

HAVING A SELFLESS DETERMINATION
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There is so much we can learn in the SGI that we can't learn in school. What school, for instance, teaches us to have the spirit to help others selflessly?

I never learned this in college — I never even *heard* it in college, much less in high school, junior high or elementary school. It was in the SGI, studying Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism with my fellow members, that I learned about having a selfless determination.

In this Buddhism, to be selfless means to consider others' struggles, others' sufferings, as our own, equal to our own. And then making this what defines us. Helping others becomes what we're about, how we spend our time, why we do the things we do, why we live the way we live.

Martin Luther King Jr. is a great example of someone who developed this kind of identity. He was focused to the very end of his days on human rights.

Once, he explained how he wanted to be remembered on his funeral day: "I'd like somebody to mention that day, that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to give his life serving others. I'd like for somebody to say that day, that Martin Luther King Jr. tried to love somebody.... I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity."

An audio tape of him speaking these words was later played at his funeral. He had lived true to them throughout.

The Daishonin describes this way of life when he says that "the king makes the people his parents" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1554). Leaders, in other words, should put the people they serve first. And as Buddhists, we're all leaders. We all should revere our fellow human beings, always trying our best to accomplish *everyone's* happiness.

This selflessness, Buddhism teaches, is at once the one thing that can steer human history away from war, toward peace, and the key to our deepest, most lasting personal happiness. The Daishonin writes in "The Opening of the Eyes" that "I, Nichiren, am the richest man in all of present-day Japan" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 151). He says so not because he was in the money, of course; through his selfless dedication to the people, he had witnessed many of his friends change their destinies. He knew that the whole world would eventually change due to the Buddhist practice that he had introduced. He thus had great hope. He thus *was* rich.

While selfless determination entails making others' sufferings our own, it's also having their joys as our own. This is what makes us richest in life.

How, though, can we best foster this selflessness in ourselves and experience this wealth? Isn't it a little difficult to just will ourselves to selflessness — especially when we've got plenty of our own problems to deal with?

Actually, it's in facing our problems — in not cringing from whatever our current struggles are (no matter how nasty) — that we open our hearts to others and their problems. Courageously facing all personal difficulties with a strong Buddhist practice is indeed the first and unavoidable step toward selflessness. As SGI President Ikeda says, "If we act with courage, we find that our compassion for others grows deeper."

If we are well versed in the struggles that everyone must face — and if we seek our own happiness primarily in fighting against *all* human unhappiness, not just our own disappointments — we're on what the Daishonin calls the direct path to "true peace and comfort" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). And we're bringing the whole world along with us. **WT**

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