

PERSPECTIVE: Letting Go of Her Negativity

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When Briah, my women's division chapter chief, asked me to give an experience at a large meeting, I automatically said, "Yes."

Then I thought, "Uh-oh." Every time I shared an experience, obstacles immediately kicked in. This time was no different. But, I have learned, obstacles present us with opportunities to change our negative karma. I decided to change my attitude to say, "OBSTACLES — you just gotta love 'em!"

Before I started practicing this Buddhism, I thought I had a pretty good life. I had a wonderful and supportive family, three great sons and a few good friends. However, I was living in a very tiny, very limited little box called "my life." I had a list of goals that included: doing volunteer work, supporting causes I believed in, finding a religion, becoming active in my community, meeting new people, learning about other cultures, and participating in activities and events that would stretch my imagination and horizons.

But the fact is that I never took one step toward making even one of my goals a reality. I was too busy, I thought, to add another thing to my hectic life. I didn't have the time or energy to meet new people.

I was in a rut, which, by its lack of initiative or growth, can be a hellish life-condition. As the 3rd chapter of the Lotus Sutra describes, it was like "having dwelled in hell for so long I had come to think it as natural as a garden."

Then I started practicing this Buddhism, and I have either achieved or am in the process of achieving all of the goals on my list. My life isn't perfect, but it is far better than anything I could ever have imagined just two-and-a-half short years ago.

One of the biggest things I have learned to do is to take responsibility for my life and the choices I make. Although it has been difficult, I am learning to take a hard look at the dark, ugly sides of my personality — looking at those negative qualities I have spent a lifetime denying.

I am trying to take these qualities and change them, one by one, from poison to medicine. One thing I have been working on is letting go of the need to be in control of everything and everybody in my life, all of the time. I am learning to let people be who they are.

You wouldn't believe how much freedom letting go has given me. I had wasted a lot of time and energy trying to get my way; trying to make people do what I wanted them to do; and trying to get everybody to agree I was right about everything. It was so frustrating to me when people wouldn't "act right," which meant do what I wanted them to do. I stayed mad all the time and couldn't understand why people wouldn't just simply listen to me and take my most excellent — and unsolicited — advice!

An ex-boyfriend used to accuse me of thinking I was perfect. I would think, he has a lot of faults and I've got my work cut out for me here, but he is kind of cute and extremely perceptive. Since I didn't want to seem to be as arrogant as I really was, I would always say, "No, honey, I'm not perfect, I'm sure I must have SOME fault." The problem was that I couldn't think of one.

The most wonderful thing about the personal changes that have come about as a result of this practice is that it has, miraculously, changed the way I view the world. I see clearly, for the first time, that each of us is like a flower — we are precious, beautiful and unique, with special gifts and talents to contribute. Each of us also has our private journey of human revolution that does not look, nor does it have to look, like anyone

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else's journey.

Letting go of negativity has created a vacuum in my life that has allowed me to be more open, curious and seeking about the world. I am happier than I have ever been, regardless of what is going on around me. And I have learned to trust the universe and to know that I am loved, protected and supported.

My favorite Goshō passage best sums up my philosophy: "Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and keep chanting Nam-myōhō-rengē-kyō, no matter what happens. Then you will experience boundless joy from the Law" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 161).

I am delighted to have encountered this Buddhism in this lifetime. I can hardly wait to see where the next chapter of this adventure will take me.

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