

**PERSPECTIVE**  
**FINDING THE POSITIVE IN MENTAL ILLNESS**  
**BY JULIAN KURITA**  
**NEW YORK**

**Julian Kurita's experience of battling mental illness with faith has given him a positive perspective on this obstacle so many Americans are facing. Now, he wants to help others see it positively, too.**

*Valerie Kurita, Julian's mother, shared her experience of her struggle to help her son in the March 2 World Tribune.*

During my childhood, there were times I thought I was talking to people in my head. Sometimes, they would suggest I do self-destructive things, like stealing or mistreating someone. I never told anyone about this because I didn't know there was anything wrong with it.

After I left home to go to college, the hearing of voices increased. I believed there were people giving me telepathic instructions and I began acting very strangely, as most people who knew me during my college years could tell you. Throughout this time, I continued to chant, attend discussion meetings and study Buddhism.

I thought there was nothing wrong with me, but my roommate, who is also a practicing Buddhist, became increasingly concerned with my behavior. Finally, he called my mother, Valerie, who came to Wisconsin and brought me home.

At the age of 22, I was admitted to a hospital and diagnosed with schizo-affective disorder. This mental illness is a combination of schizophrenic symptoms, such as paranoia and delusions, and depression. The standard understanding of this illness is that it is incurable. The best that could be hoped for, I was told, was that the symptoms could be controlled with drugs that were almost as debilitating as the illness.

Some people in my position might have just given up and resigned themselves to a life of misery. However, my experience in the SGI had taught me to challenge my difficulties, not give in to them. So I did gongyo whenever I was able and chanted extra daimoku during my most depressed and delusional moments. I always felt better afterward.

My mother was determined that I would become healthy. Every day, she read books and did research on the Internet. We tried many different treatments until we found the work of Dr. Abram Hoffer, a colleague of the late Dr. Linus Pauling, and his use of megadoses of vitamins to cure mental illness.

Of course, chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo led us to this solution, but action was just as important. If we had just chanted and not taken action we would never have found this treatment. In January 2000, I started the vitamin regimen, eliminated sugar from my diet, gave up smoking and learned to be disciplined in the things I ate. It felt like an austerity that might have been practiced in the time of Shakyamuni.

My recovery didn't occur overnight. I started out lying on the couch all day at home by myself, fighting off feelings of desperation and suicide. As my condition improved, I became more active and my psychiatrist connected me with a vocational rehabilitation program here in New York.

I continued to chant. When I felt negative, I talked openly and honestly to my parents.

Just talking about my feelings seemed to take half the pain away. My parents' encouraging responses took care of the rest. Gradually, I learned to encourage myself. The practice and philosophy of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism were indispensable in my recovery—I gained the ability to derive hope from the most dismal of situations, the power to turn poison into medicine. When I went to discussion meetings, everyone was so supportive. They said things like, "You're going to win, no matter what." Even though I had a cloud of hell hanging over my head each day, their kind words penetrated my heart.

This illness has given me the perfect opportunity to revolutionize my life. I fight every day to improve myself. I am learning how to live and to determine right and wrong. My suffering has taught me to be compassionate toward others. Many people look down on those with mental illness, but I have learned to try to help them see things in a positive way.

Now, at the age of 24, I honestly feel better than I did before my breakdown. I no longer hear voices or suffer from delusions or paranoia. I feel happy and proud to have had this struggle and that I have an advantage over those who have not yet had a major life challenge. I've learned so much, especially to never listen to those who tell you something is impossible. As human beings, we all have infinite potential.

I experienced this difficulty so that I can challenge my dreams for the future. I am now working a part-time job that my vocational rehabilitation program arranged for me. I'm taking art classes and applying for school in the fall as a transfer student to finish up my MFA degree. I also practice martial arts—kung fu and tai chi. I play electric bass and hope to put a rock group together for the Youth Family Culture Festival in our zone.

This struggle has taught me that a never-give-up spirit in prayer and action equals victory in all things.