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What One Person

I think the main thing that differentiates young people from adults can be summed up in one word — *hope*. When we're very young, we usually have unlimited hope. Anything is possible! But after we get a little older, and life beats us up a bit, we start to lose that all-encompassing hope. We become practical and realistic.

But SGI President Ikeda has said that “youth itself is hope, passion and freedom. I hope that you will live your entire lives with a youthful spirit. Please become more youthful as the years go by. Wherever the flame of youth exists, there is no stagnation.”

Four years ago, I made a determination to embody his youthful, fighting spirit in my little corner of the world.

The first part of my experience began in 1990: President Ikeda came to the United States and challenged us to show actual proof of the power of the Gohonzon in our daily lives. In the two years following his visit, I overcame many obstacles, including a gang of drug dealers that moved in across the street from my house. I also went on to write a new kind of black history book, which was soon published. It won the Los Angeles Mayor's Award and Toyota Motors paid for me to travel the country and give copies of the book to dignitaries and civic and political leaders in a number of cities.

After that, I knew that I wanted to spend as much time as possible encouraging young people. So I decided to leave journalism and go back to higher education — but this meant that I would have to go back to school and get my doctorate so that I could teach at the university level. If I wanted to complete the degree as fast as possible, I would need a full scholarship, which is something very hard to come by, particularly for someone returning to school after a number of years.

I began to chant — for one, two and three hours a day. I was first accepted to the University of Southern California but not with enough scholarship money to quit my job and attend full time. I was really discouraged.

I went to see Ted Fujioka, one of our senior leaders, for advice. He calmly told me to just keep chanting and refuse to give up. But give up is all that I wanted to do! *After all*, I thought, *I've already shown actual proof!*

When I went home, I remembered all of the young people I wanted to teach and encourage. I knew Mr. Fujioka was right: I couldn't give up. But I literally did not know what to do next. So I opened the *Daily Guidance*, volume 4, and the page I read became my inspiration as I fought and overcame one obstacle after another. It's from Sept. 16:

“Even though you practice faith, you may encounter an unfortunate incident. But meeting with misfortune does not mean your prayer to the Gohonzon will not be answered. You may see something that makes you wonder why it happened, but as you persevere, you will later see that everything is moving in a positive direction for your happiness within the protection of Myoho.”

I read that guidance every day, and every time life knocked me down, I would double my determination, just as I imagined President Ikeda would. Each day, I'd get up and struggle twice as hard again. I did this day after day, chanting and chanting, for a solid year. At the end of that year, UCLA informed me that they were awarding me their most prestigious graduate fellowship: tuition and all expenses paid for four years.

Then my challenges really began — I had to withstand the curriculum for the top degree at one of the country's top universities! I chanted to show actual proof to my classmates, many of whom were much younger than me. I instituted a team-study system, and our

department became known for cooperation (whereas in other departments students were often very competitive and back-stabbing). I helped organize a series of forums for graduate students of color, many of whom felt alienated on campus. All this while preparing for a series of extremely rigorous written and oral examinations.

Eventually, the time came for me to take my last, most important exam, an oral exam in front of a panel of top professors, who could ask me anything they wanted about my field. I launched a weekend chanting campaign along with other members who were also students.

Just days before the oral exam, I got a call saying that my mother had had a stroke in Chicago. The news was so overwhelming, I decided that I couldn't possibly go through with the test. But my father urged me to do so. I dragged myself to the Gohonzon and read that guidance again about not giving up. My wonderful husband, Glenn, took off from work and chanted the entire time that I was in the exam. I passed the oral and was on a plane to Chicago the next morning to see my mother.

As if all this weren't enough... next, I had to write a dissertation (which is the length of a small book) and then find a teaching job to get to those students I had been chanting so much about.

I found out that to be hired as an English professor, I had to participate in a national job search. All of the colleges in the country basically hire once a year, so I had to attend a national conference in Washington, D.C. By the way, I had to be invited to attend, just to get interviewed. One school told me that I had beat out 350 other candidates from around the country just to receive an invitation.

At this conference, I was interviewed by teams of top professors — whom I had never met — from colleges across the country. And again, they could ask me any question about American literature, and I had to answer on the spot. This went on for 18 hours a day for three-and-a-half days straight. After this conference, each college then selected only three people to fly out to their school for yet another round of interviews, after which the candidates had to teach a class with a team of professors sitting in the back of the room watching.

It was worse than the NBA draft! The pressure was so intense, people were having nervous breakdowns. Including me, almost. But every time I wanted to give up, quit, commit suicide — anything to get out of the enormous pressure — I would think of the resolution I made to show actual proof.

At the end of this struggle to keep doubling my determination, I was completely flabbergasted with the result. I was offered an incredibly good teaching position at, of all places, my alma mater: Kalamazoo College in Michigan. It's one of the most prestigious private colleges in Michigan, like the Claremont Colleges in Southern California.

But here's the *amazing* part: The president of the college personally called and told me that I had been awarded a trustee professorship. This is something like an endowed chair. It is an honor normally reserved for older, very prestigious faculty members who have been at a college for many years. No one at the college had ever made such an appointment for a new assistant professor before!

But the president said that the school had picked me because they were so impressed with the kind of person I had become since I graduated. And that it was thought I would be just the kind of role model desired for the students — exactly what I was chanting to be.

So I am now the Marlene Crandell Francis Trustee Professor of the Humanities in the English Department at Kalamazoo College.

In closing, I encourage everyone to challenge and re-challenge themselves to show actual proof of what a person can do with the Gohonzon — with the never-give-up spirit.

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