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Don't Settle for Less

Thirteen years back, as a high school student, scoring straight A's, adjusting well to my early teens, and with a great family, I thought I did not have too much reason to practice Buddhism. But touched by the solemn rhythm of gongyo and daimoku, I started chanting. It was probably an unconscious search for meaning and purpose in life that carried me through the first six months with practically no study or activities.

A chronic problem with bronchial asthma, which improved greatly over this period, finally forced me to take this wonderful practice more seriously. Gradually, as I studied the literature, engaged myself in activities in India's fledgling SGI organization, and struggled to understand what was being repeatedly termed my mission, I started to realize the tremendous profundity of this faith. My mother and brother also started chanting, and slowly in a remote corner of northeast India, a small sapling of the Daishonin's Buddhism took root.

The Goshō states: "As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge, vying with one another to interfere" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 145). Problems started appearing in my life as never before. Graduation from high school left me confused about my career path; my brother failed twice in his undergraduate program; my mother was having an undiagnosed health problem; and my father was confronted with an unprecedented legal issue regarding our property that could cost us a huge sum of money.

We suddenly felt our safe and secure world receiving a big jolt. My district chief encouraged all three of us that it was a great chance to change karma for the entire family, to create value for all eternity.

We united together and, while struggling in our daily lives, also fought for the growth of the district. We supported my mother to attend an SGI General Meeting in Tokyo, and that is when we received our family Gohonzon.

Gradually as our district grew stronger, we felt our own problems sorting themselves out. I developed a desire to delve into the human body and psyche and entered medical school; my brother went for graduate study to one of India's most reputed schools; my mother was diagnosed with hypertension and, with treatment, all her other problems disappeared; and our property issue turned out to be a tax department mistake.

Medical school was tough but very interesting. The more I learned about the nuances of life, the more deeply engrossed I became in Buddhism. Concepts like the oneness of body and mind and the oneness of life and environment took on new meaning. Medicine and Buddhism expanded my perspective of life. For the first time, studying, which had always been an endless chore in the past, took on an entirely new and profound meaning from which I could derive pleasure and satisfaction.

Around this time, due to socio-political unrest in my state, we were forced to temporarily suspend meetings and all group activities. We could only keep in contact through the phone or occasional home visits. But what had originally seemed to be a very trying period for the district turned out to be a time of tremendous growth — not in numbers, but in spirit. All of us decided to chant at a particular time every day, for peace and harmony in the state. We seized all the time we could to read about the fundamentals of Buddhism and tried to apply them in our lives.

Though there were only 30 of us, we determined to develop into lions laying an unshakable foundation of kosen-rufu in northeast India. Four years later, when we finally

started activities again, we expanded explosively — by three or four times in just six months. All 30 of us still fondly look back at those four years of struggle when we built the foundation for our district and consequently established a core of conviction and confidence in our lives.

In 1994, having excelled in medical school and dreaming of a rosy career, I went to New Delhi, determined to work in one of the finest hospitals in the country. My spirits were high and I was brimming with confidence. However, five months later, having failed four qualification exams in a row, I was desperately trying to gather the broken pieces of my dream.

Having never tasted academic failure, I couldn't believe this was happening to me. In another month, I was seriously doubting if I would ever pursue graduate medical training. Staying alone in a small room, daimoku, SGI President Ikeda's guidance and my fiancée's encouragement were my sole companions. Finally, in utter desperation, I sought guidance.

My senior told me: "If you want to create value in your profession, you must go where the education is best. Don't settle for less than the best medical training in the world! In Buddhism, victory or defeat starts in the mind. If you give in to doubt, you have already lost."

On Jan. 1, 1995, I made up my mind to pursue my graduate training in the United States, a step that involved a study course of 35 books, two exams to be taken in Thailand and a huge sum of money. It also meant that I had to go back to my state without having achieved anything remarkable. When I told my brother that I couldn't go back home like a loser, he told me: "A lion takes two steps forward, one step backward and then leaps. You are taking your step backward to prepare for the final leap. That is not defeat, it's preparation for victory!!"

I started a one-year ordeal where my sole purpose in life was to study and save money. Daimoku and *The New Human Revolution* provided the much-needed motivation and helped me keep my goal in sight. Surmounting impossible financial odds and work hours, I went to Bangkok twice for the two steps of my test. Though I stayed in the cheapest hotels and ate free food, the entire experience was fantastic. To top it all off, I passed my exams with great scores and got interview calls from 15 U.S. hospitals.

I flew to the United States in late November, just after I got married, and went on a month's tour to a number of cities all over the Northeast interviewing in different hospitals. Greyhound buses, miles of highways and differing lifestyles were all in all a very enriching experience.

When I finally signed a contract in Cleveland on New Year's Day, 1997, I looked back over the last two years and reminisced about what my senior had told me: "Victory or defeat is all in the mind." Today, I redetermine to continue developing into a more compassionate and humane physician with a deep commitment toward the SGI's vision of global kosen-rufu.

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