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Breaking the Karmic Chains of Unhappiness

I was brought up on a farm in a very small New England town. Both my parents were alcoholic — very, very unhappy, fighting regularly, and usually blaming their children for their existence. “If it weren’t for you, we wouldn’t be broke!” “If it weren’t for you, we’d be happy.”

My dream, my vision, was to never be like my parents — ever. I was going to become all the things my parents weren’t.

But as I entered my 20s, major dysfunction began showing up in my life — drinking patterns, relationship patterns (I was with a new man every week; it was almost like changing socks!) and so on. And as much as I fought these patterns, they always came right back.

So, I thought to myself, I’ll remedy this: I’ll get married! Did that help? Of course not. I tried so hard to think right, eat right, you-name-it right, yet nothing came out right. To make a very long story very short, I was divorced in nine months.

Between the ages of 23 and 35 (when I started chanting), I had two near-death experiences, many unsuccessful relationships, and as hard I tried to change, I couldn’t. I never gave up; I had such a desire to become a person with a mission to help people. I began my healing profession (a combination of Jin Shin Jyutsu and Shiatsu body work), which literally saved my life, and I held onto my vision of being a truly happy person. But still, food or alcohol or cigarettes or relationship addictions plagued my life despite the therapy and the external things I tried.

When I was 35, I moved to Los Angeles. Within three months, my life was virtually steered into trying out everything to become happy. Brenda, a client of mine who eventually became a dear friend, told me about Buddhism. “I want to try it,” I told her. “I’m really looking for something. But this week and next week is Kundalini Yoga, the following week is a crystal healing workshop, and the week after that I’m trying transcendental meditation — so, let’s get together the following week.”

My first meeting was a young women’s division chanting session at 6:00 a.m. I’m sure everyone loved my daimoku — I was about 10 octaves higher and four beats different, but by the end I was sold. If this can help me, I thought, I’ll do it.

And I did. Chanting for three hours became a light day for me, and the young women’s division dance team became part of my life.

We danced in the 1987 West Coast General Meeting in Seattle. That’s right, me — a 35-year-old young women’s division member, with two left feet, in white shorts and T-shirt and old running shoes. Oh, my. All I remember is that I thought I’d be able to hide on the stage in my taps, swinging across this huge auditorium, but I doubt I did. I was mortified, but, hey — I did it. Even today, I think about that, and I figure, if I could challenge that, I can challenge anything.

I learned that giving 100 percent in any campaign brought wonderful results. By 1989, my business was booming. And by the time that SGI President Ikeda came to the United States in February 1990, I was receiving many, many benefits, including the one benefit I really needed: I was getting happy and non-addicted. I knew I was going to make a difference in the world.

During President Ikeda’s visit, I felt what I had instinctively been looking for all those years — a happiness that transcended any little ache or pain or emotion I might be feeling. It was, I realized, what kosen-rufu feels like.

After that, I realized I must prove to myself that I could win in every area of my life. My

business tripled; I was near to signing a contract to start a healing center, and I knew it would take all my energy and time.

At that time, I also met Scott, my best friend who became my husband within four months. I knew one of my biggest prayers had been answered. Within three years, Elizabeth arrived. When she was 2 months old, we decided to start completely over and move to Phoenix.

The constant challenges of our relationship and our family have been huge. Because of my practice, I am always filled with appreciation for Scott and Elizabeth.

In 1996, during President Ikeda's most recent visit, I was invited to come to Denver to take part in activities. My husband knew how important this was to me, and was behind me 100 percent.

Scott has a wedding photography business, which I help him with. We participate in only one bridal fair a year, but that one fair usually books us for 12 solid months, so it is very important to attend. We were registered for a June 9 fair — the same date that President Ikeda would be speaking in Denver.

All I could do was chant with the attitude that something would change. I WILL go to Denver, I told myself. The more I chanted, however, the more I was upset because I realized that my place was not in Denver: It was supporting my husband.

Meanwhile, Scott had even arranged to hire two friends and fly them out from Los Angeles to help him at the fair. As I chanted about this, I asked the Gohonzon — asked my own Buddha nature — what would President Ikeda say to me? Support your family, was the answer that came back.

I told Scott what had been going through my mind, and I could sense his relief and gratitude.

The very next day, we got a call from the bridal fair organizers. "We have changed the rooms and want to offer you another booth," they told us. We dropped everything and went to the hotel, to see where our new booth would be. Our old booth placement was terrible — it was tiny and stuck in the center of a huge room with narrow aisles. When we saw the new location, I just knew it was my first benefit from doing the absolute best thing for my family: It was the best location at the whole fair.

Still, despite all the indications that I was doing the right thing, I was very upset to not be seeing President Ikeda. I was filled with vivid memories of how thrilling and refreshing it was to be involved in activities when he was visiting. I was missing it all.

I started chanting for the success of President Ikeda's visit. I felt him virtually winking at me through every tear I cried in front of the Gohonzon.

That is, until I finally got it. I *was* with him. All along. Every minute.

Those early days of June, getting ready for the bridal fair — and especially June 9 — went by with such joy and synchronicity between Scott and myself.

To make a long story much shorter, as I felt myself becoming a happier person, I saw my parents becoming happier as well. My mom is not the miserable woman who raised me. That tells me my vision must be to always believe in people, including (especially?) myself.

Because of the power of the Gohonzon, I must continually, as President Ikeda says, not focus merely on reality, but also on possibility. I see myself creating people's successes, looking ahead to the 21st century. At the same time, I see my family being very happy together, and my petty criticisms getting buried by my daimoku and my hopes.

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