

WINNING IN LIFE: THE BASICS OF THE PRACTICE OF NICHIREN'S BUDDHISM
Buddhahood Lies in Continuing
BY JEFF FARR, ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The gruesome story of Shariputra and the Devil of the Sixth Heaven stuck in many people's minds after they studied it for last year's Elementary Exam. Shariputra, a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha, was practicing the bodhisattva austerities, nearing their completion, when the Devil of the Sixth Heaven tried to trick him into quitting. Disguised as a Brahman, the devil begged for Shariputra's eye, which Shariputra promptly ripped out and handed to him.

But when the Brahman stomped the eye into the ground, Shariputra couldn't take it. The practice of giving alms was too difficult, he thought, so he quit his practice, only to end up miserable. Of course he eventually started practicing again, but he always regretted the time he wasted.

"I felt that [frustrated] at times," John Sweeney of San Lorenzo, Calif., said after the test. "Especially when it was hard for me to encourage someone else to practice. I'm trying to overcome this feeling and dig down deep in myself, so that I can really help people." The Shariputra allegory teaches us to continue in practice even when life deals us a blow. As Nichiren Daishonin says: "To accept [this sutra] is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 127).

Continuing is indeed not always easy. Sometimes it seems there are just too many components to the practice: doing the morning and evening prayers, chanting daimoku, going to meetings, reading articles like this, etc. And on top of all that, there's encouraging others to do the same.

Yoshi Nagaoka, SGI-USA youth division advisor, learned that a self-motivated practice is the key to continuing in all these things. "I was, so to speak, born into this practice; my parents joined when I was 2," he recalls. "When I was very young, like ages 5 to 10, I was always forced by my mom to do gongyo."

When he became a teenager, though, he felt he had to find his own reasons to practice Buddhism. "You don't get any result just being forced," he says. "At first, as I was told by my senior leaders or my parents, I tried to do something to contribute to the organization. But through those activities, I learned the importance of self-motivation, the self-realization of this practice."

While chanting one more Nam-myoho-renge-kyo or talking to one more person with a problem can sometimes seem as painful as taking out an eye, these are opportunities to remind ourselves why we are practicing in the first place. When we get back to our original self-motivation, continuing down the road can be a whole lot easier.

As SGI President Ikeda said when he visited America last year: "Ceaseless effort is what makes our faith a living and breathing part of us. And making our faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism an active and indivisible part of our lives is what it means to attain Buddhahood" (*SGI President Ikeda's Addresses in the United States — June/July 1996*, p. 13).

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