

GET REAL!
THE TIME IS NOW
BY BOBBIE STEMPLER, SGI-USA JR. HIGH SCHOOL LEADER

“You’ve done well. You were able to plant the seed of Buddhahood in your friend’s heart. That’s a splendid thing.” So saying, you should praise and encourage one another, sharing one another’s joy as brothers and sisters. Touched by such a family-like atmosphere, more and more people will begin to take faith in true Buddhism. Love and peace are the lifeblood of a true home (SGI President Ikeda, *Faith Into Action*, p. 157).

A few weeks ago, we experienced another shooting tragedy in a high school. Once again, America watched the news in horror and fear. The question is what can we do to prevent this. Some say it is because of the availability of guns or drugs. This was the debate when I was in high school. And instead of getting any better, it’s actually worse.

But this isn’t about guns — it’s about people, people who don’t value human life. The only way we can change this is by changing ourselves and those around us.

I attended a performance group meeting the weekend after the shooting in Santee, Calif. In my discussion group, one student talked about a shooting and a suicide at her school. The students said that one reason why they didn’t end up attempting suicide or other violence is because they had friends with whom they were able to talk.

We are so fortunate to have the SGI where we have many friends who support us. I have been an SGI-USA member all of my life. I grew up in a city of 50,000 where there were two junior high schools and two high schools. All of my teachers and classmates knew that I was a Buddhist. I was told that being Buddhist was normal just because my mom was Japanese. But I was also teased at times.

When my classmates would come over for group projects, they would ring the bell and say, “Oommm.” Some people asked why I didn’t wear an orange robe and shave my head. Because of this I was reluctant to tell other people that I was Buddhist. This hesitation continued well past high school.

In a recent article in the *World Tribune*, SGI-USA Women’s Leader Matilda Buck shared about being introduced to the SGI. I thought about the people I’ve met, but didn’t tell about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I can think of some of the cashiers at the stores I have shopped at or classmates in college who looked unhappy.

I chanted for them, but I didn’t have the courage to tell them about the Gohonzon. I felt that I didn’t know enough or didn’t have the perfect life to show them actual proof. There are many excuses I thought of, but looking back, maybe they were just waiting like Matilda, or my grandmother or the other millions of members around the world.

This is a perfect opportunity to share our organization and this practice. Victory Over Violence has never been so needed. This is an opportunity for me to grow and become a person who values life enough to share with other people our practice and our organization. This is my chance to make a difference.

SGI President Ikeda says, “We must never lose sight of the fact that a third millennium imbued with respect for the sanctity of life, free from nuclear arms and war and rich with the rainbow hues of diversity, will come into being only through the efforts of empowered and responsible citizens who don’t wait for someone else to take the initiative” (*Faith Into Action*, p. 287).