

Standing Alone—But Not in Isolation

NICHIREN Daishonin states in the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” that “the voice does the work of the Buddha” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 708). Nichiren Daishonin set the example. Of course we’ve never heard him speak, but the manner in which he wrote, in other words, how he used language, provides some insight. I continue to be impressed with the care with which he chose each word he wrote. And the fact that he was able to encourage and inspire such a variety of recipients with his correspondence illustrates the thoughtfulness with which he crafted each letter and treatise. Using the “voice of the Buddha,” he clearly put his heart and soul into what he wrote. He embraced men, women, government officials, the wealthy, the poor, the educated and the commoner alike with his words.

How we employ the “voice of the Buddha,” that is, how we use language as we tend to our daily affairs is vitally important. And given that what we say can have such an effect on another person’s life, the ideas and expressions we use should convey our thoughtfulness and conviction. It is one thing to parrot what we’ve heard others say. It is another matter entirely to understand what we are saying. How many expressions have we used over the years that seem to slip off our tongue automatically, from force of habit?

One expression that comes to mind is the “stand-alone spirit.” It’s a phrase we’ve all heard hundreds of times, but what really does it mean? On one level it can mean to depend on no one but ourselves. But how do we strike a balance between standing alone and standing apart? To stand alone does not mean to stand in isolation. It means to take full responsibility for our actions. Misunderstanding that point alone can be the difference between being curious about life or falling into a state of self-satisfaction; between being open or being closed.

Inherent in having a stand-alone spirit then is the desire to learn, to seek out new knowledge about the intricacies of life from any source. As Nichiren Daishonin states in “The Gift of Rice”: “To have a profound knowledge of this world is itself Buddhism. No affairs of life or work are in any way different from the ultimate reality” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 269).

WHEN you consider the classic literature, the many novels, the number of scholarly works available to us, not to mention the journals on every subject imaginable, there is certainly no shortage of material to choose from. We just have to seek it out. If we are to change our environment, we must understand it from as broad a perspective as we can. In other words, curiosity is an aspect of a stand-alone spirit.

I attended the 10th Headquarters Leaders Meeting on April 21 in Tokyo where President Ikeda spoke about the military regime that was installed in Brazil after a coup d’état in 1964. Two years later in 1966, he visited Brazil. But the climate was so oppressive he had to cut his trip short and it would be another eighteen years before he could secure a visa to visit Brazil again. During those years, one woman, Sylvia Saito, exercised her stand-alone spirit. She decided she wouldn’t accept such an untenable situation. Of her own volition, she set out to chant daimoku relentlessly to turn things around. She didn’t boast about her campaign or coerce others to join her. She simply took it upon herself to pray for the political situation to change.

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FINALLY, in February 1984, President Ikeda returned to Brazil to an overwhelming reception. And again, in 1993 he returned and met with Mrs. Saito and her husband at the Nature and Culture Center of Brazil where he praised her sincere endeavors. It was soon after that she passed away on April 28. More than 5,000 people attended her funeral, including many prominent members of the government and Brazilian society.

Today, a park and a street have been named after the first Soka Gakkai president, Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, and another park to be named after the second president, Josei Toda, is in the planning stages.

No one told Mrs. Saito to do what she did. Her actions were propelled by her single-minded determination to see kosen-rufu flourish in her country and relieve the people's suffering of living under a military dictatorship. President Ikeda said that her daimoku was the driving force that created the current growth of Brazilian kosen-rufu.

In his 1997 peace proposal, President Ikeda says:

Indeed, every one of us should realize that we possess the nobility of spirit to be the main actor in changing the course of history, and with that conviction, to undertake the task we share of solving the global issues of our time. (April 1977 *Living Buddhism*, p. 29)

Because of these mostly unseen efforts of SGI members throughout the world, the foundation of kosen-rufu has been laid. Just as the members in Brazil experienced, obstacles of all kinds may rise to hinder our efforts as we greet a new century. Now is the time to cultivate the stand-alone spirit—to confidently employ the wisdom, compassion and courage innate in our Buddhahood to lead brilliant daily lives and build an amazing future. At the conclusion of his peace proposal, President Ikeda declares:

Humankind is at a major turning point: Will it simply extend the existing course of history and wait for self-destruction? Or will it open up a new horizon and create a truly "global" and genuinely "human" civilization? We must choose the latter. The crux of our challenge is whether to simply be a passenger on the ship of fate, leaving everything to others, or to take the helm and be responsible for that ship ourselves to search, with the help of all, for the most desirable course. (Ibid., p. 29)

It is up to our own sense of mission whether we are passengers on our own ship of fate or we take the helm as one woman "standing alone" in Brazil so eloquently demonstrated.

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