

Knowing a Benefit When You Have One

BY JEFF FARR
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

At a recent kosen-rufu gongyo, SGI-USA Senior Vice General Director Danny Nagashima shared a moving experience of his mother's death last year. It was emotional, but he made it warm and funny, too. An earlier experience that night from a headquarters member, also moving, was as well about his mother's death. So in the middle of his experience, Danny suddenly asked, "This meeting has too many experiences about death, doesn't it?"

Everyone laughed. You wouldn't think experiences about death could be so encouraging — but both experiences had clearly shown the benefit of this practice manifested in the two mothers' states of life at the time of death and how both families dealt with their grief.

But how could death ever be a benefit? Wouldn't a benefit be if no one ever got sick and everyone lived forever? This raises the question: What is a benefit anyhow?

Nichiren Daishonin writes in "The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," "*Ku* of *kudoku* [benefit] means happiness" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 762). He also says that "*ku* means to extinguish evil and *doku* means to bring forth good" (*ibid.*). While there's nothing wrong with seeing benefit in a down-to-earth way — like the material benefits we get from the practice — Nichiren Daishonin says true benefit is extinguishing evil in our lives. In other words, the Daishonin teaches that we should rid ourselves of the inner weaknesses that hold us back in life.

Former SGI-USA Vice Youth Division Chief Robert Uruma's inner weakness was not studying. "Have you ever heard of Japanese high school baseball tournaments?" he asks. "Baseball is a crazy sport there. And people who play baseball in high school in Japan just do not study. I was one of them. I was a very bad student — the worst."

After high school, Robert went to a technical college for aircraft engineering, but never having studied before he just did not know how to. He was about to drop out when his Soka Gakkai leader encouraged him to start chanting seriously, doing gongyo regularly and of course studying a lot. On the next exam he was No. 3 in his class. "When I graduated from the college I was the No. 1 student!" he remembers.

Temporary benefits, like being No. 1 in class, are called conspicuous benefits. They're nice, but they don't last forever. The more lasting benefits, like learning how to study — or learning how to do anything that you hate to but really need to — are called inconspicuous benefits.

SGI-USA Youth Division Advisor Melanie Merians' weakness was depression. At the time she started practicing, she would often lapse into deep depression. "Over the years, through practicing," she now says, "I honestly don't feel I suffer from depression anymore. I used to get into a depression for two months; then it kind of shrunk to three weeks, then a week. Now it's frankly like a couple of hours or even a couple of minutes."

This kind of true Buddhist benefit, this satisfaction found in overcoming our weaknesses, is something we can't necessarily see. Nevertheless, to those who experience it, this feeling will always be something tangible. Perhaps the best things in the long course of life are feelings like these.

WT

Title: Knowing a Benefit When You Have One

Subject: World Tribune 02/07/97 n.3125 p.9 WT970207p09

Author: Jeff Farr

Keywords: Basics Benefit Concepts Knowing Life Practice Study Terms Tribune Winning World