

BABIES FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

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I have been practicing Nichiren Dai-shonin's Buddhism for 17 years. I feel that I have been able to change something deep in my life and karma because of my practice. This has been possible because I chant and have continued for many years, determined to change for the better.

My experience is about my opportunity to work with children. I always assumed that I would have children, but other things were always pressing and there never was a very good time to plan for having children of my own. My other deep fear was that if I had a child, that I would become like my own mother and perpetuate the same kind of conflictual relationship that I had with her. Because of this fear, I put off planning for having children of my own, not wanting to face my own issues.

When I married my husband, I was 28 years old, and although my biological clock was ticking away, I had my career goals to focus on as I was striving toward a career in medicine. There was never really the right time to plan for having children. Then my husband's son, who was 11 at the time, moved in with us. I thought this was my opportunity to have a relationship with him, and would fulfill my desire for having children. In reality, however, my stepson not only did not appreciate me, but did not even like me and openly competed with me for attention from his father. My husband and I struggled together through his adolescence. Because of our practice and many hours of daimoku and determination for him to succeed, he did complete high school and moved out on his own. It was never easy and much to my disappointment, was never the sense of fulfillment and joy that I had anticipated and hoped for.

Ross is now 24 years old and still struggling with his life, but I do believe my relationship with him has improved because I have grown up and he has been able to see his life more clearly.

Just before I entered medical school, we considered having a child, but the time was not yet right and everything seemed too hectic and uncertain so we put things off again. After my second year of medical school, I took a year off to do a fellowship in pathology, partly because my stepson was having so many problems, but also because we wanted to have a baby. My husband and I began seeing a fertility specialist to help us to conceive. Eight months later and after multiple tests and constant anticipation and anxiety, we learned that I was unable to get pregnant. I cannot describe to you how devastated I was by this news. The waves of grief were so overwhelming that I just had to set them aside so that I could continue with life. For as long as I had put off the decision to have a child, never in my wildest dreams had I imagined that the opportunity to do so would not be possible for me. Having a baby is something that people do all the time. Babies are brought into the world every day who are not even wanted by their parents. Why would this opportunity be unavailable to me? I asked myself many questions as I processed through my grief.

I chanted my way through anger, through grief and through profound disappointment in the karma that I had to accept as my own. I struggled with frustration and jealousy toward women who were pregnant and families with children. I spent many years wondering what I had to change to resolve this sadness. I felt that this was possibly karma that was so deeply ingrained in my life that it could not be changed in this lifetime, the kind of immutable karma I learned about in Buddhism. I chanted to open my life to children in

whatever manner that would benefit my life and resolve this deep doubt that I was fighting.

My biggest struggle was that of feeling that there was something wrong with me, that this was an experience that I was not worthy of having. I believe that with this practice there is a responsibility that we have to ourselves to open up to the difficult karmic issues that eventually surface in our practice to win in life. I know this feeling of unworthiness that I experienced stemmed from not feeling appreciated and valued by my own mother. How could I change this?

My husband and I considered many options, which included adoption and foster care. Through chanting I took a real leap of faith and chose to specialize in family medicine — I now deliver babies and care for children on a regular basis. This has been a long process for me of reconnecting with my childhood and learning how to love and value the child in my own heart. Through my experience of caring for children, I have found the spontaneity and joy that I was missing. Each baby that I deliver, I feel very connected to and feel such a sense of happiness to watch them grow and develop. I have experienced a feeling of richness and fullness with interacting and developing relationships with my patients. Where once I was sad because I was not able to have children, now I am so grateful and blessed to have Chase and Isabelle, and Shane, and Allaura, and Rachel, and Olivia, and Robert, and Leah, and Jessica, and Tabitha, and Angelica, and Alli, and Marc, and Ashley, and all the babies who will be born this year and in the 21st century.

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