

BEING THE CHANGE I WISH TO SEE PAMELA MISHLER, BERKELEY, CALIF.

I was able to attend this year's Student Division Conference at the Florida Nature Culture Center for the first time, held the weekend of Aug. 2–5.

Before I left for the conference, I felt like I was facing a wall, because no matter how much I chanted or how hard I worked, I didn't feel like I was moving forward. I also felt confused about what my mission would be. This all changed when I went to the conference and met hundreds of bright and determined students from all over the country. We had more than 200 people attending the conference, which was the most ever! The theme was, "Be the Change You Wish to See."

On the first night, we were told that we would change our lives in these three days as the foundation for the next 30 years. I'm sure most of the students were skeptical at first, but we would soon learn that this was true. We were also told that we are propagating Buddhism through changing our lives. This conference would challenge our weaknesses and train us to become future leaders.

As an icebreaker, each of us partnered up with the person sitting next to us and shared three goals with each other. My goals were to: 1) get a clear insight on what my mission is, 2) break through the wall I have been trapped behind and 3) develop ever-lasting friendship.

On the second day, Northern California Zone members put on a session titled "Be the Change You Wish to See." We performed a skit that showed how a person could do human revolution by doing small things each day, such as studying five more minutes or chanting 10 more minutes. We broke up into discussion groups and got to know each other better by sharing our goals and discussing what kind of changes we would like to make. It was interesting for me to see how other members are struggling over similar things. We ended the session by writing a letter to ourselves and putting it into a time capsule, promising to meet again in 30 years.

Members from Northeastern Zone presented the Soka Spirit session. We learned more about Soka Spirit and discussed what causes negative characteristics in people. In my group, we discussed how negative characteristics may be caused by chanting with an incorrect spirit. The solution would be to not point fingers at people, but to chant to find wisdom and to gain conviction.

The highlight of the day was when SGI-USA General Director Danny Nagashima lectured on "Prayer, Shakubuku and the Mentor-Disciple Relationship." He was extremely funny and kept everyone in the room laughing! He said that it is not a coincidence that we are here together today and that we should develop our dreams for the rest of the world. He said that we need to have a big dream, not a cheap one. It is important for us to create our dreams and challenge ourselves to the limit.

It was especially touching to hear his experiences as a college student. When he was 22 years old, he chanted 12 hours straight to find his mission. He pointed out to us that President Ikeda says that only humans pray. It is important for us to fuse with the Gohonzon when we chant—to become one with the Gohonzon. He said then we are able to uncover our natural identity when we chant. We gain wisdom and courage when we don't give up. We were all encouraged and in high spirits after hearing him speak. Later, SGI-USA Women's Leader Matilda Buck made a surprise

visit that night and encouraged us as well.

Southern California Zone members held a high-energy session on “Shakubuku and Unity.” SGI-USA Youth Leader James Herrmann, spoke about shakubuku. He said that we should share this Buddhism with confidence and in a natural way that touches another person’s heart.

The talent show that night was unbelievable! It brought everyone together and opened up our hearts. I had the opportunity to sing the song I was preparing for the upcoming San Francisco Family Youth Festival on Aug. 19. Because of everyone’s support, I was able to put my all into the performance. I felt like I was in the state of Buddhahood! I overcame my fears and gained confidence in myself.

My experience at the FNCC was truly amazing! I have a hard time explaining it in words, because I am still absorbing everything. I had so many great conversations with youth from all over the country. Before I knew it, I had broken through the wall I was stuck behind and created deep friendships. Although I still don’t know what my mission is, I have confidence that I will be able to overcome whatever struggles I may be faced with. I am looking forward to seeing everyone again in 30 years! Until then, let’s chant abundant daimoku and become confident and courageous people who will fight to the end, no matter what situation we may find ourselves in.