

**PRAYER AND ACTION FOR PEACE
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- A woman is carried, first by one and then by two co-workers, down more than 60 floors to escape the World Trade Center.
- A wife, buoyed by her family, searches for her missing husband.
- A firefighter, risking his life to save others, is himself pulled alive from the rubble of the World Trade Center.
- Twelve Malaysian-born New Yorkers band together to provide volunteer support at relief centers throughout the city.

There are thousands of such stories from last week's events. The ones I have listed here all concern SGI-USA members, and I am deeply inspired and humbled by them, by their demonstrations of heroism and humanity.

Along with everyone else, I watched with stunned horror as the events of Sept. 11 unfolded. I am still processing my reactions, still making realizations. I believe that the events of that day and the days that follow will lead to profound changes in our lives and our world. More significantly, I also believe that it is up to us—that we must choose—whether those changes will strengthen or defeat us.

SGI President Ikeda writes in *For the Sake of Peace*: “Peace is not something to be left to others in distant places. It is something we create day to day in our efforts to cultivate care and consideration for others, forging bonds of friendship and trust in our respective communities through our own actions and example” (p. 212). This is precisely what we have been doing for the last few decades through the activities of the SGI-USA. And this is precisely the foundation that we can—must—continue to build on in the future. In this realization, I take a defiant pride.

In the aftermath of last week's tragedy, people in every corner of the nation feel a bond, a kinship. We see American flags everywhere, people standing in long lines to donate blood, fundraising efforts, candlelight vigils where strangers embrace one another. In an editorial in the Sept. 16 *Los Angeles Times*, author Richard Rodriguez writes that all week long, people “seemed to feel closest when they were acting kindly to one another.”

Will this last? Again, I believe it's our choice. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism has always stressed the interdependent nature of prayer and action. True progress occurs only when both ingredients are present. What kind of prayer we make will be reflected in our action.

So, how do we pray?

I want to tell you a story that is nothing like the stories coming out of New York City but is no less humanistic. I was recently in Japan with Yumiko Hachiya, SGI vice women's leader, when she lost her wallet. She sent us on to dinner while she went back in search of her wallet. When she caught up with us, her face was radiant. “She's found her wallet—how amazing!” I said.

Her smile broadened: “No, I didn't find my wallet.” When I asked her why she was not upset, but in fact happy, she responded: “I have been praying that your visit here would be completely successful and without mishap or accident. Because I prayed so strongly, I know that this is some kind of protection—a lessening of karmic effect. I feel so much appreciation!”

I was bowled over. All I could think was, “That’s the kind of faith I want; that’s the way I want to pray every day.” To pray with such focus, such clarity, such conviction; to face each day with appreciation, understanding that whatever happens will have the best possible outcome because we work to make it so.

Before that, I sometimes reacted to obstacles either with a sense of frustration—“Hey, I’ve been chanting about this situation, and it’s getting worse!”—or worthlessness—“It’s my fault; I didn’t chant enough.” After watching Mrs. Hachiya, I realized I was being judgmental, which is a waste of time. I realized that my practice involves a relationship of trust and *collaboration* with the Gohonzon.

“Prayer is not a feeble consolation; it is a powerful, unyielding conviction,” writes President Ikeda. “And prayer must become manifest in action. To put it another way, if our prayers are in earnest, they will definitely give rise to action. Prayer becomes manifest in action, and action has to be backed up by prayer. Only then can we elicit a response from the Buddhist gods and all Buddhas” (*Learning From the Gosho*, pp. 92–93).

Right now, many are fearful of war. But we can pray in the most proactive way about this. In his thesis “The Selection of the Time,” the Daishonin writes, “Great struggles and disputes such as have never been known in the past will break out in the Jambudvipa” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 542).

President Ikeda concludes that this passage refers to World War II: “Whatever happens, we cannot permit another world war to occur. Let us pray to the Gohonzon with strong determination to prevent such a thing at all costs, pledging to dedicate our lives ungrudgingly to the cause of propagating the Law. Let us definitely achieve kosen-rufu—the dream of lasting peace and happiness for all humanity!” (*The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 1, p. 166).

More than ever, this is a time of prayer, and action based on that prayer. This is a time to understand that we are peace activists in the truest sense—Peace that begins with each of us, and that helps us find our own stories of heroism. Let us not be intimidated or fearful. Let us pray wholeheartedly for exactly what we want—peace.