

Forty Years of Faithful Effort
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Since I don't have cable television, seeing a videotape was my first opportunity to view the fruits of Anne Marie Offer's long sought-after interview with Rosa Parks and her assistant, Elaine Steele. During their 15-minute on-air dialogue, Anne Marie asked Mrs. Parks questions that delved into the formation of her character and her motivation for the activities she has undertaken over the past 40 years. The questions showed the care and diligence of Anne Marie's research into Mrs. Parks' life and work.

For example, she asked Mrs. Parks, "What were your dreams as a little girl?" Mrs. Parks responded that her dream was for society to be free of racial segregation and discrimination and for all people to have the same opportunities.

Another question was, "Who were some of your role models?" Mrs. Parks replied: "My mother, because she believed in freedom and equality and education. She was a teacher in a rural area of Alabama. She wanted her students to know their lessons and believed we should respect not only ourselves but other people, too."

Ms. Steele and Mrs. Parks explained how they came to work together and about Pathways to Freedom, the organization for students ages 11-17 that the two women now work on together.

Asked whether she had any words of wisdom on becoming a valuable citizen, Mrs. Parks answered: "Develop a spiritual awareness; stay in school and get good grades; make the best of your education; register and vote and take part in the government, perhaps even becoming a candidate for public office." Mrs. Parks seemed to believe that freedom, equality and education are inseparable. Her refusal to give up her seat on a Montgomery, Ala., bus 40 years ago led to a highly successful boycott of city buses. More importantly, her actions led to a Supreme Court ruling against the Jim Crow laws in the South, which had legalized discrimination against African-Americans.

The answer that most inspired me was to this question: "Mrs. Parks, you could be taking it easy, sitting on your veranda sipping lemonade. I know why you do what you do, but how do you keep going?"

Mrs. Parks answered simply: "I don't dwell on any personal problems that I might have. We all feel, as time goes on, that we can't do as much as we would like to. But I haven't given up yet and I don't plan to. As long as I can get up everyday, I want to contribute. I do hope that, after I pass on, my work will be taken up and improved on by others."

Mrs. Parks speaks in a humble, quiet way, but her passion burns constantly within her heart, always propelling her forward. I think Nichiren Daishonin called this faith like flowing water.

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