

From Addiction to Mission
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I could not understand. Why was it happening to me? As an adolescent, drinking beer and smoking marijuana were acceptable. However, long after my friends stopped, I continued — on the road of addiction.

Early in my practice, I struggled tremendously with an addiction to crack and heroin. This was the very reason I began to chant. I was told I could change anything I wanted if only I chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Why not, I thought to myself as I sat and listened to members chanting those intriguing words.

Ten years later I am celebrating five years of sobriety and still enjoying the sound of those intriguing words. I now understand with the depths of my life what SGI President Ikeda is talking about when he says, “Unless you go through difficulties, you cannot empathize with others’ hardships.” Ten years ago, I could not have imagined that my mission in this lifetime would be as a substance abuse therapist specializing in women treatment issues. But because of the sufferings I went through, I can better help my clients. Working with this population continues to allow me to bridge the gap among families suffering from the effects of chemical dependence.

As I have worked with chemically dependent women and their children, I have gained a deeper understanding of addiction and karma. Often, I adapt Buddhist principles and SGI President Ikeda’s guidance in providing therapeutic services.

I sometimes encourage clients with President Ikeda’s words: “It takes courage to become happy — courage to remain true to one’s convictions, courage not to be defeated by one’s weakness and negativity, courage to take swift action to help those who are suffering. It is through such daily efforts that true identity will shine forth.”

Courage is usually the key ingredient most clients lack. They are fearful of life and of taking responsibility. They tend to find it easier to blame others and the environment for their negative circumstances. So I try to help them understand the concept of cause and effect. Through compassion and respect, I empower them to understand they possess the inner strength to change their poisonous situations into medicine.

I am encouraged when, despite all obstacles, my clients move from being victims to accepting responsibility for the causes they have made. My job is most gratifying when I see a woman whose children have been placed in the system regain custody and move toward having a value-creating family.

Addiction is often referred to as a spiritual, mental and physical prison that hinders a person’s development. However, chemical dependence does not just affect the user but also the person’s loved ones. Denial and co-dependence play a major role in the continuation of suffering for all involved.

I never realized the impact that my addiction had on my family until I began to study Nichiren Daishonin’s writings. Now I clearly understand the concept of family karma. My addiction permeated their lives, but I am so appreciative that my practice has had an even greater impact.

Through my work, I am confident that I am forwarding the goals of kosen-rufu and peace as I help people overcome their addictions. And, just as important, encouraging clients to challenge their fundamental darkness helps me realize just how important it is for me to keep challenging my life and win no matter what.

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Title: From Addiction to Mission
Subject: World Tribune 10/03/97 n.3159 p.5 WT971003p05 Pontiac, Michigan
Author: Shalom Martin
Keywords: Addiction Experiences Health Michigan Mission News Pontiac