

WING LEE, DALLAS
Applying What I've Learned From the SGI

Starting off alone in the United States, Wing Lee finds that always asking, 'How can I best contribute to kosen-rufu?' leads him along the right paths.

I attended SGI meetings with my mother when I was growing up in Hong Kong, but I didn't care much about the practice. Although I had seen time and again how my mother changed situations and overcame tremendous difficulties through her sincere prayers, I never had the desire to find out for myself the meaning of practice. I just relied on her to practice for me.

After talking about this with the general director of the SGI-HK (Hong Kong), my mother made the bold decision to send me to the United States to pursue a college education and, more important, to learn to be responsible for my life. She entrusted her only child — me — to the Gohonzon and to the Gakkai.

That was 10 years ago.

During college, I was fortunate to practice with my fellow SGI-USA members in Oklahoma and Texas. As I could not count on my mother to protect me anymore and I had no friends or relatives in the States, I felt overwhelmed. Fortunately, the SGI-HK sent my contact information to the SGI-USA, and local members reached me. It was a significant turning point in my life: I finally started to learn how to practice for myself.

Through attending activities, studying Buddhism, learning from President Ikeda's guidance and writings, and the kind encouragement of the SGI-USA members, I learned how to be responsible for my life, developing both a sense of appreciation and, most important, an understanding of why I practice.

I started to appreciate my mother's hard work raising money for my college education. I worked on campus while carrying a heavier-than-normal course load so I could finish my education and not burden her further. I still vividly recall my first job as a janitor, cleaning dormitories — through my Gakkai activities I had learned to do my best, no matter what, while continuing to chant for jobs where I could apply what I was learning. Soon I got a job as a computer lab assistant, then as a teaching assistant. I majored in information systems and management at the University of Texas at Austin, and earned a bachelor's degree in the fall of 1989 with a number of academic honors.

I received offers from several Fortune 500 companies before my graduation, despite my international student status and the economic slowdown. I had no prior work experience in the industry, so my decision was simply based on the question of "Where can I contribute to kosen-rufu the most?"

At the time, the SGI-USA had just purchased a beautiful culture center for Texas Joint Territory in Dallas. That helped me decide to take the position of systems analyst with a national retailer also located in Dallas. Later, I realized how protected I was when the recession of the early '90s led several companies I had talked with to lay off a number of employees.

Things were going well at work: I had supportive colleagues and was fortunate to be given different assignments that continued to broaden and deepen my technical horizon. Applying what I'd learned in the SGI, I always asked for more challenging work and, when given an assignment, exerted my best. Through my Buddhist practice, I learned to respect others, no matter who they were and how they might treat me. In the process, I made many new friends — some of them even attended SGI-USA meetings, culture festivals, exhibits

and symposia.

I felt that becoming a U.S. citizen would enable me to better support the world peace movement, and I mentioned to the recruiter when I accepted the job that citizenship was one of my goals. After working there for two-and-a-half years, I thought that it was time to initiate my U.S. Permanent Residency application. To my surprise, the human resources department advised me that it would be unfeasible for them to carry out all the requirements to sponsor my application.

Disappointed, I told this to my mother (who was visiting from Hong Kong). She immediately reminded me that we had overcome too many obstacles to be discouraged by this incident — a widow since I was seven, she had been forced out of my father's family after my grandparents transferred all of my father's assets to themselves. Then she ran into a friend who was practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism. From that day, through her sincere practice, we had continuous protection and my mother started a small but thriving business.

Now we started to chant for a job that would not only let me excel but could also let me show actual proof and contribute further to kosen-rufu. Soon after we made this determination, I was introduced to several headhunters and presented with promising opportunities. After a series of interviews, I was hired by a telecommunications company. After obtaining a written commitment to sponsor my U.S. residency (in addition to a decent raise), I turned in my two-week resignation at my old company. My manager was astounded and insisted that I let him work with senior management to appeal to the legal department. Although the legal department maintained its stance, I saw the results of my practice through the company's sincere efforts to retain me.

When I called my immigration attorney to advise him of my new job, he told me that I was supposed to have filed an application with the Immigration and Naturalization Service before any change. To make matters worse, the process would take about one month!

Since my resignation had been turned in and I was expected to report to the new company in two weeks, I found myself in a rather embarrassing situation. I chanted, then called my future and previous managers respectively. At the end of the first phone call, I was told that I could take as long as necessary to report to my new position. And at the end of the second phone call, I was asked to come back to work with full pay and benefits until I was ready to start my new job. What else could I ask for? Again, it was yet another actual proof of the practice.

Approval from the INS (to change jobs) came through at the end of the third week, and close to 40 people attended my farewell lunch. After exactly three years working there, I left the company with several awards and a letter of commendation from its president and CEO.

My new assignment was indeed exciting. My department specialized in the implementation of advanced distributed computing systems, and I was assigned to work in the technical architecture group — designing and creating components that form the foundation of large-scale distributed systems. It was a privilege to be assigned to this team, and I later found out that it was comprised exclusively of experts (with the exception of myself) in different fields.

I had to exert myself by spending many extra hours at the office to learn the new technologies and play catch-up. SGI President Ikeda has told us many times that youth is the time for building foundations. Only by overcoming mounting challenges, he has said, can we show actual proof of this practice. I was glad to be presented with this opportunity to solidify my foundation. Again, through the practice, I was protected by my peers and seniors alike at work — they were patient and willing to mentor me. Continuing my efforts to apply President Ikeda's guidance in my life, I developed sincere friendships and mutual

respect among my peers.

Since the work we do is pioneering, I have participated in various conferences and interacted with peers in the industry. Over the past two years, I have been invited to present our work at various highly regarded conferences in the industry and in colleges. In both instances, I found myself among much more senior speakers.

I was hired as a software engineer in the company. Over the course of the past three years, I have been presented with numerous awards and promoted to senior software engineer, then to lead software engineer. I am happy to report to you that I recently celebrated my third anniversary with my third promotion to lead architect. I am responsible for the strategic architectural direction and day-to-day functioning of the technical architecture group. Not only is the rate of my promotion pace-setting, but at the age of 29, I am also the youngest person in my rank.

Along with the promotions, my salary has more than doubled. Such financial benefits made owning a house feasible. I was very fortunate to share with my beloved mother the excitement of having my first house built. She came to the States to observe the groundbreaking and gave me invaluable input on its design and color coordination. It was indeed a gratifying experience for my mother, given the countless hardships she endured to raise me.

I have great neighbors, too: I recently traveled to San Jose for a week-long conference and found that my neighbor trimmed my lawn while I was away!

I am also very happy to report that in February 1996, I became a permanent resident of the United States.

When President Ikeda visited the United States in 1994, he mentioned that since America is so large, when it is not possible to physically visit the members easily, we should use the telephone to stay in touch. I feel that the advent of telecommunications can have a positive impact on kosen-rufu and fostering world peace. I enrolled in a graduate program in telecommunications management and have been maintaining a 4.0 grade point average. In addition, my company is paying the tuition and expenses.

President Ikeda once said, "When dealing with others, we should make them feel like they are in spring weather, but we should treat ourselves with the strictness of winter."

It is easy to be overwhelmed by a hectic schedule. Maintaining a balance of activities, work and school often becomes an interesting balancing act.

However, I have repeatedly found that by challenging myself to contribute as much as I can to kosen-rufu, by not using my hectic schedule as an excuse for not participating in activities, I can often be in rhythm and become more effective in tackling my day-to-day activities. Cause and effect are indeed absolute.

Looking back, by putting the practice and kosen-rufu as my prime focuses, I realize that everything that has happened has contributed to the momentous progression of my life. Both my mother and I are very grateful to President Ikeda for giving us the opportunity to practice the Daishonin's Buddhism and for providing the most wonderful organization in which to practice — the global family of the SGI. Without the sincere care and support from the members of the United States and Hong Kong, we simply could not be where we are today.

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