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Toward a Contributive Life

In March 1997, I celebrated my 11th year of practicing this Buddhism. In 1993, after a job-related injury, I had the opportunity to complete my bachelor's degree with hopes of one day finding a career in education. But two years later, with a degree in French from San Francisco State University, I was unemployed and my savings were rapidly disappearing. I mistook a relaxed attitude for confidence that I could resolve this situation with the Gohonzon — before things reached a critical stage.

As a graduation present, a friend in Denver sent me a plane ticket to visit. During my stay, I convinced myself to move there. At the time, I couldn't see that it was an emotional decision and not at all based on faith or even common sense. Upon my return, I gave up my place and sold most of my belongings.

But the move never happened. I was left without a place of my own and no income. Without seeking wisdom from the Gohonzon, I recklessly invested my remaining funds in a business venture. I was chanting for the success of my business but lacked experience, which contributed to its failing. Gradually I lost the motivation to push the products.

I found a house-sitting arrangement for six weeks, but after that, I lived with different friends for what seemed like an eternity, desperately struggling to get on my feet. Until then I had always enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle. It seemed impossible that this virtually homeless situation had become my life. It seemed like I was acting out someone else's misfortune.

Over seven months, I had eight different living arrangements. And usually I had to bargain or trade something in lieu of rent or some portion of it.

Despite everything, I chanted to encourage the members and continued to home visit them. Few people knew how severe my situation had become. I tried my best to hide it from my mother, who had doubts about my SGI-USA activities and faith in Buddhism. I sustained hope by propagating, chanting, doing activities and receiving guidance.

Last year, I was invited to participate in the SGI-USA Sophia Group, a study activity for women. That was where I was inspired to chant with a deeper appreciation for my life. I began chanting to improve my study of Buddhism and to show brilliant actual proof of happiness in my life. I wanted to enhance my passion for kosen-rufu and to build a career in society that would contribute to humanistic education — education that would foster global citizens. This, I knew, was SGI President Ikeda's dream, and continues to be my determination.

While studying *The New Human Revolution* along with the women in the Sophia Group, I experienced a dramatic change in my practice. I was inspired by reading and understanding that deepening one's faith leads to fulfilling one's dreams. I had no idea how to deepen my faith, but with a pure seeking mind I chanted to do so.

Then I read an excerpt from the book *Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death* by President Ikeda, in which he writes that the Gohonzon is the crystallization of the Mystic Law (Nam-myoho-renge-kyo), as are our lives.

I wondered, what on earth does that mean? As I chanted and chanted to understand how to bring the Mystic Law out from within my life and how the Gohonzon functions inside me, I could feel myself chanting with a different attitude. I realized that there was a connection to be made, and I wanted to make it.

One morning as I chanted with this desire, I was distracted by the wind blowing outside my window. And as I looked out, I was swept by the feeling that there was no separation

between me and the wind, between me and the world, between me and the Gohonzon. I was surprised to feel, and actually believe, that my life and the Gohonzon were one.

In November, my women's division district chief suggested I apply for a temporary job at Head-Royce School where she works. I was hired, and that week I also accepted two other temporary jobs doing Christmas retail sales. Two weeks later, a friend and I moved into a house one block from my new job at the school. A year and a half later, I was still there — I had become a member of the faculty.

With Sophia Group as the starting point, my Buddhist study really took off. I became one of five members who presented the youth division–sponsored Gosho lectures for the East Bay Headquarters. Also, I became a member of the Research Group, which does preparatory research for Gosho lecturers in the Bay Area.

My focus has evolved from being self-centered into a desire to do more for others. I want everything I do to be a catalyst toward world peace. How do I develop my life, how do I contribute to world peace?

I thought about President Ikeda, who has devoted his entire life to the happiness of others. If I can learn from his example, I thought, I can make a difference in my circle of society as he has in his. And so I'm learning what it means to have a service mentality — not one of self-sacrifice. When I give to others, I receive the most. By embracing President Ikeda's dream for world peace, I find myself working to become the best I can be. This is my constant prayer.

A year ago, I came across information about graduate admissions qualifications for Soka University of America. I recall my surprise that I met all the qualifications. Right then I knew I had to chant about it to see if it could be for me.

President Ikeda says of SUA: "Makiguchi asserted that the human being must progress from a condition of dependence, to self-reliance, and finally to a contributive way of life. The mission of SUA is to foster a steady stream of global citizens committed to living a contributive life."

After the holidays, I reached the assistant dean, who spoke with me at length and patiently answered my questions. With her encouragement and lots of daimoku to overcome my initial insecurity, I began preparing the Statement of Purpose for admission. It's the kind of thing you stress over, because it's weighed heavily in the acceptance process.

One of the teachers at my job acted as a positive force by volunteering to edit my statement. She helped me find the confidence that I could make this dream a reality.

And she encouraged me to visit the SUA campus, so I went to the town of Calabasas in the beautiful Santa Monica Mountains, where the university is just a 10-minute drive from Malibu beaches and 45 minutes from downtown Los Angeles.

When I got there, I was warmly welcomed and then met with the dean, Dr. Tomoko Takahashi. We exchanged photographs — hers of previous SUA students and mine of my adorable first graders at Head-Royce School. Instead of an admissions interview, it felt like meeting with an old friend.

Afterward, I was invited to join the students for lunch, then to sit in on a class. During the break, a student and I bicycled across campus, so I could see the dorms. It was a very impressive break.

I'm overjoyed that I was accepted to Soka University! Also, I was awarded one of only two full academic scholarships offered by the school. I am now enrolled in the master's program of Second and Foreign Language Education with an emphasis in English as a Second Language.

I am learning the methodologies and academic foundations of language teaching and

learning, which include cross-cultural awareness.

During my development at SUA, I intend to deepen my mentor–disciple relationship with President Ikeda. My prayer to the Gohonzon is: What can I contribute as a global citizen? How can I contribute to world peace? I am grateful to the Gohonzon and to my friends in faith for this tremendous opportunity.

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