

EDITORIAL: Moving Ahead After Divorce

A good marriage,” said the French essayist Montaigne some 400 years ago, “would be between a blind wife and a deaf husband.” It seems, however, that U.S. couples suffer no eye or ear problems, as nearly half of all marriages in this country end in divorce.

People’s views on this trend run the gamut. A new book by Barbara DaFoe Whitehead, *The Divorce Culture*, laments the effects of divorce on children and warns that society may be too easily accepting the two-parent family’s decline. Other books, like *The Way We Are* or *The Good Divorce* say that divorce is with us and we should learn how to deal with it and its effects on children. Bookstore shelves overflow with guides for divorced women, men and children. Other volumes urge reconciliation and a return to self-sacrifice and traditional family values. Even so, experts on both sides agree that some divorces are necessary.

While some religions doctrinally oppose divorce, such social concepts as marriage and divorce are not fundamental to the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Divorce is a private decision. Touching on the process of reaching that decision, SGI President Ikeda has said: “I encourage unhappy couples to remember that, from the Buddhist perspective, it is impossible to build personal happiness on the suffering of others. Such situations sometimes require painful reflection and forbearance. But through that pain one can strengthen and discipline the internal workings of the conscience.... Ultimately, those concerned are able to minimize the destruction of human relationships that might otherwise result.”

Naturally, even after such “painful reflection and forbearance” couples may decide to end a relationship. As practitioners of the Daishonin’s Buddhism, everything is a source of our own internal growth, our own human revolution. Even getting over the hate we may hold for a divorced partner, no matter how painful the past, helps us grow. Couples who’ve divorced have a connection, and by continuing to chant for the other person’s happiness, we expand our own capacity for compassion, and we ultimately benefit.

Every encounter ends with parting. Whether through divorce or death, relationships in this lifetime will eventually end.

“The important thing is to overcome the sorrow that accompanies any type of separation,” Mr. Ikeda said in a recent dialogue. “The vital thing is to continue to advance. Do not look back. Just forge on. There must be many reasons why people bid farewell to one another. People have their own thoughts and situations. It may be difficult indeed not to look back. The deep scars within your heart may not heal quickly.

“Yet brace yourself so you can look forward,” he continued. “You have to advance, even a step. You should strive to move on as if cutting through the clouds in your heart. As long as you advance, new hope will be born. The sun will also rise. Only when you continue to advance can you encounter an even better, more wonderful ‘you.’ A new life will unfold for you.”

Our faith allows us to use any sadness or pain as a force for our growth, so that we can go on to achieve our goals and fulfill our missions. As Nichiren Daishonin urges Shijo Kingo, “A truly wise man will not be carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 206). Nothing — not the giddiness of falling in love nor the agony that separation can be — should keep us from the path we have chosen for our lives.

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