

**THE JOY OF ‘SHAKUBUKU’
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‘What if he had hesitated?’ asks Matilda Buck about the person who introduced her to Buddhism. ‘I cannot imagine. I only know that I am so glad he didn’t.’

Whatever we may call it—propagation, introducing others, *shakubuku*, spreading the Law—the act of sharing faith and practice with another person is, for me, the greatest joy.

It may not start out that way, but if I can communicate my experience and the great value of Buddhism to another human heart, I inevitably feel elevated. Surely it must be because I am bringing forth the world of Bodhisattva. Nichiren Daishonin left clear directions for us: “You must not only persevere yourself; you must also teach others. Both practice and study arise from faith. Teach others to the best of your ability even if it is only a single sentence or phrase” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 386).

Cleve Ford—the man who introduced me to Buddhism 28 years ago—had only been practicing for six months. In a sense, he was still experimenting himself. But he felt some confidence in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and some sympathy toward the glib but troubled woman buying a dashiki in his African shop. What if he had hesitated? I cannot imagine. I only know that I am so glad he didn’t.

I want to share part of a letter he recently wrote to me. It expresses the depth of the friendship, the bond, that was born that day when he said, “Have you ever heard about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo?”

My dear friend,

I’m sitting in front of my Gohonzon and reflecting on our years [of] friendship, a wonderful collage.... So clearly I see your smile when we first met. Your shyness at your first Buddhist meeting. Pictures of you...and others in joyous laughter at the baby shower celebrating my youngest daughter’s birth. She is now 22 and on her way to medical school. Do you remember her playing violin in [her high school] symphony orchestra? I still recall [your husband’s] tearful response, “Why don’t they talk more about these kids?”

Your tears and sadness at the death of my son. The flowers you’d leave at my office announcing your wedding anniversary [thanking me for introducing you to this practice that you say saved your marriage]. The chicken soup I’d leave at your front door when you had a cold....

How grateful I am that he kept inviting me to a meeting until I finally came. Even more than that, how grateful I am that he stuck with me. When I decided after a few months that the practice was too demanding, he didn’t walk away. He introduced me to people who could answer my questions, and he called to read excerpts from the *World Tribune*. He was patient, gently but confidently saying, “Why don’t you share this practice with your friends?” I did, and my life took off.

Once again, I am experiencing that same exhilarating takeoff. Last month, two of my good friends received the Gohonzon. Joan, more than two decades ago, was one of the first people I introduced to Buddhism. She practiced in difficult circumstances then, and eventually the opposition in her surroundings was so strong that she returned the

Gohonzon to me. I felt such regret. We remained in touch, and last year, saw each other several times and had wonderful open-hearted talks. She came to several meetings with me, and I prayed that she would want to practice again. One day, she called to say she had decided to begin again.

We repeatedly tried to attend Gohonzon-conferral ceremonies in her area, but some conflict always came up. Danny Nagashima, our SGI-USA general director, heard the story and said, “Why don’t we bring the Gohonzon to her?” So simple!

But wait, the plot thickens.

I also told Danny about my friend Yolanda, who has come to many meetings. Her 12-year-old granddaughter has been attending SGI-USA youth activities in her neighborhood and has written many letters to SGI President Ikeda sharing her dreams for the future. Yolanda even has a small space set aside in her bedroom to chant. She brought her whole family to the Southern California Zone Joy2K meeting and Latin festival last fall, and has been subscribing to the *World Tribune* for several years now.

When I was at home recuperating from an injury in January, Yolanda told me that she had been chanting every day for my health while I was in the hospital. I was shocked to realize that, right under my nose, this entire family had been practicing. I asked Yolanda if she would like to receive the Gohonzon and have an altar of her own. She was elated!

Soon after, we conducted Gohonzon-conferral ceremonies at my house for both Joan and Yolanda. We all shared in their great joy. I believe both of these women were at a spiritual turning point, seeking and openhearted. If we had made them wait for a designated conferral ceremony, we might have lost that moment.

I am always moved by our general director’s compassion and wisdom for people. He saw past the formality of a scheduled conferral ceremony to the true intent of *shakubuku*—bringing the source of eternal happiness to one person at his or her crucial moment of life. That is a great lesson for us all.

Here’s my thinking: Our membership guidelines are here to support us. Most of the time, they work well to ensure that each new member is well cared for and serious in his or her commitment to practice Buddhism. But there may arise unique situations in which things need to be dealt with flexibly. In any case, we should always keep our eyes on the real goal and find the best solution for everyone.

As I write this, Joan is planning to pick me up for our women’s meeting. Yolanda is bringing four guests to her women’s meeting. In the car with Joan and me will be my physical therapist, who has been so impressed by the rapid recovery of my injury and by the members she has met at my house that she wants to know all about Buddhism. She may not begin to practice immediately—that’s not the point. Although the ideal result is that another person embraces the Gohonzon, the point, as I see it, is to open the door to the SGI, to share all that we have to offer. That is the source of joy I feel in sharing this practice with others.

I am feeling bolder these days. I am not shy about encouraging others to try chanting and see what it can do for them. I am so grateful that Cleve Ford was bold 28 years ago.

We finished up our wonderful women’s meetings last month. By all reports, they were creative, inspiring and well attended. There were many guests at these meetings, too. I believe these gatherings are building a momentum of propagation and the joy that accompanies it. We can carry the spirit of our women’s meetings into smaller gatherings for women who may have been unable to attend. Why not include our new guests? For the upcoming March district meetings, our youth will be taking responsibility. What a perfect

event to bring our guests to. Who wouldn't be encouraged to see young people engaged in this movement of peace?

President Ikeda once shared second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda's description of propagation (I just love this one!): "It is important to share Buddhism with a spirit of compassion. It's almost like being in love.' President Toda certainly has a way of putting things! When people are in love, they go all out. They waste many sheets of stationery writing and rewriting letters. They stay up all night thinking about the words they will use to invite the other person out on their next day off. If everything goes well, they might decide to get married. However, unlike marriage sometimes, *shakubuku* will never cause one to have regrets" (February 1997 *Living Buddhism*, p. 28).

Shakubuku causes us to feel great joy and, to me, it is the greatest action to be taking toward May 3, 2001. We have grown and learned so much in these last few years. I believe that not only are we ready to welcome and care for our new members, the world is ready for us.

Now is the time. Let's open the doors!