

Yours Truly, Betty B.

DEAR BETTY: It's February and I'm getting nowhere with my resolutions: to quit smoking, control my short temper, be more considerate toward my wife and call all my members once a week. But nicotine withdrawal caused me to have an even shorter fuse which made me fuss at my wife, who accused me of calling my members to avoid her!

— BEHIND THE 8 BALL

DEAR TIME TO CATCH UP: While obstacles may seem like they're attacking from the outside — all right, I know you're not really blaming your wife — we must defeat them by building up the reserves of our life force on the inside. This can only be done with lots of daimoku.

Changing your karma — reversing the direction of the well-worn path you constantly create — takes constant, and often excruciating, effort. When I quit smoking, I put on 10 pounds. So my next resolution was to lose the extra weight. I put a lock on the refrigerator (well, figuratively), but I still had all this nervous energy. The solution? I began biting my nails. So my next resolution....

It was tough, all right. But did I take it out on others? *Nooooo*. I was unfailingly wonderful to everyone around me.

(OK, IT'S JUST A JOKE! STOP BUGGING ME, WILL YA! — Say, buddy, got a chocolate bar? A stick of gum? Anything?)

Obviously, these things can get pretty complex. Before you know it, you begin to wish you were back to your familiar, if flawed, old self.

Don't look back! Transforming yourself into the kind of person you deeply hope to be is the biggest benefit of our Buddhist practice. Don't settle for less.

DEAR BETTY: From the time she was little, I dragged my daughter to SGI activities — she marched in the parades, attended the picnics, sang at the meetings. Now she's a teenager and refuses to chant about her problems. Instead she turns up the television to drown out my daimoku! What can I do — that's legal, I mean?

— 19th NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

DEAR MOTHER COURAGE: Would that a parent could stuff wisdom into a child as easily as stuffing the wriggling little critter into a snowsuit. There are few things more frustrating than standing by while a person you love bumbles through life, unwilling to take well-meaning if — from her point of view — dorky advice. But teenagers need the chance to make their own mistakes and test their coping mechanisms with difficulties.

Like any living thing, your daughter will develop in her own time. Patient nurturing is the key: A sprinkling of food, a few gentle words and lo and behold your teen may respond. Then again, she may not. Not right away, anyhow.

Why not see if there's a member your daughter respects who could give her a call once in awhile? Like someone with a navel ring and blue hair, maybe.

Make sure you're setting a good example, too. Don't forget, the little charmers are only too eager to judge Buddhism by our sometimes feeble practice — and actions.

Above all, take heart. All those causes you made weren't for nothing, you know.

SGI President Ikeda said recently: "When parents exert themselves in faith, they can lead their children to happiness without fail.... One lighthouse illuminates the way for many ships to steer safely through uncertain waters. In the same way, a person with strong, committed faith shines as a beacon of hope for his or her family."

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Title: Yours Truly, Betty B.

Subject: World Tribune 02/21/97 n.3127 p.5 WT970221p05

Author:

Keywords: Betty Bodhisattva News Practice Tribune Truly World Yours