

## **EXPERIENCE—BILL RAY, VISALIA, CALIF. WINNING THROUGH FAITH AND PERSEVERANCE**

**Police Officer Bill Ray develops the strength to never give up, based on Nichiren Daishonin's words 'Continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens.'**

I first encountered Buddhism nearly seven years ago at the age of 40. My life at that time was an unbelievable mess due to a deep, crippling depression. Being a police officer required that I handle not only my problems but others' as well. However, due to this illness I also suffered physically and intense chest pains landed me in the cardiac intensive care unit. I took a medical leave of absence, filed a worker's compensation claim and, while on disability, tried to figure out what to do with the rest of my life.

Despite the stress inherent in my occupation, I had always been able to do the work. I took pride in my job, in protecting the citizens of my community and bringing to justice the criminals who victimized them. Now, I could no longer do this.

While on leave, two of my supervisors visited me at home. What I had expected from them was the kind of support that I would have given a fellow officer facing difficulties. I truly believed in the brotherhood of police officers and still do. Instead, in reaction to my sudden absence from work, I was informed that I was no longer on active duty and had my badge taken from me. In addition, the chief of police issued a memo forbidding anyone in my department to have any contact with me. The motivation for this action is still a mystery to me, although I suspect it had to do with my filing a worker's compensation claim. I felt as though I had been thrown away like an old piece of equipment. My feelings of anger and uselessness reached such new depths that I contemplated suicide.

Within a week, a local emergency room physician who was also a reserve police officer paid me a visit. I had heard through a friend that he was a Buddhist, so I started asking him questions, just out of curiosity. Normally, I would not have asked such questions due to prior bad experiences with some organized religious groups, but my situation had become so desperate I was willing to try almost anything. And, I took an interest.

My friend told me about the benefit of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and how it functions as "good medicine" for your life. He continued to encourage me during his frequent visits, despite the personal risk he was taking in defiance of the department's order forbidding anyone to talk to me. This soon led me to try chanting. I had nothing to lose.

After my first 30 minutes of chanting to the Gohonzon in my sponsor's home, I felt happy for the first time in months. When I chanted, my problems were no longer at the center of my life. After years of suffering, I suddenly felt hope again. As I would later learn, this was the beginning of a process where my life would change immensely for the better. However, I still had my negativity to deal with.

Unemployment, poverty, unremitting anxiety, health problems and low self-esteem were daily issues I had to deal with. My friend encouraged me to challenge the severe reality of my life and view it as an opportunity for growth. When seeking encouragement, rather than engaging in long philosophical discussions, our conversations led us repeatedly to the Gohonzon where we would chant daimoku.

Initially I found this a bit irritating. Functioning as an "excellent physician," though, my

friend encouraged me to chant with him, often for hours at a time, and together we studied *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*. As I struggled during these very difficult times, the words of the Daishonin seemed to come alive. I read “Happiness in this World”: “Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. Then you will experience boundless joy from the law” (WND, 681).

Written to a 13th-century samurai warrior with a liking for sake, I thought this writing had a special relevance for me. Though at first my mind would often wander, making it difficult to chant, keeping the words of the Daishonin in mind enabled me to continue. As I did so, my life-condition grew stronger and chanting daimoku became much easier. Chanting for hours on end, though sometimes difficult, turned out to be the very best thing I could do. In time, I developed a strong determination to “continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo no matter what happens.”

I felt I was getting stronger inside. By comparison, my personal situation seemed slow to change. Soon I moved into cramped, single-room living quarters and received the Gohonzon. The times that followed were filled with hardship. While going through highs and lows, my chanting and my connection to other SGI-USA members became my safety net.

Having left my old job on adversarial terms, I found my applications for police positions consistently rejected. Despite my desperate situation, opportunities presented themselves at crucial moments. I found a job as a youth counselor 10 miles from home. Having no way to get there, at the last minute I obtained a functioning car by trading my guitar and hand-gun for it.

To make ends meet, I took on numerous additional part-time jobs, often working three at a time, seven days a week, with no time off. After a year and half of struggling, doing things like delivering court subpoenas, department store security and farm labor, I was offered a job as an investigator for check fraud cases at the Visalia Police Department, a well-known agency. Though I was a non-sworn, part-time employee without benefits and at low pay, I challenged myself to do the best job possible and show actual proof of my Buddhist practice. Soon I was successfully preparing cases for trial and obtaining convictions. After three years, I was overseeing as many as 200 active cases that earned me recognition within my department. This led to a promotion to a full-time position in the Violent Crimes Unit.

Still, my effort to find a full-time sworn peace officer’s position met with continual dead-ends. Without it, my police certification from the state allowing me to work as a police officer would soon expire. I felt angry and discouraged. Just when it seemed things were at their worst, when I felt I could no longer continue and was ready to give up, I remembered the Daishonin’s words “Continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens.” At that most crucial moment, my life suddenly changed and I began to break through my obstacles.

One year ago, the state of California hired me as a full-time sworn police officer in a position ideally suited to my needs. With my prior investigative and patrol experience, I now train new officers just beginning their careers in law enforcement. I do my best to nurture in them the confidence that the power to win over any problem lies within.

One of my greatest benefits is having met Emiko, a beautiful woman whose determination in Buddhist practice has encouraged me immensely, and we have built a foundation for our lives together. We recently purchased a new, two-story home,

something that was previously unimaginable to me, where we regularly hold meetings for kosen-rufu.

In just less than seven years, my life has totally transformed. Though I have achieved outward success, nothing compares to the change I have experienced inside. Low self-esteem has been gradually replaced with confidence and my crippling depression is a thing of the past. Best of all, I have developed the strength to never give up by living the Daishonin's words, "Continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens."

— *With help from Joseph Rogers, M.D.*

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