

QUESTION OF THE MONTH:
***'What was your greatest victory in 1996 and
what is your determination for 1997?'***

I accepted the opportunity to be a district men's division leader because last year started out for me as one of comfortable complacency. My 10-plus years of practice had hit a plateau. I had been active but was not pulling forward, so I accepted this responsibility. The new direction of the organization has helped me to recommit myself to the growth of the district and to reaching out to the community to build those bridges of friendship.

— CHUCK TURNER, Louisville, Ky.

My greatest victory this year (and it was a long time coming) was that I finally got tired of mistreating myself and of living in denial. I began to truly listen to my heart. Consequently, I committed to a lifelong dream of mine — to succeed as an actor. I joined a very challenging acting class and attracted the attention of some prominent people in my field. I have never felt this focused and hopeful, and I'm determined that 1997 be a year of conspicuous breakthrough in which I create roles in film and television that ultimately shine light on the human condition.

— RICHARD CASSELMAN, West Hollywood, Calif.

I successfully passed the Elementary Exam given this year by the SGI-USA. That was truly a wonderful thing for me. I was fortunate and had several other victories in 1996: retiring as a teacher from the state of Louisiana after 30 years; realizing a lifelong dream to move to the state of Florida; there being accepted as a middle school classroom teacher; and thus not having to give up one of my greatest loves, teaching children.

My determination in 1997 is to do more daimoku, concentrate on gongyo and to increase my faith, study and practice. I plan to use my talents as a teacher to advance the cause of kosen-rufu and try to create value.

— JOSEPH J. NECTOUX, Lake Mary, Fla.

My greatest victory in 1996 was leaving my job of 10-and-a-half years with the same company and moving into a new career in non-profit work. I felt my work in my prior job to be totally devoid of any real joy, especially since it wasn't contributing to kosen-rufu. It was very scary to move into a field where I have little experience and where the pay is less. My confidence in the Gohonzon combined with my passion for helping people enabled me to face my fears and overcome my karma. I now love my new job. I love it!

— MINA RHODEN, Marin County, Calif.

My 1996 determination was to have friendship with my only sister. After many years of painful separation, I was able to acknowledge and take responsibility for past actions that caused her to suffer and severed our relationship. I also overcame my judgmental attitude toward her lifestyle, and I finally apologized to her with hope for reconciliation. Though I have yet to receive her response (we've been writing), I feel the victory of my human revolution through the transformational power of the Gohonzon. This has been my greatest victory.

— REBECCA TOROSIAN, New York

One very satisfying victory for me in 1996 was to rid myself of a serious personal enemy: television. In January I decided that I should be able to defeat this depression-enhancer

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once and for all. Through chanting and action, I can confidently state that I no longer am remotely interested in television. Not only do I feel better, I have more time for worthwhile things. As a Buddhist and long-time business owner, time is a precious commodity. In 1997, I intend to use it wisely.

— ERIC J. THOMPSON, Portland, Ore.

My greatest victory was overcoming breast cancer: discovering the lump by accident, getting a mammogram that showed nothing, but having the Buddha wisdom to proceed. Some of the most significant guidance I received: “You must overcome this victoriously since we can be victorious in both life and death and show the validity of this practice with confidence that no prayer goes unanswered.” In the end, the lymph nodes were clear and no chemotherapy was necessary, only radiation treatments. Through daimoku, and from my leaders and friends, I learned what it means to fight at that crucial moment, and I am now fully recovered.

—IRIS HOFFMAN, Woodland Hills, Calif.

My greatest victory was receiving the Gohonzon on Sept. 13. I first encountered the practice almost three years ago, but it wasn't until the end of 1995 that I decided to become a member. It seemed that obstacle after obstacle arose in my pursuit to join the organization. Through sheer determination and lots of daimoku (along with the support of many wonderful members), I proudly received the Gohonzon along with other members.

As 1997 approaches, I have determined to develop my faith and practice and make them as strong as they can be.

— MICKY PIZARRO, New York

I am a 19-year-old sophomore at Iowa State University and have been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for just under a year. My greatest victory of the past year was overcoming, through Buddhist practice, the break-up of a long-term relationship. I am determined to practice and study strongly throughout the coming year, following the guidance of SGI President Ikeda to never give up, no matter what. I am also determined to build the SGI-USA on my campus and to share the benefits of this faith with everyone I know, advancing toward the dawn of the new century together.

—RYAN SCHWARTZ, Ames, Iowa

My resolution for 1996 was to become really rich. My greatest victory was that, in spite of not making my goal, I continued to fight my devils. (Sort of like working without a paycheck!) I had to spend a lot of money on health — mine, my son's, my mother's and my car's. Plus a lifelong friend died, and my best friend in faith moved 3,000 miles away. Through it all, I gave 100 percent of myself to activities in the SGI, my family and community. I cut expenses in creative ways, and I continued to strive for a cheerful attitude and victory at all times. Not giving up under the circumstances was a victory!

— NATALIE BLISS, Philadelphia

Thanks to all who responded!

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