

**The Rhythm of Peace**  
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**The path to becoming a “first-class” individual in any field of endeavor is not easy. Even though they don’t practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, many “first-class” people are engaged in serious, wholehearted efforts in which they exhaust their energies. You will never become a successful “first-class” individual unless you make more effort than anyone else.**

— SGI President Ikeda, *Daily Guidance*, vol. 4, p. 381

My oldest daughter, Megan, called from college a few weeks ago to ask me to purchase four tickets for our family to go to a Ladysmith Black Mambazo concert. I thought this was an unusual name for a female singer, but followed Megan’s instructions (the parent *does* become the child).

Imagine my surprise when 10 South African men in black pants, tennis shoes and loosely fitting, bright yellow-patterned shirts skipped onto the small indoor stage at the Barns at Wolf Trap. The audience was electrified.

During a question-and-answer session, Joseph Shabalala, the smiling leader and founder of this wonderful a cappella group, explained that Ladysmith is the hometown of the Shabalala family (his sons and brothers are also in the group). *Black* refers to black oxen, the strongest farm animal. And the Zulu word *mambazo* means ax, symbolizing the group’s ability to “chop down” the competition in musical contests.

I realized this was the same group that sang with Paul Simon on his *Graceland* album. Their singing and unique, high-stepping, Zulu warrior dance style was inspiring, as was their obvious devotion to their traditional culture and to spreading a message of peace and harmony.

Upon returning home, my wife, Trude, and I sat down to perform our evening prayers. As we began to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo slowly in unison, I was struck by how similar we sounded to the harmonious singing of Ladysmith Black Mambazo.

While our Buddhist chant has a much deeper, spiritual significance from the universal, eternal perspective, both the singing and chanting evoke a positive sense of hope, community and peace. I couldn’t help contrasting this with negative feelings associated with discord in a family or relationship, arguments at work, or even acrimonious exchanges among world leaders.

When I’m in a low state of life and try to communicate with others, I don’t sound like a Black Mambazo. I’m more like a Purple Hyena. And that’s how people react to me. Nothing positive comes from this life-condition. My family just assumes it’s because I’ve skipped breakfast and ignores me.

On the other hand, when I’m filled with a positive life force, my voice can “chop” through someone’s negativity, building a bridge of understanding and harmony. This is one of the primary reasons I return day after day to the Gohonzon.

We spend a lot of time trying to construct situational happiness. Some of us worry so much about what other people think about us that our happiness depends on everyone liking us. I can definitely relate to this. Others worry so much about having the perfect job that they spend their whole lives pursuing an elusive, ideal work environment. Or we worry so much about having a disagreement with our significant other that we plunge into despair when a conflict arises.

My friend Joe recently shared with me a concrete experience regarding situational

happiness. (This was impressive considering it was before a Sunday morning world peace gongyo. My deeper spiritual insights don't usually emerge that early.) Joe said that he had recently learned something important about himself. Everything was going relatively well with his great new job, his family, his health and his practice, yet he still worried about things...fretted about performing poorly at his job or someone getting sick or....

He was forced to conclude that the main factor standing in the way of his happiness was himself. Simple, but profound. How much of my happiness, I wonder, do I allow to depend on my circumstances? On the planets lining up just so?

Last October I wrote an article for the *World Tribune* about my wife's battle with a debilitating illness. I'm so grateful that Trude has regained almost all the feeling in her lower body and has returned to teaching full time. This has been a tremendous victory for her and for our many friends who supported us through the crisis.

At the same time, we must deal with the diagnosis — multiple sclerosis. This is a strange disease that affects individuals in unpredictable ways. She will, at a minimum, have to learn to adjust to becoming more easily tired.

And yet, as Buddhists, we understand that as long as we look for our happiness from within, her illness can't overwhelm us. Instead, we can use it to motivate us to live, love and practice harder than ever...to really appreciate each moment of our lives as if it was our last. To become Black Mambazos of true humanism and to share this happiness with the world around us.

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Title: Perspective: The Rhythm of Peace

Subject: World Tribune 05/16/97 n.3139 p.3 WT970516p03 Vienna, Virginia

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Keywords: Daishonin Experiences Happiness January June Major Nichiren Opinion Peace Perspectives Practice Rhythm Tribune Vienna Virginia World Writings