

**GET REAL!**  
**THE WINDS OF LIFE GIVE US LIFT**  
**BY SHAN SERAFIN, SGI-USA VICE HIGH SCHOOL LEADER**

**I** got really excited when someone told me that, put in perspective, all my hardships are just banks on a billiard table, ricocheting me toward the Gohonzon.

Another elucidating, somewhat bizarre analogy I found is to compare life's obstacles to the rushing air around an aircraft wing. The distinctive teardrop shape of the wing—if you're looking at it as a sliced-off section (never mind *why* you'd be looking at a sliced-off section)—is a clever design that channels air both quickly and slowly around itself. The drag, the pressure of the air, is what actually lifts the wing, which in turn lifts the plane. It's precisely this resistance that a jet manipulates so it can soar through the sky at horrendously insane speeds.

I'm finding that in my own daily life it's precisely the resistance of my mundane struggles—my career troubles, girl troubles, health and so forth—that I utilize to strengthen myself as a young bodhisattva. I'm now finding that struggle is an ally. It's not at all, as I would've sworn in a court of law, my worst nightmare.

Many of us have a little yellow book on or near our altars called *For Today and Tomorrow*. In the introduction, SGI President Ikeda mentions one of his lifelong mottoes:

“A wave grows stronger with each obstacle it encounters.”

Simple yet profound!

I'll resist boring you, the reader, with my own woefully inaccurate description of how this physically works—a wave getting stronger—but note that it's pretty easy to picture how true this is. Just close your eyes (not while driving a car) and imagine a heap of boulders near the shore and a majestic wave surmounting each obstacle. How poetically this mirrors our own youthful journey!

As I write this, I'm getting off the phone with my friend Michelle, whose father is on the verge of death. As of yesterday, his doctors gave him one day to live. Michelle's father managed to stay alive long enough for his son to visit him and long enough to encourage many, many people with his valiant spirit.

Michelle, a high school senior, is telling me all this with a penetrating confidence in her voice. I am blown away. All I can do is blurt the word “wow” every few seconds, which I repeat (no exaggeration) some seven times in a row. I'm scrambling for ideas on how to encourage her. But in reality, she's the one completely encouraging me. Her father's plight forced her to summon a mountain of inner strength, and indeed here she is earnest with resolve.

Another friend (to keep her anonymous, let's call her V. Krauss—no, that's too obvious. Let's just say Vicky K.) wrote in her college admissions essay a detailed history of her difficult life in East Los Angeles. She culminated this with an insightful analysis: Because of the mad, foul, nasty things she went through, she is ready to face anything. Vicky is realizing that hardship is the flame in a forge, tempering the steel sword inside it.

In their final confrontation, Obi-Wan Kenobi says to Darth Vader, “If you strike me down, I shall become more powerful than you can possibly imagine.” Ah, I love this conviction. I dream of saying this to some girl who'd be about to break a date.

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She'd begin, and I'd calmly reply: "If you strike me down I shall become more powerful than you can ever imagine! ...Pass the ketchup." With this mentality, even my worst experience will lead to a positive action, propelling me toward a better Buddhist practice. Everything can go wrong, everything around me can collapse, even my own cellular structure, but nothing can stop me from seeking the Gohonzon. In fact, when things try to stop me, that's when I get my second wind, my lift.

Now, by no means have I mastered this principle. But thus far, just even striving to follow it has yielded amazing results.