

PERSPECTIVE: HAVE FAITH, WILL TRAVEL
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When I first began piling into tour buses with my fellow SGI-USA members, I did it because people senior to me in faith told me if I made the big effort, I'd get the big benefit. And that's all I needed to hear.

I wasn't interested in deepening my faith, and I didn't particularly care to spend time with the members. I was in it for the benefit. Pure and simple. Aside from chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, "Just show me the benefit" had become my own little, private mantra.

I remember so vividly the first bus trip I made as an SGI-USA member. We traveled 10 hours to Boston. I sat in the front seat with my young women's leader and watched as food was passed, pillows were tossed and various faces were turned together in heartfelt conversations. But I felt like a stranger on that bus — an observer. It didn't matter, I told myself, because I wasn't there for the conversation. *Just show me the benefit.*

Now when I take these marathon trips, I don't feel like I'm among strangers. Now when I look out across the bus, I see my friends. But if you had told me 13 years ago, when I made that first trip to Boston, that *that* would be my benefit, I would have said, "No thank you."

I wasn't interested in deepening my faith back then because I didn't understand the relationship between faith and benefit. I thought Buddhism was magic. Make the big effort, get the big benefit. And I wasn't interested in nurturing new friendships. But it didn't matter, because as SGI President Ikeda promises, in the world of faith, absolutely no effort is wasted. He assures us that all our "efforts in traveling will turn into benefit. This is the profound working of the Mystic Law." Despite my weak faith and private mantra, I still received benefit.

Recently, nearly 45 SGI-USA members from Buffalo and Rochester traveled nine hours to New York City to help celebrate what SGI-USA General Director Fred Zaitzu called "the grand departure of the Northeastern Zone." We hooped and hollered, saw old friends, cried, renewed our determination to show victory in our communities — and then piled back on our bus to make the slushy, nine-hour trip home.

Spending 18 hours on a bus to attend a two-hour meeting might seem crazy to some people. But, to the members who came, it was an opportunity to nourish friendships, our Buddhist faith and our lives.

"Being on the bus with everybody is my favorite part," said Buffalo's Lakeshore District member Lynn Berg.

Atsu Hollister from Rochester told me she doesn't ask herself why she comes or if she wants to. She just comes because she knows these trips are important for her faith. She's been making these marathon bus trips for more than 30 years.

As a result of this recent trip to New York City, I am beginning to understand the relationship between faith and my coveted benefits. I'm also realizing that deepening my friendships, my faith and gaining benefit are not separate.

In *Discussions on Youth*, President Ikeda says: "It is important not to isolate yourself. Remaining aloof from others cultivates only selfishness and accomplishes nothing." I believe this is the road I was on when I first climbed on to that tour bus to Boston. I still struggle from time to time with heart-to-heart connections, but I know that because of my Buddhist practice and this SGI organization, I have saved myself 13 years of needless suf-

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fering.

It might not be the benefit I expected, but I am profoundly grateful.

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