

A Perspective on Prayer
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In so many ways throughout the Gosho, Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly tells us of the amazing power of prayer. In "Reply to Kyo'o," he states: "Believe in this mandala with all your heart. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness can therefore be an obstacle?" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 119).

When giving advice in "On Prolonging Life" to a woman who had fallen gravely ill, Nichiren states:

It is extremely difficult to fathom another person's mind. I have experienced such difficulties on many occasions. You do not readily accept advice, so I will not counsel you directly. Just pray to the Gohonzon frankly and sincerely, without help from anyone. (MW-1, 231).

And, in "On Attaining Buddhahood," he states, "Therefore, when you chant the Mystic Law and recite the Lotus Sutra, you must summon up deep conviction that Myoho-renge-kyo is your life itself" (MW-1, 4).

While extolling the virtues of prayer, Nichiren Daishonin also strictly warns us that our faith alone will determine whether we can manifest our prayers into reality. He states: "But your faith alone will determine all these things. A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra must be wielded by one courageous in faith. Then he will be as strong as a demon armed with an iron staff. I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi, so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart" (MW-1, 3-4).

The bottom line for us, as practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, is how can we actualize our prayers, thereby proving to ourselves and others the validity of our practice?

I believe that there are two essential ingredients — the sincerity of our prayer and our ability to not be swayed by obstacles that will surely arise to test us.

With regard to the sincerity of our prayer, I have watched over the years as countless members literally make the impossible happen when they were backed into a corner and had nowhere else to turn but to the Gohonzon after all other strategies had failed. In this kind of crucial-moment situation, I have seen houses saved from foreclosure, cancer disappear on the morning surgery was scheduled, a life that medicine had given up on extended for a period of years, a terribly lonely woman find a wonderful partner, a homeless couple find a home and jobs, and a suicidal person develop the will to live, just to mention a few.

What has always been apparent to me is that, in the crucial moment, all of these people developed one thing in common — the ability to pray wholeheartedly. The depth and sincerity of their prayers moved the universe and was revealed in a manifest form.

I believe the challenge for each of us is how to develop this sincerity of prayer on a more consistent basis. In other words, how to be sincere without having to wait for the crisis to occur. One way is to awaken to a deeper understanding of our respective missions.

As human beings, each of us must cultivate our inner beauty from within, a beauty that results from constantly challenging our own inner limitations while helping others to do the same. We must become people of integrity who are trusted and respected by those around us. Integral to this process is our ability to use all obstacles that arise to deepen our commitment to win. As President Ikeda states in *The New Human Revolution*:

The greater the adversity, the more important it is to resolve that now is the time to achieve a victory in life and to keep challenging oneself. It is here that the beneficial

power of the Gohonzon becomes manifest. Adversity is therefore an opportunity to prove the power of Buddhism. (vol. 1, p. 251)

In *Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*, President Ikeda also writes:

It is said that life is like a drama. Whether in the world of business, education, the home or wherever, each person acts out a drama, This "role" is itself an expedient means; but should the "actor" abandon this role, he or she will be at a loss for a mission. When acting our respective roles, we manifest our own inner truth most fully.

Daily life equals faith. And the world of Buddhahood appears nowhere except wedded to the stage of the reality of the nine worlds. Let us enact the drama of human revolution on the stage of our lives.

From misery to happiness, from disappointment to hope, from fate to mission, from suffering to eternal joy — the driving force that makes these dynamic transformations possible is the Mystic Law, is faith." (vol. 1, p. 83)

Thus, it can be said that our mission is to do our very best each moment of our lives. Grappling with our present reality is what gives us the opportunity to expand our lives, to win over our circumstances, and to prove to both ourselves and others the power of faith. What really matters is not which "role" we play in life so long as we devote ourselves to playing each "role" to the best of our ability. Obstacles are the fuel for the development of our character, and everything that happens to us can be a source for our growth, if we use it that way.

I wonder how many times a day we miss the opportunity to grow. How many times do we not tap the power of the Gohonzon? How often do we just pray out of formality? Or how many times do we pray but actually expect to get the "answer" from our friends, lover, boss, psychic, etc.?

First and foremost, I believe that sincere prayer begins with challenging ourselves to be 100 percent present in the moment while we are in front of the Gohonzon. We must check whether we are truly praying with a sincere heart to find a solution to the problem. For example, our prayer should be based on a determination that — "I will show actual proof." Then, we must rely exclusively on our prayer and the action based on the wisdom resulting from our prayer to create the victory. This kind of prayer stands in vivid contrast to the one in which we expect the Gohonzon to give us the benefit merely because we have offered our prayer.

Buddhism means taking full responsibility to find the solution. Precisely because we are experiencing the problem is why we must be the ones to find the solution. This is our golden opportunity. Taking this kind of responsibility for our lives is actually freeing. For the first time our ability to transform any suffering into joy is no longer dependent upon anyone or anything outside of ourselves.

But sincere prayer does not stop once we have finished chanting. The willingness to change our lives and achieve our prayers means taking action to accomplish our prayers. In other words, we must make effort.

Buddhism teaches us that we create our lives by our thoughts, words and actions. Are we taking responsibility for the thoughts, words and actions we engage in once we have stepped away from the Gohonzon? Our lives and our environment are inseparable. This means that, as Nichiren Daishonin teaches us in "On Attaining Buddhahood," our "life at each moment permeates the universe and is revealed in all phenomena" (MW-1, 3).

Is it any great mystery, then, that we do not achieve our prayer if we repeatedly tell ourselves that we are a failure, that we cannot do this or that? Our tendency is to doubt that we can accomplish something. We usually use this to justify giving up on our dreams;

Title: A Perspective on Prayer

Subject: World Tribune 07/11/97 n.3147 p.8 WT970711p08

Author: Linda Johnson

Keywords: Actively Closing Perspective Practice Prayer

“reality,” we think, is showing us that we cannot reach our goals.

However, the environment from a purely causal standpoint is only mirroring our own *ichinen* or belief system. Human revolution, the object of our practice, entails a change on the inside that manifests itself in our behavior. One does not, for example, become a more compassionate person without being able to visibly express this compassion to others. Thus, sincere prayer must be accompanied by action that is consistent with the object of one’s prayer.

Our daily lives should be based on daimoku. It is daimoku that purifies our lives over time. As President Ikeda tells us:

When you purify your lives with daimoku, you will definitely develop an utterly indestructible state of absolute happiness that abounds with great fortune. In such a state of life, everything will become a source of joy. You will feel a deep sense of fulfillment even if you have neither worldly fame nor wealth. Each moment will be totally satisfying. Your heart will be filled with joy and all things will appear beautiful to your eyes. You can instantly discern the truth, distinguish between good and evil. You will think about the welfare of others in any circumstances. This is the state of mind you can develop through faith. (April 1993 *Seikyo Times*, p. 40)

I believe that each of us deserves to achieve this state of life. However our efforts and our efforts alone will determine this. Even though we have the all-powerful daimoku at our disposal, whether and how sincerely we strive to utilize it in our lives will determine the quality of our daily existence. After all, no one can give us happiness. It is something that we must earn through our own efforts.

Discovering the limitless potential of our lives is our option. How will we ever know the true power of faith if we don’t challenge ourselves to really live this Buddhism? To me, living Buddhism means more than the ability to talk about theory, it means the ability to translate the theory of Buddhism into actuality in our lives. This is the struggle. This is the challenge. Exploring the depths of absolute happiness is our destination.

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