

Winning in Life: Getting It Right

By JEFF FARR

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Whatever wisdom we have is expressed in how we make decisions. Simply put, wisdom is our best judgment.

And we make decisions and judgments every day. From the moment we wake up until we fall asleep. From little choices like to what to wear to big decisions like where to work. Thus the more wisdom we have, the better off we are.

There's no easy way to become wise, unfortunately. Wisdom is always based on experience and understanding. It is often hard-won. Sometimes it takes many a failure to gain the wisdom to know what we're doing wrong and finally get it right.

Since we talk a lot about wisdom in the SGI-USA, many members wonder if there is something that makes Buddhist wisdom, as opposed to "regular wisdom," special. "Buddhist wisdom is not intellectual," explains Greg Martin, SGI-USA vice general director. "It's not wisdom in the sense of having deep thoughts all the time or intuitively knowing the answers to everything. In Buddhism, wisdom is practical. It has to do with living correctly." But to live correctly, doesn't it take some brains? "You may not even know why you're doing something," Mr. Martin says. "You may not deeply understand every nuance of a situation. But still you find yourself living correctly based on the wisdom you tap through chanting."

Three sources of this intuitive Buddhist wisdom are helpful to keep in mind: our determination, our sense of responsibility and ourselves. First, Buddhist wisdom arises from our determination to make improving ourselves and helping others integral parts of the way we live. In acting and praying to fulfill this, Buddhist wisdom naturally emerges. So with clear daily goals to improve ourselves and help others, we're sure to gradually experience more wisdom on a daily basis.

This wisdom also comes from fulfilling our responsibilities and accepting new ones, whether in the organization or in our personal lives. In being responsible, we're forced to stop and think. Often, just stopping to think about what we're doing, how we're living, is what we neglect to do. In a recent discussion on the benefits of reading, SGI President Ikeda pointed out that even when second Soka Gakkai president Toda was ill, he would make time for reading and contemplation — essentially for stopping and thinking. A strong sense of responsibility forces us to reflect carefully on all the possible consequences of our actions. And this, again, naturally leads to our Buddhist wisdom.

Most important to keep in mind, though — and this is sometimes the hardest aspect to remember — is that Buddhist wisdom comes from ourselves, from within us. There's a story where Shakyamuni goes to the mountains for six years to meditate. And upon attaining enlightenment, the first thing he says is "How wondrous that all people are endowed with the wisdom and virtues of the Buddha." *All* people, he said. According to Shakyamuni and Nichiren Daishonin, there's Buddhist wisdom in everyone.

When we find our Buddhist wisdom within, what we should do, the best way to go in life, becomes clear. Nichiren says this in a poetic way in "The True Object of Worship": "When the skies are clear, the ground is illuminated" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 82). It's just like the sun breaking through the clouds and the road we need to take being illuminated — we know the right way.

The above was one of first Soka Gakkai president Makiguchi's favorite Goshos, which described for him just how he felt when starting to practice at age 57 — the wisest way to live suddenly revealed itself to him, he felt.

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“If you’re not living wisely, you’re living foolishly, and you’ll be unhappy” says Mr. Martin. “And if wisdom is not translated into action, if you’re not actually taking wise, value-creating action in your daily life, it isn’t wisdom. It’s intellectualizing. To chant daimoku to the Gohonzon thinking: ‘I’m a great Buddhist. I’ve really got it together,’ while not behaving as a Buddhist, is not wisdom. It’s just intellect. And there’s a big difference.” Perhaps the greatest wisdom we get from Buddhist practice is learning this big difference and acting on it.

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