

The Challenge To Care for Others

LAST month a group of SGI-USA young men from around the country gathered for a conference at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. I was there as well. Observing how open they were with one another and the thoughtfulness and earnestness of their questions, it made me feel even more confident that the future of American kosen-rufu is in good hands.

We spent much of our time discussing the basics of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. We explored the significance of developing a practice for oneself and for others, focusing on what it means to pray for the happiness of another person. As is the case with many of us, such concepts make sense in the abstract. But what these young men wanted to know is how, on a practical level, they should pray for others—especially those who give us the biggest headaches. They shared examples of people they encountered at school, at work and in their communities with whom they had strained relationships.

The difficulty of seriously praying for the happiness of another person was apparent to all of us. It was also apparent that therein lies our challenge. At the same time, experience tells us that when we accept the challenge of truly praying for another's happiness—in spite of feelings such as “they deserve to suffer”—we find how quickly and immeasurably our own state of life expands. These are the times when the profound meaning of such a prayer becomes apparent to us. Our lives become stronger, more humanistic and more inclusive. That, I think, is the crux of the change promised in undertaking human revolution. You might say that human revolution means “I'll change.” It has nothing to do with whether the other person changes.

That is why it is so crucial for me to change my view when I'm thinking less than flattering thoughts about someone else. When I chant, I try to imagine their virtues and humanity as I offer prayers for their happiness.

Chanting is the physical part of my prayer. It's where I exercise the voice of the Buddha. The content of my prayer is the spiritual part, the heart of the Buddha. This is where I must get down to business. President Ikeda always stresses this passage from “The Strategy of the Lotus Sutra,” “Faith (the heart of the Buddha) is what really matters” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 246).

As we continued our discussion, we realized something very basic; a variety of problems each of us might be facing is why we chant in the first place. But the blessing goes two ways. For instance, because I attended this conference, I could perhaps encourage another person. Not only would that benefit the recipient, the benefit also accrues to me. Nichiren Daishonin makes the point in the “Ongi Kuden” (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings). He writes: “When Bodhisattva Fukyo bowed irreverence to the four categories of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of these arrogant people bowed back to him. This is the same as how, when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 769).

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AS you might well imagine, as general director, I encounter all kinds of people with all kinds of problems and life-conditions. I enjoy pleasant relationships with the vast majority; however, I've learned to use all of my relationships, especially those that cause me discomfort, as the impetus for me to confront those aspects of my character that still need development. It has taught me to embrace everyone's opinion as warmly as possible.

President Ikeda tells us that:

Capable people are the greatest treasure. Without capable people the eternal establishment of the Law cannot be achieved. First of all, you must find capable people. Just as a miner searches for gold ore in ordinary rocks, you have to look for members who possess great potential, and then work to develop their ability with your heart and soul. Prayer is most fundamental in raising capable people. You should pray earnestly to the Gohonzon that the person you have found will become an able person. And then, with this prayer, you take the utmost care to help that person develop (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 9).

Concern for others is the heart of the Soka Gakkai. The world of Buddhism is a world of human harmony woven from the thread of mutual consideration. Accordingly, concern for others is the foremost requirement of leaders. (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 4, p. 105)

It takes effort by all of us to develop the imperative of the bodhisattva and learn to exercise humanism in our relationships. In "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin writes: "Although I and my disciples may encounter various difficulties, if we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood" (MW-2, 205). Notice that the Daishonin says, "I and my disciples." He doesn't say, "Because *you* may encounter difficulties." In a true mentor-and-disciple relationship, it can never be that one stands over the other.

Now is the time to focus on the sanctity of life, to build a new age that shines with the glory of humanity and culture.

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