

PERSPECTIVE: It Matters Because I Share It

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As I approach the 25th anniversary of my introduction to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I find myself reflecting on my life since I received the Gohonzon. I am struck by, on one hand, the immensity of what my life has been and, on the other, the simplicity. I could write volumes detailing the experiences I've had, and maybe someday I will, but at this moment I find myself pondering the highlights and thinking about these questions: What's happened? What does it mean? Why does it matter?

The short version of what's happened in my life is: I've *lived*. I've lived in a way that I can't imagine would be possible without this practice, this Gohonzon. I've lived through tremendous joy and suicidal depression. I've faced and defeated death — both the apparent certainty of my own, several times, and the reality of the death of someone I love. I've experienced extremes of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, and through it all I've come to experience the previously undiscovered truth of a middle ground where all things are possible; where nothing is outside of my grasp if I really want to reach for it.

I've also come to realize — in my saner moments — the serenity that comes from finding, again and again, the value of wisdom. By this I mean the Buddhist concept that transcends knowledge or experience, letting my life conquer my mind — a good thing, in my case. I have lived extremely and I have lived fully, and, at 47, I anticipate more of the same, both good and bad, and I welcome the prospect.

There's a passage written by Nichiren Daishonin that's haunted and enticed me since the early days of my practice: "How swiftly the days pass! It makes us realize how short are the years we have left. Friends enjoy the cherry blossoms together on spring mornings and then they are gone, carried away like the blossoms by the winds of impermanence, leaving nothing but their names. Although the blossoms have scattered, the cherry trees will bloom again with the coming of spring, but when will those people be reborn? The companions with whom we composed poems praising the moon on autumn evenings have vanished with the moon behind the shifting clouds. Only their mute images remain in our hearts. The moon has set behind the western mountains, yet we shall compose poetry under it again next autumn. But where are our companions who have passed away?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 255).

I understand some of it, and I could expound at great length on the meanings I find in this piece, but in my heart it still intrigues me, baffles me, beckons me on. This passage displays a little part of the vastness that is offered by this great practice, and I think that my meandering acquaintance with it serves to remind me of the profundity of what living really is. So I have lived.

What does it mean? It means that, because of this practice, I have managed to turn my life from one on a path toward certain destruction to one of certain value. It means that this practice can alter destiny, change karma. It means that a person determined to be miserable can learn to be happy and can learn the value of teaching others how to be happy. It means that the real meaning of happiness, the value of a life lived for a great cause, can replace the transient and shallow concepts we have learned to seek. And it means that rewards — true, meaningful rewards involving partners and friends and love and children and shared pain and joy — are possible for anyone who practices Nichiren Daishonin's teachings. Anyone.

Why does it matter? It matters because I can share it. It *only* matters *if* I share it. I can stand in front of any person or any group and confidently say: "This Buddhism has changed my life. It has *saved* my life. It has made my life worthwhile. It can do the same

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for you.” And I can show them how.

As I reflect on the past 25 years, I realize that it is both my responsibility and my privilege to teach even one more person what I have learned and what I know to be true. I have no doubt, although I can't explain it in words, that I will enjoy the cherry blossoms again and again with the companions I love, and I also know that it will be a vast and wonderful gathering. It matters that I know that, and it matters because I give it away.

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