

THE JOYS OF PARENTING

My son, Evan, is my hero, my joy, my guide, my trainer. He helps me be good, keep commitments, come home early, smoke and eat less and play more. I chant for his health, happiness and safety every time I pray. Yet I always worry about him. I wonder if I'm doing the right things as his dad. I remember chanting with my wife before his birth that some life out there in the universe would want to have us as its parents. We promised we'd be the best parents. Evan picked us, and we've been striving to fulfill that promise ever since. In my 26 years of chanting, it's the biggest challenge yet.

—VAHAN TAFRALIAN, LAS VEGAS

When he's cranky or sick with a cough or the flu
the good and the bad
we've been through it all
but being a mother
is the best job of all.

—JULIE TAFRALIAN, LAS VEGAS

Motherhood is the most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. You need only witness how quickly I beeline to the three lower worlds on those "low daimoku" days. But those moments are completely eclipsed by the love and appreciation I feel, which grows exponentially, each day I have the fortune to spend with my baby Buddhas—John and Alice.

—NANCY CASSARO FRACCHIOLLA,
PACIFIC PALISADES, CALIF.

Like gongyo, fatherhood takes assiduous practice—it's not easy, should never be taken for granted and requires more than 10 minutes a day! At the same moment, just as "there is no greater happiness than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo," there is no responsibility that brings such unparalleled joy to life than that of being a father.

—MARK EPP, LINCOLN, NEB.

Many job offers have come my way that would have quickly solve my financial situation. However, I refused any job that meant long periods away from my son. I wanted to be there when he got out of school. I wanted to be able to do things with him on the weekends, and more. My son means the world to me. The big dollars can wait. This is Father's Day to me—being there for your kid or kids when they need you. When they are grown up, they do not remember the long hours you put in at the office. They remember the hours they wished you were there. Father's Day to me is being a father 24/7. I would not have it any other way.

—GLEN A. SMITH, LAS VEGAS

It's so different before and after I had my son—he has taught me to really think about and care for someone else besides myself. It's a wonderful challenge to be a mother, the greatest responsibility that I've ever had. It teaches me to be a good human being. Because

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of my Buddhist practice, I can change negative situations to positive ones. I believe I'm growing stronger and have learned about the spirit to never be defeated in the face of any obstacle in my life.

—*TOMOKO CARTER, WESTCHESTER, CALIF.*

I remember after having my first son, a friend of mind asked me what it was like to become a mother. I told her it felt like all my life I was like a tree working hard to be the very best tree I could be—unaware of anything more. Having a baby was like waking up to see this beautiful fruit hanging from my branches, and life had a whole new dimension and joy. The journey it started has never ceased to astound me. I know in my heart I would not have experienced being a mother if it weren't for practicing this Buddhism, and I am ever grateful.

—*WENDI HREHOVCSIK-EBEL, OCEANSIDE, CALIF.*

My daughter, Lauren, was born almost exactly seven years after I received the Gohonzon. My son, Michael, was born almost five years later. I love being their dad! To be able to share my life and help shape the future for these two unique and wonderful persons is my greatest joy and a very large challenge. As a parent, I cannot possess too much wisdom and compassion. My challenge is to expand my life, my wisdom and my compassion and become the best person and father I can be. I still feel like a novice at this fatherhood thing, but my children work hard at helping me to improve. I love them so much!

—*CRAIG BERG, OCEANSIDE, CALIF.*

The interesting theme of mothers in my mind is the act of pushing. We push those babes out at birth with a grand fury. We spend the next years pushing these beings to eat, crawl, walk, learn, be safe, be fair, be excellent. As a Buddhist, I have finally realized I can only push my children toward their enlightenment, toward giving their most significant, precious, individual gift to humankind—and then, I am enriched, too.

—*SUSAN SHAW,
TOPANGA CANYON, CALIF.*

Being a mother has taught me to appreciate my own mother. I was born into this practice and I grew up watching my parents and grandmother make efforts in the SGI; especially my mother who did activities every day to help people and chanted many hours. I feel that because of her efforts, I am able to enjoy the life I lead today. I am married to a wonderful person, Julian, who is also an SGI member, and we have two incredible children. I, too, have an opportunity to show my children the greatness of this practice. Thank you, Mom, for being the best example, showing me the power of this practice, the greatness of the Gohonzon and to support President Ikeda.

—*NANCY OSAKI, LOS ANGELES*

I feel it's not an easy thing to be a father, but it's very fulfilling; it's very hard to explain in words—it's a feeling deep inside of me. It's so wonderful to be one—to create another generation into the future, especially so when I look at my 7-year-old grandson; one of my sons, Edwin, already has his own family. My oldest son, José, will be receiving the Gohonzon on June 4. When I started chanting 14 years ago, I saw the proof of Buddhist practice in my family because I know my kids were protected from going into a wrong

direction in their lives; they didn't join any gang, even if there was a potential to do so.

—*JOSÉ ZELADA, INGLEWOOD, CALIF.*

I cannot express what being Benjamin's dad means to me. He's the child Lisa and I would never have had (to which he'd say, "That's what you think!"), who had his first birthday in our 20th year of marriage. Who challenges every fiber of my being, providing nonstop motivation for my practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Whose sensitivity to my every shifting mood leaves me no choice but to finally get over myself. I won't have his world clouded by my darkness, and as I stand aside to keep from blocking the sun, it shines on me as well.

—*WAYNE GREEN, LAS VEGAS*