparing past marine life with the present would provide a running start on projections. “What did live in the oceans?”—the first question—motivated a Census program called the History of Marine Animal Populations, which paints pictures of what lived in the oceans before humanity’s fishing became important, a time stretching back thousands of years in some cases and 50 in others. From these pictures, analysts can dissect the influence of fishing, habitat loss and climate variability on marine life populations.

In addition to this, the key components of the Census are 14 field projects to investigate, “What does live in the oceans?” The projects span near-shore to open ocean, surface to abyss, equator to pole, and microbes to mammals. Building on the history program and the 14 field projects, the Census also developed a program to answer, “What will live in the oceans?”

The integrating element is a database called the Ocean Biogeographical Information System (OBIS) that collects and makes Census information widely and durably accessible. The Census has already archived more than 20 million records on more than 120,000 species in OBIS, which links to other powerful databases that provide genetic descriptions of species and biographies of them in an Encyclopedia of Life (www.eol.org).

Limits of Knowledge

It helps to understand what you know and why you know it, what you do not know but might readily learn, and what is hard to learn or might even be unknowable. That is, it helps to understand the limits of knowledge. Knowing what you do not know, like writing terra incognita on a map as Roman geographers used to do, can help as much as adding detail to lands you have already explored.

In considering ocean life, the causes that separate the known, unknown and unknowable are numerous and diverse, falling into five families: the invisibility of the lost past, the vast expanse of the oceans, difficulties of assembling parts into a whole, blinders we put on ourselves, and surprises from outside.

The first family of limits is the invisibility of the lost past. Some phenomena leave no traces or may have left traces we cannot find. In New York City, many are shocked and disbelieving that reefs of oysters extending for hectares dotted New York Harbor 200 years ago. Even if the animals may be lost in the past, their oil, bone, dyes, fur and DNA may survive intact or in records. Still, we need imagination to explore the limits of our knowledge of the past.

It is also difficult to see what is far, dark, deep or under pressure (the second family of limits). Expanse also challenges the timeliness and frequency of observations. Only a few governments regularly send vessels or divers out to assess stocks directly. Ships trawl only in a few locations, their sonars probe only narrow swaths where vessel noise or pressure waves may scare away fish.

Because light can penetrate to a shallow seafloor, the near-shore may seem easier to study than deeper realms. But even here, the vastness of even the ocean edges—the variety, rarity and patchiness—creates limits to knowledge.

The third family of limits, assembling parts into whole models, encompasses statistical challenges. Fisheries and biodiversity statistics are inadequate. Fishers tend to underreport catches, and commerce addresses fished stocks, rather than fish stocks. Whether a species is truly absent, or present and uncounted, bedevils much biodiversity data. Even counted species may be misidentified. Mathematical models used to turn available data into assessments of stocks or abundance may misbehave. Small
mis-specifications in initial conditions magnify into tornadoes of error.

The fourth limit is the blinders we put on ourselves, which stem from both economics and culture. The agencies that survey stocks, such as environmental or fisheries ministries, are poor and obtain only small or brief samples. They concentrate on commercial and charismatic species in convenient or attractive locations and seasons. Blinded by disciplinary myopia, experts overlook species or numbers. We act as if the 1 or 2 percent of the 250,000 named species of marine life that enter commerce have an independent identity. Although microbes make up 90 percent of ocean biomass, researchers have largely ignored them, too.

We bring cultural biases that lead us to exclude or discount certain data and information. What is near may seem so familiar that we take it for granted. Often we know only what an oil company or local government pays for.

“Census researchers in the Gulf of Maine project watched 50 million herring swimming in a school almost the size of Manhattan.”

A tsunami exemplifies surprise interventions from outside, the fifth family limiting knowledge. Surprising events can harshly limit our knowledge. Abrupt changes disturb our orderly world.

Discoveries
Limits may discourage us, but overcoming limits brings victory. The Census of Marine Life pushes at the extremes marking the boundaries of knowledge. Four extremes exemplify the discoveries of the Census.

Hottest: At the site of a seafloor vent in the extreme pressure three kilometers beneath the equatorial Atlantic, Census researchers encountered water at a broiling 407 degrees C. Nevertheless, in heat that could easily melt lead, life continued! Although the overheated species resembled those around cooler vents, differences in chemistry show how life adapts in a furnace.

 Richest: The richest biodiversity discovered was 20,000 kinds of bacteria that the Census found floating in a liter of seawater near a fissure erupting 1,500 meters deep on a seamount in the Northeast Pacific. DNA sequences taken by the Census revealed that most of the 20,000 kinds were unknown and certainly rare. This richness invites speculation about what rare species contribute to their biosphere and invites an estimate that there are at least 20 million kinds of bacteria in the oceans.

 Farthest: Tags attached by the Census to sooty shearwater birds and continuously monitored by satellite mapped a small bird’s search for food back and forth across the Pacific Ocean, from Chile to Japan to California and New Zealand in a giant figure of eight. This 70,000-km journey—350 km a day for 200 days—is the longest trip of any animal ever recorded.

 Most: Census researchers in the Gulf of Maine project watched 50 million herring swimming in a school almost the size of Manhattan. A new technology of focused sound scanned areas a million times wider than ever before. The scan reveals the swelling and shrinking, fragmentation and merging of the schools as a person might watch schools of minnows swimming in a brook.

The discoveries were made by 2,000 Census scientists from 80 countries. The shearwater flying 70,000 kilometers did not carry a passport. I hope that someday everyone who cares about the ocean carries a Census of Marine Life passport, exemplifying humanity’s systematic challenge to the limits of knowledge and devotion to conservation of ocean life. Together, we can see clearly the marvels of what is both near and far, propelling the world to preserve and increase life.

Jesse H. Ausubel is vice-president of programs at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and director of the Program for the Human Environment at The Rockefeller University in New York City. On behalf of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences, he was one of the main organizers of the first UN World Climate Conference in Geneva in 1979. In the late 1990s, Mr. Ausubel helped initiate the Census of Marine Life. He was also the founding chair of the Encyclopedia of Life project to create a webpage for every species. Read about the findings of the Census at www.coml.org
In describing seas and oceans as one of the geographical features that serve as a site for human life, Makiguchi begins with an analysis of the standing and role of the oceans within the contemporary world situation.

In 1903, tensions with Russia were high and nationalist sentiments were reaching a fever pitch, as were calls to take a hard-line stance against Russia. (In 1904, Japan and Russia would in fact go to war.) Against this political and cultural backdrop, Makiguchi presents an extremely objective analysis:

In today’s world, a country confronting the Western Powers may seek sovereignty or independence, but this can only be political independence. Economically, all countries are equally parts of an enormous market. Working together, each with their respective responsibilities for a different economic function, they advance the life of the whole. They can each be compared to stores that sell the products resulting from their particular role in the larger division of labor. This is what is ultimately meant by those who suggest that the term “trading organization” should replace the word “nation.” In this regard, the only difference between the so-called civilized and uncivilized nations is the sophistication of the products that they offer for sale.

Among other things, this can be read as Makiguchi’s rebuttal to the Japanese nationalists’ vehement call for autonomy and independence through military might by asserting that international cooperation and participation in the world market are the only way for Japan to thrive within the currents of historical change.

For Makiguchi, peoples who were at the time considered uncivilized had fallen behind the progress of human history because of a fearful avoidance of the oceans. The obstacles to ocean travel “had dampened their courage, and intimidated and disheartened them; the vast powers of nature were seen as magical forces inspiring only fear and dread.”

To Makiguchi, Europeans and Japanese had come from an equally “uncivilized” past. Differences in development and national strength can, he asserts, be largely attributed to different attitudes toward the oceans. Development and national strength come from transforming the oceans from barriers into interconnecting pathways. Attempting to remain isolated behind the barriers the oceans provide will lead to decline.

By opening itself to the world in the mid-19th century, Japan had managed to avoid the ruin and colonization that had been imposed on the peoples of Southeast Asia. Makiguchi further urges Japan to develop as a maritime nation, interacting with the entire world, rather than remaining an isolated and provincial “island nation.”

It is clear that for Makiguchi the oceans, like the categories of civilized and uncivilized, were not absolute or static. The oceans will offer their natural resources and embrace human beings who initiate positive interactions. The oceans are a human condition rather than simply a geographical feature.

Both the positive aspects (such as enabling development) and negative aspects (such as provoking fear) of the ocean are ultimately not inherent functions of the natural, but depend on human factors. As long as nature and humans share the planet, the human facts should precede geographical facts. This, for Makiguchi, is the relationship between geography and human life.
Communities living in a certain degree of geographical isolation have evolved a distinctive relationship with the natural environment. Lakshadweep is a tropical island archipelago in the Indian Ocean just off the southwestern coast of India. Ten of its 27 islands are inhabited, with a collective population of 60,570. The islands host an extraordinary degree of biodiversity in their coral reefs and lagoons. The knowledge of this biodiversity is stored in a complex, rich oral archive of ecological information the islanders have built up about the marine realm. Their traditional wisdom can be grouped into three major categories, which relate to species habitats, the fishing of species for commercial purposes and the fishing of species used for subsistence and sustenance.

The islanders’ collective memory has been passed down orally from generation to generation. As the islands develop and the economy and culture transform, this knowledge, through which the islanders have maintained a sustainable relationship with the natural environment, is at risk of being lost. During public dialogues and focus-group discussions with islanders earlier in the decade, the necessity of documenting and incorporating this knowledge base into current management plans, as well as conservation and development plans, became apparent. From 2000 to 2001 and after, I worked as an intermediary in the planning stage, to bridge the gulf between what islanders are doing on the ground and the Lakshadweep Administration’s planning.

There is a particularly rich indigenous fishing knowledge related to tuna fishing, which is a mainstay of the economy. In the past, tuna fishing constituted more than 30 percent of the economy, but it is now being replaced by employment in the government sector. There are 30 species of live baitfish essential to tuna fishing; the fishing grounds, best fishing times and seasons within a 25-km radius of the islands are well-known to the islanders. The fishermen and women have a highly developed knowledge of the influence of the ocean currents in this dynamic picture.

A tuna fishing team consists of 10–14 people. Of these, six of the fishermen are experts in handling a pole and line. This usually requires one or two people to throw out the baitfish from the boat and two others to manage the boat. Four people are needed to carry out various duties on land. The catch is then shared out in the ratio of half for the boat owner and half for the crew.

The islanders take from their natural...
environment both for their own consumption and for the market. Fishing is mainly concentrated in the lagoon. The species composition of the catch varies depending on the fishing equipment used. For example, the largest composition of species caught with cast nets is carangids, followed by goatfish, with other catch being halfbeaks and mullets. There is a set etiquette about sharing space in the lagoon between the islanders, who are aware of different habits and habitats of fish. The movement of fish shoals is connected to a tidal chart to which islanders frequently refer. On many of the islands there are experts who specialize in shark and turtle catching, which require good observation and agility.

Women contribute to the subsistence economy whilst fishing. For instance, they collect cowry shells for export to the mainland as well as octopuses to supplement the daily menu, and have a good knowledge of where to find these.

There are many customary laws which enable the community to use the resources wisely. The most prevalent law in relation to fishing has been with regard to lagoon use. Areas within the lagoon are marked as fishing grounds for different fishing groups by the village head. There is an understanding about the areas, and disputes are avoided.

As modern development of the islands started, fishers observed changes in the availability and behavior of fish. Reef blasting in Agatti Island was the cause of changes in halfbeak fish shoal movement, which disrupted the fishing ground allocation pattern. An El Niño (period of unusual ocean surface warming) in 1998 caused coral reef bleaching. There was also a change in the association between species within coral communities as well as a subsequent change in the diversity of flora and fauna.

**Traditional Knowledge and Management Strategies**

I was involved in two important processes: a National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan and the process of setting up a conservation reserve in Agatti Island, both of which revealed the need to collate and document this deep and invaluable knowledge about marine bioresources. The lack of a resource map of the islands offering relevant information on the bioresources dependency of the community was a major hurdle for both projects. However, we were able to construct a reliable map by recording data held in the mental map of the fishers about good fishing grounds and species habitats.

The various development projects being planned on the islands for entry of more boats and the opening up of uninhabited islands with good fishing grounds require a detailed understanding about the way the resources would be used. The conservation ethic of the islanders was felt a decade ago when they expressed concern over the decision of the Lakshadweep Administration to collect apparently useless but abundant sea cucumbers. In fact, a ban was imposed after islanders raised concerns about the plummeting of the species population. A recent reduction in the availability of fish bait has been related to changes and destructive practices in the lagoon along with overexploitation.

The islanders also expressed concern over the possibility of a no-take zone that accompanies the setting up of Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). This fear has had to be allayed, and there was assurance about a management strategy incorporating participatory resource mapping, which was reiterated.

The islanders’ knowledge of the habits and habitats of fish and other organisms on which the community depends provides the foundation for evolving sustainable harvesting strategies as the islands develop. This mental map, which includes fishing grounds as well as time and seasonal variations, opens up new arenas for a participatory management plan. It includes both commercial and noncommercial species and resources. The integration and marriage of traditional knowledge with modern management plans is paving the path for an ecologically viable and sustainable life strategy, leading to long-term survival in the islands.

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“*The islands host an extraordinary degree of biodiversity in their coral reefs and lagoons. The knowledge of this biodiversity is stored in a complex, rich oral archive.*

Anitha Sharma is an environmental educator and researcher focusing on coastal ecology and community-based issues. Her research and outreach work has been focused in Kerala State in south India as well as the coral islands of Lakshadweep in southwestern India. She recently published a book for children and also writes for journals such as *Tourism Watch* and *Contour*.
I went out on the ocean in search of solitude, self-knowledge and self-fulfillment. Many indigenous people have rites of passage in which they go into the wilderness to prove their inner strength, their ability to survive and their readiness to become a mature member of their society. Their wilderness might be the desert, the savanna or the outback. Mine was the ocean. It is where I came of age, mostly by putting myself into a very challenging situation that there was no way out of except to keep on rowing, and to figure out how I was going to get to the other side without driving myself crazy.

On land I’m quite gregarious—I love being around people—but mine is a life of contrasts, and I love the solitude of my ocean life as well. It gives me time and space to think about what is really important in life and to see things clearly as if from a distance. Out there I’m not someone’s daughter or sister or friend or wife. I am free to be purely me. I’ve certainly found out things about myself on the ocean that I don’t think I could have learned in the midst of all this busyness on dry land. On my first ocean row, I struggled with some personal demons, the negative voices in my head, telling me I wasn’t good enough. I had to learn to come to terms with them. It wasn’t a comfortable experience, but in the long run it has helped me to be at peace with myself and become a happier, more fulfilled person.

I have rowed across the Atlantic and also completed two out of three stages of a row across the Pacific, from California to Hawai‘i (2008) and from Hawai‘i to Kiribati (2009). I thought the Atlantic was pretty big when I rowed across it—my voyage from the Canaries to Antigua was around 3,000 miles and took 103 days. My route across the Pacific will be nearly three times that distance. In this era of affordable flights, it’s easy to forget just how big our Earth is—until you experience it from the deck of a slow-moving rowboat. But despite that enormous size, humankind has managed to trash the oceans. Even a thousand miles from land,
on a calm day I could look down into the water and see a multitude of little pieces of plastic, like a plastic soup. And the oceans connect us all. They remind us that no nation is independent. We all share this fragile ecosystem, and one nation’s trash will end up on another nation’s beach.

**Looking for Tomorrow**

In 2009, I ended the second stage of my voyage at the tiny island of Tarawa, the capital of Kiribati, a scattering of small coral atolls lying one degree north of the equator, on the far side of the International Date Line from Hawai‘i. It is one of the first nations to enter tomorrow—both literally and figuratively. Not only is it in the first time zone west of the dateline, but it is likely to be one of the first nations on Earth to fall victim to climate change. As the oceans rise and extreme weather events become more frequent, this fragile nation clinging to the edge of the world will become uninhabitable, its water supply contaminated by salt water even before the low-lying islands disappear beneath the waves.

I met with the president of Kiribati and asked him how he felt about the future. He replied, “It’s not just about the polar bears. It’s also about the people.” That really struck home with me. I wondered how I would feel if it was England, my country—the places where I had been born, grown up, gone to school, got married and raised children—that would soon be gone forever. So I decided to do something about it.

A friend of mine uses a great quote in his e-mail footer: “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has,” a quote from the famous anthropologist Margaret Mead (1901–78). I truly believe that our every thought, word and deed makes a difference. On a practical level, the degradation of the Earth has generally not occurred through a few major disasters. It has happened as the result of thoughtless decisions taken day after day, year after year, by most of the billions of humans alive on the planet. But likewise, we can start to allow the Earth to heal, by doing the right thing day after day, year after year.

And I believe that there is a ripple effect—both directly and spiritually. When we do the right thing, other people will notice and be influenced to do the same. And because we are all connected, the new, better ways will become the norm. By being the change we want to see in the world, to quote Gandhi, we can change the culture of carelessness to one of awareness. I can see this movement growing. We are raising our collective consciousness, and each and every one of us needs to continue doing that for the sake of our future.
If You Go Down to the Beach Today…

Interview with Edo Heinrich-Sanchez

In 1992, Edo Heinrich-Sanchez cleaned up a beach in Okinawa, Japan, teaming up with fellow volunteers on the island. They used the Okinawan word for community participation, “Yuimaru,” as a starting point to launch the Okinawa International Clean Beach Club (OICBC) that same year, organizing volunteer cleanups through their I Love Okinawa Campaign® and coordination of the Ryukyu ICC (International Coastal Cleanup Day) and other activities. In the first year, 70 volunteers hauled away truckloads of trash. Currently there are thousands of active volunteers in Okinawa alone, and a variety of ways to get involved in beach cleanups. In 1995, OICBC members established Okinawa O.C.E.A.N. (Ocean Culture & Environment Action Network), an NPO that runs a range of activities and awareness campaigns to address marine environmental problems. This year marks 25 years since the launch of the International Coastal Cleanup by the Ocean Conservancy, which is partnered with UNEP (the United Nations Environment Programme).
SGI Quarterly: How did O.C.E.A.N. start?

Edo Heinrich-Sanchez: When I moved to Okinawa in 1990, I used to go to a small beach in Cape Maeda close to where I was working. One day I went there to have my lunch, but someone had been there first and left their garbage on my spot. I became angry when I noticed this and, of course, I took the garbage with me. I decided to clean up a little bit more after that, and I kept noticing more and more.

I went to that beach every day for three months, and eventually I realized that I needed to partner with somebody. I met a local hamlet shop staff who said her nephew spoke English and was also trying to clean up. I immediately went to meet him. After a few meetings, and many beers, we decided to call people up. So the Okinawa International Clean Beach Club was started. We were hoping to do that just a couple of times so we would have the beach cleaned. That was almost 20 years ago.

We started discovering different layers of things that needed to be worked on—such as local awareness and coastal management. It all comes down to awareness, motivation and budget. The person who plants seeds of awareness will really affect what is happening on our islands.

We get a lot of garbage from other countries. Our trash ends up in Hawai’i! It is the whole problem of our “throwaway” society. When it comes to garbage disposal, things are still pretty prehistoric. The thinking is: “Let’s dig a big hole, dump it here, and cover it up,” like a cat, or “Let’s just burn it.” There is a huge gap between what we can do and what we are willing to do. When things are out of sight, people think it’s OK, but the Pacific, for instance, has become a plastic soup, which is affecting us. How garbage and toxins are entering the food chain is just starting to become apparent.

SGIQ: Which projects that you have started have most raised awareness about the oceans?

EH-S: When we started Okinawa O.C.E.A.N., we needed to partner with government and and the ICC from September. It has become fashionable, and people want to go out and clean. There has been a huge budget provided for Okinawa Prefecture in Japan’s Green New Deal to clean up the garbage and process it. I am happy to say our organization is now serving as one of the advisers for the project.

Awareness of how we are connected by the ocean is needed. We hope to bring attention to the important aspects of biodiversity in Okinawa and the Kuroshio Current. This current brings warm tropical water into collision with the Oyashio Current, which runs north to south, and the combination of the nutrients and plankton where they meet creates a major fishing ground that is a huge protein source for Japan. Okinawa and the Ryukyu Islands are also the location of one of the most diverse coral reef systems in the world, and Okinawa is a major diving area.

The International Coastal Cleanup is coming up to 25 years old. People are now taking part all over the world. We need to be able to guarantee that children can grow up with clean beaches and healthy oceans. Life’s a “clean” beach! And then you sail on...
Fifteen years ago, I traveled from my home country of Germany to Namibia, in southern Africa, intending to take a short holiday before becoming a PhD student. Instead I met my future husband who worked as a game ranger in the most remote parts of the country. Struggling to find work and obtain legal status, I soon lost sight of my hopes to continue my university education. At the time I was the only SGI member in Namibia, living in splendid isolation on the Skeleton Coast with my husband. I managed to set up my own business as an environmental knowledge consultant working on contract for the Namibian government and several environmental NGOs.

My dream to return to school resurfaced, and in 2002 I enrolled as a PhD student at the University of Cape Town in South Africa. That year I had the opportunity to support the SGI environmental exhibition “Seeds of Change,” during the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. The exhibition highlights the Earth Charter, a statement of ethical principles for a sustainable world, and through supporting the exhibition I made the determination to continue to promote the values expressed in the Charter through my work.

My research explored the space between environmental conservation, information technology and ethics. I became increasingly aware of the tension between the needs of society and the threats people pose to their environment. Western thought tends to regard human beings and nature as separate—to the extent that some believe that human beings are bad for nature. In contrast, Buddhism regards life and its environment as deeply interconnected. As a Buddhist I felt that it was no coincidence that I found myself living in a former German colony. I really wanted to repay my debt of gratitude to the country I now call home.

In 2008, with hopes of contributing more directly to society, my husband and I relocated to the harbor town of Walvis Bay. The Namibian coast is situated in the center of the Benguela Current marine ecosystem, which stretches from the Cape of Good Hope in the south all the way to southern Angola. The Benguela Current supports an important global reservoir of biodiversity and biomass of plankton, fish, seabirds and marine mammals. Many of the coastal regions are still pristine and amazingly beautiful. Against all odds, I was then accepted as a postdoctoral fellow at the Marine Research Institute of the University of Cape Town, which conducts cutting-edge research in the field of fisheries management in the Benguela region and supports a holistic approach to fisheries management.

In fisheries management there has always been a strong focus on mathematics and natural sciences to determine fishing quotas. In the face of overfishing, climate change and coastal poverty, however, it has become clear that there is a very important human dimension to fisheries that past approaches have failed to address. My work, in a transdisciplinary research environment, is about clarifying these human dimensions. I speak to many different people including scientists, government officials, fishers and community representatives in order to get a better understanding of the issues. How do people think and feel about fish and fishing? What are their values and goals? Most importantly, how can these perspectives be brought together?

To me the ocean is an amazing space. The sea can be terrifying, nourishing, beautiful and destructive. For those who live inland it can seem like a world far removed from everyday life. For the fishers I meet, the sea is not separate from their lives but central to them. For me, the Buddhist concept of the oneness of self and the environment and the notion that nothing can exist in isolation provide the philosophical basis for my research toward a holistic approach to fisheries management that can help bring human society back into harmony with nature.
Ninety percent of the goods we use are transported by sea at some stage. Japan’s busiest seaport (Nagoya) alone, for example, sees some 200 million tons of cargo moving through it annually. My job involves installing software on ships that assesses ships’ stability, which ensures they can be loaded safely, and training crew members to use this software. A few years ago, I could not have imagined I’d ever find myself working in marine technology and engineering.

My work experience in Japan, after moving here from the Philippines in 2000, was in factories and as a telemarketer. At the beginning of 2003, I was in the process of separating from my Japanese husband, jobless and heavily in debt. Fortunately, a friend introduced me to the president of the company I currently work for. Despite my depressed state, he saw some potential in me and took me on as a part-time trainee employee. Around the same time I was introduced by friends to the practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

My new job was more challenging than I had anticipated, and I soon felt like quitting. As well as my own lack of experience and confidence, I also felt ostracized by the other employees. Outside of work, several of my relatives and friends seemed to have turned against me after my decision to become a Buddhist, and so I was considering quitting Buddhism as well. I felt alone and helpless. Reading through some SGI magazines, though, I was moved by the experiences of several people who had overcome difficulties much greater than mine. I realized how cowardly and weak-willed I was being.

With a renewed sense of determination to uncover my potential and self-worth, I reapplied myself to my job. The people with whom I work are English-speaking ships’ officers from different countries hired to run the newly built vessels in which we install our software. I realized that there were often misunderstandings and tensions that arose between our clients and the company through miscommunication as a result of language differences. I found I was able to establish an understanding with clients and resolve many of the problems. As a result of the positive feedback the company began to receive, I was offered a full-time position.

I applied myself to studying to improve my skills, and my Japanese coworkers became my allies, helping me with technical issues. We began to work as a team, consolidating our efforts and ideas and motivating each other.

Talking about these unimaginable changes with my fellow SGI members, I realized that it was the change in me—bringing out my courage, perseverance and patience—that had led to the changes in my workplace.

SGI President Ikeda has written that when a ship is caught in a storm, the best thing to do is to face the waves head-on. In the same way, we need to confront our problems with strength and hope. The ocean for me symbolizes the wide and deep expanse of life’s eternal challenges. As we travel across this ocean, leaving the shallow waters of fear and foolishness, we are able to purify and develop our lives, gaining knowledge, experience and a sense of life’s profundity. The beauty of the ocean lies in the vast mysteries that lie beneath its surface—the immense potential we all possess. Without the will to explore this, to confront challenges and delve into ourselves, we will never be able to experience these wonders.

I feel a huge sense of gratitude for the encouragement I have received from members of the SGI and SGI President Ikeda, which has helped me courageously set sail on the ocean of my life.

Creating Stability

By Elizabeth Penioso Pernites, Philippines and Japan
In recent years there has been a growing chorus of calls for a world free from nuclear weapons. The Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference scheduled for this May will be a crucial test of the international community’s ability to unite toward this goal.

Two keys to realizing a breakthrough will be creating institutional frameworks for pledges of non-use of nuclear weapons and establishing clear norms for their prohibition.

We should work, based on the existing NPT system, to expand the frameworks defining a legal obligation not to use nuclear weapons, in this way laying the institutional foundations for reducing their role in national security, while establishing international norms for their eventual prohibition. This can challenge the thinking that justifies nuclear weapons—the willingness to eliminate others for the sake of one’s own objectives—clearing the way for their abolition.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has stated that nuclear weapons are immoral and should not be accorded any military value. As this indicates, nuclear weapons are not only an absolute evil, entirely impermissible from a humanitarian perspective; they epitomize the military spending that continues to absorb vast amounts of the world’s limited human and economic resources—resources that are needed to respond to the common challenges facing humankind, such as poverty and environmental destruction. Their continued existence represents a fundamental threat to humanity.

Today, the thought of the possession, much less the use, of chemical or biological weapons inspires widespread revulsion in the international community. We need to give concrete form to a similar recognition regarding nuclear weapons, which are undoubtedly the most inhumane of all.

As a concrete step toward this, I urge that the Statute of the International Criminal Court be amended to define the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons as a war crime. The objective here is obviously not to punish the actual use of nuclear weapons but to establish a clear norm that such use is always and under any circumstance unacceptable. This could in turn open the way to the eventual adoption of a convention comprehensively banning nuclear weapons.

An indispensable aspect of this effort must be a redefinition of security policies. The nuclear-weapon states must develop a shared vision of a world without nuclear weapons and break free from the spell of deterrence—the illusory belief that security can somehow be realized through threats of mutual destruction and a balance of terror. A new kind of thinking is needed, one based on working together to reduce threats and creating ever-expanding circles of physical and psychological security until these embrace the entire world.

In this context I urge the nuclear-weapon states to undertake the following three commitments at this May’s NPT Review Conference and to work to fully implement them by 2015:

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On January 26, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda published his annual Peace Proposal, titled “Toward a New Era of Value Creation,” marking the 35th anniversary of the founding of the SGI. The following editorial is based on the proposal, focusing on its core theme of achieving a world without nuclear weapons. The full text of the Peace Proposal can be found at www.sgi.org
1. To reach a legally binding agreement to extend negative security assurances—the undertaking not to use nuclear weapons against any of the non-nuclear-weapon states fulfilling their NPT obligations.

2. To initiate negotiation on a treaty codifying the promise not to use nuclear weapons against each other.

3. Where nuclear-weapon-free zones have yet to be established, as a bridging measure, to declare these as nuclear non-use regions.

Declaring nuclear non-use regions would encourage progress toward global denuclearization. It could be part of a comprehensive system to prevent the proliferation of all weapons of mass destruction and forestall the dire possibility of nuclear terrorism. The key aim would be to encourage shared efforts to reduce threats, which would in turn reduce motivations for countries to develop or acquire nuclear weapons.

If progress can be made toward these goals, it will make even more obvious the benefits of participating in existing frameworks, as opposed to the further deepening of isolation on the outside. Overlapping assurances of physical and psychological security can encompass not only countries relying on the nuclear umbrellas of nuclear-weapon states, but also North Korea and Iran, as well as countries such as India, Pakistan and Israel that are currently not part of the NPT framework.

None of this will be easy. But no matter how great the divide between our ideals and reality, there is no need to give up hope or accept this with resignation. Instead, the ordinary citizens of the world should come together to create a new reality. The prohibitions on land mines and cluster weapons that have been realized in recent years are the fruit of such solidarity.

To quote U.S. President John F. Kennedy: “There is no single, simple key to this peace—no grand or magic formula to be adopted by one or two powers. Genuine peace must be the product of many nations, the sum of many acts.”

We must remember that there is always a way, a path to the peak of even the most towering and forbidding mountain. Even when a sheer rock face looms before us, we should refuse to be disheartened, and instead continue the patient search for a way forward.

What is most strongly required is the imagination that can appreciate the present crises as an opportunity to fundamentally transform the direction of history. Mustering the force of inner will and determination, we can convert challenges into the fuel for positive change.

Every year, SGI President Daisaku Ikeda publishes a peace proposal which explores the interrelation between core Buddhist concepts and the diverse challenges global society faces in the effort to realize peace and human security. Visit www.daisakuikeda.org

Building an Era of Human Dignity

The following are some of the further points and proposals raised by Mr. Ikeda.

Expand employment opportunities, in particular for young people, and stabilize employment in the developing world in accordance with the Global Jobs Pact adopted by the International Labor Organization (ILO) in June 2009.

Establish a task force dedicated to promoting decent work and the Global Jobs Pact under the G20 umbrella.

Promote education for girls: girls’ education has a crucial impact on all aspects of human development. All the objectives of the Millenium Development Goals, such as alleviating poverty and hunger, involve and affect women. In this sense, gender equality and the empowerment of women hold the key to regaining momentum toward the achievement of those goals.

Establish an internationally administered fund dedicated to realizing a better future for women, a portion of developing countries’ debts to be forgiven and the equivalent amount allocated to girls’ education.

Protect the lives and living conditions of children: schools should function as a refuge to protect children from various threats—as strongholds of human security—and become a venue for fostering children as protagonists of a new culture of peace.

Empower children as agents of change rather than simply affording them protection.
Action for Nuclear Abolition

SGI organizations around the world have been taking part in activities to raise awareness about the necessity for nuclear abolition in the run-up to the 2010 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference to be held in New York in May. In the months of January and February this year, Soka Gakkai youth in Japan hosted a series of lectures and events to support this effort.

In Hiroshima, the exhibition “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit” opened at the Soka Gakkai Hiroshima Peace Center on January 22. On view along with the exhibition panels were items recovered from the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Guests at the opening ceremony included Mr. Hur Duck-haeng, Consul-General of the Republic of Korea in Hiroshima, and Dr. Shizuteru Usui, president of Japanese Physicians for the Prevention of Nuclear War.

Soka Gakkai youth members also organized one of a series of peace lectures at the Josei Toda International Center in Tokyo on February 1, titled “Toward Nuclear Abolition: Now Is the Time to Stand Up for Peace.” The guest lecturer for the event was Keiko Nakamura, secretary-general of Peace Depot, an NGO specializing in peace research and education. Ms. Nakamura noted that nuclear weapons issues are not simply a matter of international politics but a question of concern and contemplation for every citizen. She emphasized that aiming to get rid of all nuclear weapons is not enough, but that what is necessary is to create a broad understanding that nuclear weapons do not offer security.

On February 8, Soka Gakkai youth members in Nagasaki hosted a lecture by Dr. David Krieger, president of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation. In his talk, titled “A Message to Youth: Live to Your Full Capacity and Save the Planet,” Dr. Krieger stressed that as long as people continue to live under the threat of nuclear weapons, human security cannot be guaranteed. In 2002, Dr. Krieger and SGI President Ikeda published a compilation of their dialogues titled Choose Hope: Your Role in Waging Peace in the Nuclear Age. Making reference to his collaboration with Mr. Ikeda, Dr. Krieger said, “We espoused the principle of choosing hope, rather than succumbing to ignorance, apathy or despair. Hope gives rise to action, and action, in turn, gives rise to hope. Our shared hope includes the goal of building a more peaceful world, free of nuclear weapons—a daunting but essential goal. I stand with Daisaku Ikeda in choosing hope. I’m sure that you stand with him as well.”

Soka Gakkai youth throughout Japan have been conducting a petition campaign calling for the abolition of nuclear weapons. Signatures will be presented during the NPT Review Conference in May.

SGI-South Africa Receives Gandhi Award

SGI-South Africa received an award from The Gandhi Remembrance Organization on January 31 in recognition of its contributions to the community. The award was presented at a ceremony at Tolstoy Farm, near Johannesburg, where Gandhi developed his nonviolence philosophy in the early 1900s. The event coincided with the scattering of the last remaining ashes of Gandhi off the coast of Durban.
Art Exhibitions in Malaysia

Soka Gakkai Malaysia (SGM) hosted “Guangzhou Art Sensation: An Exhibition by Renowned Guangzhou Artists” at the Wisma Kebudayaan SGM Center in Kuala Lumpur from December 13–27.

The exhibition celebrated the 35th anniversary of Sino-Malaysian diplomatic relations. It was jointly organized by SGM, the Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in Malaysia, the Malaysia-China Friendship Association, Guangzhou Federation of Literacy and Art Circles and the Guangzhou People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries.

Dr. Hou Kok Chung, deputy minister of higher education, presided over the opening ceremony on December 13. Approximately 800 attended. A Chinese ink painting workshop was held in conjunction with the showing.

From December 27 to January 3, “The Differing Faces of Southeast Asia” exhibition was shown at Wisma Kebudayaan. The collection featured the work of Chia Hoy Sai, including his oil and pencil portraits of people of various ethnic groups such as the Karen, Akka, Batak and Hmong.

Mr. Chia spent many years traveling throughout Southeast Asia and living in remote communities with different ethnic groups. His work conveys his hope for a multicultural society that embraces all ethnicities. A talk chaired by Mr. Chia was held in conjunction with the exhibition opening.

Faith and Development in Southeast Asia

An SGI representative participated in a workshop on “Global Development and Institutions Inspired by Faith in Southeast Asia” from December 14–15, co-organized by the Berkeley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University, Washington DC, and the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), and held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

The workshop, the latest in a series of six regional meetings aimed at “mapping” the involvement of faith-based organizations in development work, was attended by 20 individuals from different countries in Southeast Asia representing a wide range of organizations from Muslim, Christian and Buddhist traditions.

Participants shared insights gained and challenges faced in tackling development and humanitarian projects as faith-based organizations. They considered unique elements of such groups, such as an ability to reach the poor through an often preestablished local presence. The importance of providing unconditional assistance with no link to proselytizing was repeatedly stressed, as was the need to move away from institutional solutions such as the setting up of orphanages. The particular challenges to their operations caused by current levels of suspicion toward Muslim humanitarian organizations was a recurrent theme.

The need for dialogue and coordination among religious groups, with a focus on strengthening interfaith action for social justice, was discussed. Specific areas considered during the workshop included conflict resolution and issues relating to the needs and rights of children.

Guam Celebrates SGI Day

Guam SGI members gathered in Tamuning on January 16 to mark the anniversary of the SGI’s founding on the island 35 years ago on January 26, 1975. A monument commemorating the founding was unveiled in Tamuning Park. Guam Governor Felix P. Camacho declared January 2010 International World Peace Month and January 26 International World Peace Day.

Commemorating Martin Luther King Jr.

SGI-USA members participated in the Los Angeles Kingdom Day Parade in California on January 18, which commemorates Martin Luther King Jr. Day. Some 700 SGI youth from throughout Southern California took part, braving heavy rain. SGI-USA has participated in this parade for close to 20 years.
Ikeda Center’s Dialogue Forum on John Dewey

The Ikeda Center for Peace, Learning, and Dialogue in Boston, Mass., USA held its Sixth Annual Ikeda Forum for Intercultural Dialogue on November 14, titled “John Dewey, Daisaku Ikeda, and the Quest for a New Humanism.” The forum marked the 150th anniversary of Dewey’s birth.

An introductory lecture from Steven Rockefeller, professor emeritus of religion at Middlebury College, remarked on the shared aspirations of Dewey and Ikeda: “As religious humanists . . . they are concerned to break down the dualism of the sacred and the secular, the religious life and everyday life.”

Professor Larry Hickman, director of the Center for Dewey Studies and professor of philosophy, Southern Illinois University, explained that both philosophers point to paths of transformation that might be described as “guidelines, not blueprints,” since this process of adjusting or finding a balance between ideological extremes is, for both Dewey and Ikeda, ultimately a very individual one.

Building on this theme, Gonzalo Obelleiro, doctoral student of the Program of Philosophy and Education at Teachers College, Columbia University, said that personal and social growth need to be worked out in the actual conditions of every moment. Charlene Haddock Seigfried, professor of philosophy, Purdue University, commented that both Ikeda and Dewey speak of transcendence that is situated here in “the phenomenal world” and achieved through social engagement.

Haiti Relief Efforts

Soka Gakkai Vice President Kenji Yoshigo visited Jean Claude Bordes, Chargé d’Affaires at the Embassy of the Republic of Haiti in Tokyo, Japan, on January 15 to pledge a contribution of 3 million yen (US$32,900) toward government-organized relief activities for the earthquake that hit Haiti on January 12.

SGI-Dominican Republic (SGI-DR) members donated 2,400 bottles of water, canned food, powdered milk and crackers to the NPO Socio-Cultural Movement of Haitian Workers (MOSCTHA). Four SGI-DR members, including two doctors, traveled to Haiti with MOSCTHA’s team to assist with the provision of emergency medical assistance. SGI-Venezuela also made a donation of foodstuffs, diapers and sanitary towels through the Venezuelan Red Cross.

In addition, SGI-USA donated US$10,000 to the American Red Cross International Response Fund and held extended prayer sessions for the repose of the victims. On January 18, SGI-Hong Kong contributed HK$200,000 (US$25,750) to the Hong Kong Committee for UNICEF in support of relief activities. On January 22, Taiwan Soka Association donated 1 million Taiwanese dollars (US$31,420) through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and on February 10, SGI-Thailand made a donation of THB1,274,691 (US$38,340) through Thailand’s Ministry of Culture.

During ceremonies held in Japan to commemorate the victims of the massive Kobe earthquake which occurred on January 17, 1995, Soka Gakkai members offered special prayers for the victims of the Haiti earthquake.

Recycling Trash for Groceries

Singapore Soka Association (SSA), together with other religious organizations, participated in the recycling project “Clean Up South West” on January 17. Started by Singapore’s South West Community Development Council, the project aims to engage residents in a “trash for groceries” system. Items such as newspapers and clothing are redeemed for groceries, which are then distributed to low-income families and individuals.

Cultural Festival Held in Macau

SGI-Macau held a cultural festival at the Macao Polytechnic Institute on January 10. The festival, part of celebrations commemorating the 10th anniversary of Macau’s return to China, included chorus and dance performances and was attended by various government representatives from the Macau Special Administrative Region (SAR).
At the Parliament of the World’s Religions

SGI representatives from Australia, Japan and the United States participated in the Parliament of the World’s Religions, the world’s largest interfaith gathering, held in Melbourne, Australia, from December 3–9.

An SGI-sponsored panel discussion on December 7, titled “Nuclear Weapons Abolition: Responses and Advocacy by Religious Communities,” raised the call for moral leadership by the world’s religions in the effort to abolish nuclear weapons. Speakers included Dr. Sue Wareham, former president of the Medical Association for Prevention of War (Australia) and board member of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), and Ibrahim Ramey, director of human and civil rights of the Muslim American Society’s Freedom Foundation.

SGI Program Director for Peace Affairs Kimiaki Kawai outlined the organization’s efforts to strengthen grassroots momentum toward nuclear abolition through its “People’s Decade for Nuclear Abolition” initiative, stating that it is imperative that civil society organizations take the lead in generating a global groundswell of public opinion and getting this message heard by policy makers.

Other speakers included Paul Morris, professor of religious studies at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand, who contributed a Jewish perspective, and the Rev. Dr. Wes Campbell, chaplain to the University of Melbourne for the Uniting Church in Australia.

On December 6, during another panel on nuclear disarmament, Judge Christopher Weeramantry, former judge of the International Court of Justice, spoke about the threats posed by nuclear weapons, stating that the only way to abolish nuclear weapons is to generate public consciousness of this agenda. SGI Executive Director for Peace Affairs Hirotsugu Terasaki concurred, saying that the time is right for increased efforts toward nuclear abolition in the run-up to the May 2010 NPT Review Conference.

The SGI’s antinuclear exhibition “From a Culture of Violence to a Culture of Peace: Transforming the Human Spirit” was shown at the Melbourne Convention Centre during the Parliament.

The Parliament of the World’s Religions, which takes place in a different location every five years, brings together over 8,000 representatives of a wide array of faiths to build bridges and address global issues.

Min-On Cosponsors Folk Dance Concert

The SGI-affiliated Min-On Concert Association cosponsored the 2009 Mekong-Japan folk dance concert, hosted by the Japan Asia Fine Arts Association, on December 10 at the Tokyo International Forum, Japan. Dance companies from Southeast Asia performed traditional court and folk dances. The event was attended by Japanese Crown Prince Naruhito and ambassadors from eight countries.

“Seeds of Change” in Italy

SGI-Italy hosted the “Seeds of Change: The Earth Charter and Human Potential” sustainability exhibition in Carrara, Italy, from December 9–17. At the opening, a city council member spoke about the power of dialogue to resolve conflict. The exhibition highlights the potential one individual has to make a difference to global issues. Over 3,300 people attended.
On May 3, 1960, Daisaku Ikeda was inaugurated as the third president of the Soka Gakkai. He was 32 at the time. Ikeda had encountered the Soka Gakkai and its second president, Josei Toda, in August 1947, at one of the organization’s discussion meetings to which he had been brought by a school friend. In the physical and spiritual chaos that followed Japan’s defeat in 1945, Ikeda was very consciously seeking a teaching—and, if possible, a teacher—to provide direction and guidance. For his part, Toda was actively engaged in sharing the confidence he had gained in the validity of Buddhism through his awakening in prison [see January 2010 SGI Quarterly], and was seeking someone to whom he could entrust the sense of mission he felt in its entirety.

Starting from this meeting, Toda and Ikeda forged a profound collaborative relationship, one that conformed with the ideal described in Buddhism as the spiritual unity of mentor and disciple. Ikeda supported Toda across the full spectrum of his activities, eventually feeling compelled to stop attending college due to the demands on his time and energies. Toda instead tutored him one-on-one before the start of each weekday and on weekends, sharing with the young man his vision of a peaceful society realized through the promotion of Buddhist practice and ideals. Ikeda proudly refers to these study sessions as “Toda University.”

In these early years of the Soka Gakkai movement, Toda consistently assigned the young Ikeda the most challenging tasks, such as supporting local groups whose morale and propagation efforts were languishing. Ikeda responded to his mentor’s expectations by producing concrete outcomes that had a transformative effect on the organization as a whole. These experiences honed his skills in offering personal encouragement, inspiring people to transform their lives through altruistic religious practice.

Starting from 1955, Toda began encouraging members to run for public office. Toda deemed this kind of engagement necessary in light of Nichiren Buddhism’s commitment to reflecting Buddhist principles, such as respect for human dignity, in the actual practices of society and politics. He was also motivated by the wartime experience of the organization, which had been violently suppressed by an ideology that fused militarist fascism and fanatical worship of the Japanese emperor. He saw the organization’s political involvement as necessary to protect freedom of religion. Following one election campaign in Osaka in 1957, Ikeda was held responsible for the acts of a few individual Gakkai members and was charged with violation of election laws by the authorities. After a drawn-out legal proceeding, he was found innocent of all charges in January 1962.

Following Toda’s death in 1958, a movement arose to nominate Ikeda as the organization’s third president. One of his first actions upon becoming president was to travel outside of Japan, making visits to North and South America in October 1960. In 1961, Ikeda traveled to Hong Kong, Sri Lanka, India, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia, with visits to Europe, the Middle East and Oceania following in the next few years. At this time, membership outside of Japan was still very limited, consisting mostly of Japanese emigrants and businesspeople. In these travels, Ikeda was acting on his mentor’s often expressed conviction that the principles of Nichiren Buddhism were universal and could benefit people of all cultural backgrounds and worldviews.

In 1964, Ikeda began writing his serialized novel, The Human Revolution,
which details Toda’s struggles to reconstruct the Soka Gakkai after his release from prison at the end of World War II. It opens with a scathing condemnation of war and militarism that offers a clear context for the movement’s objectives: “Nothing is more barbarous than war. Nothing is more cruel . . . Nothing is more pitiful than a nation being swept along by fools.” Ikeda has often described this and its sequel, *The New Human Revolution*, as his life’s work.

Under Ikeda’s leadership, the organization in Japan expanded rapidly, reaching a membership of 3 million households in 1962 and approximately 7.5 million in 1970. By this time, Ikeda was convinced that the foundations for the movement had been firmly established; it was also evident to him that an organization of this scale could not function in isolation from society at large. In a speech given on May 3, 1970, he proposed a series of changes that would reorient the organization and its activities. In particular, he emphasized the function of religion as a source of cultural creativity benefiting society as a whole.

Education and other secular concerns were a natural focus for the Soka Gakkai given its origins as an organization of educators seeking to promote founding president Makiguchi’s philosophy of value-creating education. In 1967, Ikeda founded Soka High School in Tokyo, followed by a full range of nondenominational educational institutions including Soka University in 1971 and the four-year liberal arts college Soka University of America in 2001.

The organization’s youth division launched a number of important initiatives for peace in the 1970s. In 1974–75, for example, they collected more than 10 million signatures on petitions calling for the abolition of war and nuclear weapons; these were delivered to the United Nations by Ikeda in January 1975.

Ikeda had founded the Min-On Concert Association in 1963 and the Fuji Art Museum in 1973. With the full-fledged launch of peace activities by the youth membership in the 1970s, the three pillars of the organization’s activities—peace, culture, education—were all given concrete form.

The essence of the Soka Gakkai’s practice of Buddhist humanism under Ikeda’s leadership has been the promotion of the process of fundamental transformation—human revolution—in each individual, with the confidence that this has the power to change society in meaningful and positive ways.

Soka Gakkai History Timeline:

1928 Jan. 2 Daisaku Ikeda is born in Ota Ward, Tokyo, Japan, to a family of seaweed farmers.

1947 Aug. 24 Ikeda joins the Soka Gakkai and begins practicing Nichiren Buddhism.

1956 Jul. 8 The Soka Gakkai fields candidates in national elections for the first time, winning 3 seats.

1957 Jul. 3 Ikeda is arrested and detained on suspicion of violating election laws in Osaka.

1960 May 3 Ikeda is inaugurated as third Soka Gakkai president.

1960 Oct. 2 As a first step to transform the Soka Gakkai into a global movement, Ikeda visits the U.S., Canada and Brazil.

1962 Jan. 25 The Osaka District Court exonerates Ikeda of July 1957 election law violation allegation.

1962 Jan. 27 The Institute of Oriental Philosophy (IOP) is established in Tokyo, to conduct research and promote dialogue among different civilizations and faith traditions.

1963 Oct. 18 The Min-On Concert Association is established in Tokyo, Japan, to promote cultural exchange.

1964 Nov. 17 The Komeito or “Clean Government” Party is established as an independent political party.

1964 Dec. 2 Ikeda commences writing *The Human Revolution*, a novelized account of the Soka Gakkai’s history, in Okinawa.

1967 Nov. 18 Tokyo Soka Junior and Senior High Schools are founded in Kodaira, Tokyo.

1971 Apr. 2 Soka University is founded in Hachioji, Tokyo.

1973 May 3 The Fuji Art Museum is founded.

1975 Jan. 10 Soka Gakkai youth present the UN secretary-general with 10 million signatures supporting the abolition of war and nuclear weapons.
What does the ocean mean to you?

**Victor:** The ocean is the single most important biome on our planet and regulates our global climate system and biogeochemical cycles. It also provides food, allows trade between cultures and has been an inspiration for artists throughout history. To me, the ocean is a vast horizon of mystery and inspiration; but at the same time, paradoxically, it presents itself as a powerful force of nature that can pummel human endeavors and take life with no remorse. On a day-to-day basis, the ocean is a scientifically motivated research endeavor and fruitful resource for education about physics, chemistry, biology and life.

**Teruaki:** To imagine that the diversity of Earth’s life today originally derived from some single-celled organism from the ocean amazes me. The ocean remains a frontier of discovery and adventure even in this day and age. But when I go scuba diving, I simply relax and enjoy the beauty of Mother Nature.

What do you find most fascinating about your field?

**Victor:** The amazing thing about ocean science is how much we still don’t understand about how the dynamic and interrelated aspects of the larger puzzle come together. As a researcher, I am continuously fascinated by the constant spatial and temporal variations of the sea—from micro to global scales both horizontally and vertically, and from milliseconds to hundreds, even thousands, of years. My current research is focused on how ultraviolet radiation from the sun affects coral reef ecosystems and biogeochemical cycles.

**Teruaki:** The Earth is 70 percent water, and yet we understand so little about it! Currently I am studying the zooplankton ecology in the tropical waters of Malaysia. Zooplankton form the basis of the marine food web as a resource for consumers on higher levels of the food chain including fish. Research in the tropics is still limited, and I am interested in finding out the important roles each organism plays in the big picture.

How does your perspective as a Buddhist influence your approach to your work?

**Victor:** Being a Buddhist doesn’t really change my “approach” to work. Science is a profession that has clear quantitative approaches to resolving or deciphering natural phenomena. I think being a Buddhist only influences my motivation to conduct good science, and helps me broaden my research initiatives to cover applicable changes for the sake of humanity. Buddhism has allowed me to figure myself out, so that I can be a better scientist. I would say that my life mentor, Dr. Daisaku Ikeda, is more influential in my approach to work than Buddhism itself. He is a man of continuous action for peace, culture and education, and this has influenced my own actions as a scientist.

**Teruaki:** Practicing Buddhism inspires me to always challenge myself and be an example to others. The Buddhist concept of the oneness of life and its environment was a core value when I decided to pursue my studies related to the environment. This concept also teaches us to change our environment through self-motivated action. We continually need to self-reflect and muster the courage to take action.
What are the most enjoyable aspects of your work and what are the most challenging?

**Victor:** Initially, I wasn’t very interested in the science; it was out at sea where I found oceanography to be most exciting. Only later during my doctoral program did I start to think about the larger impact the science results could have on the world. For me, there is nothing quite like the smell of salt water in the air, the sound of waves gently or crushingly shaving the coastline, the sensation of floating in or on water, and the indescribable sunsets and sunrises. It’s a serene and humble feeling being close to or in water. I really enjoy collecting data in innovative ways, and it’s very exciting to then sit down in front of a computer to analyze it.

The most challenging aspect of my work is disseminating my research results to the broader community. It’s hard to compete for research funds and publish results. Sometimes it is also challenging to convince people that oceanography is a necessary endeavor.

**Teruaki:** I have always been intrigued by the workings of nature, how it keeps things in balance, and its innate ability to regenerate. I enjoy going out to sea and also going underwater. I also take pleasure in reaching out to the public and to the students through lectures and talks, and I try my best every time to convey the importance of the ocean as effectively as possible. Laboratory work could be time-consuming and exhausting, but I always get excited in anticipation of some interesting results or even a new discovery at the end of it. Conversely, it’s a challenge to overcome the discouragement of a failed experiment or unrequited hypothesis.

Why is oceanography important and what is one interesting current objective of the field?

**Victor:** Everything we do in daily life, no matter where you live, depends on this ocean to function properly—the water cycle, temperature circulation, carbon circulation, and so on. The hottest topic today is climate change: how will the warming of the ocean affect everything? On a more positive note, scientists are trying to find ways to harness the incredible amount of kinetic energy in the ocean, from waves to tides to currents.

**Teruaki:** The ocean also plays a major role in the carbon cycle as more carbon dioxide is being absorbed by photosynthetic ocean organisms compared to terrestrial plants. Experiments to increase the CO₂ uptake by these marine autotrophic organisms are being carried out in the hope of finding a solution to global warming. It is vital that human society become knowledgeable about the sea and why we should care for a healthy ocean.

What is one thing that concerns you about the state of the oceans?

**Victor:** I am really worried about our coastlines. Whatever happens on the coastlines will eventually affect the open sea as well. Even in the advanced economies many of the waterways are poorly regulated and directly flow out to sea. For far too long, many countries have relied on the massive volume of the ocean to naturally process various pollutants. And we are really beginning to see frightening results. On top of this, vast volumes of ocean are literally dying due to dramatic depletion and unbalancing of food webs from overfishing and pollution.

It is critical that every one of us reflect on our personal footprint in this world and make conscious efforts to limit our excesses.

**Teruaki:** The ocean is invariably interconnected with other ecosystems, and the impact on any one of them will form a chain reaction that ultimately affects the other. Exploitation, pollution and other human impacts on the ocean often transcend political boundaries. This makes separate, isolated efforts to resolve them unlikely to succeed. Ecological integrity is the shared interest and concern of all humankind, and any solution will require a strong sense of individual responsibility and commitment by each of us as inhabitants sharing this same planet. I feel we should all strive together in becoming “global citizens” with each one of us developing an active awareness of our commitment to humankind as a whole.
The Three Obstacles and Four Devils

Changing ourselves can be hard work. Anyone who has tried to stick to a New Year’s resolution knows that a decision to change even a simple aspect of their behavior for the better usually entails a determined struggle. Our lives seem to contain an innate resistance to change that is at least as strong as our desire to improve ourselves.

In Buddhism, such resistance is characterized as “obstacles” and “devilish functions,” which are a natural part of the dynamic workings of our lives.

The most profound positive transformation that human beings can undertake is encapsulated by the idea of “attaining Buddhahood.” This could be described as the process of expanding one’s capacity for compassion and making concern for the happiness of all people the core of one’s life—a challenge in terms of action as well as intention and awareness. The difficulties that confront a person progressing in this effort are described in the Nirvana Sutra as “the three obstacles and four devils.” The description of these obstacles and devils includes such things as karma and obstructions arising from greed, anger and foolishness. More broadly, they are the various kinds of difficulties that accompany any effort to bring about transformation.

In his writings, Nichiren (1222–82) quotes the great Chinese Buddhist scholar T’ien-t’ai (538–97) who developed a system of meditation, described in his work Great Concentration and Insight, to enable practitioners to perceive the true essence of life and attain Buddhahood. T’ien-t’ai writes, “As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge in confusing form, vying with one another to interfere . . . one should be neither influenced nor frightened by them.”

For T’ien-t’ai, these obstacles and devils were internal obstructions and distractions arising in the mind of practitioners as their Buddhist practice developed. For Nichiren, whose adult life was a continuous series of persecutions and confrontations with the repressive social structures of his time, these obstructions were concretely manifest in the very real opposition he and his disciples experienced on account of their beliefs.

Whether they appear externally or internally, these obstacles arise from the same source, what in Buddhism is termed “fundamental darkness.” This is a fundamental ignorance of the true enlightened nature of our lives, and is the source of all illusion and misery in the lives of human beings. It can manifest as dark, destructive impulses in ourselves or others or as an insidious pull toward feelings of complacency, discouragement, temptation or intimidation.

Nichiren, however, takes a positive view of the obstacles and devils, saying that when they appear, “the wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat.” This is because it is precisely by squarely confronting and triumphing over such negative functions that we are able to develop our lives, polish our character and ultimately manifest our enlightenment.

Life, in this sense, could be thought of as an ongoing process of striving for development, overcoming resistance and experiencing growth. Two qualities that are vital to this process are wisdom and courage—wisdom both to self-reflect and to recognize negative functions for what they are and not be influenced by them; courage to confront and not be defeated by these influences.

“There is no easy path to the realization of good,” writes SGI President Ikeda in his 2010 Peace Proposal. “We have no choice but to root ourselves firmly in reality, deliberately taking on difficult challenges, ceaselessly training and forging ourselves in the smelting furnace of the soul.” In this process of overcoming obstacles and devilish functions, we become, as he describes elsewhere, “protagonists of a ‘story’ of inner victory forged in the depths of [our] lives.” This is a goal at the very heart of Buddhism.
Founding Soka Gakkai president Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871–1944) was a forward-thinking geographer, educational theorist and religious reformer who lived and worked during the tumultuous early decades of Japan’s modern era.

Find out more about Tsunesaburo Makiguchi’s life and teachings at:

www.tmakiguchi.org/
The Soka Gakkai International (SGI) is a worldwide association of 82 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.