

**THEME FOR FEB. 27 COMMEMORATIVE WOMEN'S MEETINGS  
EXPLAINED  
THE POWER OF ONE WOMAN TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE  
BY MATILDA BUCK, SGI-USA WOMEN'S LEADER**

This year's theme for our commemorative women's meetings is: The Power of One Woman To Make a Difference. I hope that using this theme, each woman of the SGI-USA chooses to make a victory in her life unmatched by any she's previously experienced. I hope that this will be the year that we each carve out another layer of incredible actual proof. Then with powerful lives and a deepened conviction in faith, the women of the SGI-USA can inspire and encourage everyone we come in contact with. In other words, we will make the difference.

During the month of February, we'll be celebrating the 10-year mark of SGI President Ikeda's guidance given to the women of America on Feb. 27, 1990, which came to be known as the "clear mirror" guidance. He begins with: "What is the purpose of life? It is happiness. But there are two kinds of happiness: relative and absolute." I would like to discuss with you some of my thoughts on how we establish this seemingly elusive condition of absolute happiness based on the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

In the guidance, President Ikeda cites a passage from "On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime," in which Nichiren Daishonin writes: "This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 4).

Many of us after reading this letter arrived at the conclusion that we must look into the mirror of the Gohonzon to observe our lives, see our faults and then chant to correct them. That is certainly one perspective. But the Daishonin also states in other writings that we can attain enlightenment just the way we are. So an additional perspective on this quote is that observing one's life means to chant to see our innate Buddhahood reflected in the mirror of the Gohonzon. That means we already have it. We just need to uncover it.

For example, today, my daughter is happily married and a great mom. But, her senior year of high school was a turbulent time for our family. Every day, like millions of mothers across the country, I sent my daughter off to school with no inkling that anything was not as it should be. Until the day the school phoned me and asked me was I aware that my daughter was not going to graduate because of her truancy rate and all the work she had not handed in. They also told me the school was not going to allow her any opportunity to make the work up. To make matters even worse, when my husband and I confronted her, she told us in no uncertain terms that she didn't care.

I was shocked, angry and hurt. I couldn't stop thinking about all the efforts we had made for her. How could she do this to us? How could she do this to herself? Slowly I moved from focusing on her to a deep, more familiar feeling of guilt and self-abasement. I had totally failed as a mother.

One night, I overheard her crying while talking on the phone with her friend. She told her friend she would just die if she didn't graduate. It melted my heart. I went to get guidance from someone whom I trusted.

It was pointed out to me that I was only focused on how her behavior made me feel as a mother, not on her actual suffering. He suggested I chant to understand my daughter's suffering and to take responsibility for her victory. With this new perspective, I began praying that my daughter become happy and that she not suffer any further. I prayed that she graduate from high school on time.

At first, there seemed to be no change in her attitude or effort. I prayed to open myself up even more. I saw, while I was chanting, that I still kept focusing on what was wrong with her behavior or how deeply flawed I was as a mother. Things began to turn around when I understood what I was up against—her loss of hope. This lack of hope was stopping her from taking action. I put my love for my daughter into my prayer and let go of my belief that there had to be something wrong with her or me. I graduated my prayer to: “Wait, I’ve got the Mystic Law. I can change this.”

Soon after, my daughter found the courage to ask her teachers to reconsider their decision and allow her to make up those missed assignments. When they said yes, she went into overdrive getting those past assignments done well and turned in on the agreed upon dates. When she graduated on time, it was a victory for both of us.

I also learned from this experience that how we view ourselves as we pray is as important as what we are praying for. As women, we must guard against our tendency to pray to the Gohonzon like damsels in distress, victims desperately in need of rescue. And we must guard against praying while being so self-critical that we paralyze ourselves. As I learned the hard way, those prayers are weak. And we must avoid taking the easy route, choosing to solely focus on the “tarnish” because the tarnish is so obvious.

A long-time leader from Kansai once shared some insight on this tendency to focus on the negative. He said the reason that the members of Kansai were able to achieve so many individual and collective victories was contained in a formula: First, to determine that you will achieve some particular thing. Second, to pray concretely and positively toward that goal and, finally, to take the appropriate action.

I had heard this formula before, but he added an important ingredient. He said the formula is infallible—the only thing that can destroy its efficacy is if you carry grudges in your life. If you blame your history, your circumstances or other people, you cannot pull the strength from your life that guarantees triumph. Grudges weaken our lives. Again, if we focus on the tarnish of our own lives or of others, more than the potential, we weaken our prayer and our effort.

So every difficult situation, every difficult person or even our own “tarnish” should be viewed as a catalyst to our victory. He said we must decide, “Because of this I will chant strongly, because of this I will make a greater effort.” Developing this spirit as our response removes the feeling of being victimized from our prayer and self-image. It moves us from being reactive to proactive, as we bring forth meaning and power from what we experience in the course of our lives.

Especially in the area of human relationships, our experience of faith is transformed once we decide that every difficulty is in fact the answer to our prayer, the “polish” for the attainment of our dreams.

A stanza from President Ikeda's New Year's poem says: Even the macroscopic ideal of peace / Is actualized only when it connects with the life of each individual. / Peace is not found in some distant place; / It lies close at hand, in the vibrant sense of fulfillment felt / By each person taking earnest action / For the welfare of their community, society and fellow citizens. (Jan.1 *World Tribune*, p. 3).

As President Ikeda illustrates, there is no peace found in self-centeredness or the separation between us and the people in our environment. Any victory achieved will lack a sense of fulfillment, with the feeling of rapture dying off quickly, unless this achievement occurred as a result of extending ourselves to others and working as hard for their victory as we did for our own. Fortune and happiness created this way is the most fulfilling.

In the “clear mirror” guidance, President Ikeda states: “Human relations also function as a kind of mirror. Nichiren Daishonin states in the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”: ‘When Bodhisattva Fukyo bowed in reverence to the four categories of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of these arrogant people bowed back to him. This is the same as how, when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back.’ ...In the inner realm of life, cause and effect occur simultaneously. With the passage of time, this causal relationship becomes manifest in the phenomenal world of daily life” (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*).

In closing, I believe absolute happiness is found in striving to honor our own lives and the lives of others regardless of circumstances. To always be delving deeper, seeking out the humanity in our lives and the lives of those around us gives us power. This is the key to transcending that nagging self-critical voice, or the voice that always blames the environment. As we do this, we move toward living happily and positively affecting the lives of the people we touch.

I look forward to hearing about each one of your powerful breakthroughs, and the difference you have been able to make in the lives of others.