

**YOUNG DISCIPLES
GRABBING THE ROPE
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The following is the conclusion of a two-part summary from recent discussions I've had with representative members of the SGI-USA High School division. The discussions revolve 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. (Part 1 can be found in the March 16 issue of Seize the Day.)

Jomo: What are some of the things that can get in the way of us learning from a mentor?

Rey: I think that arrogance can block our connection with a mentor. Lots of times, young people don't really question if the things we think we understand are really as they seem. We sort of become satisfied with a superficial understanding of our lives. It's arrogant for me to think that I don't have anything to learn from others. Unfortunately, usually unaware that I have this attitude, it's hard to see that it's blocking my ability to learn from a mentor.

Niiayi: Yeah, once we find someone we consider a mentor we should trust his or her advice. My mom told me about an experience a fellow SGI member had recently. She went to get guidance about how to expand her business. The person she went to talk to had a lot of faith and business experience, and while he gave her a good piece of advice, she refused to listen. It would seem that she ultimately did not trust his words.

Jomo: In the letter, "Questions And Answers On Embracing The Lotus Sutra," Nichiren Daishonin uses the image of climbing a steep mountain to describe the importance of trusting and having faith in our Buddhist practice. He writes:

Suppose that a person is standing at the foot of a tall embankment and is unable to ascend. And suppose that there is someone on top of the embankment who lowers a rope and says, "If you take hold of this rope, I will pull you up to the top of the embankment." If the person at the bottom begins to doubt that the other has the strength to pull him up, or wonders if the rope is not too weak and therefore refuses to put forth his hand and grasp it, then how is he ever to get to the top of the embankment? But if he follows the instructions, puts out his hand and takes hold of the rope, then he can climb up.

If one doubts the strength of the Buddha when he says, "I alone can save them"; if one is suspicious of the rope held out by the Lotus Sutra when its teachings declare that one can "gain entrance through faith"; if one fails to chant the Mystic Law which guarantees that "[concerning this man's

attainment of Buddhahood,] there can assuredly be no doubt,” then the Buddha’s power cannot reach him and it will be impossible for him to scale the embankment of enlightenment.

Lack of faith is the basic failing that causes one to fall into hell (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 59–60).

I think that in some ways mentors are people who stand at the top of the mountain of their particular fields. They keep throwing down rope to help us climb the mountain. But without even knowing it, we sometimes push away that rope. I think that SGI President Ikeda is like that guy at the top of the mountain of life, and that we need to grab a hold of the rope he’s handed to us. The mentor–disciple relationship in Buddhism exists so that we can learn how to practice Buddhism correctly and apply Buddhist philosophy to our day-to-day lives.

Brian: We need to be humble, which can be hard for young people, even if we don’t realize it. Having to rely on someone else is a healthy check on the part of our minds that believes there is little to learn from others.

Rey: We need to start developing relationships that help us learn from each other. We need to try to make a difference in the lives of others at each encounter.

Niiayi: Yeah, I agree.

Jomo: Thanks for sharing your thoughts, guys. I feel like I learned a lot from you.