

CLEARLY A PARENT: Together Again

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In my early practice, I was always negative about having to do five prayers in the morning. My thoughts were: “Why don’t we just do the whole book once? You cover both ‘Expedient Means’ and ‘Life Span’ chapters, then you can spend the rest of your time chanting.”

When I realized the SGI wasn’t going to change the practice of gongyo for my sake, it was time to adjust my attitude.

I began by reading the paragraph explaining the silent prayers in my sutra book before I did morning and evening gongyo.

The last sentence in particular gave me the mental alignment I needed: “Therefore, it is not the specific wording of the silent prayers, but rather what we have in our minds while performing the prayers that is most important.”

What I had on my mind during the first part of the fourth prayer changed when I had my children. Praying “and that the Soka Gakkai International to develop eternally” to me meant to pass this great philosophy on to my children. To raise them to respect the efforts of SGI members, past and present, and to encourage them to be a part of the noble mission of our organization.

I feel that it is no coincidence that we, as an organization, have so many children now. I also feel it’s no coincidence that they chose us to be their parents.

My daughter Emily confirmed that for me.

It came out of nowhere. It was Saturday morning. I was at the stove making pancakes when my 5-year-old came into the kitchen, still with her “wake-up” hair and puppy breath.

She gave me her pitiful face and said, “Mommy, I don’t want you to die!”

Whoa! “You can’t say that now,” I thought. “I haven’t had my first cup of coffee much less done gongyo.”

Well, raising children isn’t like getting on the freeway — you can’t just sit on the entrance ramp waiting for the perfect opportunity to open up. So I addressed her concern. I couldn’t minimize her feelings by telling her, “Oh, don’t be silly” or “Everybody dies.” Instead I swelled with gratitude that I was a Buddhist. I could tell my daughter: “Oh honey, we will *always* be together. We’ve been together before and will be together lifetime after lifetime. You chose me to be your mother.”

After some serious discussion and the usual questions, she got that I’m-gonna-have-to-think-about-that look.

Since you can never be sure what gets into their active little brains, I could not tell just how satisfied she was. The rest of the day she was a silent ankle magnet. Whatever I was doing, she was right there with me. I would leave the room to retrieve something, turn around, and there she would be.

That afternoon we went to the grocery store, which was very busy. The check-out lines were three people deep and all were open.

As I stood there blocked in with nowhere to run and nowhere to hide, my daughter breaks her silence. At the top of her voice (children don’t know how to whisper), Emily puts her hands on her hips and shouts, “Well, I know one thing, I love you more than my mommy in my last life!”

Enough said.

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Title: Together Again

Subject: World Tribune 07/31/98 n.3202 p.12 WT980731p12 Dallas, Texas

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Keywords: Again Clearly Dallas Experiences Parent Parenting Relationships Texas Together Tribune World