

Keep on Praying

SGI President Ikeda explains in this speech why sometimes our prayers seem to not be answered. 'This is a manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom — so that we can deepen our prayers, become stronger people, live more profound lives and secure deeper, more lasting good fortune,' he says.

This is part 2 of SGI President Ikeda's speech at the 23rd Soka Gakkai Headquarters Leaders Meeting, June 16. Part 1 appeared in last week's issue.

Recently, Ushio Publishing Company published *Beloved Wife!* by Yoshiyuki Kono.

Mr. Kono was a victim of the sarin gas-poisoning incident in Matsumoto, Japan, about 125 miles northwest of Tokyo, on June 27, 1994. The Matsumoto Incident claimed seven lives, injured hundreds of others, and left Mr. Kono's wife, Sumiko, with massive brain damage. Though the nerve-gas poisoning is now known to have been carried out by members of the Supreme Truth sect (Aum Shinrikyo), the mass media initially treated Mr. Kono, who was first to call for an ambulance for his wife, as the perpetrator.

In his book, Mr. Kono writes: "I married my wife, Sumiko, in October 1976, and we lived a very ordinary life together until the night of June 27, 1994, when the chemical-weapon nerve gas, sarin, suddenly invaded our home. Four years have passed since then. Every member of my family was harmed by the gas, and Sumiko remains in a vegetable state to this day. Our two pet dogs died trying to warn us of the gas.

"The mass media quickly labeled us 'the murderer and his family,' as it dragged us into the mill of false accusations," he writes. "No matter how much I protested and declared my innocence, I was powerless against its staggering force. After the incident occurred, society at large treated us as criminals."

Japan is a terrible nation. We Japanese are, as far as human rights are concerned, uncivilized barbarians.

Mr. Kono continues: "But from the beginning, I did not become upset, no matter what happened. I knew that this was a part of my life, and I came to terms with it... I didn't cry or rant, I didn't complain... I never once thought about how terrible it was, or that I was hard done by. I knew that happiness was a matter of how you think, your attitude toward life. It all comes down to your perception of things. No matter what the circumstances are, if you think you've been hard done by, you'll feel miserable. And if you think you've been very lucky, then you'll feel very fortunate."

"I had always done what I wanted to do, at my own pace, when suddenly this incident occurred," he goes on. "However, I just see it as one act in the drama of my life. I am the one living my life, and I feel fortunate to be doing so. I believe in seeing things in a positive light. By doing so, you will always have a sense of hope."

A Cry for Ethical Journalism

Mr. Kono also writes of the lessons Japan must learn from how the media covered the Matsumoto Incident and subsequent sarin gas attack on the Tokyo subway system [March 20, 1995]: "There is an urgent need to institute in Japan a system that upholds and

promotes journalistic ethics, like the press councils and ombudsman systems of Europe and the United States, so that individuals can defend themselves against unfair media reporting. The individual is small and puny in the face of the overwhelming power wielded by the media. I know this from bitter experience. No matter how strongly you state the truth and insist on your innocence, your voice simply isn't heard. I believe the need for such a system will continue to grow — a system that would provide an official, objective channel for hapless media victims to have their voices heard, that enables them to file suits against incidents of the inaccurate, fraudulent and libelous reporting that invades people's privacy and oversteps the bounds of ethical journalism.”

Human rights are the foundation of democracy. I have introduced Mr. Kono's thoughts because I think he brings an important problem to our attention.

Where We Can Discuss Anything

On July 3, 1278, Nichiren Daishonin wrote a detailed, considerate response to the questions of a follower.

Leaders should always try to respond to any questions people have with patience and consideration. It is wrong to reply casually or thoughtlessly or in a patronizing or surly manner — as if you were superior and couldn't be bothered. It is a sign of deplorable arrogance.

The follower who asked the Daishonin a question was Myoho-ama, who was practicing with an earnest seeking spirit toward Buddhism, at the same time nursing her sick husband. She was the equivalent to one of our women's division members today.

The first thing the Daishonin does is praise her highly for asking about Buddhism. Such was the great compassion of the original Buddha: He had the generosity of spirit to listen warmly to everything his followers had to say and every question they wanted to ask.

Let us do our utmost to sustain the wonderfully warm atmosphere of the SGI — an atmosphere where members feel free to discuss whatever is on their minds. Unless we do so, our organization will stop growing, stop developing.

An organization run by orders from above is bound to sink into bureaucracy. It will become rigid and so will its members. We must not allow that to happen.

The SGI is a world of humanity — of the heart, of faith, of compassion. It is a world of unity and mutual inspiration. That is why it is strong.

If we continue to value and promote these qualities, the SGI will continue to grow and develop forever. I want to declare here and now this atmosphere where we can discuss anything is fundamental to the SGI.

The Daishonin, referring to the six difficult and nine easy acts, wrote: “In this age of the Latter Day of the Law, those who ask about the meaning of even one phrase or verse of the Lotus Sutra are much fewer than those who can hurl great Mount Sumeru to another land like a stone, or those who can kick the entire galaxy away like a ball” (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 221). It is more difficult, he says, to earnestly seek the Mystic Law than to kick a star system about as if it were a soccer ball. If that's so, then how noble is the activity of propagating Buddhism in which all of you are engaged!

The original Buddha, Nichiren Daishonin, would surely praise your efforts. You are incomparably more worthy than those who care only about fame and social status, and strut about arrogantly filled with self-importance.

The Members Always Come First

In the same letter, the Daishonin goes on to say: “This is a sure indication that if you embrace the Lotus Sutra, you will certainly attain Buddhahood. Since the Lotus Sutra defines our life as the Buddha’s life, our mind as the Buddha’s wisdom and our actions as the Buddha’s behavior, all who embrace and believe in even a single phrase or verse of this sutra will be endowed with these three properties. Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is only one phrase, but it contains the essence of the entire sutra” (MW-1, 221–22). The Daishonin states clearly that those who embrace the Mystic Law will attain Buddhahood.

All of you have your own problems and difficulties, yet you plunge intrepidly into a society mired with lies and corruption to work for kosen-rufu, for Buddhism, for your fellow human beings. How admirable you are! Seeking no reward for yourselves and enduring criticism and slander, you diligently keep advancing the cause of kosen-rufu a little further, day after day. In light of the Daishonin’s writings, you are bodhisattvas, you are Buddhas.

Those who criticize and attack us and the SGI will incur negative effects and consequences in accord with the uncompromising workings of the Mystic Law, of the strict Buddhist law of cause and effect. Some have said that the hard times Japan is now suffering are part of those adverse consequences.

When we work for kosen-rufu, the vibrant life force and wisdom of the Buddha well forth in our lives.

As SGI leaders, it is important that you know the best, most productive action to take in each situation. And what will bring the greatest joy and benefit to the members. Please pay close attention to every aspect affecting the members — down to the time a meeting ends — responding to their needs and situations flexibly. The members always come first. You are leaders only because there are members.

I hope that you will always treat your fellow members with utmost respect and courtesy, greeting them pleasantly and thanking them sincerely for taking time out of their busy schedules to participate in meetings or other activities. The mark of a successful leader is when all who meet him or her say: “He’s really a wonderful person.” “She’s always so supportive.” The members’ gratitude and love are proof that you’re doing your job.

Above all, you must never be arrogant. As leaders, you must always resolutely oppose corruption and evil, and sincerely work for the happiness of your fellow members.

Problems Are Proof That We’re Alive

The SGI members have worked tirelessly to spread the Mystic Law and the Daishonin’s philosophy and ideals throughout the world. We are responsible for worldwide kosen-rufu. We are the first and only ones to achieve this in the 700 years since the Daishonin’s passing and the 3,000-years history of Buddhism.

It wasn’t famous people or learned scholars or professors who achieved this feat. And it certainly wasn’t the priests. It was all the work of ordinary people. It was the result of our persistent daily efforts and the power of faith — especially the women’s division members’.

Immense benefit definitely accrues to such sincere efforts. This benefit, this medal of honor that adorns our lives, is adamant, indestructible, eternal and everlasting. Each of you has made remarkable contributions to the widespread propagation of Buddhism. You can walk proudly with your head held high.

Only the SGI is faithfully carrying out the Buddha’s will and decree. Let’s advance with

the certainty that no other organization is as sublime.

With all of us firmly united in faith — many in body, one in mind — let's go on to create an eternally victorious, immortal history! It feels good to win, and it is vital that we win in life. Failure is so sad and miserable.

The same is true in kosen-rufu. Only if we succeed can kosen-rufu be realized.

Mr. Toda once said: "Because we have taken faith in the Mystic Law, we have gained entry to the state of Buddhahood within the world of Humanity. Although we are beings of the world of Humanity, having entered the Buddha way means that we must carry out bodhisattva practice." Even when people attain Buddhahood, the actions they undertake in society for others' benefit are as bodhisattvas. Our SGI activities are the modern equivalent of bodhisattva practice.

By devoting ourselves earnestly to SGI activities, we gain the ability to turn all difficulties and obstacles into benefit, recognizing that earthly desires and delusions are enlightenment, and that the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana. No matter how unpleasant the circumstances we find ourselves in, we can transform them into hope and good fortune — into eternal happiness. How incredible this is!

Life is a series of sufferings and problems. Struggling with problems is the essence of life. This never changes, no matter how much good fortune we accumulate or how amazing the benefits we receive. It may seem that a life without problems or conflicts would be ideal, but it would actually be empty. We wouldn't be fully alive.

Problems are proof that we're alive. They're also the source of all our growth and progress. We have to use our problems and suffering as the energy or fuel to propel us toward even greater happiness in the future. The ability to do this is the wonderful thing about a life dedicated to SGI activities.

Keep Praying Until You Get Your Answer

Nichikan Shonin, the renowned restorer of the Daishonin's Buddhism, assures us: "If you have faith in this Gohonzon and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo even for a short while, no prayer will go unanswered, no offense unexpiated, no good fortune unbestowed and no righteousness unproven (The Essential Works of the Fuji School, vol. 4, p. 213). We must never forget to have absolute conviction in this.

Yet, why is it, then, that sometimes our prayers seem to not be answered? This is a manifestation of the Buddha's wisdom — so that we can deepen our prayers, become stronger people, live more profound lives and secure deeper, more lasting good fortune. If our every, slightest prayer were answered immediately, we'd become lazy and degenerate. And we couldn't hope to build a life of great dignity and substance.

You don't normally receive your paycheck at the end of your first day at work. The sapling you planted today isn't a mighty oak tomorrow. If our prayers were automatically answered, with no true, deep prayer on our part, without a desperate life-or-death effort, we would become spoiled and useless. If that's how it worked, our Buddhist practice wouldn't make us into outstanding people — it would destroy us.

There are many other elements involved in a prayer being answered, but the important thing is to keep praying until it is. By continuing to pray, you can reflect on yourself with unflinching honesty and begin to move your life in a positive direction on the path of earnest, steady effort.

Even if your prayer doesn't produce concrete results immediately, your continual prayer will at some time manifest itself in a form greater than you had ever hoped. It will also protect you.

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For example, you may pray about something at work, and your continual prayer about that one area of your life will eventually place your whole life, every aspect of it, on the road to happiness — on a much broader scale than your original wish.

You will look back on what happened and realize that your prayer was indeed answered. And you will be completely satisfied with the result.

The essence of it is this: If what you are praying for will truly contribute to your happiness and to your becoming a better person, it will be answered without fail. Even if you don't see the result immediately, it will in time become apparent.

Let us all set our sights on leading great lives dedicated always to truth and move toward that goal in good health, brimming with hope. Let us live our lives boldly, without regret, advancing with patience, enthusiasm and a genuine spirit of friendship and camaraderie.

See you again in mid-July at the next Headquarters Leaders Meeting!

I am praying for your good health and successful endeavors. Stay well!

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