

EDITORIAL: Learn, Grow, Live

Life needs growth. When we stop growing, it's been said, we start dying. To always advance, seeking new ways to grow, never resting on our laurels — this is the key to living the happiest lives.

“Strengthen your faith day by day. Never slacken even a bit...,” the Daishonin urges (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 241–42).

In a speech in this issue, SGI President Ikeda restates this idea. “I hope you, as leaders, will always have the spirit to learn with a lively curiosity and interest,” he says. “When leaders are enthusiastic to keep learning and growing, they inspire others. New ideas emerge and spread. Fresh energy to advance surges forth. Instead of pretending to know all the answers, assuming an air of wisdom, let us always strive for greater understanding and insight into all things, so that we can continue learning together and spur one another to grow. This is the kind of spirit I want to cherish” (p. 13).

You're never too old to learn. In fact, learning keeps you young. Some research suggests that learning a musical instrument, starting to do crossword puzzles or studying a language can slow down the normal decline in brainpower as you actually create new neural pathways.

Physical learning works the same way. Studies show that people in their 70s and 80s who start a regimen of weight training can increase their muscle mass up to 50 percent. This use-it-or-lose-it attitude resonates with what Buddhism teaches.

How easy it is — after doing something a long time — to think you've seen it all. How easy it is to believe that the way something has always been done is automatically the best way for the future. In Buddhism, certainly, there are many timeless truths, like that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon will benefit us. But when it comes to creating an organization that will best spread Buddhism's profound teachings here in the United States, it's often a matter of trial and error. An organization that wants to keep growing needs to commit itself to the lifelong learning process, too. To progress, we need to continually learn from new ideas, to see what works and what doesn't.

What can we do to maintain a fresh approach to life and to learning? For one thing, we can study the example set by President Ikeda — a person who reads prolifically every day, who meets new people at every opportunity, who takes on new challenges without hesitation. When we open one door to learning, many other avenues open as well. Why not start with a class at a local school, or set a target to study the Gosho every day? And why not ask questions? About everything. Every chance you have.

Mr. Ikeda celebrates the 50th anniversary of practicing this Buddhism on Aug. 24. Fifty years of practice, 37 years of being president, accomplishments too numerous to mention — and still the spirit he cherishes is to learn and grow more. That's probably one reason he's accomplished so much.

For all of us learning and growth are the keys to accomplishment, to making a difference. Whether it's in becoming a better parent or bricklayer or chess player or cook, the spirit to be a lifelong student will benefit ourselves and others.

As President Ikeda has stated in his “Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra,” a Buddha is someone who continues to grow.

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