

SIGN POSTS: Good Friends
By REIKO GROSHELL
SGI-USA Youth Division Study Committee

**The best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a *zenchishiki*, or good friend...
But encountering a good friend is the hardest possible thing to do. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 109)**

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin talks at great length about people relying on mistaken forms of Buddhism while slandering the Lotus Sutra. But in the very beginning he touches on the importance of having good friends, especially friends who will support and encourage us to practice.

I truly treasure my good friends. We laugh and cry together, we're concerned for one another. We share everything — from things that are important to things that are just frivolous. My friends care about me unconditionally, and I care for them the same way.

While growing up, I used to think having many friends would make me feel wanted and popular. I did my best to make people like me, but I was variously considered not part of the crowd, too much of an introvert, not attractive enough, etc. And frankly, for a long time, I thought I would never have good friends. How could anyone like me if I didn't like myself?

This Buddhism is amazing, though. Through my SGI-USA activities and the encouragement I received to take on responsibilities, I faced many things that I had to deal with. I couldn't escape. While trying to help others, I *had* to learn to help myself. It was during these times that my friends really supported me. When I didn't want to hear encouragement, or didn't think I needed any, or when my parents just couldn't get through to me, it was my friends who had the courage to "tell it like it is" and help me self-reflect. I learned I, too, had to be honest with them and help them in any way I could, even if it meant hurting them by telling them the truth.

I think SGI President Ikeda described it best in his "Discussions on Youth": "Friendships among people who cheerfully encourage one another while striving to realize their dreams are the kind that deepen and endure." I don't have many "best friends," but I have just enough. They are my treasures.

WT