

## Maintaining a Positive Attitude in the Face of Obstacles

By Craig Tachibana  
Honolulu, Hawaii

I HAD a major turning point in my life in 1997, as I faced nine months of unemployment. This coincided with my efforts regarding the temple issue after I heard Soka Gakkai Vice President Eiichi Wada encourage us to share our understanding with others.

In his thesis on "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin explains that taking courageous action against evil is a compassionate act and necessary to protect Buddhism. To help members develop a passion to fight evil themselves was my motivation as I traveled around the islands. As President Ikeda stated: "Logic and eloquence alone will not touch a person's heart ... you need compassion and sincerity in speaking to others ... words coming from your heart can move the hearts of others." (*Daily Guidance*, vol. 4, p. 151)

As I faced the reality of being laid off from one of Hawaii's largest real estate developers in October 1996, I was not afraid. Fear would come later.

At that time the economy of Hawaii was stagnating and even now still continues to decline. Jobs related to real estate development and construction industry that constituted my background were unstable and scarce. Fortunately my wife had a stable job.

In my twenty-two years of Buddhist practice, I had many experiences of getting good jobs. What I had learned from these experiences was that in essence, if one builds fortune in life through this Buddhist practice, a specific job could be found.

While chanting though, I did wonder how things were going to turn out. What came to my mind frequently was the question: "What am I going to learn from this?" I realized that it wasn't simply a job question any more, but a battle as to whether I could continue to live in Hawaii and maintain my living standards.

During this time, I qualified for a federally funded vocational training program, which allowed me to take many computer training classes. My daily routine included attending computer classes, looking for jobs, writing resumes, chanting and doing activities.

I began to understand that because the economic situation in Hawaii had deteriorated so much, in order to get a job, I had to change dramatically both in qualifications and in attitude to compete with the multitudes at the interview table. Getting a job now required a very upbeat, positive, super optimistic, highly qualified applicant with an enthusiasm that would fill the interview room.

I chanted, went to interviews and chanted again. Even my friends prayed that I would get a job. However, days, weeks and months passed. Reality grew grim and hope hung upon hope.

I had always thought that I was an optimistic person, because of my leadership experience in the SGI-USA since my youth and my many years of practice. I was wrong.

Title: Maintaining a Positive Attitude in the Face of Obstacles

Subject: Living Buddhism 01/98 v.2 n.1 p.28 LB9801p28 Honolulu, Hawaii

Author: Craig Tachibana:

Keywords: Attitude Career Experiences Face Hawaii Honolulu Maintaining Obstacles Positive Words

Getting out of bed each morning with hope and joy, chanting daimoku and being cheerful became very arduous.

Through chanting I realized that I had to learn how to be optimistic, or else I could fall into the emotional pit of depression and anxiety, if I wasn't there already. Being optimistic did not mean just being positive. Optimism required that I catch myself as soon as I start to slip or slide a bit into negativity. I needed to push and push and fight back to being positive and optimistic.

I learned that there are no degrees to being optimistic. I was either one hundred percent optimistic or I was falling down toward negativity. I learned this firsthand every morning I got up as the days wore on.

Optimism required my constant vigilance to fight the negative nature in my life in order to stay on top and not slip or fall off the cliff into any negativity.

Soon, learning to be optimistic every day became the real battle. Getting a job became secondary because there were no options on that issue—if I was not optimistic, I could project that at my interviews and I would not be selected no matter what my abilities were.

According to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we live in this *saha* world—the world of endurance—where we must endure all types of suffering. So I came to understand that I needed to learn now to enjoy myself as I went through this painful experience, because this is what life is and can be about. Through chanting I began to see beauty in the world. Living in this world is a great benefit, a great stage where Buddhas can take action.

I chanted, and asked, "What should I learn to fear in this world?" The answer that came to me was, "To fear being negative." So whenever I caught myself being negative, I learned to respond to that fear and start chanting, as if I were running away from a monster in a bad dream. This slide or fall into negativity had to be feared like the plague.

I challenged myself to be cheerful and optimistic, even if I had to act the part like an actor on a stage until it became second nature. In my unemployed state, I had no choice because I could fall into the chasm of hopelessness. It was either or—a no brainer. I could not afford to fall into the chasm because doing so would drag my wife down, too.

After nine months of unemployment, several qualifying tests and a seven-member panel interview, in July 1997, I received a job offer from the Hawaiian Electric Company, the largest electric utility company in Hawaii. The position offers opportunities for advancement and much more security for the future. My experience with the telephone company, my many computer courses, and my positive and confident responses during the panel interview were plus factors for my employment.

To me, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism signifies total jubilation or simply the "celebration of life." SGI President Ikeda talked about Ananda, a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha, whose name means "jubilation." He says:

Ananda stands for the great joy of life, which wells up from within through

chanting the daimoku of the Mystic Law. Joy of faith overflowing in our lives or a rushing stream of energy and vibrancy emerging from the depths of our being—this is the kind of invigoration in life which we can enjoy by practicing the Mystic Law.

Only when you challenge obstacles burning with strong and unflinching faith can you establish a life of indestructible joy. That is, only thus can you develop the life of Ananda of the Mystic Law.

A true leader of Buddhism is one who wraps himself and fills others with the brilliance of joy. His heart full of joy at being able to expound the teachings of Buddhism, he causes those around him to feel joy in the depths of their lives. Just as sunlight burns away dark clouds, such a person gives hope and sense of security to all those he meets and leads them to rejoice in faith.

This is what it means to be a Buddhist leader. This is all the true spirit of the Soka Gakkai. (September 1988, *SGI Graphic*, p. 8)

I believe that through my own suffering, I have become more compassionate and gained the confidence to carry out an optimistic and joyful Buddhist practice. □