

PERSPECTIVE: You Don't Always Get What You Want
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I have lived in South Korea since 1991. I started practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in 1988 but stopped when I arrived in Korea. I felt I was getting nowhere in my practice and nowhere in my life. Then, as the saying goes, the plot thickened. Some SGI members got word about me and asked if I'd like to come to a meeting. That's where I heard the following story, which changed my attitude and understanding of Buddhism once and for all.

There was a couple at the meeting we'll call Mr. and Mrs. C. They were obviously in love — so much so that I thought they were newlyweds. Actually, they had been married for a long time. Mr. C beamed with enthusiasm, his eyes shining with vigor while talking about the benefits of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism or gazing at his wife. Here was a man happy and at peace.

After the meeting, impressed with his strong devotion, I asked how he had arrived at such strong faith. What he told me influenced me so much that not only did I start practicing again, I eventually became the district leader for Songton.

His story began with his wife, who first taught him how to chant. She wanted him to chant badly, and that's just what he did — he chanted, badly. He had trouble with Buddhism and chanting and would only chant to appease his wife. Besides, he felt trapped in a loveless marriage. His wife pushing him to chant was just another example, he felt, of how she was always pushing him to do things he didn't enjoy. His recitation of gongyo was just something to hurry up and get out of the way.

Then one day a senior leader visited and asked Mr. C how his practice was going. He answered that it was going about as well as his marriage. Asked to elucidate, he replied that he was not happy with anything. The senior leader then explained that he should chant for something he wanted, and if it wasn't realized in 100 days then this Buddhism was not for him. Mr. C thought he could tough it out for 100 days and thanked the leader, assuring him that he'd be chanting vigorously.

The next day he started to chant that his wife would die! He felt that his wife was the source of his unhappiness and with her gone, his life would be better. He chanted every day and night, like there was no tomorrow.

After a while, as he was chanting he started wondering why his marriage was such a mess. As he began to reflect, he soon realized that he often came home in not-the-best mood. Later, he realized that he was authoritarian with his wife, slow to praise and fast to complain. He vowed to be a more considerate person. At least one of them should act civilized, he felt.

As the days passed, he also realized that his attitude was changing. He started seeing things in a different light. He attempted to understand his wife's side of disagreements. At first, his wife was apprehensive about his attitude changes, thinking he was setting her up for some type of humiliation, but when she saw that the change was genuine she started to change, too. When he came home, she would prepare his favorite meal, ask him about his day and listen to him with full attention.

He was getting close to the 100 days and thought about how much his wife had changed for the better, much more like the woman he had met and fallen in love with. He started to feel emotions return that he thought were long gone — love, patience and understanding. He felt overwhelmed by how much his environment was changing and started bringing gifts home for his wife like flowers, knick-knacks and love notes.

He started complimenting her on her looks. She started showing him more affection.

By this point, he had actually started chanting for his wife's happiness as well as their continued happiness together.

One hundred days passed. Mr. and Mrs. C attended a discussion meeting where the man who had given Mr. C the 100-day advice asked him how things were going. Mr. C replied that at the start of the 100 days he was chanting for one thing but by the end he was chanting for something entirely different. He said, "I thought I knew what I wanted for my life to change for the better." He told the leader about his hidden wish for his wife to die, but stopped thinking that way when his wife changed.

The leader pointed out: "You say you wanted your wife to die. But it was your negativity that died, taking that negative environment, including your wife's negativity, with it, too. You changed your environment by changing yourself — by changing your actions.

"We often hear that every action has an equal and opposite reaction, but Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches us that every momentary action and reaction has 3,000 possible manifestations. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can always choose our own paths of action. Chanting simply opened your eyes to the truth that was always within you."

Mr. C received what he really wanted, what he really needed.

I will always remember this story, which reminds me that I, like Mr. C, have always attained in one form or another whatever I have chanted about. A person should chant with strong determination and in so doing reap many benefits. I know I have.

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