

**Understanding Mentor and Disciple: A Promise to My Mentor**  
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Perhaps the most beautiful, fulfilling aspect of my practice of more than 25 years has been the development of my relationship with my mentor, SGI President Ikeda. This has enabled me to experience the spirit of the mentor–disciple relationship.

When I joined the organization in June 1971, I could not understand what Daisaku Ikeda was about and why everyone was making such a fuss over him. I dismissed him as having nothing to do with me and was relieved when I learned that in this practice we follow the law, not the person.

But over time, I’ve had many opportunities to be with President Ikeda. And some of these were so profoundly personal and meaningful to me that they enabled me to form a relationship with him, even though great physical distance separates us.

One such experience occurred in August 1979, when I had the chance to travel to Japan. President Ikeda at that time gave guidance about the importance of propagating the Daishonin’s teachings.

He asked us, in the most humble way, if we thought we could each set a goal to introduce one person to the Gohonzon a year. I considered the request and said to myself, “This is something I can challenge — and *want* to challenge.” I made a promise to President Ikeda to do so.

As a disciple of Nichiren Daishonin and President Ikeda, I knew it was my mission to introduce as many people as possible to the practice and enable one person a year to receive the Gohonzon. Helping another person change his or her karma was something I could pray for wholeheartedly. And I received tremendous benefit as a result of responding to President Ikeda’s request to introduce new members to the Gohonzon and take responsibility for their care and development.

Perhaps the single most important experience for me with President Ikeda was on June 18, 1981, in Glen Cove, N.Y., the day President Ikeda wrote his poem “To My Beloved Young American Friends.” Two hundred of us had assembled with President Ikeda to receive guidance from him and reaffirm our commitment to the kosen-rufu movement. For my friends and I, the feeling of joy on that day will live in our hearts forever.

After the day’s events concluded and we were being driven to the airport, a message came over our driver’s radio to go to the Pig and Whistle Restaurant as soon as possible. President Ikeda wanted to express his appreciation to all of the drivers who had helped behind the scenes during his visit to New York. We had not been invited since we were not drivers, but we were in the car when the call came in so we “went along for the ride.”

As my friends and I blended in with the regular restaurant clientele, I observed President Ikeda’s attitude throughout the afternoon. He treated the young drivers as if they were the most important people in the world, embracing them with his heart and showing them profound appreciation. His extension of himself did not stop there, but included the restaurant staff who were taking care of him and his guests. It was the same respect I have seen him show royalty or heads of state.

Actually, it doesn’t matter whether President Ikeda is meeting with members, non-members, seniors, children, people with high social status or ordinary people like ourselves — his attitude toward each person is the same. He seems to recognize the Buddha nature in each person he meets and is able to bring it out. I had read his guidance to treat all people with respect, but his behavior demonstrated this guidance in a way that I will never forget. Further, it enabled me to trust him more deeply from that point on. I could follow his

guidance without reservation, because there was no discrepancy between what he taught others and how he lived his daily life.

I continued to follow President Ikeda's guidance to practice for myself and others, introducing my friends to Buddhism and developing the organization. As a result, major breakthroughs in my life occurred.

My husband and I were both succeeding in our careers and our first son was born in January 1983, after a 10-year struggle with infertility. This event demonstrated to me that any karma can be changed, that the impossible can become the possible, when we practice for ourselves and others. I also received the outstanding teacher award in the community in which I work, which was verification to me that my practice to the Gohonzon was correct.

I am still responding to President Ikeda's request to introduce one person a year. Several years ago at my school, I introduced a third grade teacher to our Buddhist practice. That teacher has now become the principal and is one of my best friends. Together we do our best to make our school excellent for children and staff alike. Last year the school psychologist joined, and this year a new third grade teacher joined. Whenever we face obstacles at school, we chant daimoku together and get fantastic results.

Throughout my practice, what has typically caused me the most suffering is feeling separated from my husband due to his work and Gakkai activity schedule. The first year of our marriage, 1973, was the most difficult because I spent most of my time begrudging the time he wasn't with me — and suffered profoundly as a result. My life was totally compartmentalized; I had drawn a mental line that separated Gakkai activities and my personal life.

Trying to respond to President Ikeda's request to introduce friends to the practice enabled me to change this begrudging attitude. Last year my husband was working in Japan for one week; unexpectedly his schedule changed and he extended his trip by three months! And what happened to me was the most extraordinary experience — I felt absolutely no separation between us. Whatever he was doing for kosen-rufu and the SGI, I felt I was doing, too. Although he was thousands of miles away in Japan, involved in round-the-clock meetings, I was at home taking care of our two sons, my students and the members. I realized my mission was just as important and not separate from his.

When in 1994 President Ikeda founded the Boston Research Center for the 21st Century, it was an impossible dream come true for the Boston members. An SGI leader years ago had encouraged all the Boston youth division members that if we continued to introduce people, one day many academics would seek out the SGI to discuss issues of peace, culture and education. Now that dream is coming true through the activities of the BRC, where academics are discussing global issues and ways to solve society's problems. Looking out the windows of the BRC upon the very streets of Cambridge where we joyfully encouraged friends, day in and day out, I am reminded of the promise I made to President Ikeda in 1979 and my mission as a disciple.

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