

PERSPECTIVE
LET US ALL LIVE LIKE KINGS
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On Oct. 28, at approximately 1:00 a.m., a great Bodhisattva of the Earth was ushered into his next existence. Anthony Dwain Lee, 39, was a strong SGI-USA member and leader, and my friend.

He was attending a Halloween party in an exclusive area of Los Angeles, when a police officer, mistaking the gun accompanying his costume as real, shot and killed him. The officer believed Anthony was pointing the weapon at him and responded as he had been trained.

Anthony died in yet another tragic case of gun violence, and this may be all the general public remembers of him. But I believe his legacy is much greater.

I remember a man who, through his Buddhist practice and pursuit of his dream of an acting career, rose from a life of gang violence to become one of SGI-USA's courageous heroes of peace. He transformed himself into someone determined to change humanity through his own sweat, through engaging one person at a time.

Upon meeting Anthony, you could not help but be drawn in by his intensity, the way he packed so much life into every moment. I remember playing basketball with him earlier this year, and, despite my advantage of being some 12 years younger, he made me work harder than I ever thought I could. And afterward, as was customary with him, we shared the biggest laugh you could imagine.

His passing has hit me hard. For the first time, the reality of our challenge in the Victory Over Violence campaign has reached the deepest place in my life. VOV is not just a lapel pin and a great sounding pledge. It is life or death. It touches the people we love, the men we call brother.

If we cannot use the opportunity of VOV to teach people in this society about the Buddhist values of nonviolence and the sanctity of life, people will continue to die needless deaths. This was Anthony's way. He was not afraid to tell somebody the path they were on was destructive—to display true compassion.

The power of our organization lies in the bonds among its members. Anthony and I, two men from completely different backgrounds who would not likely come together under any other circumstances, both lived for the dream of kosen-rufu. His appreciation toward SGI President Ikeda for creating such an organization, where anyone can contribute to humanity, was unmatched.

In his death, as he did in his life, he has shown me the great path of living as a Bodhisattva of the Earth and a disciple of the mentor we shared, President Ikeda. Through his great sacrifice, I believe the youth of SGI-USA can once again stand up and reach out to our friends and elders alike, saying: "There is a better way. We must achieve victory over violence!"

On Nov. 1, more than 650 people gathered at the SGI-USA Los Angeles Friendship Center to celebrate Anthony's life. There were songs, cheering, a few tears and firm determinations. In the faces of those present, I could see Anthony's desire for them to revolutionize their lives as he had his own, telling them, "You've got no choice but to win!"

At Anthony's memorial, Mike West, a young man whom Anthony had personally raised

in the SGI-USA and imbued with his own sense of passion for kosen-rufu, shared that Anthony would always greet him by saying, “What’s happening, King?”

“I never understood what he meant until now,” Mike said. “Anthony lived like a king and he wanted me to as well. For Anthony, I will live my life like a king.”

May we all create such a legacy.