

WORLD TRIBUNE MAILBOX

The Leap of Faith Debate

In response to the letters in the Oct. 17 *World Tribune* on Steve Piontek's mentor-disciple essay (Sept. 19 *World Tribune*), I disagree with Mr. McCloskey's assertion that the decision to take a mentor doesn't take a leap of faith but is a choice made.

"With our eyes wide open" — yes, it is true that it is a conscious and even thoughtful decision. However, to limit it to the prerequisite of being based totally on knowledge and reason discounts the huge number of people who truly are unsure yet are willing to take that leap of faith based on intuition, sense and feeling. That would exclude many people and make our movement a small, exclusive group, much as in Shakyamuni's early teachings. Only those with tremendous knowledge and rational ability — the men of the two vehicles of Learning and Realization — were then said to be capable of being disciples of the World Honored One.

Nichiren Daishonin says, "The Gohonzon is found in faith alone" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 213)... It is the heart, not the brain, that moves the disciple. It is those many crucial moments when the disciple resolves, "It may not make sense to me, but I trust my mentor and therefore will follow."

Now don't mistake this for blind trust. What I mean is the superior wisdom of the Gohonzon, the Buddha, the mentor, that comes from substituting faith for (common mortal) wisdom. The wisdom of the heart and not the brain. Yes, we do not follow the mentor if "he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own views" (from Nikko Shonin's admonition about when it is correct to not follow the high priest). But it is the heart based on correct faith that tells us that, not the brain. If it were not for this leap of faith, what would the disciple have to learn from the mentor? He/she would know everything already.

— MARC GINSBURG, Staten Island, N.Y.

I thought I'd add my two cents' worth to an ongoing debate over whether embracing a mentor is a leap of faith or a deliberate act. To me, it's a mix of the two.... Not only that, we repeat a pattern of taking a leap of faith followed by deliberately deepening our commitment throughout the mentor-disciple relationship.

Disciples come with varying degrees of skepticism. That's (partially) the reason why Shakyamuni tells the story of the excellent physician....

Physician refers to the Buddha. *Children* refers to mortals. The story opens with the children having taken poison by mistake and writhing in agony. That's a reference to common mortals who suffer from their delusions and are unhappy.

The physician mixes up a marvelous antidote to the children's poison.... Some of the children take it immediately and get well right away. That's a reference to those of us who embrace the Buddha's teachings and get happy. The remainder, because the poison has deeply entered their minds,...cannot embrace faith....

The physician goes away and sends a messenger home, saying to the children that the good doctor is dead. Fearing that this is the last chance to get well, even the most delirious child takes the medicine and is cured.

Many of us tend to be self-satisfied and don't search for a mentor until,...faced with a spiritual deadlock, we look for mentors in a variety of disciplines, ranging from sports and

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recreation to psychology and religion....

Being a disciple is serious business; it requires attention, effort, and a great deal of time, not to mention a lot of self-discovery, which can be unpleasant at times. Let's face it, most people are unwilling to fully invest in being a disciple for fear of not having a life of their own. Still, if a teacher looks even remotely promising, some of us will take a chance, timidly at first. That to me is the leap of faith. Later, if the teaching proves its efficacy, we change from skeptical followers to faithful ones. That is the deliberate act....

— SEWARD HUNG, New York

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