

**PERSPECTIVE: Still Magical After All These Years**  
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**Salt Lake City**

Sometimes a person makes mistakes in life, serious mistakes, regretful mistakes, and wonders, if one is a Buddhist, how to change poison into medicine.

Sometimes a person just needs to burn with passion until there is nothing left but “pure white ash.” I am one of those persons. I need to follow my heart.

Sometimes I chase my fortune and end up in a mess. Such was the case this spring-turns-into-summer, when I foolishly deposited myself in Salt Lake City.

I was hoping to find love. Instead, I hated myself. The only job available to me was temporary. The only living quarters I could find were also temporary and with strangers. The love melted with the snow on the Wasatch peaks.

But I did find a voice — the voice of the bodhisattva. I found myself telling everyone about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, even at those times when I doubted myself the most. On the inside, I felt insecure and incredibly stupid. I kept trying, though; I kept sending out resumes and telling people about the practice.

In this predominately Mormon town, I found myself working alongside three Christians. And although they believe just as strongly in their creed as I do in my 24-year practice, we supported one another, as we all shared rough times and times of self-doubt. We became friends and that kept me going, along with long, slow hikes in the mountains. Still, I was lonely.

Last Friday I found myself going the half-hour distance to the downtown SGI community center to chant with other members. “Somewhere,” I thought, “there must be somebody in this town like me.” For in all this time, even considering my co-workers, I had not found anyone who truly seemed like, looked like, felt like me. I chanted on my drive to tightly connect with someone. I clung to that hope like my tires clung to the torn-up asphalt.

But when I arrived at the community center, the door was locked, the lights were off, and no one was home. I sat in my car in disbelief, berating myself once again. I had desperately needed the company of members, but it appeared the plans were off.

And then — along came Mary. She cruised into the parking lot, looking at the empty spaces and me sitting there, the Lonely Ranger. “Join me,” I asked her.

She sat with me in my car and eventually reached out to touch the spurs that hang from my rear-view mirror. “Do you ride horses?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“What kind of riding?”

I hemmed and hawed — it has been my experience that more horse people in Utah are into ropin’ and wranglin’ cows than dressage. But I uttered the D word.

Mary gaped at me, “I ride dressage, too!”

Not only did I find possibly the only other American Buddhist/dressage rider, but the woman hikes, too! We drove over to her house to chant and talked about Buddhism and horses until after 11 p.m. Heaven.

Which brings us to Saturday night — the Fourth of July. Joined by her husband and another member, we climbed the nearly 9,000-foot Grandeur Peak to watch fireworks explode over Salt Lake City. Homemade burritos and red wine, too. Good company. New friends.

And yes, people like me!

Who says there’s no magic in this universe?

I won't be staying in Utah. But now I have a wonderful memory to take away with me.  
Thanks, Mary. You were there when I needed you.

Sometimes we make mistakes. They're part of life (at least my life). But sometimes we can turn poison into fireworks, or loneliness into a cup of wine on top of a mountain. I'm so glad I chant and can still feel the magic after all these years.

**WT**

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