

Kedren Jones Werner, Los Angeles Practicing Faith

No matter how difficult your situation may be, as long as you base your life on daimoku, and devote yourself to practice for kosen-rufu, the walls of difficulty that stand in front of you will surely disappear to reveal actual proof of your victory. To make this happen, we practice faith.

— SGI President Ikeda

Eight years ago, when I attended a meeting at which SGI President Ikeda spoke, the only thing I was happy about was that I had a clear view of the stage. My life had begun a free fall a year or so earlier, and I had hit bottom.

The first few years of my Buddhist practice were full of challenges and conspicuous benefits. I had fulfilled most of the things on my list of desires, which ranged from overcoming cancer to getting a new car. And I had become a high-profile leader within the organization.

My career in film was developing quickly. Often my jobs took me out of town and sometimes out of the country. I continued to spend time studying Buddhism and attending activities wherever I was, but I grew increasingly distanced from the spirit of President Ikeda. Before I realized this, it was too late. I learned, to my regret, that to merely study Buddhism without applying it, without living it, is almost useless.

I also found it increasingly difficult to be honest with myself about my choices. What's more, I no longer felt a need to do my human revolution — any problem that people had with me was theirs, not mine.

My life became a mess. My husband and I were divorcing; our house was to be sold. I resigned from all of my leadership positions within the SGI-USA and was then transferred to another area. I was fired from my job and was encouraged to change careers. Lost, and scared of what people thought of me, I realized that I had damaged something I had taken for granted — my personal integrity.

On New Year's Eve 1989, I sat up all night in front of the Gohonzon crying. My sister, Marné, sat next to me chanting. I had not known such despair since the death of my father when I was a little girl.

The next few weeks were no better. I went to meetings where I felt unwanted, and I continued to interview for jobs that I didn't get because, as I found out, I had a terrible reputation in the film business.

My sister tried to encourage me by quoting Nichiren Daishonin: "Even a bad reputation will spread far and wide. A good reputation will spread even farther, particularly if it is a reputation for devotion to the Lotus Sutra" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 201). I didn't find this encouraging; I felt I could never change my reputation. My mother became so worried that, as she later told me, she would often sleep outside my house in her car "to make sure the lights came back on in the morning."

At this low point, I received an invitation to attend the meeting with President Ikeda. I had not been invited to anything in a long time, and I was so grateful and deeply appreciative of this consideration during my crisis. I felt certain that it was an expression of President Ikeda's compassion for me. I prayed that this meeting would be a turning point toward my happiness.

I participated in a planting ceremony that was the most fun I'd had in a long time. Then President Ikeda began his lecture:

Title: Practicing Faith
Subject: World Tribune 02/06/98 n.3177 p.8 WT980206p08 Los Angeles, California
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Keywords: Angeles California Experiences Faith Practice Practicing

I am very pleased to meet with all of you promising young people of wisdom and passion, who are committed to the pursuit of your ideals. Because you are all important leaders whom I trust will shoulder the responsibility for the future of humanity, I would like to share my thoughts with you in a frank and candid manner. I deeply admire you for your invigorated seeking spirit. You are pioneers who are responsible for shaping the future course of humankind and society. Also, you are forerunners of the American kosen-rufu movement and are the true successors of [the SGI-USA]. You are in fact envoys of the Buddha who are contributing to the development of American culture and global peace. I hope that you will become leaders in various sections of American society.

I thought: “I am in the wrong room. I have none of these qualities.” But, as President Ikeda continued, I began to feel that he was setting a goal for what I could become. He spoke about common sense and how “harboring hatred and jealousy eventually can lead us to discarding our faith.” I realized that while I had never stopped practicing Buddhism, I had discarded my faith, its principles. My circumstances — my relationship with my husband, my work, the organization — reflected where my life was at.

It would be great to say everything was easy from that point forward, but it wasn't. I had to face myself everywhere I went. I had to see my suffering as solely my responsibility. Albert Einstein once said, “The problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.” I had to raise my life-condition and practice faith. I participated in Buddhist activities with a commitment to be my true positive self and help others do the same. I had to admit my mistakes and share my weaknesses.

I continued to look for work and eventually got a job as one of the producers of a new TV series, *Northern Exposure*, which became successful. I worked with my husband and our lawyers to finalize our divorce.

I continued to study President Ikeda's guidance:

Even though you practice faith, you may encounter an unfortunate incident. But meeting with misfortune does not mean your prayer to the Gohonzon will not be answered. You may see something that makes you wonder why it happened, but as you persevere you will later see that everything is moving in a positive direction of your happiness within the protection of Myoho.

I prayed to live with confidence in these ideas.

Through the obstacles I faced over the next few years, I realized the importance of being willing to change. I pushed myself to regain trust and responsibility in our organization and to be a part of its development, too.

I have remarried with a wonderful man. He is a friend in faith, and we are district leaders together in a wonderful group of members with whom I share trust and appreciation. My ex-husband and I maintain a friendship to this day. And I have steadily advanced in my career.

At last year's luncheon for some of the Golden Globe award nominees, I sat with the cast of *The People vs. Larry Flynt*. I spoke with one of the cast members about Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, who told me of her concerns about her reputation, and I shared Nichiren Daishonin's reputation quote with genuine confidence.

I'm currently president of a film company, and I interact with studio heads, top producers, writers, actors and agents. Recently my boss told me how much everybody with whom we work likes me, and what a good reputation I have.

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This change has come about because I relentlessly challenge myself through prayer and practice to live up to the goals set for us in President Ikeda's encouragement in 1990. I'm constantly renewing my determination through faith. When I fail to meet those goals, I often think of President Ikeda, who writes poetry to encourage us in the midst of his own struggles. "Live true to ourselves and the law" he says, and "To be great is to be misunderstood." With President Ikeda as an example for my life, I keep going.

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