

THE POWER OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE BY DELANO DAVIDSON, NEW YORK CITY

“My mother didn’t force me to chant, she encouraged me. Then naturally, as I faced my daily struggles, I turned to the practice more, prayed sincerely and got clear results.”

At one point in junior high school, my grades were low. I felt discouraged about everything. I was afraid that I would not amount to anything and school felt overwhelming.

Although I was very angry and frustrated, when it came to the practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, my mother never forced me to chant. She did not get angry with me for my bad grades in math. She encouraged me to take my problems to the Gohonzon. She said that if I put the practice in the center of my life then everything else would follow. I knew if I did not overcome my problems in school, I would regret it in the end.

I used to think that chanting was boring, especially chanting for a long time.

Gongyo seemed too hard and I only knew the A (Hoben) and C (Jigage) portions. But I was desperate. There was nothing else I could do, so I decided to face the Gohonzon and chant.

In the beginning, it was difficult to stick with it. Sometimes I sat with my mom and during part B (Juryo), I would try to say the words, but mostly I followed along with my finger. I remember SGI President Ikeda writing that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is enough if you can’t do gongyo. Daimoku is the key and what matter’s is one’s heart. He also said, “Gongyo is important, but essentially the most vital thing is to continue to embrace the Gohonzon your whole life and never, ever abandon it” (*Discussions on Youth*, vol. 2, p. 181). With that in mind, I started to chant on my own and do activities at the culture center.

When I reached high school, more time was demanded of me. At times when I couldn’t chant because I was tired or woke up late, I read President Ikeda’s guidance in his book for teenagers, *The Way of Youth*. It really hit home with me. I was surprised how much the situations he mentions are so similar to what I was going through. I would read it when I left home in the morning on the subway or on the bus because it prepared me for the day and the turmoil of school. Chapters like “Love and Relationships” and “Being Smart Enough” are great. However, all of the topics are really helpful, like choosing a career and introducing this practice to our friends and family.

I wanted to win badly. I took all of my pain and suffering to the Gohonzon. As I started to chant with a lot more vigor and passion, little by little my situation started to improve. I made daily efforts to achieve victory by studying a little extra whenever I could. When I saw I was making progress, chanting longer wasn’t a problem. Toward the end of the school year I had a 95 average in math. I was excited and overjoyed—I finally won! I even taught the class when the teacher was away. In my sophomore year, I had a 96 average, and in my junior year I reached math honors classes. Thanks to my mom and President Ikeda’s guidance, I discovered I could win.

What advice would I give a teenager who has these kinds of challenges? Start out by reading President Ikeda’s guidance about parents in *The Way of Youth*, and then

set your own goals. Your parents may seem as if they are nagging, but they are only looking out for you. They know the power of Buddhist practice and they are trying to help you. This practice shows you how to become a winner. Do it for yourself and for your own life. Chant five minutes a day, take the necessary action—you will definitely get results.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How is the conviction and spirit of propagation that Nichiren Daishonin expresses in this essay related to a spirit of tolerance?

2. What do most people look to as the basis for their happiness? In your view, does society embrace a “correct view” or an “incorrect view”? What are the “misleading teachings” of contemporary America?