

Each Day's Efforts Make a Big Difference

By TONY SEKINE
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I was born and raised in Japan; when I was 7 my parents started practicing this Buddhism. At 16, I left home and started working for a restaurant. It was then that I first dreamed of opening my own restaurant someday.

Although I worked hard and did my best, many troubles arose. As a result, by 19 I had lost my confidence and become hopeless.

Fortunately, young men's division members were communicating with me periodically. In my desperate state, they encouraged me to start chanting and doing gongyo. My life began to open toward the future with hope.

Reading SGI President Ikeda's guidance and putting it into practice in my daily life changed my vision for the future. In September 1985, at a culture festival in Tokyo with President Ikeda in attendance, I made a determination to go to America. It was based on his encouragement to youth to go overseas, to become capable people for worldwide kosen-rufu and society.

In January 1986, I arrived in New York with no English ability, no job and little money. Right away, I started participating in SGI activities. At the same time I got a job as a dishwasher.

Nothing was easy for me living in a foreign country. Even communicating with members by phone was such a big deal. I was nervous, sweaty and exhausted by the end of each phone call. However, I truly appreciated the patience of the members who called me and the opportunity to reach out to others.

Since my first struggles in the United States, many things have changed. I received my green card, bought a house in Long Island, received a GED, completed an associate degree in business — and recently became a U.S. citizen!

Through those years, what never changed was my daily Buddhist practice and my strong bond with SGI members. Steady practice enabled me to break through many difficulties in my life. I now understand how every day's little effort makes a big difference in the future.

Last year was the most incredible year. In January I met a bright, beautiful lady from Japan. Later we got engaged.

At the end of last June — after the New York members' longtime dream of having President Ikeda visit New York finally came true — I went to the Florida Nature and Culture Center as part of the cooking crew. This was the turning point in my life; I was so encouraged by seeing members from all over the world and felt fortunate to work with cooking crew members from across the country. I was making soup, salad and sushi every day. The quantities were incredible, like 600–800 servings of soup every day.

And I was so happy when I saw President Ikeda. I remembered that a little more than 10 years earlier, at the culture festival in Tokyo I had made the determination to come to America. I redetermined to show actual proof of this practice in my daily life for the next 10 years.

At the beginning of August, the fulfillment of my longtime dream of opening my restaurant came close.

Soon, with a capable business partner and a great location for our restaurant, in Westbury in Long Island, we signed a lease agreement and in September had a grand opening. Although we have been open for only a few months, our restaurant has received great reviews in *Newsday* and *The New York Times*.

Now, as a new restaurant owner and new husband, every day I am facing new challenges. Once again I have to broaden my capabilities. I know I can do it, though, by making continuous efforts in my Buddhist practice and daily life.

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