

GET REAL!
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I have the great benefit of being a teacher at the same high school from where I graduated. As I walk around campus I cannot help but think of the good and bad times when I was a high school student. One memory that I cannot forget is when I was a freshman. As I entered high school, I became very lazy. I would rarely do my homework and would sometimes skip class. My grades were low. I continued this habit through the first five months of high school.

During this whole time, I was vigorously participating in YMD, Brass Band and district activities, but I was not showing actual proof of the practice at that time. At meetings we would have discussions about showing actual proof in society. I would feel so ashamed about my results in school. My YMD leaders would encourage me to do well in school and not give up.

After these meetings, I would go home with a fresh determination to fight hard. I would start to do gongyo every day and after about two to three weeks I would quit. I just could not break my lazy nature. In February, during my first year of high school, I brought my friend to a meeting and my YMD leader helped me encourage him to join the organization. He received his Gohonzon. I made a determination to start practicing this Buddhism for real. I asked myself, "How can I teach my friend to practice if I am not practicing correctly myself?"

From that point onward, each day I consistently did morning and evening prayers. I also started to try hard in school. It was such a challenge. I was so frustrated and I wanted to quit many times. I never stopped chanting and I kept making steady efforts. At this point, I was just chanting not to give up because that was my tendency. So, for the last five months of school I showed a modest improvement and completed the school year. I continued to chant to show actual proof.

When my sophomore year started, I was determined to win. With eight months of consistent practice under my belt, I was ready for school. I ended up completing the whole school year with six A's and one B. I continued to fight this way and ended up graduating with honors. I continued my education and I received my bachelors degree six years after that. I look back on all this as a great benefit. I am so glad I decided to challenge my circumstances. SGI President Ikeda says to us: "Your lives will be enriched and deepened in proportion to the pain and grief you suffer, the degree to which you struggle and the amount of daimoku that you chant. The hardships you face now will all serve to nourish your growth into leaders of the twenty-first century" (*Discussions on Youth*, vol.1, p. 16).