

QUESTION of the MONTH: 'What has Buddhism taught you about independence?'

From the time I graduated from college to the time I started chanting, I often called my parents when I was desperate to survive. When I realized chanting worked, I vowed to stand on my own. From then until the time I changed my financial fortune, I chanted for whatever I needed, no matter how dire my circumstances, and I was always protected. I really learned the power of my life.

— MAGGIE BRYAN, Los Angeles

My mother died in January. Nevertheless, I do think it is important to ready oneself to meet others on even ground early. Until my 6th birthday, I spoke little or not at all due to autism. Others took advantage of me. That created bad experiences, but chanting cleared it up. Today I drive a car of my very own for kosen-rufu.

— KENNETH J. BRITCHER, Annapolis, Md.

I've learned that independence isn't easy to come by. It's a serious responsibility. Each person, according to the concept of cherry, plum, peach and damson, has a specific mission to fulfill in this lifetime. Striving to understand, appreciate and carry out our unique mission, while encouraging others to fulfill theirs, frees us from the grip of the three poisons of greed, anger and delusion.

Cherry, plum, peach and damson represents not only diversity of mission, which may be initially invisible, but ethnic diversity, which is immediately apparent. Knowing that cherry, plum, peach and damson have unique and nourishing properties, that each of us has a rightful place in the garden of the law, allows me to appreciate and pursue my mission without feeling restricted in any way.

— FLETCHER DALTON, Boston

I think the most important quality of independence is to cooperate with others. For example, a country cannot defend herself by isolating herself from her neighbor countries; or one cannot become independent by making decisions without concern for others, because such selfish decisions will eventually create trouble to the person and others. The SGI is a training place that teaches us how we can cooperate with others in any situation — that is human revolution. To value one's independence means to respect one's Buddha nature, and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism shows the ways to do so.

— MIDORI KISHIMOTO, St. Louis

In today's world, with everything and each person being tied together, it often seems that we're dependent on each other, the government and our environment for happiness and to do what we want to do. But because of chanting I think that I've learned that I don't have to be dependent on our environment, the government or the next person to achieve what I want to achieve or to have the freedom to do what I want in life.

Because I have the Gohonzon, the wisdom that I can derive from my practice allows me total freedom and independence to pursue my goals, dreams and happiness that isn't dependent on anyone or anything else. Most people in society don't feel that way.

— JIM BALL, San Diego, Calif.

I think that Buddhism teaches us about individual independence. It is an independence that allows us to free ourselves from our past causes and to free ourselves from our

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overwhelming karma. Buddhism has taught me that independence is priceless and always needs to be celebrated.

— EMI GWINN, San Diego, Calif.

Independence equals responsibility both for my life and happiness. I find this gives me the greatest control possible. One way I declare my independence is by chanting with a positive expectation to achieve my goals, thereby excluding negative thoughts from others who don't believe my goals are achievable. A second method is to make every effort not to let fear be a part of my life, since it has proven to be a negative prayer, drawing to me the very thing I fear.

— CHARLES A. EVANS SR., Denver

I have learned independence through the confidence and courage that is gained by realizing we are all the Buddha, all worthy of happiness and peace in our lives. Independence is a natural benefit of knowing that there is no one who can stand between myself and the infinite power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

— BOB MACK, Los Angeles

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