

TRAILBLAZERS!
BY DAISAKU LESLIE
SGI-USA STUDENT DIVISION LEADER
“VICTORY LIES IN THE CHALLENGE”

“The journey from Kamakura to Kyoto takes twelve days. If you travel for eleven but stop with only one day remaining, how can you admire the moon over the capital?...How swiftly the days pass!” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1027)

It’s hard to believe that a whole year has passed. It feels like we just celebrated New Year’s Day a month ago. The other day I thought about the year 2000, the goals I set and what I was able to accomplish. Honestly speaking, I didn’t accomplish all of my goals, but I did accomplish most of them. I set very high standards for myself, but this does not justify the fact that I didn’t read all the books that I had set out to read. But there are still nine days left in the year.

My reflection on this past year reminded me of an experience I had in graduate school. I was required to write a master’s thesis of more than 100 pages. I struggled with many issues that final year in graduate school. I was a full-time student, doing SGI activities, and struggling to make ends meet by working 30 hours a week. In order to write, I felt I needed to spend more time on my studies.

I took a chance at a scholarship and cut down on my working hours, only to find that the scholarship didn’t go through and my pockets were empty. I couldn’t even afford to take a bus or train to the library, let alone pay for the books and make copies for my research. I was stuck in a very hard place.

The Gohonzon looked at me as if to say, “I’m here, talk to me.” I chanted earnestly to overcome this situation in the blistering heat of a humid summer.

Then one day I received a phone call: “Can you work and interpret for a choir touring Japan for a month and a half?” I thought, “Another six weeks of not working on my thesis?” But I needed funds to do my research, so I accepted the job. When the job was finished, I had three months to write my paper, and as I began the research, the focus and topic of my paper began to change. I read, took notes, read, took notes, wrote down my thoughts and comments on note cards along with note headings. By the time I completed all the research and developed a solid outline, there were only three weeks left to write a 100-page thesis.

For the next three weeks I ate, slept on cardboard boxes, racked my brain, and wrote like my life depended upon it. I determined that I had to finish the paper as if it would cost me my life. In 17 days, I was able to complete my thesis. As a result, I was offered entrance into the doctoral program.

The moral of this story is that time is not the most important factor in life, but rather the strength of one’s determination and the spirit to not give up; to challenge oneself to the very end so that you can “admire the moon over the capital.”

President Ikeda recently stated in Singapore that the spirit of mentor and disciple exists whenever people try to elevate themselves in any realm of endeavor whether in the world of art, crafts, sports or education.

So whether or not I am able to accomplish the rest of my goals for this year, I am determined to challenge myself in the next nine days and experience how truly

precious each day of life is. Moreover, acting on the conviction that how I end this year will determine how I begin the new millennium, I am confident that good fortune will follow. Victory will lie in the challenge.