

ROBYN THAW, SAN FRANCISCO
The Long Search for Mr. Right

I've waited a very long time to have this experience, and it feels great to be able to share it finally. This is about that one chunk of karmic rock that never seems to budge over the years. For me, this rock was relationships — in particular, to find and marry the right person for my life, otherwise known as my soul mate. I determined every New Year's gongyo that this is the year I would change this. And then every following New Year's Eve I'd be home (alone) chanting in front of the Gohonzon to make a fresh determination. This went on for more than 20 years.

I maintained a strong Buddhist practice through the years and as a result changed my life. I also got to the point where I did not suffer over not finding someone to share my life with. I realized I was sharing my life with so many people I deeply cared about. I thought that "by now" I'd be married with kids, but I couldn't complain. I was happy and, despite bouts of loneliness, I had a wonderful life that included an exciting and fulfilling career that three years ago took me from Boston to San Francisco.

I decided I really didn't need to chant about this issue anymore. I knew that, as long as I continued to chant and practice for the sake of others, this area would be taken care of when the time was right. The Gohonzon is not outside my life, and I felt I didn't have to chant specifically about this issue for the Gohonzon to know my desire.

I spoke with SGI-USA Women's Division Leader Wendy Clark when she was in town. At the end of our conversation, I happened to mention my new way of thinking. She looked a little surprised. She asked me if I still wanted to marry. I said yes. She then asked why in the world I wouldn't chant about it. She said that sometimes it's OK not to chant about everything we want; as we devote ourselves to other people's happiness, our lives are flooded with benefit. But if there is a weakness or area in life that we are avoiding, a gap is created and that gap fills with doubt, which deepens with time. She said it was important for me to continue to challenge this area and make it happen — if it was something I truly wanted. I did.

A wonderful benefit followed. I went to Japan and was with SGI President Ikeda at the May 3, 1997, commemorative meeting at Makiguchi Hall. He talked about what it means to have true determination to win. He said that often our own determination is very shallow, but true determination lasts day after day, year after year, never faltering no matter what happens or how long it takes.

I realized that just having expectation for our dreams to come true without the determination to sustain those dreams is a shallow view of our Buddhist practice and one that can lead to doubt and unhappiness. For many years I had passively expected certain problem areas to change based on my strong practice instead of using my practice to challenge those areas — I had mistaken expectation for determination. While both are important, the difference became very clear. I felt exhilarated with tremendous gratitude and hope.

When I returned home I was truly determined to challenge many areas, including finding the right person with whom to share my life. My prayer was simple: to find someone who would love and cherish me and love and cherish the SGI. I felt I already had the result every time I chanted to the Gohonzon. Each time I gave an experience or talked with others, I would tell them that I knew I was going to find this person very soon. I had no doubt at all.

Two weeks later I met Alan. Eight months later, Alan asked me to marry him. I just

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celebrated my 47th birthday and this is my first marriage-to-be. So much for those statistics about a woman's chances of marrying as she moves past the age of 35!

I should mention what a wonderful man Alan is. We have the most incredible relationship, more than I could have ever imagined with anyone. There's mutual love, respect, passion, fun and deep friendship. He doesn't practice but supports me in every possible way, including reading and talking about Buddhism in depth. We are soul mates. When people are with us, they often comment that ours is the kind of relationship they want.

Alan is the person I dreamed of my whole life. I truly appreciate that I had the tremendous fortune to wait — even though it didn't feel that way through the years. We met each other at the absolute right time in both our lives. I know, based on my own tendencies, that if I had married many years ago when I wanted to, I would not have been able to develop the strong practice and deep conviction I now have in faith. My sense of who I am and where my happiness lies would have remained shallow. Of this I am certain.

An SGI-USA vice president once told me a beautiful experience about meeting and marrying his wife. He said that when he was young, he decided to get married. He started chanting to find the right person for his life. He chanted and practiced strongly within the organization but years passed and still no wife. When he finally met her, he knew that she was the one — he felt a deep connection to her. The part of the story that touched me was that at the time he determined to find a wife, she was only 14 years old! Obviously, the time was not yet right, and he did not meet her for many years until she was older and ready to marry.

His waiting reminds me of what President Ikeda says in volume 1 of his *Lectures on the "Expedient Means" and "Life Span" Chapters of the Lotus Sutra*: "There may be times when we think, 'What did I do to deserve this?' But we should not be swayed every time some such phenomena arise; for it is already certain that we will become happy in the end. We should regard everything that happens to us in our practice to reach the destination of happiness as our training. If we do so, then later on we will see the profound 'meaning' and 'intention' underlying each of these phenomena."

My experience of having this particular prayer answered is not a result of any one thing. I didn't suddenly hear the right guidance, or find that one area of weakness to change. It is not merely based on deepening how I care for others, changing one aspect of my practice, or being determined for the first time. It is a combination and accumulation of everything.

Clearly, I broke through because I never gave up. And this was not easy when my doubts would rise up year after year. President Ikeda writes: "The Daishonin says, 'If we do not harbor doubts in our hearts, we will as a matter of course attain Buddhahood.' Those who avoid succumbing to doubts no matter what happens are winners in faith. They are people who truly understand the Daishonin's intention."

I changed my circumstances because year after year, no matter how deeply I felt the doubt, what obstacle I was facing, or how I was feeling at any one time, I always returned to the Gohonzon and did my best for the sake of others within the SGI — without ever stopping. Even though there were times I did Buddhist activities for my own sake or from my own ego, it didn't matter. I always tried to be close to President Ikeda's heart, work on my own "stuff," and devote my life to helping my SGI friends practice. Because of this, I won. What incredible fortune we can accumulate living this kind of life day after day, year in and year out.

As wonderful as it feels being engaged to someone I love, I have to say that the true benefit actually has nothing to do with finding this person. The center of my joy is knowing with every cell in my life that the Gohonzon is true and that our practice for others truly

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brings benefit to our lives. I want to thank President Ikeda and so many SGI friends and leaders on both coasts who have been with me and encouraged me throughout the years. You are my treasures of the heart.

There is one last thing I should say. When I was in Japan in 1990, I received guidance from SGI Vice Women's Division Leader Yumiko Hachiya about how to break through and find the right person. She told me that my challenge was not to find a husband. My challenge was to develop a warm and open heart. Then I would attract the right person to my life.

One night Alan sat me down and said: "You have the most beautiful heart of anyone I've ever known. Will you marry me?"

Guess what I said.

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