

PERSPECTIVE: KEEPING A SEEKING MIND
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Why is receiving encouragement in faith so important for our Buddhist practice? How does it affect our daily lives? I have been practicing for 24 years. I still remember what was said to me from my first encounter with an SGI leader at a discussion meeting. That encouragement was given with such thoughtfulness, I was inspired. That encounter set in motion my willingness to start chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and participating in SGI activities and the reason I have continued, in part, until this very day.

Due to life's continuous daily challenges, however, it's very easy to become discouraged when faced with situations that cause us suffering related to our families, jobs, health or relationships or whatever. Sometimes we become so unhappy over these situations that we can dig a hole that we cannot seem to get out of.

My tendency is to blame. I have not always viewed my problems and negative situations clearly and I've needed direction. Without someone to act as a catalyst, helping me to see the nature of my life, I can become even more unhappy.

As a security guard, I struggled with my perception of my job. I was not proud of my work. When I received some specific encouragement and direction, I was able to make a leap in faith and within two days I changed my problem — one with which I struggled for over 10 years! This senior in faith allowed me to see my attitude toward work and how I needed to change internally before I could expect to see a change externally. I hadn't been able to see this before I spoke to someone whom I trusted to help me get back on track.

As a result of my change in attitude, I got a new position that had all the components and benefits I was looking for. I now do the same type of job, but it's for the United States government and it has much more prestige, security and respect. Although these qualities can be important in a job, I now realize that I had to have a change of perception in order to appreciate my new job and all these added benefits. I realized, among other things, that I do not have to look outside my life for self-esteem.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that both gain and loss of benefit depend greatly on a seeking mind. Since the Gohonzon doesn't talk, we come to understand the functions of our Buddhist practice in relation to our daily lives through chanting daimoku and/or receiving faith encouragement. SGI President Ikeda states: "Whether you have positive or negative influences in your practice of faith will determine whether you turn toward happiness or unhappiness...you should always cherish the Soka Gakkai, the greatest source of positive influences for kosen-rufu" (*Daily Guidance*, vol. 4, p. 249).

In my case, through receiving encouragement, I believe I was protected from my arrogance. As I said, it allowed things about my nature to be uncovered and revealed, and it prevented me from developing a distorted view of life. Based on this experience that I've gained in faith, I now chant with more appreciation to the Gohonzon and I can encourage others who have similar problems. Additionally, I feel I have a better understanding of the mentor-disciple relationship.

I'd like to conclude with a thank you to SGI President Ikeda and to the many SGI leaders that I've received encouragement from. Forming relationships with people like this has enabled me to appreciate my practice and my life so much more.

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