

PERSPECTIVE: I Believe the Borders Are Gone

By DONNA FEEHELEY

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Driven by my health problems, which escalated over a seven-month period, my Buddhist practice led me to close the gap with my mom.

The president of our lay organization, Daisaku Ikeda, frequently talks about our debt of gratitude to our parents. In 1992 I began chanting about the anger and resentment I felt toward mine. I realized this anger had made me a very arrogant, moody, miserable adult. Because of my sincere prayer to change, my parents came to my house and ended 20 years of not speaking to each another.

Although I knew intellectually that the causes I made created my circumstances, I was still angry and hurt over my parents' divorce, which was when I was in my teens. I blamed my mom, especially, for what happened.

Although she and my husband could see what a turkey my dad had been, I thought he could do no wrong. However, I continued to chant and pray for my mom. I chanted to remember and appreciate all the nights she stayed up sewing clothes for me or waiting for me to arrive home safely from a date. And to remember how she struggled to raise four kids on her own. I can't actually remember most of the things my mom has done for me over the years, but I know she's always been there — I just didn't see it.

My mom's devotion became very apparent as she supported me through my recent health crisis. From the first time she took me to the emergency room, she was beside me every minute, if not physically then by phone or in spirit. If it wasn't for her love and wisdom, I would not be here today.

She skillfully approaches dialogue to keep my temper at a distance. She has the wisdom to know when and what to say — well, most of the time. She's been my protective force all along. For instance, once she said, "I don't think you're eating enough protein." A week later my blood work showed — you guessed it — I wasn't getting enough protein. Because of the enormous amount of daimoku I was chanting, I could appreciate her efforts.

My mom took off work many days, using her precious leave to run me to the doctor when I couldn't drive — even though driving through the harbor tunnel and on the beltway are terrifying experiences for her. She is also valiantly struggling to raise a challenging 11-year-old granddaughter. But still she makes time for each of her four grown children, all of whom have had recent life-threatening problems.

Prior to this experience, I called my mom once a week or every two weeks out of a sense of obligation. Sometimes I would even talk to her through my grandmother. Now, I call her and think of her almost daily, out of appreciation, respect, friendship and love. Amazingly, I never realized how wise she is.

Wendy Clark, our SGI-USA women's division leader, has said: "'Actively Closing the Gap' [the 1997 women's division theme] is about removing the borders that separate us from one another. To do that we must first remove the borders we have built around our hearts."

Through my mom's love and my chanting, my anger toward her melted away. I believe the borders are gone. Closing the gap with my Mom was possible only through this incredible practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. And for that I am truly grateful.

Now I will work on my relationships with my husband, my co-district leaders, my sisters and brother, my co-workers, neighbors — the list is endless!

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I shared this experience at a meeting earlier this year — the first one my mother ever attended in my 10 years of practice. Two weeks later, she sent me this note: “I really enjoyed myself with you on Sunday. Great meeting — fast-paced, interesting, and you gave everyone a chance to participate.

“Your testimonial touched my heart. I think we both work hard to make our relationship loving and caring. When you were growing up, there were times when I thought we’d never even like each other. Now we couldn’t love each other more! Let’s always be like this.”

I will treasure this note and this memory for the rest of my life.

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