

EXPERIENCE—TAMARA FRASIER, JERSEY CITY, N.J. DEFEATING THE ENEMY FROM WITHIN

Tamara Frazier overcomes doubt and fear in establishing her legal career.

A quote from SGI President Ikeda adorned my grandmother's Buddhist altar for as long as I can remember: "Any person, before being defeated by an enemy is first defeated by himself and will be ultimately beaten by the traitor in his heart." My grandmother converted to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1968, and since her passing in 1992, I have cherished this encouragement as a reminder of her strength. I have also used this passage to continuously fuel my determination to show the power of the Gohonzon.

Although I was born into this practice, it was not until my most recent experience that I had to challenge myself and my faith by undergoing severe struggles and hardships. This journey began when I graduated from law school in June 2000.

Upon graduation, I immediately started studying for the New York and New Jersey Bar exams, which I had decided to take simultaneously. Every day, I attacked my bar studies like I was training for a marathon. In the process, I also became disciplined in other areas of my life. My Buddhist practice became stronger than ever, and I even lost more than 60 pounds from the combined regimen of daily jogging and stress, which was so intense that my stomach was constantly upset.

The Saturday before I left to take the Bar, more than 20 SGI-USA members from the New Jersey region came to support my 13 hours of continuous chanting. I will never forget that when my study partners asked if I felt that I would pass the exam, I declared with confidence, "There is no other option."

After I took the bar, I was able to relax for the first time in months. However, my mind became overwhelmed with the harsh reality that I had no job and, even worse, I had no idea what I wanted to do with my law degree. This was devastating. I was 25 years old and had been in school all of my life. My desire to learn and my affinity to fight injustice had brought me this far, but I never envisioned myself post-school. I fell into a deep depression, and even further into debt since I now had to confront not only school loans, but also rent and bills.

For many weeks, I had the following routine: wake up, do morning gongyo, sit on the couch all day crying, drink rum-and-Cokes, watch TV talk shows, do evening gongyo, and go to bed. One day, I found myself on a train to Maryland in search of the comfort that only my mother could provide. While at home, I remember crying on my mother's shoulder shouting, "I did everything right, why is this happening to me! I've chanted so much and done so many SGI activities!" My mother simply responded: "You're right. You have created the fortune, now open your life to experience the benefit. Go out there and take the job that you know you are worthy of!"

At that moment, I realized that this practice consists of prayer plus action. I had only focused on the former thinking my job would miraculously appear. I went back to New Jersey, immediately began chanting abundantly and spent my time during the day visiting fellow members, studying Buddhist literature and doing temporary assignments at law firms. I had a refreshed attitude toward my work. Instead of feeling demeaned by the assignments, I determined to do the best that I could even if that just meant filing. I felt

confident that if I continued to make good causes, the best job would manifest.

On my third temp assignment, I was placed with one of the largest corporate law firms in New Jersey and instantly bonded with the partner who interviewed me. She hired me as a temp and, three weeks later, I was offered an associate position, which is almost unheard of in the legal community.

As soon as I accepted the position, it seemed as if everything fell apart. While all my efforts to pass the New York Bar had paid off, I was not so fortunate with the New Jersey bar, and in order to keep my job, I had to take the bar again in February. Also, I, like many others at the firm, began having severe conflicts with the boss. Her emotional mood swings, constant put-downs and tendency to aggressively blame others created a very unpleasant and humiliating work environment. I felt I was suffering from “battered wife syndrome,” constantly questioning my own dignity and self-worth.

Again, I was devastated and felt that my whole world was crumbling. I had nothing to cling on to except my practice to the Gohonzon. I determined to stand up for myself and to show everyone at work how a practitioner of Buddhism responds to adversity.

As a result of my renewed determination, the firm supported me by paying for my taking the bar a second time. Even though I was working 12 to 14 hour days and had no time to study, a week prior to the exam, I had the fortune to study the very issues I would be given on the exam and was able to pass. Today, my relationship with my boss also continues to develop and grow. Although many employees under her supervision have quit, I have been able to survive longer than anyone.

I have come to realize that although I cannot control everything that happens to me, I can control how I respond to situations. I have also learned to utilize my practice to the Gohonzon as a tool to invoke my own strength to overcome any obstacle. The benefits I have received from my Buddhist practice are immense. I am a 26-year-old corporate immigration attorney admitted in New York and New Jersey, and practice law at one of the biggest law firms in New Jersey. My biggest benefit, however, is the freedom that I have gained from replacing fear with faith. As such, I face every day with a renewed resolve to show actual proof. I have come to appreciate my practice to the Gohonzon as the calm in any storm and place all of my confidence in that, which is my own Buddha nature. Finally, I continue to develop unshakeable confidence to stand up for myself in the workplace.

In the words of my deceased grandmother’s favorite passage, “Any person, before being defeated by an enemy, is first defeated by himself.” I will continue to win over myself and my environment, and realize all of my dreams no matter what!