

## PERSPECTIVE: Write Your Own Destiny

By FRED MAYER

Philadelphia

**Faith in this sutra means that you will surely attain Buddhahood if you are true to the entirety of the Lotus Sutra, adhering exactly to its teachings without adding any of your own ideas or following the arbitrary interpretations of others. (“Letter to Niike,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 259)**

In the movie *Lawrence of Arabia*, Major Lawrence — a British officer in charge of Arab troops in a battle against the Turks — decided to try a unique strategy. The Turkish stronghold was a city bordered by the sea, and a large artillery cannon rendered attacks by boat virtually impossible. Lawrence’s plan was to cross the desert on the opposite side of the city. He knew that the cannon could not be turned around, and the Turks would be hard-pressed to defend their position.

Why was this strategy unprecedented? Simply because his proposed convoy across the desert had never been successfully completed. Many considered it suicide to even attempt such a crossing. There were no sources of water along most of the stretch, and it required a perfect management of time and resources. At one point in the trip, even if the supplies didn’t run out, it was certain the camels would perish from the heat within two days’ time if they didn’t keep their strict schedule.

According to the film’s portrayal of this historic event, the Arab soldiers, although respectful of Major Lawrence, opposed the plan. Out of a combination of fear, superstition and firsthand knowledge, they were quick to point out that it was impossible for human or beast to cross in safety. “It is written on the wind!” they passionately declared. Persuaded by his iron-clad resolve and leadership, however, they agreed to venture forth.

Most of the traveling was done at night to conserve strength and to avoid the harsh desert sun. During one of the nightly treks, an exhausted soldier fell off his camel. His absence was not discovered until the next day. Major Lawrence didn’t hesitate to go back to save the soldier, even though the odds of finding him, let alone surviving the trip back, were grim.

In this story, the desert could probably be considered the universal symbol for the expansive, infinite nature of life. Viewing the profundity and richness of life, I am sometimes intimidated as well as awed. Imagine how these travelers must have felt as they saw the search party backtrack over the vast plains stretching out before them, miles upon miles in every direction.

“The slightest diversion could spell death.” This feeling was based on their experience and beliefs but not necessarily the true nature of the situation — the true nature of their lives. For instance, the same view was very different to Major Lawrence. Where they saw doom, he saw possibility; where they saw defeat, he saw victory. His confidence and purpose were so solid, in fact, that he was willing to retrace his steps without fear of backsliding.

How do we view life: Would we rather stay close to the places we know for fear of getting lost? Do we purposely leave behind the people and places we know in search of some “oasis”? Or, are we focused on getting to our destination, come what may?

At this point in my life, I feel I am about to embark on a new journey. I am fighting the negativity that berates me by saying, “You’ll never get a good job,” “That last relationship was your last chance for a meaningful romance,” and “Your health will only get worse.” It’s a daily battle against my fundamental darkness, the aspect of my life whose motto is:

Title: Perspective: Fred Mayer, Write Your Own Destiny

Subject: World Tribune 08/28/98 n.3206 p.10 WT980828p10 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Author: Fred Mayer

Keywords: December Destiny Experiences Fred Heroes July Mayer Opinion Pennsylvania People Perspectives Philadelphia Practice Tribune World Write Your

“You have not changed — things are going to be this way forever!”

Although these feelings are not new to me, the “journey” is. Through my practice I can determine that I will choose my own destiny. Through faith, suddenly life’s seemingly endless directions and possibilities are a source of comfort and passion instead of a cause for fear and hesitation. Sometimes I get caught up in the quest for the ultimate accomplishment that will really show proof to myself and others. But what is actual proof?

My job, my relationships and my health, of course, reflect where my life is at in some regard but my determination, my unshakable conviction to achieve my dreams, is the real proof of this Buddhism. It is just as SGI President Ikeda points out, “To advance toward our dreams cheerfully, to courageously work toward achieving them — this is what gives the most sublime meaning and value to our lives”(July 31 *World Tribune*, p. 8).

When Major Lawrence returned with the fallen soldier in tow, the troops rejoiced. They anointed him ‘He Who Writes On the Wind’ in reference to his steadfast determination and his ability to seemingly change destiny. He would not allow people’s opinions or his own misgivings to deter him from his purpose. We, too, can write our own destiny.

Correct practice guarantees our victory. When traveling, I’m the one who picks the destination — should I blame my car if I am driving around in circles? With this practice, I am in the driver’s seat.

Just like the traveler in the desert or the driver on the road, we each decide how far we want to go.

**WT**