

## GETTING TO THE ROOT OF VIOLENCE

**One morning after spanking her daughter, LaVora Perry ‘recommitted,’ as she says, ‘to the premise that if I truly hope to raise happy kids who’ll grow up to practice Buddhism and contribute to world peace, I’ll have to be a good example for them.’**

The Saturday morningbefore Mother’s Day, things were pretty intense at our house. Determined to be a fit dad and husband well into the new millennium, my husband was out on a morning walk while I was scrambling to get the kids — ages 3-and-a-half years, 2 years and 3 months, dressed and fed.

My 3-and-a-half-year-old girl had run frantic circles around her room instead of going straight to the bathroom, and for the umpteenth time proceeded to have a totally avoidable accident right on the floor. Then she had the misfortune of telling me “No,” or moving too slowly, or doing *something* to tick off her already stressed out mom just one time too many, and I did what I’d sworn never to do. I spanked her. I spanked her while her younger brother, who’s always being told not to hit anyone, looked on in confusion, as if to ask, “Why can *you* hit, Mom, when *I* can’t?” I spanked her while another part of me observed the whole thing, asking: “What in the world are you doing, LaVora? What are you teaching your children with this horrid action?”

It was a blaring wake-up call for me. I had to chant for my kids, and to get my life in balance for the sake of my family and for the part I play in the entire human drama. I realized that subtly I’d lost sight of the profundity of my mission as a parent.

I’d also stopped liking my daughter. She whined too much, was too mean to her brother, and was way too ready to disobey me. So the first thing I did was chant from the bottom of my life for my daughter’s happiness, because as I sat before the Gohonzon, vowing never to hit my children again, it occurred to me that maybe she wasn’t as happy as she could be. I also recommitted to the premise that if I truly hope to raise happy kids who’ll grow up to practice Buddhism and contribute to world peace, I’ll have to be a good example for them. To be a good example, I must be happy myself, and I must have genuine compassion for their lives — even when they do things I don’t like. I realized that I’d lost that loving feeling for my own daughter. And I wanted it back.

After chanting and talking things over with my husband, some new ground rules for our family interactions were laid. These were needed, but even more importantly, I laid a new foundation within my own heart for my relationship with my daughter. I also reminded myself that although it would be convenient for me to have a child who always did exactly what she was told, cause and effect is no joke, and I was nowhere near being such a child for my parents. Nor would I want to totally squelch my daughter’s creative and independent spirit.

After chanting and taking action, I got immediate results!

I feel lighter, can laugh with my daughter again, and can simply enjoy her company. Even her whining doesn’t bother me as much. And when discipline is needed, I dish it out sternly, but with care, not bitterness. She has responded by being a lot less cranky herself. That chanting about my relationship with my daughter has affected the way I see her

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reminds me of the passage from the Daishonin's writings, "Once you realize that your own life is the Mystic Law, you will realize that so are the lives of all others." (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 5). I feel that through prayer, I activate my Buddha nature, which enables me to see the Buddha in my little girl, too.

The other day, our family was leaving the shopping mall where we'd celebrated my son's birthday in an indoor amusement park when we walked by a shoe store and heard a child crying hysterically. As I passed by, with my older daughter holding onto my shirt tail while I pushed the baby in a stroller, I saw a woman whipping a preschool-age girl with a dress belt. Not seeing what had happened, my daughter asked, "Why's that girl crying, Mom?" "Because her mom hit her with a belt," I answered. "Remember I told you that some mommies hit their children when they don't do what they're told?" Before I actually *became* one of *those* mommies, I'd tell my daughter about spanking as a way of saying, "See how lucky you are to have a mommy like me?" Anyway, hearing of the little girl's distress, my daughter replied: "Her mommy shouldn't have hit her. That wasn't nice."

I was torn. On the one hand, I didn't know this woman at all, but on the other, here I was with my kid who was very clear in her mind about the injustice of the situation. How did I want her to remember this incident? What did I want her to learn from it? So I wheeled the stroller around, and the three of us went into the shoe store.

"Excuse me," I said to the woman. "Is that your daughter you were spanking?" It was. "Well, I know I don't know you, but I'm a mother, too. This is my daughter, and my baby girl is in the stroller. My husband's in the mall with our son. Last week, after vowing never to do so, I spanked my girl." Not knowing how she would react, I told the woman my story. Ending with my belief that with the way violence is sweeping over our world — in Kosovo and other less-reported armed conflicts, in our own neighborhoods and homes — we must find new ways to teach our children to solve problems, because in the end, violence can only lead to death.

I saw tears form in the woman's eyes. We connected. Like me, she was a mother doing her best to raise a child, and harming that child was the last thing on earth she wanted to do.

Having children forces me to be braver than I may have been otherwise. Were it not for wanting to pass on my deepest held values to my children, I may not have dared approach a woman who could easily have responded in anger to my intrusion in her personal family business. But as it turned out, I came home and chanted for that mother and her daughter, wishing I'd have also told her about the Mystic Law, and praying that she and her family will come to practice Buddhism in this lifetime.

Realizing that the only way to get to the root of violence and create a truly peaceful world is by sharing Nam-myoho-renge-kyo far and wide from heart to heart, I now know more than ever that I've got a lifetime of work to do.

**WT**