

PERSPECTIVE: My First 'No Limit' Holiday Season
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For many years, the holiday season was not my favorite time of the year. When the weather began to turn cold and the Thanksgiving holiday drew closer, I became overwhelmed by feelings of despair, hopelessness, loneliness and sadness, as well as a loss of interest in life and an inability to enjoy it. A cluster of dark clouds would seem to settle in over the duration of the holiday season. Inside, I felt captive to a dark mood. Like winter, I felt barren and cold.

This melancholy mood continued for many years, even as I practiced Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. I often wondered if I would ever experience the "boundless joy from the Law" that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo promised. Even at celebrations with family or SGI members, I often felt a deep loneliness. I spent a lot of holidays alone. My son would be off visiting his father. If I was in a relationship, my suitor was often nowhere to be found.

I must admit I never specifically chanted about this problem. I sort of went with the flow. I expected the clouds to settle in like clockwork every year.

At one point, though, I came across a quote by SGI President Ikeda. He wrote that he had "no time to hide behind dark clouds." I never forgot this. Periodically, it would come to mind. Still, I never chanted to understand what it meant. I continued to suffer.

The greatness of this Buddhism is that in the process of chanting, we do change — in spite of ourselves. Through my efforts at chanting, struggling to become consistent with gongyo, teaching gongyo to others, chanting with and praying for others, and introducing others to the practice, the sun of Buddhahood or absolute happiness gradually rose in my heart, my life. It dispelled my dark clouds as surely as early dew drops disappear in the sunlight.

I don't remember at what point in my 14 years of practice it changed. I only know that eventually when the holiday season approached, I embraced it with boundless joy. I sought out family and friends more. I became the life of the party at family gatherings. It wasn't important if I didn't have a man in my life. I was OK with my son being away from me; I learned to follow the guidance given me long ago to stop using him as a security blanket.

I began to perceive the nature of my life, and it felt good! The dark clouds passed. I felt the warmth of the sun envelope my being even in the cloudy, cold, barren dead of winter. It felt like spring was upon me. I experienced what fellow SGI member and psychotherapist Lee Wolfson described as the "underlying message of the Buddhist view of the self that the individual is born with the inherent capacity to overcome all difficulties and achieve a remarkable state of self-actualization."

So I am grateful that I met Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the winter of 1983. I now see myself more clearly. I am learning that I can make a difference. "No time to hide behind dark clouds" continues to be my personal motto to meet all challenges daily. I also now have what Dr. Martin Seligman, a leader in cognitive theory on depression, described as "faith in the larger institutions of society — the family, the nation, and religion." I am in harmony with myself and society.

This year, I have determined to have my first "no limits" holiday season. To paraphrase from *No More Holiday Blues* by Dr. Wayne W. Dyer, I will have "no depression, and most important, no holiday blues." It is going to surpass my wildest expectations about what a holiday season can be. I will be positive, up, full of life and fun in a season that is supposed to bring out the best in me rather than do me in.

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Now, thanks to my practice, this time of the year offers me a wonderful opportunity to rekindle the spirit of love and living life to the fullest.

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