

Swing Hard and Fast
By MARK KAPLAN
SGI-USA Youth Division Study Committee

A sword will be useless in the hands of a coward. (“Reply to Kyo’o,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 120)

Chant and take action,” we say in the SGI. Well, I have no problem with the chanting part of this equation for victory. But one of my most insidious devils is the feeling that I haven’t chanted enough to take action.

Generally, I start chanting a lot, and things start happening. Then, inevitably, because my life is speeding up, my chanting drops. Simultaneously, because I’m on the verge of a breakthrough (and don’t know it), a little voice in my mind says, “Gee, I think we need to chant more to get through this.” Sometimes, this is the voice of wisdom that I’ve cultivated over 13 years of practice and coached to speak out whenever I’m in danger of slipping in my practice.

At times when I’m overwhelmed with the feeling of being utterly under-prepared for everything before me, this voice seems to make a lot of sense. Other times, this voice is actually an obstacle. At these times, it says: “It’s obvious that, once again, you haven’t chanted enough to face the challenges in your life. Instead of taking action, you should crawl back to the Gohonzon and chant more.” It’s almost as if the “need to chant more” becomes an excuse for not taking action.

So I remind myself: “It is precisely because I am practicing hard that I’m encountering obstacles and challenges. This is not the time for sharpening the sword. The courageous disciple has to swing hard and fast with whatever he is holding at the crucial moment. It is not the time to chant, it’s time to take action.”

This, I think, is the wisdom expressed in the sayings “A pot of rice on a stove with no flame will never come to a boil,” and “The sword of the Lotus Sutra is useless in the hands of a coward.”

I have to push through and take action when obstacles come, especially if I’m feeling overwhelmed. Chanting is crucial, but chanting without action manifests no power.

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