

FOR DECEMBER, JANUARY, FEBRUARY MAKING BREAKTHROUGHS IN LIFE

During her recent visit to the United States, SGI Vice Women's Leader Yumiko Hachiya gave encouragement to individuals at their homes and in small group discussions. At meetings, she interspersed her speeches with stories from her 49 years of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

When I finished high school, I started looking for work. Every day, I went to the Soka Gakkai Headquarters in Shinanomachi, Tokyo, to chant daimoku. My prayer was to get a job that would allow me to leave early on weekdays, with weekends off, so that I could attend activities and practice Buddhism freely; in addition, I wanted to make lots of money.

One day at the Headquarters, I met Daisaku Ikeda, who was then the leader of the youth. He told me that Buddhism is win or lose. He said it is up to my faith and practice whether I would achieve my dreams. Eventually, I was hired at a bank. It turned out that I had to work every night, as well as on Saturdays and Sundays, and I was paid less than average. I really worried, but I made the determination that I would endure every hardship.

There was a great propagation campaign in 1957–58. All reports I received as a leader in the young women's division flowed into the bank to the branch manager's phone; there were so many calls, he asked me if I were running a business somewhere else!

To tell the truth, I really wanted to work somewhere else. But Mr. Ikeda said, "A person who cannot fully devote herself to the workplace cannot make progress." So, I worked hard at the bank for five years, and those years became the foundation of my practice.

On April 1, 1960, shortly before his inauguration, Mr. Ikeda told me: "You have worked hard at the bank for five years. Now, please come to work for the Soka Gakkai." I was thrilled. It was a dream come true.

On Oct. 2, 1960, President Ikeda departed for Hawaii and San Francisco on his first trip overseas. I was able to help him prepare his suitcase. I packed ramen, miso, salt, rice, seaweed and sugar—I packed as if he were going to a country where there was no food. In photographs in magazines, it seemed that everybody wore a hat, so I got him a hat. When President Ikeda returned to Japan after the trip, he said, "Nobody wears a hat over there." But that's how you see pictures of President Ikeda as he went around the world in those early days—wearing that hat.

In "Repaying Debts of Gratitude," the Daishonin declares, "Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 272). When Nikken stopped the conferral of Gohonzon to members of the SGI in 1991, he put a stop on this prophecy. But the Gohonzon is for everyone in the world.

I have yet to find someone introduced to this practice by a priest. Hearing the news that the SGI members were excommunicated, President Ikeda was saddened. He said that whatever Gohonzon we have, let's share it and treasure it.

In 1992, Mr. Sendo Narita, one of the priests who left Nichiren Shoshu, said: "We have a Gohonzon that has been handed down from generation to generation that was inscribed by Nichikan Shonin, the 26th high priest and the restorer of the Daishonin's Buddhism. I want the Soka Gakkai to use it to distribute Gohonzon to people." Incidentally, right after

the war, it was a Nichikan-transcribed Gohonzon that was given to new members.

I received such a Gohonzon when I joined. But in 1993, Nikken went awry, saying that SGI is giving out fake Gohonzon.

Last January through March, I made a trip to the United States, and among the places I visited, I went to Seattle and Chicago. I met with Mr. Shoga Nishimura, a Nichiren Shoshu priest in Chicago. I think he was trying to persuade me. He repeatedly told me that the Soka Gakkai is conferring fake Gohonzon. I asked him who first told him about the practice of the Daishonin's Buddhism. "Soka Gakkai members," he said. I replied, "Had the Soka Gakkai not been a reality, you would not be here as a priest." Then I said, "Let's study the Goshu." He said, "Sorry, I didn't bring my Goshu today." It was unbelievable that he would not bring the Goshu to such an important meeting. So I offered him mine to read. He said, "That's a fake Goshu, I can't use it."

Before the Soka Gakkai published the Goshu under the guidance of the second president, Josei Toda, on April 28, 1952, the priests had been using the Goshu compiled by the Minobu sect. Last year, they published their own Goshu, but it is based on the work of the Soka Gakkai. It was a hurried job, and I understand there are too many errors in it.

I told Mr. Nishimura that Nikko Shonin's "Twenty-six Admonitions" states, "Do not follow even the high priest if he goes against the Buddha's Law and propounds his own view" (*Goshu Zenshu*, p. 1618). His answer was that Nikko Shonin's writings were not meant for members, they were meant for priests. I asked him to show me where in the Goshu that that was written and to please not tell lies.

When the meeting came to a conclusion, Mr. Nishimura refused to chant to the Gohonzon that was enshrined where we met. He said that he couldn't chant with someone who is on the wrong path and who does not respect the high priest. I felt it was a disgrace that he refused to sit in front of the Gohonzon transcribed by Nittatsu Shonin, Nikken's predecessor. Then, one of the American members spoke up, "You are discriminating," he said. "You think priests are above lay people." At this, Mr. Nishimura went pale.

I saw the reality of the situation in my encounter with Mr. Nishimura — that the priests were trying to deceive the precious American members, who are so kind-hearted and unaware of their true nature. Please go back to your districts and encourage even one person to understand the nature of this conflict. When you make such an attempt, you strengthen your own life. And the protective forces in the universe that we call Buddhist gods come to your aid.

In "Upholding Faith in the Gohonzon," the Daishonin states: "When one embraces this mandala, all Buddhas and Buddhist gods will gather around him, accompanying him like a shadow, and protect him day and night, as warriors guard their ruler, as parents love their children, as fish rely on water, as trees and plants crave rain, or as birds depend on trees. You should trust in it with all your heart" (MW-5, 177). Make that determination and then pray to Gohonzon.

In a "Letter to Sairenbo," the Daishonin states that when a bamboo shoot grows, it develops a growth ring. But to grow still more, the bamboo shoot must break through its own growth ring. It is the same with us. We have many problems and face various challenges as we attempt to make breakthroughs in our lives. What happens as we continue to break through? We develop a life-condition that is truly indestructible. President Ikeda once said that obstacles don't say, "Knock, knock, I'm here." They sneak in at our weakest spot.

In "Letter to Misawa," the Daishonin says, "Although the people who study Buddhism

outnumber the dust particles of the earth, those who actually become Buddhas are fewer than the number of dust particles one can place on his fingernail” (MW-3, 251). Why? He goes on to explain that obstacles and benefit exist side by side in your life. The three obstacles and four devils arise. He writes, “Even if you should manage to overcome the first six, if you are defeated by the seventh, you will not be able to become a Buddha” (MW-3, 252). The seventh is the hardest of all to detect; it is called the devil of the sixth heaven, and it enters the lives of authorities to harass you.

You may ask yourself: “What’s wrong? I’m chanting and I’m dedicating myself to the Gohonzon. Why is this happening to me?” You may even find such obstacles appearing within the organization to create conflict between you and another person, so that the two of you cannot get along. This devilish function causes you to harbor ill feelings and doubt. That’s why President Ikeda always says let’s be friends, let’s be kind to one another, let’s work in unity.

The devil of the sixth heaven will inhabit the most respected person to prevent people from attaining Buddhahood. However, when you really chant, your life force becomes strong enough to counter the enemies of the Buddha.

You all know the story of Devadatta, the cousin of Shakyamuni Buddha, who tried all sorts of things to get Shakyamuni killed. He represents the condition of jealousy. People like him cannot make room for anyone they think is more respectable than they are. And so we see High Priest Nikken destroying everything built by his predecessor, Nittatsu. His life has become the entity of the devil of the sixth heaven.

In Japan, I’m in charge of two wards—Adachi Ward has 500 districts, and Shibuya Ward has 110 districts. Our chapter and area leaders go into the districts in order to better serve the members. I try to ensure that the meetings are joyful, because then our members will want to attend. Also, meetings should reflect a sense of determination. At the meetings, it’s important to exhibit hearts of compassion in order to touch the lives of people who are suffering. President Ikeda always tells me that if I don’t move for the sake of the members, I’ll get old.

Next year is the 70th anniversary of the Soka Gakkai, the 40th anniversary of President Ikeda’s leadership, and the 100th anniversary of President Toda’s birth. So, let’s celebrate the best way we know how. Let’s challenge ourselves and work toward resolving even one or two situations in our lives before New Year’s.