

Saplings Into Mighty Trees

SGI President Ikeda discusses the various factors that go into making a prayer come true and says that those who keep praying ‘day after day, year after year, will without fail develop — just like saplings into mighty trees — becoming people of outstanding strength and character.’

The conclusion of a discussion on how our prayers are answered among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Hidenobu Kimura (young men’s leader) and Yoshiko Ueda (young women’s leader). Part one appeared in last week’s issue.

Hidenobu Kimura: One member writes wondering whether skipping a day of gongyo and daimoku will invalidate all his practice up to that time.

SGI President Ikeda: Skipping gongyo occasionally is certainly not going to erase all your previous efforts. There’s no need to worry about that. If you’re running late for school and don’t have time, there’s no need to be anxious about missing gongyo.

For example, if your mothers are practicing and are chanting for you, their prayers will protect you. More important, as long as you have sincere faith in the Gohonzon, the fortune you have accumulated will stay with you.

You need not feel guilty when you miss gongyo. Of course, I’m not saying that it’s all right to neglect gongyo. If you fall into the mind set that you don’t have to do it, your heart will gradually grow estranged from prayer.

Nevertheless, because faith exists in daily life, there’s no need to take things to the extreme of making yourself late for school because of gongyo.

Yoshiko Ueda: Our attitude toward faith and the Gohonzon is most important, isn’t it?

Ikeda: Even if you are busy and don’t always have time for gongyo, it’s important that you don’t give up the practice of gongyo altogether. If you do, the flame of your faith will go out. Please don’t cast aside your gongyo.

Prayer fulfills us spiritually and heightens our spiritual conviction, so it is a definite plus for all of us.

Kimura: When we are pressed for time, which should we give priority to, gongyo or daimoku?

Ikeda: Those who don’t have time for gongyo or find it difficult to do gongyo should chant daimoku. To use the allegory of a meal, daimoku can be likened to the main course and gongyo to the side dishes.

Of course, having both is best. But daimoku comes first. Please chant — even it’s just one daimoku. Nichiren Daishonin states that even a single daimoku contains infinite benefit.

And if you can do at least a short gongyo [A and C gongyo] along with some daimoku, then you will feel even greater satisfaction.

Of course, it goes without saying that doing a full morning and evening gongyo is ideal.

Title: Saplings Into Mighty Trees

Subject: World Tribune 12/18/98 n.3222 p.1 WT981218p01

Author:

Keywords: Discussions Guidance Mighty News Practice Prayer Saplings Trees Tribune World Youth

Chanting helps you to give your 100 percent.

Ueda: Some members wonder if they shouldn't devote any extra time they might have to studying instead of chanting.

Ikeda: Those who are busy studying and feel that they don't have time to do gongyo should give priority to their studies and then chant daimoku when they have some spare time.

You're in charge of your daimoku. So you're free to make your own decisions about how and when you make time to chant.

Studying is one of the duties of a high school student. A student who studies hard and is active in extracurricular school activities may not have much spare time. That's why making time to chant despite a busy schedule is a mark of real dedication.

When you chant, you create the cause for your success. Daimoku is for your benefit. It strengthens your life force and sharpens your mind. It enables you to tap the vital inner strength to give full play to your talents and abilities.

If you have the ability to score 100 percent on an exam, chanting will give you the life force to actually put 100 percent into it, rather than the 70 or 80 percent that might usually be your best effort.

Ueda: I guess it's hoping too much to get 100 percent on an exam if you only put 50 percent into taking it!

Ikeda: Yes, it's misguided to think that simply chanting without making any serious attempt to study will improve your grades. The realization of your prayers begins with making concrete efforts toward their fulfillment.

If you really believe that things will turn out the way that you have prayed — as long as you just continue all your efforts — then your mind is filled with the hope, optimism and confidence that all prayers will definitely be answered. At the same time, by chanting daimoku, you will see, as clearly as the morning sun illuminates the earth, what you must do to succeed in your studies and your life. Your daimoku will give you the energy to keep trying to achieve your goals.

Faith and prayer are the engines that fuel our efforts — we have to make our own efforts. Please never forget that.

Kimura: That's clear. Just chanting with an unopened encyclopedia at our side isn't going to make us any smarter, no matter how earnest our prayers!

With appreciation, our prayers are answered quicker.

Ikeda: You can't expect to get paid a salary unless you work. Similarly, our prayers are answered only to the extent that we exert ourselves to realize the Buddha's wish for the happiness of all humanity. The Gohonzon has no obligation to answer our prayers. It hasn't asked us to chant to it.

We request the privilege of praying to the Gohonzon. If we have such a sense of gratitude and appreciation, our prayers will be answered more quickly.

Ueda: A member asks a related question: "Why are some prayers unfulfilled? Do those

Title: Saplings Into Mighty Trees

Subject: World Tribune 12/18/98 n.3222 p.1 WT981218p01

Author:

Keywords: Discussions Guidance Mighty News Practice Prayer Saplings Trees Tribune World Youth

unrealized prayers also contribute to our personal growth?”

Ikeda: There are times when our prayers seem to take ages to be fulfilled, or when they remained unrealized despite our most impassioned daimoku. But the important thing to remember is to keep chanting until they *are* answered.

Our continued chanting gives us the chance to take a good hard look at ourselves, leading to positive changes in our daily lives. It’s like work — you get a job and go to work, but you don’t get paid the first day. Or it’s like gardening — you plant a sapling, and water it every day, but it still takes a long time for it to grow into a tall tree.

Kimura: There’s an old Japanese saying about time and patience: “Peaches and chestnuts take three years to bear fruit, and persimmons take eight.”

Inconspicuous benefits matter most.

Ikeda: The benefit that we receive as a result of chanting to the Gohonzon is comprised of both conspicuous and inconspicuous benefit. Conspicuous benefit refers to such instances where we are clearly protected in times of trouble and find a speedy solution to a problem we’re facing. Inconspicuous benefits, meanwhile, are like the sapling growing into the mighty tree. We accumulate good fortune little by little and this manifests itself gradually over time.

In life, it is the inconspicuous benefits that matter most. Conspicuous benefits may help in a pinch, but what really counts is coming out on top in the long run.

Ueda: So it can take ages for inconspicuous benefit to manifest in a visible, concrete form, can’t it?

Ikeda: Yes. But with regular watering each day, a sapling steadily grows into a solid, sturdy tree. With diligent application every day, you can progress gradually in your studies. All good things are the result of continuous, incremental efforts.

Kimura: Buddhism is the law of life, so all its teachings accord with reason and universal principles, don’t they?

Ikeda: Yes. Just because we’ve prayed for something doesn’t mean that we’ll automatically get it. But even if our prayers are not immediately answered, if we keep chanting every day, we are creating the causes for a momentous positive future change. Without exception, you will look back and say to yourself that things worked out for the best.

Kimura: That’s why it is so important to keep chanting every day, isn’t it?

Ikeda: Many factors are at work when it comes to our prayers being realized. But by chanting sincerely with those prayers at heart, we can correct our life’s orbit and move in a more positive direction.

Our prayers have a far-reaching impact on our lives. Though you may chant to do well in your studies, the effect of your prayers will extend much further, rippling across the whole spectrum of your life.

When all is said and done, to want to sit in front of the Gohonzon and chant is very

Title: Saplings Into Mighty Trees

Subject: World Tribune 12/18/98 n.3222 p.1 WT981218p01

Author:

Keywords: Discussions Guidance Mighty News Practice Prayer Saplings Trees Tribune World Youth

important. It is an expression of one's determination to improve oneself. That spirit is important. That spirit is proof of our humanity, an expression of our noble spirit to accomplish something with our lives.

Gongyo and daimoku shouldn't be too fast — or too slow.

Kimura: What is the right speed for gongyo and daimoku?

Ikeda: Our chanting should not be too fast nor too slow. It should also not be too loud nor too soft. And it should have a good, vigorous rhythm.

The speed of gongyo also depends on such things as a person's age or the time and place. Don't worry too much about what's the right speed. Just do gongyo in the way that seems most natural and comfortable to you. One of my seniors once said that we should do gongyo with the rhythm of a galloping horse.

Look at the part of the Gohonzon that you feel most comfortable looking at.

Ueda: One member says: "When I was little, I was told that we should look at the character myo on the Gohonzon when we chant. Why is that?"

Ikeda: Looking at the Gohonzon is like looking at the universe — like having a vast, commanding view of its entirety. The Gohonzon is a representation of the driving force and essence of the universe. Therefore, whatever part we look at, we're looking at the entire universe. It doesn't really matter where we fix our gaze.

Still, it is easier to chant if we focus on the center. I have also been told in the past by my seniors that *myo* represents the human head, and that I should look at it when I chant.

In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin says with regard to the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo, "Our head is myo, our neck is ho, our chest is ren, our belly is ge, and our legs are kyo" (Gosho Zenshu, p. 716).

Just look at the part of the Gohonzon that you feel most comfortable focusing on. The Daishonin merely states that we should sit up straight; he doesn't tell us where we should fix our gaze when we chant. In his great compassion, the Daishonin permitted us the freedom to chant in the way best suited to us.

The Daishonin, with his immense understanding and insight, took into account each individual's autonomy, personality and circumstances, encouraging each to approach faith with flexibility and freedom. It was the self-serving priests of later generations who, intent on shoring up authority, forced rituals and practices not described in the Daishonin's writings or the sutra on believers.

We are not chanting to a piece of paper.

Kimura: What about people who say that they don't want to pray to a piece of printed paper, arguing that it couldn't possibly have the power to solve their problems?

Ikeda: Our Gohonzon may be printed on paper, but it retains its inherent power. A \$10 bill is printed, as are graduation certificates and the letters of appointment for cabinet ministers. All important documents are printed, and they all have their respective powers.

The paper is physical matter, but the words written on it are the Daishonin's spirit and

Title: Saplings Into Mighty Trees

Subject: World Tribune 12/18/98 n.3222 p.1 WT981218p01

Author:

Keywords: Discussions Guidance Mighty News Practice Prayer Saplings Trees Tribune World Youth

essence. The original Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, the Daishonin, inscribed his life in ink on the Gohonzon.

“I, Nichiren, have inscribed my life in sumi (black Chinese ink), so believe in the Gohonzon with your whole heart” (MW-1, 120).

The principle of the oneness of body and mind teaches that the physical and spiritual are one. Life is found in their unity; the Gohonzon embodies the life of the Buddha. When we chant to the Gohonzon, we are not chanting to a piece of paper.

Textbooks are also printed paper, but by reading the words on that paper we acquire knowledge, make new discoveries and encounter new ideas.

Or let’s take another example: Suppose that you come across a sign with the two words *Tokyo Station*. Those two words contain all the many different functions of the station, including that it’s the starting point of the bullet train and the gateway to the city of Tokyo. Of course, Tokyo Station would exist without the sign, without the words, and its many functions would also still exist. But the sign and the words help people get to Tokyo Station easily.

Kimura: The characters on the Gohonzon are a means by which we can communicate with the universe, aren’t they?

Ikeda: Another example: A cellular phone is of no use without base stations that transmit the radio waves from one point to another. In the same way, the Gohonzon is a base station from which we can communicate with the universe.

Chant with the resolve that you will make your prayer a reality.

Ikeda: As I mentioned earlier, it is important that our prayers be specific and concrete. Being vague and unfocused when you chant is like shooting an arrow without looking at the target.

When you chant, it should be with a strong, passionate resolve to make your prayer a reality. To have the attitude “If I chant, everything will be all right” is just wishful thinking. Earnest prayer — prayer infused with one’s whole heart and being — cannot fail to be communicated to the Gohonzon.

Another thing to remember is that, as the focus of your prayers expands to include not just your wishes but the happiness of your friends, your family, your classmates, your society and humanity as a whole, you will expand your horizons and your breadth as a human being.

When I became Soka Gakkai president at 32, my first two prayers were for Japan to have a good harvest, so that there would be no hunger, and for there to be no major earthquakes. On another occasion, I prayed that I alone would bear the brunt of any major persecution we suffered for kosen-rufu. My prayers were answered when I was arrested by the authorities on trumped-up charges in the 1957 Osaka Incident.

Kimura: Your prayers are of such a noble dimension!

Your prayers reflect your state of life.

Ikeda: There’s no need for anyone to imitate me. Prayer is not such a simple thing as that.

Title: Saplings Into Mighty Trees

Subject: World Tribune 12/18/98 n.3222 p.1 WT981218p01

Author:

Keywords: Discussions Guidance Mighty News Practice Prayer Saplings Trees Tribune World Youth

That said, it's important to remember that your prayers always reflect your state of life. In that respect, prayer is a solemn means to raise your life-condition. And to get exactly the results that you're praying for, it is crucial to make determined, single-minded efforts toward that goal. That is the true path of manifesting faith in daily life.

Those of you who proceed along this path day after day, year after year, will without fail develop — just like saplings into mighty trees — becoming people of outstanding strength and character.

Title: Saplings Into Mighty Trees

Subject: World Tribune 12/18/98 n.3222 p.1 WT981218p01

Author:

Keywords: Discussions Guidance Mighty News Practice Prayer Saplings Trees Tribune World Youth