

**PERSPECTIVE
PRACTICE FOR OTHERS BENEFITS ME
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In January 1998, I started my own home visit activity. I did this to break my weekly routine of leaving work and going straight home and feeling sorry for myself. So I decided to visit two people who did not come out to SGI activities very often. My purpose in visiting them was to get to know them better and to encourage their practice of Buddhism in the SGI. At the same time, I had heard that practicing for others is important, and I wanted to practice correctly to gain benefit for my life.

I had my own specific plan as to how these home visits would go: I would arrive at their homes, talk with them a few minutes, recite the evening prayer with them, and then leave. Afterward, I would pat myself on the back and say what a good person I was for helping my friends practice Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

This was the plan, but from the time I started visiting my friends, the home visits did not go as I had planned.

Once I entered their homes and we sat down, my friends would start to talk about their problems. They seldom wanted to start chanting right away. In fact, sometimes we would get very little chanting in. I became frustrated because my friends were not following the plan I had in my head! Sometimes I would have to listen to them for what seemed like a long time. This was no easy task, because anyone who knows me knows that I like to talk! At times as I sat listening to my friends' problems, I would feel like there was something I should have been able to do to help them solve those problems. I even had the nerve to think that I had the answer to their problems in my head. At other times, I felt helpless and discouraged. Even so, at the end of each visit, my friends would thank me and give me a hug. Because of this, I kept going to see them, even when it was difficult for me. I was visiting my friends as a "practice for others"; in other words, I saw the home visits as a way for my friends to learn more about Buddhism.

The question I had never asked myself was "How was this home visit activity benefiting me?" As I thought about this question, I came to realize a couple of important points. First, that a person's problems are very real to them (even if they seem to me to be easy to solve). Second, if a person feels like they can trust me enough to tell me their problems, it means that they believe I care about them (and they will start to care about me, too). In this way the home visits allow me to deepen my faith and my friendships.

At this point in my 15-year practice, my listening skills began to become stronger. And then I read something written by SGI-USA Vice Women's Leader Linda Johnson (from a women's meeting in New York City, April 9), which said: "We tend to expect, merely because we are practicing a religion, that people ought to be perfect. The minute we find out they are not perfect and [are, in fact,] human, we are profoundly discouraged. This is a practice of human revolution. Without challenges we would not grow. I am coming to understand that every person in my life exists to teach [me] how to become a better human being."

With this in mind, I began to sincerely chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo every day to understand what my friends were trying to teach me. I prayed for their happiness so that when I went to visit them I would be refreshed and ready to listen once again.

And then one day, a "light bulb" went off in my head and I realized very clearly that I

did not have the solution to anyone's problems but my own. But there were a few things I could do: First, I could chant with my friends and in this way offer them the hope that comes from practicing Buddhism. Second, just by listening to their problems, I could show them that I cared and in this way, too, offer them hope for their future happiness.

I have been visiting my two special friends for over a year now, and it is they who have taught me these important lessons.

Because of our home visit activity, I believe that I have become more compassionate and patient with others. I also have improved my ability to listen and have become less judgmental about others' circumstances. From my friends, I am learning that when a person feels they can talk to me, that means they trust me and will be glad to see me when I do visit them.

This activity has, I believe, strengthened my character and is helping me to stop running from my own sufferings. For I see some of myself in each of these women. I realize that when these women let me enter their homes to visit with them, when they smile at me and ask me where I have been, when they offer me a glass of water, when they give me a hug and say thank you, it is I who should thank them for helping me to be the bodhisattva I want to be.