

SPECIAL YOUTH
PULLOUT SECTION

SEIZE The Day

Why I Am Now a Buddhist

By **Brian Mochizuki, Riverdale, Md.**



I was born into a Buddhist family. My mom dragged me to meetings all the time. After awhile, I didn't want to go. When I got older, I refused to go with her. When I got into middle school, I didn't want to be a Buddhist at all. Nobody else in school was a Buddhist and I was very negative about anything having to do with Buddhism.

Last year, one of the music corps leaders in our area asked if I wanted to go to the Florida Nature and Culture Center for the Youth Performing Groups Conference. I agreed to go and my parents said they would pay for me to attend. However, just before it was time to go, I changed my mind and told my mom it was a waste of money to send me. She said it was already paid for, so why not go and check it out? I think she and my dad were really chanting that I would go. So I went.

What an incredible experience! I had a great time and met youth from all over the country who were Buddhist and in the music corps. When I got back, the first thing I told my mom was that I was determined to go back to the FNCC next year. I asked her if she would pay for my airfare if I paid for the conference.

I started saving the money I was earning from working at my dad's restaurant. It was hard to save that much, but I did. I was chanting a little bit, mostly on and off, but didn't want to go to meetings or chant and do gongyo regularly.

At first, I decided I wanted to go to the Junior High and High School Conference instead of going back to the Performing Groups Conference, because the music corps in our area wasn't together anymore. Then, I found out that our region's Create Peace Festival was going to take place on the same weekend as the conference. I wanted to go to the festival, but the only other conference I could attend in the summer was the Young Men's Conference in July. But I didn't want to attend that either because it was all guys—no girls.

However, after learning about what the Create Peace festival was all about—to overcome violence in our communities—I felt that I really couldn't miss it, so I decided to go to the Young Men's Conference.

I'm really glad I went. I had a great time, met a lot of incredible people and I began to learn more about the SGI, President Ikeda, the spirit of Gajokai and why people chant.

After going to the FNCC this time, I decided I wanted to be a Buddhist. On July 10, just two days after returning from the trip, I did my first full gongyo on my own—where my mom didn't have to ask me to do it. I wanted to do gongyo for myself and it took me a whole hour to complete both the sutra and daimoku.

The experience of going to the FNCC has really opened me up to want to practice and to do gongyo. I am now trying to do at least one prayer and daimoku just about every day. And since school has started, I have been doing gongyo both in the morning and in the evening. It makes me feel really good inside and a lot of neat things are happening. I also started doing Gajokai.

For the Create Peace Festival, I was asked to play trumpet in the Youth Band. I went to my first band meeting and, even though there were only eight members, the young women's region leader really encouraged us about the spirit of the band and the significance of playing in the festival. It was a real struggle. Many times only a couple of us showed up for practice and we hardly ever got a chance to practice together.

Then, three days before the festival, we were supposed to play for the entertainment committee. This was to be the first time we had ever played in front of an audience. A lot of us felt negative because we hadn't had much chance to practice together. I was feeling

especially negative but

I didn't want to disgrace the SGI-USA and mess up at

the festival. When we played, we

sounded horrible and were very discouraged. After that, many of us didn't want to play in the festival at all. But then our youth leaders and zone leader came back and gave us a lot of encouragement. They talked about the

"After going to the Florida Nature and Culture Center, I decided I wanted to be a Buddhist."

("Why I am..." continued on Page B)

(“Why I am...” continued from Page A)

importance of the band, but said it was also our decision whether or not we would play.

I know my mom asked a lot of people to chant about the band, and I chanted about whether or not we should play in the festival. My mom told me to chant to change poison into medicine. I chanted vigorously because, deep down inside, I really wanted to give a great performance. The next day we had practice again. We played for the entertainment committee again, but instead of having the attitude of we can't play in the festival, we determined to do our best. Afterward, the committee and everyone there applauded our performance and said we played well. It was so different from the night before and I learned that when you chant strongly, you can change things around completely. We played in the festival and were great. That was really

“I learned that when you really chant strongly you can change things around completely.”

encouraging because before the festival we all thought it was completely impossible.

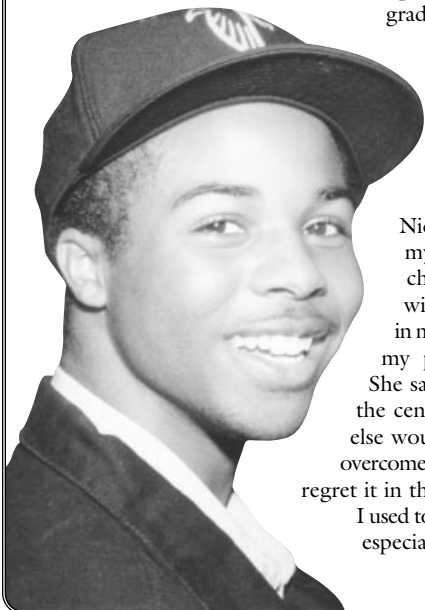
Now I am beginning to understand what changing poison into medicine means. Through this experience, I also learned about determination, fundamental darkness and obstacles. When you chant strongly, things really do happen. Now we want to keep the music corps going and become the best music corps in all of SGI-USA! I want to thank my parents for encouraging me to practice, and for their support in my going to the FNCC, being in the Music Corps and participating in the Create Peace Festival.

I want to suggest to the parents of other youth that you should send your kids to the FNCC, even if they aren't practicing and don't want to go. It really changes you and your feelings about being a Buddhist. ●

The Power of Buddhist Practice

By Delano Davidson, New York City

“My mother didn't force me to chant, she encouraged me. Then naturally, as I faced my daily struggles, I turned to the practice more, prayed sincerely and got clear results.”



At one point in junior high school, my grades were low. I felt discouraged about everything. I was afraid that I would not amount to anything and school felt overwhelming.

Although I was very angry and frustrated, when it came to the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, my mother never forced me to chant. She did not get angry with me for my bad grades in math. She encouraged me to take my problems to the Gohonzon. She said that if I put the practice in the center of my life then everything else would follow. I knew if I did not overcome my problems in school, I would regret it in the end.

I used to think that chanting was boring, especially chanting for a long time.

Gongyo seemed too hard and I only knew the A (Hoben) and C (Jigage) portions. But I was desperate. There was nothing else I could do, so I decided to face the Gohonzon and chant.

In the beginning, it was difficult to stick with it. Sometimes I sat with my mom and during part B (Juryo), I would try to say the words, but mostly I followed along with my finger. I remember SGI President Ikeda writing that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is enough if you can't do gongyo. Daimoku is the key and what matter's is one's heart. He also said, “Gongyo

“I remember SGI President Ikeda writing that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is enough if you can't do gongyo. Daimoku is the key and what matter's is one's heart.”

is important, but essentially the most vital thing is to continue to embrace the Gohonzon your whole life and never, ever abandon it” (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 2, p. 181). With that in mind, I started to chant on my own and do activities at the culture center.

When I reached high school, more time was demanded of me. At times when I couldn't chant because I was tired or woke up late, I read President Ikeda's guidance in his book for teenagers, *The Way of Youth*. It really hit home with me. I was surprised how much the situations he mentions are so similar to what I was going through. I would read it when I left home in the morning on the subway or on the bus because it prepared me for the day and the turmoil of school. Chapters like “Love and Relationships” and “Being Smart Enough” are great. However, all of the topics are really helpful, like choosing a career and introducing this practice to our friends and family.

(“The Power of...” continued on Page C)

("Why I am..." continued from Page B)

I wanted to win badly. I took all of my pain and suffering to the Gohonzon. As I started to chant with a lot more vigor and passion, little by little my situation started to improve. I made daily efforts to achieve victory by studying a little extra whenever I could. When I saw I was making progress, chanting longer wasn't a problem. Toward the end of the school year I had a 95 average in math. I was excited and overjoyed—I finally won! I even taught the class when the teacher was away. In my sophomore year, I had a 96 average, and in my junior year I reached math honors classes. Thanks to my mom and President Ikeda's guidance, I discovered I could win.

What advice would I give a teenager who has these kinds of challenges? Start out by reading President Ikeda's guidance about parents in *The Way of Youth*, and then set your own goals. Your parents may seem as if they are nagging, but they are only looking out for you. They know the power of Buddhist practice and they are trying to help you. This practice shows you how to become a winner. Do it for yourself and for your own life. Chant five minutes a day, take the necessary action—you will definitely get results. ●

QUESTIONS

for DISCUSSION

1. How is the conviction and spirit of propagation that Nichiren Daishonin expresses in this essay related to a spirit of tolerance?

2. What do most people look to as the basis for their happiness? In your view, does society embrace a "correct view" or an "incorrect view"? What are the "misleading teachings" of contemporary America?



Making This Practice My Own

By Sophie Chen, Orange County, Calif.

I was introduced to Buddhism by my mother, who has been practicing now for 15 years. I followed her out of obedience but never understood why I was practicing. I never inquired into Buddhism, neither studying nor deepening my understanding. My practice was empty—I did not believe in chanting until I started practicing seriously this past year. I only believed in tangible things, and faith is one of those things that couldn't be seen or touched. I always knew I had determination to accomplish what I wanted in life, but I was never set on changing myself from within.

I would get encouragement and advice from friends when I was desperate, but after the conversation ended, I would revert back to my old habits again. Yet, now my life seems to have made a 180-degree turn.

At one point, I was so fatigued by the vicious cycles of my negative relationships. I did not know how to put a halt to this cycle. People always quoted from great proverbs, but nobody could explain exactly how to live those wise sayings. Then something occurred to me—I should try to chant sincerely to the Gohonzon, this time with strong conviction and genuine faith. I began actively participating in SGI events, starting with the Victory Over Violence campaign this past June.

The main turning point came when I determined to go to the Florida Nature and Culture Center this year. I attended the student division conference in August, and that became the pivotal moment for me with this practice. During my visit at the FNCC,

I was faced with the depth of my fundamental darkness. It was lurking in me and I was in disbelief because I was in the most positive environment possible with the most positive young people. My observations were always about others, never on myself because it was always easier to reproach others than to have the courage to reflect on my behavior and admit that change begins with me. I learned that my environment is only a manifestation of my life-condition. Because I was so negative in my attitude, that is what I projected outwardly. It had nothing to do with the environment that I was in. I was so touched seeing each and every one of those students embracing their struggle, not judging themselves for it. Their energy was magnetic. I have never been exposed to such encouraging people. Even faced with severe problems, each still emerged with a positive attitude on life. I realized, that is the faith they have gained in themselves—having courage to never be defeated by their obstacles. The whole experience did not even penetrate or impact me until I came back home.

I gained a whole new perspective on my life and what it means to have faith in myself. I also learned about the significance of conviction. I was so invigorated and rejuvenated when I came back from the conference. I made the determination to do consistent gongyo and daimoku, as well as become even more active in SGI activities. Now, I understand what Nichiren Daishonin meant when he wrote "never seek this law outside of yourself." I now have the courage and the faith in myself that I will overcome and surmount whatever challenges I am faced with because I have gained confidence and security within my own life. ●

My observations were always about others, never on myself because it was always easier to reproach others than to have the courage to reflect on my behavior and admit that change begins with me.



By Nobuko Kobayashi, SGI-USA High School Division Leader

Pessimism Into Hope

Like many people, after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States I felt a great sense of confusion and emptiness. This event shook every ounce of confidence I had in my faith and my ability to affect change. It also challenged my deeply held views of peace becoming a reality. Through returning to SGI President Ikeda's guidance at that crucial moment, I was able to change this pessimism and confusion into newfound hope.

Terrorism, war and human distrust became more real to me after Sept. 11. It was

not something happening "somewhere else" anymore. I couldn't avoid it, even if I turned off my TV and radio. This tragedy was affecting my friends and loved ones in the deepest sense. I found myself left with many questions, such as "Why did this happen" and "What do we do now?"

For nearly two weeks, I was in a state of hopelessness. Every area in my life was affected, and I could see it as a reflection of my faith. In all the years of my Buddhist practice, I lived with the belief that since I had the Gohonzon and practiced Buddhism, I could change any situation. Similarly, with my practice I felt I could influence someone else's life regardless of how difficult their circumstances. Yet, after Sept. 11, the belief that "all I have to do is chant" seemed futile. I knew that doubt had set in and I needed to change my attitude. But how was I going to do this in the face of this terrible tragedy?

Amid my confusion, a friend mentioned to me that we should go back to the basics to find a solution. I started studying more about Buddhism, and I attended many study meetings and lectures. In the process, I began to read President Ikeda's guidance with a new attitude. I re-read his guidance, this time with an openness and eagerness I never felt before. This was like an awakening for me. I thought I knew a lot about the greatness of Buddhism, the SGI and President Ikeda, but in truth I did not. I re-learned so many things that I had missed before or just did not understand completely with my heart.

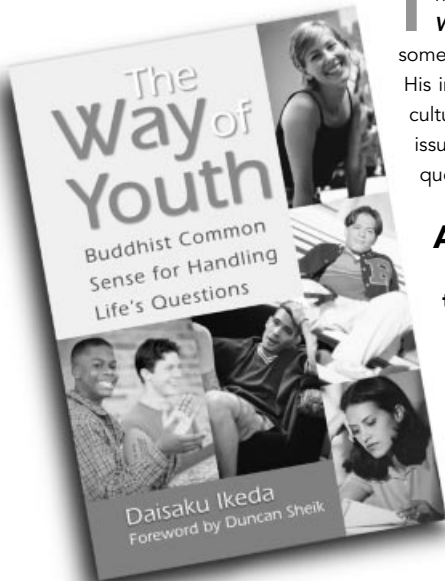
Finally, I gained a new outlook on what was going on in society and gained insight on what was going on with me.

Of all the things I read during this time, *Discussions on Youth* turned out to be a great turning point for me. It refreshed my conviction that everyone has a responsibility for peace. Through President Ikeda's clear and poignant guidance, I could see how peace can be achieved, and that it is not impossible.

One passage from *Discussions on Youth* particularly inspired me: "It is I who must thank you. I am determined to give my all to these discussions. I wish to speak honestly, to leave the truth as my legacy to all of you. Why? Because my sole desire now is to raise genuine leaders for the twenty-first century. The cultivation of truly humanistic leaders is imperative for the sake of the world, humanity, kosen-rufu and peace. The whole world cries out for this" (vol. 1, p. vii).

Since that fateful day—Sept. 11—I have regained confidence through study that with my Buddhist faith, I need not fear anything. With daimoku, courage and hope, everything that seemed bleak is not—provided I take the first step to make change happen. Through vigorous study, I realized that I have to take concrete action, and action creates change. The events that took place on Sept. 11 will be a catalyst for me to work even harder for kosen-rufu and the sake of others.

The Way of Youth



The following is an excerpt from the hit book *The Way of Youth*, a universally appealing collection of some of SGI President Ikeda's words to young people. His insight reaches beyond all barriers of race, creed, culture and gender and gets to the heart of youth issues. Each one of over 80 topics is covered in a questions and answer format.

Art Transforms the Heart, page 83

Art is beauty. Great works of art, just like the beauty inherent in nature, are a balm for the spirit—a source of vitality. Art should calm and soothe us, not put us on the defensive or make us uncomfortable. It can encourage us when we are run-down, lift our spirits when we are tense.

Art is the liberation of the humanity inside you.

To read more or to find words of wisdom to other questions you may have asked yourself, *The Way of Youth* can be purchased from your favorite online or neighborhood bookstore.

MATERIAL REQUEST!

SEND IN YOUR STUFF

Our youth publication is only as strong as what you bring us. Poems, Articles, Pictures, Stories, Commentaries, ...whatever you got, get it to us.

Postal Mail: SGI-USA Attn: Alexis Trass Seize the Day 606 Wilshire Blvd. PO Box 1427 Santa Monica, CA 90406-

HOW?

Email: 1427 seize@sgi-usa.org