

**YOUNG DISCIPLES
GRABBING THE ROPE
JOMO THORNE, SGI-USA HIGH SCHOOL DIVISION LEADER**

The following is part 1 of a summary of recent discussions I've had with representative members of the SGI-USA High School Division. The discussions revolved around issues related to the mentor–disciple relationship and are presented here as one dialogue. Participating in this dialogue are Rey Estevez, a 14-year-old high school freshman from San Francisco; Niiayi Quaye, a 15-year-old high school sophomore from Chicago; Brian Nakamura, a 17-year-old high school senior from Metairie, La.; and of course, me.

Jomo Thorne: Hey guys, how's it going?

Rey Estevez: It's cool, cool...

Niiayi Quaye: I'm doin' all right...

Brian Nakamura: Things are going well.

Jomo: I was wondering if I could get some of your thoughts on a topic I know a lot of Buddhist youth have a hard time understanding—the mentor–disciple relationship.

We hear lots of talk about the three presidents of the Soka Gakkai and how they kept Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism pure because of the mentor-disciple relationships that existed among them. We also hear a lot about SGI President Ikeda and all the great things he has done.

Still, I know that sometimes it's hard for us as youth to really appreciate why we need to focus so much on the mentor–disciple relationship and what it has to do with our own lives. What do you guys think? Have you had any experiences with a mentor in your lives?

Rey: Well, I think that a mentor is a person who can help broaden one's perspective. I mean, I think that youth are the most misunderstood group in society and that we need a lot of room to breathe.

There are lots of times when I feel like I have so much energy and that there's so much I want to do. But I get frustrated by how hard it seems to do the things I want—it feels like no matter how much I do sometimes I'm still in the same place.

Jomo: Yeah, as youth it seems very natural for us to go after what we want with lots of energy. But because we sometimes lack experience, it can seem that we keep running into obstacles in spite of our best efforts. Sometimes it feels like our lives are like cars whose wheels are spinning in place.

Niiayi: I think that the value of having someone to look to as a mentor is that they can relate to the struggles that you're going through. They've probably gone through what you're going through right now and you can learn from their mistakes. As youth, we do have a lot of energy but we don't always know how to best use that energy.

Brian: My wrestling team coach encourages us during practices by sharing some of the experiences he had when he was on his school's wrestling team. When he was a sophomore in high school, he came in first place at the state wrestling championship.

The following year he made it to the state championships once more, but this time he had a really cocky and arrogant attitude and got beat really badly (he came in fifth place). That defeat really affected him deeply.

His senior year he went into the state championships with a new determination. He wrestled and beat the number one seeded wrestler and won the championship once more.

I think that being able to hear his experience encouraged the guys on the team....

(Look for part 2 of this article in the April 20 issue of *Seize the Day*)