

No One Else
By CRAIG GREEN
SGI-USA Youth Division Study Committee

You, too, must spare no effort in offering up prayers with firm faith. It is not that my resolve [to save you] is weak, but that for each of you, the strength of your own faith will be the decisive thing. (“The Story of Ohashi No Taro,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 155)

Over the last year, I have begun swimming lessons. Nothing fancy, just trying to overcome my fear of the water. I’m not one with very good aquatic ability. I have the underwater finesse of a stapler. I’m like a boulder trying to float.

During my last semester of lessons, I would go early to try out what the teacher had gone over the week before. Every time I was about to begin, before plunging myself into the depths of the shallow end, one simple fact would come to mind: The only way that I’ll ever learn to swim is to get in the water. There is no secret program, no magical wish, no secret prayer. Head in the water, push off from the edge, kick and move your arms. When I get in the water, no one can swim for me. I either swim, or I don’t.

And the same is true of my practice. Either I practice, or I don’t. No one else is responsible for my prayers being answered. No one else is responsible for my hopes for the future becoming a reality. No one is responsible for me but me. The above passage comes from a letter written to Nanjo Tokimitsu in 1276, after Nichiren Daishonin had retired to Mount Minobu. The Daishonin is very strict about Tokimitsu’s development. He touches on this key issue: responsibility for your faith.

After 10 years of practice, I still find myself occasionally practicing out of habit, or even worse, out of guilt. Then I invariably overcompensate by practicing with no drive at all. I’m constantly asking myself how to practice from the right place. But one thing I know: I alone determine the strength of my practice.

The struggle is to understand this, without any heaviness or guilt, to pray and to keep going forward. One lap at a time.

WT