

We Can Reach for the Moon
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A recent survey found that while the majority of Americans believe in the afterlife, few feel they need the presence of a clergyman at the time of death to secure this passage. Fewer and fewer people are seeking the counsel of religious leaders at this crucial time. Our fierce independence has us arriving at the Pearly Gates without an escort.

Americans have high expectations for a better life after death but not of their religious leaders. And not, it seems, of life in the here and now. Somewhere along the line, priests and preachers have failed to meet our expectations.

Meeting expectations is what success is about. I work in the theater on nights and weekends and for a professional association from 9 to 5. In the theater, a successful play meets the audience's expectation. A successful theater company creates an expectation through advertising and the press and then consistently meets or exceeds that expectation. Over the years, I have been involved with two theater companies that closed their doors. In both instances, the people involved failed to take the audience's expectations into account.

At my day job, I recently had a conversation with the newly appointed CEO. The association has been losing money and members, and he was brought in to stop the bleeding. Over the last several years, we have gone from 160 employees to 99. The morale at the office is very low and more time has been spent on interdepartmental fighting than in providing solutions to the membership we serve.

The CEO and I talked about a basic lack of mission in the office because of the absence of strong leadership. The company is floundering because the employees don't know what to expect and are not working toward a unifying goal. We have lost sight of what the members expect from the dues they pay. Over the last several weeks, we have been working to define members' expectations and evolve a strategy for meeting them.

In the religious world, faith is often defined as expectation. We continue to pray because we expect results.

Ultimately, though, the answers to our prayers depend on the actions we take. No matter how many Sundays we spend in front of an altar, no matter how many pages are written on the validity of one belief over another, nothing happens until we take the reins and guide the horse.

Expectation is an elusive concept. As time passes, we may find ourselves yoked to the same limited expectations: "I'll never get that job." "I'm destined to be alone." "This problem is too big for me to make a difference." These expectations become our reality. And this reality is reinforced by a never-ending stream of negativity from the media and new heights of ineptitude from our institutions.

In Buddhism, a key concept is the mentor-disciple relationship. A mentor has great expectations for the disciple. A mentor inspires the disciple to go one step further, to push beyond the limits. But for this concept to work, the disciple must have even greater expectations of him- or herself.

The same is true in the workplace. Good employees work hard because of what they expect of themselves. Good employers inspire. And it is the interaction between the two that creates forward motion. In the art world, as well, the interaction between the artist and the patron requires action on both sides. We can't just sit and let the world wash over us and expect to be happy.

"Many people become angry or grieve over phenomena that are actually nothing but the reflection of their lives — their state of mind and the causes they have created," SGI

President Ikeda stated in his “clear mirror” guidance of Feb. 27, 1990. What responsibility do we take for the mess we’re in? What do we expect for tomorrow?

In the last few months, I have been caught up in the scandals of the moment. I’ve been letting the tide of information wash over me, and I find myself adrift. As I struggle to find terra firma, I have to begin by expecting better. We bring out our best by expecting the best. In today’s world of accusations and innuendo, of multi-media defamation of character and high-speed car chases, of cyber-talk and cure-all pills, we have to hack through the clutter — and raise our expectations.

“We must gain decisive victory over the harsh realities of society and lead a correct and vibrant life,” President Ikeda said in 1990. “This is the purpose of our faith. We have to become wise and strong.”

The answer to our prayers will not come from the latest product offered by Multi-World, Inc., no matter how much it spends for 30 seconds of cathode rays during *Seinfeld*.

If you take an infant out into the clear night, the baby will naturally reach for the moon. But as time passes, we stop reaching beyond our grasp. Gradually we lower our expectations. If we are to rise above the negative tide of our times, we have to learn again to reach for the moon.

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