

**Hope Is a Skill**  
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**So your lord has granted you new fiefs! It seems as though it could scarcely be true; it is so amazing that I wonder if I may not be dreaming. I hardly know what to say in reply. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 6, p. 261)**

Hope. The most wonderful benefit of our Buddhist practice. After reading this passage, I thought of how Buddhism teaches us to have hope — even in the most dire circumstances. In this Goshō, Nichiren Daishonin is praising Shijō Kingo's tenacious faith and reconfirming that it is the trials of our lives that pave the way to Buddhahood.

Of course hope is not something that just appears when we start to practice. It is something we develop — almost like a skill — through our faith experiences.

Although there are some people who are naturally hopeful and optimistic, I have to admit that when I first started to practice, I was somewhat cynical. That's why I am shocked sometimes when I catch myself expressing seemingly inherent (maybe even foolish!) optimism on occasion. This is due to nothing other than my Buddhist practice. I remember being encouraged by my seniors in faith (over and over again!) — in one situation after another — to chant and take action. Through this repeated “exercise,” without even realizing it, I developed a sense that I can change my circumstances. This in itself is hope.

Recently, SGI President Ikeda met with Dr. Martin Seligman, professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania, who is known for his work in the study of optimism. In the course of their dialogue, President Ikeda pointed out the similarities between Seligman's ideas and the basic principles taught in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, such as changing poison into medicine.

Despair and hopelessness become particularly apparent in the holiday season. And as is traditional this time of year, I ponder what I have to be thankful for and what I can give. I realize that I am thankful to be practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and that I most want to develop into a person who can give people a sense of hope.

**WT**