

GET REAL!
PESSIMISM INTO HOPE
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Like many people, after the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks on the United States I felt a great sense of confusion and emptiness. This event shook every ounce of confidence I had in my faith and my ability to affect change. It also challenged my deeply held views of peace becoming a reality. Through returning to SGI President Ikeda's guidance at that crucial moment, I was able to change this pessimism and confusion into newfound hope.

Terrorism, war and human distrust became more real to me after Sept. 11. It was not something happening "somewhere else" anymore. I couldn't avoid it, even if I turned off my TV and radio. This tragedy was affecting my friends and loved ones in the deepest sense. I found myself left with many questions, such as "Why did this happen" and "What do we do now?"

For nearly two weeks, I was in a state of hopelessness. Every area in my life was affected, and I could see it as a reflection of my faith. In all the years of my Buddhist practice, I lived with the belief that since I had the Gohonzon and practiced Buddhism, I could change any situation. Similarly, with my practice I felt I could influence someone else's life regardless of how difficult their circumstances. Yet, after Sept. 11, the belief that "all I have to do is chant" seemed futile. I knew that doubt had set in and I needed to change my attitude. But how was I going to do this in the face of this terrible tragedy?

Amid my confusion, a friend mentioned to me that we should go back to the basics to find a solution. I started studying more about Buddhism, and I attended many study meetings and lectures. In the process, I began to read President Ikeda's guidance with a new attitude. I re-read his guidance, this time with an openness and eagerness I never felt before. This was like an awakening for me. I thought I knew a lot about the greatness of Buddhism, the SGI and President Ikeda, but in truth I did not. I re-learned so many things that I had missed before or just did not understand completely with my heart. Finally, I gained a new outlook on what was going on in society and gained insight on what was going on with me.

Of all the things I read during this time, *Discussions on Youth* turned out to be a great turning point for me. It refreshed my conviction that everyone has a responsibility for peace. Through President Ikeda's clear and poignant guidance, I could see how peace can be achieved, and that it is not impossible.

One passage from *Discussions on Youth* particularly inspired me: "It is I who must thank you. I am determined to give my all to these discussions. I wish to speak honestly, to leave the truth as my legacy to all of you. Why? Because my sole desire now is to raise genuine leaders for the twenty-first century. The cultivation of truly humanistic leaders is imperative for the sake of the world, humanity, kosen-rufu and peace. The whole world cries out for this" (vol. 1, p. vii).

Since that fateful day — Sept. 11 — I have regained confidence through study that with my Buddhist faith, I need not fear anything. With daimoku, courage and hope, everything that seemed bleak is not — provided I take the first step to make change happen. Through vigorous study, I realized that I have to take concrete action, and action creates change. The events that took place on Sept. 11 will be a catalyst for me to work even harder for kosen-rufu and the sake of others.