

THOUGHTS ON THE SGI WOMEN'S THEME
THE EMERGENCE OF MY TRUE SELF
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I started 2001 with a bang. Literally. Two days before Christmas, I took my grandchildren ice-skating. Just as I made a particularly graceful turn, my skates went out from under me and—*crack!* I spent the next 10 days in the hospital with a broken pelvis.

During that horrible time, I never thought I could say what I am saying now: I do not regret this. I would not change this experience. I have received profound gifts of faith, of hope, of compassion. My life and my faith have been fortified and profoundly deepened.

For the first four days, I was in excruciating pain, especially when I was moved even slightly. I desperately chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo—sometimes silently, sometimes softly, sometimes screaming it in pain. I bargained with the Gohonzon, I pleaded, I pledged and, guess what? The pain continued. In fact, it got worse. All I could do was keep my eye on the horizon and tell myself, “I will come through this, and I will not doubt the Gohonzon, no matter what happens.”

Finally, on the fourth day, the pain became bearable, and I could look around me. I could even encourage my 86-year-old roommate, who moaned incessantly in pain from her broken hip—I knew what she was going through.

Two realizations hit me: One was tremendous appreciation for my Buddhist practice. I was cradled by bodhisattvas from the moment of my fall: my loving family, five of the sweetest paramedics who carried me out of the ice-skating rink, my doctor’s reassuring midnight visit and the hospital staff’s constant care.

I looked to the horizon and persevered in pain because of the fortitude I have built through chanting and through my relationship with President Ikeda. His guidance was there in my life 100 percent at this crucial moment. Through desperate pain and fear, I held on to his conviction when mine was weak.

Though thousands of miles away, his remembered spirit and words—like “stand alone,” “persevere” and “you will definitely win”—traveled in my mind. He was my coach all the way. I know now that we must continue to chant and believe we will win, even when we feel the guillotine at our neck.

My second realization as I took in my surroundings in the hospital was that there is such great suffering, especially among the elderly. So many in their final years are afraid, in pain, disoriented and often with no family or friends. “They have endured many things to live this long,” I thought indignantly. “It isn’t fair that they should have to end their lives in fear and isolation.”

And from some very deep place came an even greater indignation about High Priest Nikken Abe. How precious are human beings, how hard they try. When they finally encounter Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, to have it profoundly distorted and counterfeited by High Priest Nikken, to join him in actually destroying what is correct—that is the greatest evil. I cannot bear to see these precious people on a path of no fortune, of eventual suffering. It is my deep conviction that we must challenge Nichiren Shoshu’s influence without hesitation. In that challenge is the greatest act of compassion for humanity.

Now I am at home convalescing. Each day, I am stronger and can do more. I probably will not be able to attend the February women’s meetings, but it seems my experience has

put me at the epicenter of the SGI women's theme:

“Create a spiritual civilization in the 21st century, based on our solidarity as women of the SGI. 1) With strong faith, reveal one's true self. 2) As a world citizen, contribute to society. 3) With dialogue based on justice, expand the force for peace.”

First, I feel it was my “true self” that sustained me. This true self is our finest, deepest self—the self that feels rooted to the compassionate force of the universe. This strong human self, which emerged in my crisis, had been there all along, quietly growing with each prayer, each positive act. It was brave and persevering.

Although I persevered alone, it was only because of the tremendous care of so many people that I could continue. This awareness leads me to the second point, about being world citizens. The hospital staff was a miniature United Nations: Scotland, India, Africa—they represented every continent. I watched each person's full attention on caring for another human being. Whether taking vital signs or just patting the hand of a disoriented elder, saying, “It's going to be OK, sweetie,” these people have put aside likes and dislikes and cut through to caring for each human being. What world citizens they are!

I feel my interpretation of the last point, the one about a dialogue based on justice, was superficial before my accident. I saw it more in terms of righteous reaction to that which would hurt or degrade humanity. Now, I believe we have true power to act for justice only when we cultivate our true selves. These true selves are neither reactive nor self-serving, but proactive and dedicated to radiating hope and developing the highest ideals in ourselves, no matter what happens.

This entails reaching out to others, sharing the conviction of our connectedness, believing in and empowering others. When we sincerely work to polish our true selves and to live contributive lives, then when we speak out for justice, it will be with wisdom and compassion.

That is what will enable us to affect change. President Ikeda has said about Mahatma Gandhi: “Gandhi always strode in the front of protest marches. He always went to where the greatest crisis or suffering was. This is, in fact, the essence of nonviolence. In other words, it is to change oneself first and, through that transformation, change others' hearts” (July 23, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 5).

I am so grateful that this experience has made this significant SGI women's theme penetrate my life. I would not trade this for anything. Surely, this must be what changing poison into medicine means. SGI Vice Women's Leader Yumiko Hachiya sent me a message from Japan, telling me that when we are working hard for kosen-rufu, everything that happens—even an accident—has profound meaning. Certainly, my appreciation for the SGI has deepened. Everyone rallied to support me; it was a team effort and beyond. I especially appreciate everyone's prayer. I know it has propelled me on to my crutches.

I am proud and grateful to be a part of the most respectable and dynamic women's group in the world: the SGI-USA women.