

**PERSPECTIVE
LIVING A COMPLAINT-FREE LIFE
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Have you ever been inspired and made a strong determination, and in the same moment asked yourself: “Am I crazy? Do I really want to challenge this? Is this really a weakness?” I have done this very thing on more than one occasion.

On a quiet evening in December 1997, I was home reading SGI President Ikeda’s article on “Happiness in This World,” which was part of the SGI-USA Entrance Exam material in the *Living Buddhism* magazine. So, I was happily digesting his guidance about not being dragged around by other people or the environment, and that this is not the way of life the Lotus Sutra teaches. President Ikeda also said, “Rather, overcoming the tendency to blame our sufferings on others or on the environment enables us to greatly expand our state of life” (December 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 9).

I’m thinking, “I would like to greatly expand my state of life, but I don’t think I really place blame or complain.” I read on. Further in the article, President Ikeda states, “Everything is for our growth; everything contributes to the development of our state of life and the establishment of Buddhahood in our lives. When we practice with this determination, all complaints vanish. The world of Buddhahood that had been covered by the dust of complaints begins to shine, and we can freely and fully savor the joy deriving from the Law” (Ibid., p. 9).

“What is it with this strange recurrence about complaining?” After I finished the rest of the article, the thought came to me that I would make a determination to lead a life free of complaint! This will be my New Year’s determination for 1998, I decided!

While I felt this must be the “joy deriving from the Law,” I also immediately said to myself, “I don’t really complain much, so maybe I should have a different determination, something stronger and more appropriate, something more challenging.” I then remembered hearing the voice of one of my leaders saying somewhat sarcastically: “Go ahead and complain Steve. You always get results when you complain.” Well, the fact I remembered that at this point was scary and I realized that I had complained more than once and perhaps on a regular basis!

I reported to my wife and began my new campaign, a life free of complaint. Of course, I had to share my determination with everyone. I included it in my words at every meeting I attended. I shared it at the different New Year’s Day meetings we had. Pretty soon, everyone knew that Steve would be living a life free of complaint.

What an undertaking! Suddenly I was surrounded by complaining people! The phrase “Birds of a feather flock together” came to mind.

I placed this determination on our family altar to keep it fresh in my mind. I continued to chant and study, and determined not to complain. Rather, I would become a part of the solution to problems. I found it was good to publicly share my determination because everywhere I went people were asking, “Are you complaining?” To which of course I replied, “No!”

I had a real turning point in April 1998. I attended the first conference on the study of the Lotus Sutra at the Florida Nature and Culture Center. I was excited about this conference and was determined to be a sponge and absorb as much as I possibly could.

SGI-USA Vice General Director Masao Yokota lectured on “The Wisdom of the Lotus

Sutra.” Two of the several types of wisdom of the Lotus Sutra that he discussed really stuck with me: wisdom of transformation and wisdom of alternative choice.

With the wisdom of transformation, the key is to see things from a different — a positive instead of negative viewpoint. When we view things positively, we are able to create more value. Viewing things positively also brings us one step closer to our human revolution. The wisdom of alternative choices is just that, the wisdom to discover alternative ways to accomplish a goal. But, while this sounds really nice in theory, how does one apply this practically?

As soon as the Q & A session started, every hand went up with the same question: “What is the process of transformation?”

Mr. Yokota’s response was brief and to the point. “It takes daimoku and effort.” He went on to say: “Perhaps effort should come first. Daimoku provides life force and wisdom, but you must also make the effort. You find the answer.”

I realized that while I had been chanting, I really was doing nothing more than that. I was still lacking in the action department. I would still chant for wisdom, but I would also begin to take action and lead a life free of complaint.

At the same conference, I discussed how to live a life free of complaint over lunch with SGI-USA Vice General Director Greg Martin. We talked about how our complaints really express a pessimist’s view of life. Mr. Martin talked about transforming these complaints into appreciation and then taking it further by transforming that appreciation into encouragement and praise for others who may have that same struggle. Our dialogue reminded me of President Ikeda’s article from that December *Living Buddhism*. I learned many valuable lessons since reading that article. Namely, that I need to listen to others, reflect on myself and take action.

Of course, I’m still learning, but now I realize I have a choice. I can complain and do nothing, which really robs me of my life force, or I can see things as an opportunity and be a catalyst for change. Is it easy? No. Do I still complain? Yes...sometimes. But, I catch myself earlier than before and can more quickly begin to look for solutions.

This has been a truly empowering experience. Through my efforts to lead a life free of complaint and see everything as an opportunity to grow, I have become happier. I actually enjoy my struggles because I realize the value they have toward my growth. I have also determined to deepen my understanding of the Daishonin’s Buddhism so that I can display the spirit of his teachings and teach others thoroughly and clearly. While I may not yet be living a life completely free of complaint, I have seen the brochure and now know that it is a terrific place to visit. Someday, I’d like to live there!