

VOICES: How has Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism helped you deal with issues of death?

Members from Los Angeles #5 Joint Territory respond:

In the past three years, I have lost so many close friends and relatives that I often, in despair, felt helpless, confused and sad. However, I have found solace in Buddhist teachings that state that people die only when the time is right for them and that is when they have created the maximum value possible for them in this lifetime. SGI President Ikeda says, "At death our lives merge back into the life of the Universe, in much the same way that the spray of waves dissolves back into the ocean." These thoughts, in times of grief, give me peace.

— ANN GRAU, Newport Beach, Calif.

In 1980, my mother died of a heart attack at age 47. Her sudden death was a tremendous shock to me. I had been practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism with my family, but through my mother's death I began to seek [to understand] what life and death really were. After Mother's funeral, I read President Ikeda's *Life, An Enigma, a Precious Jewel* almost overnight. It gave me a great deal of relief and helped me grieve over Mother's death peacefully. Since then, I have been practicing this Buddhism most sincerely. I learned that understanding death is understanding life.

— MASAKO THOMSON, Yorba Linda, Calif.

I was taught as a child that death will be the day when I am judged for the way I lived my one chance at life. I found it hard to believe that this is my only life when its duration is minuscule in comparison to the scope of eternity. I could not accept that only one group of people would go to heaven, and all others would go to hell. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism has taught me through his writings that my practice and work toward kosen-rufu would protect me in this and future lives until I attain Buddhahood. This removes my fear of death.

— DANN HOGERTY, Laguna Beach, Calif.

I was raised in a very Christian environment, and death was always portrayed as something to fear. Since just about everything life had to offer me was bad, I felt that I had a pretty good chance of spending eternity with the little guy in the red suit, pitchfork, horns and long tail. But when I encountered Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, I found a whole new perspective on death. I realized that death is not the end. Death is more like a chance to renew yourself, like taking a little vacation before you start over again. It also gives life more meaning because life is my opportunity to change all of the negative aspects of my life-condition so that next time I'll live a better and happier life. Life never ends. It only changes, and death is the break between each change.

— KRISTY LITTLEFIELD, Anaheim, Calif.

Our culture lends itself to a youth-oriented glamorous lifestyle. Many people I know, including myself, sometimes fear aging. I believe that this represents a fear of death on a societal level. Growing up with this cultural influence, my initial reaction to death was fear, anxiety and turmoil. However, when I think of what I have learned through the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin, I find relief, solace and peace. Since both of my parents have died, I find great comfort in knowing that my prayers and daimoku for them not only reach them but also assist them. Now, I feel that I can constantly repay my debt of gratitude to them through daimoku.

— KATE LLEWELLYN, Newport Beach, Calif.

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