

VOICES: Through the course of your practice, how have you realized you held a prejudice of some sort, and how have you confronted it?

Members from L.A. #4 Joint Territory respond:

I have always felt a prejudice against practitioners of any organized religion due to my belief that the purpose of organized religion is to control people, not to support them, through tools such as fear and intimidation. Through my years of practice, as I have watched SGI President Ikeda travel from country to country, I have broadened my perspective. I have begun to understand the sincerity, love and respect people hold for the various religions that they practice and accept them as they are without judgment.

— KIM HAWKINS, Moreno Valley, Calif.

I've faced prejudice toward people who are conservative in their ideals — holding different political and religious views than mine. Through chanting and spending time with some of these people, I've had the opportunity to experience their Buddha nature. Before I began chanting, I would just sever relations and not try to overcome my prejudices. But thanks to President Ikeda's guidance and the example he sets through dialogues and friendships with people around the world, I have changed my attitude toward people who are different from me.

— CLARA GOOSENS, Moreno Valley, Calif.

Before I was a member of the SGI, I had a lot of prejudice against people. These stereotypes were reinforced during my job as a security officer, where you're trained to have stereotypical expectations of each race. However, through this practice I began to change my ways of thinking. Soon I began showing compassion for other people, other races. Through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I really appreciate people in their diversity — their different cultures and their different ways of thinking.

— LARRY RUBALCAVA, San Bernardino, Calif.

When I first began my practice, I had an experience with an inconsiderate SGI leader. My tendency was to hold a grudge against all leaders and thus the organization as well. But I continued to practice. Soon I realized that all of us, leaders or not, are human beings, vulnerable to making mistakes. Human nature causes us to do stupid things as well as good things. Now I understand that I must be a compassionate person, and I can understand these types of situations for what they are. After all, people are people — leaders or not.

— RAMON ORDAZ, Fontana, Calif.

I never even thought I had any prejudices until I started practicing this Buddhism. For me, just being able to see them allowed me to start overcoming them. The men's division reflects the diversity of this organization, and from the beginning of my practice, I have been involved in men's division activities. This has helped me confront many situations I avoided in the past. I feel that heartfelt communication is the key to overcoming prejudice.

— CURTIS MONSON, Hemet, Calif.

I had a wild life in the past. Throughout my practice, I have grown, cleaned up my act, stayed away from the drug scene and people into that. But not too long ago I saw some friends I knew in the past, and I felt embarrassed; I didn't want to be seen talking to

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them. Later on, I found out that one of them had been experiencing some really terrible things, and I thought, why didn't I tell him about practicing instead of worrying about whether someone would see me with him. I realize now that what I should have done is speak to them — "It was good seeing you, and this is what I am doing, and I've been practicing Buddhism." That's what I should have done. What I need to do is chant for those people that I shared part of my life with.

— ANGELA KILLEBREW, San Bernardino, Calif.

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