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PRACTICING WITH “GREAT SEEKING SPIRIT”
BY ULISSE GALLO, CHICAGO

Cast off any thoughts you may have to the contrary. If you doubt that you committed slander in the past, you will not be able to withstand the minor sufferings of this life. Then, you might give in to your father’s opposition and desert the Lotus Sutra against your will. Remember, that should this happen, you are certain to fall into the hell of incessant suffering and drag your parents into it as well, causing all of you indescribable grief. To grasp this requires a great seeking spirit. (MW-1, 138)

Victory is determined not only by chanting daimoku, but also in taking action. Action may involve reflecting on our problem, participating in activities or fulfilling our responsibilities at work or school. But sometimes, it’s hard to know which action is appropriate for the situation. That’s why, in this passage, Nichiren Daishonin reminds the Ikegami brothers that our practice demands “a great seeking spirit.”

When facing an obstacle or problem, not knowing which action to take can lead to stagnation in our practice. Though we continue to chant and do activities, because we know they’re the right things to do, for some reason, our determination (*ichinen*) may not be that strong and before we know it, we are “in the funk.” This can happen to anyone, whether they’ve practiced for one month, one year, or even 20 years, as was the case with the Ikegami brothers.

After having maintained their faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism for so long, the brothers were probably very concerned that their father had taken such a drastic measure as disowning the eldest son, Munenaka. Both the brothers and their wives must have asked themselves, “*Why me?*” “*Why now?*” “*Am I practicing correctly?*” As human beings, it is natural to have doubts, but no matter how sincere we are, if we do not manifest the wisdom to take the correct action, we will be unable to put all our energy and effort into overcoming our problem.

Manifesting our infinite potential, our Buddha nature, can only happen if we have a seeking spirit – the spirit to seek out the answers through reading Nichiren Daishonin’s writings, President Ikeda’s speeches and receiving guidance from our seniors in faith. For the Ikegami brothers, the answer was in the Daishonin’s explanation of the law of causality. He tells Munenaka and Munenaga that they are experiencing the effects of causes they had made in previous lifetimes. But instead of letting them blame their karma, the Daishonin explains that by understanding the true nature of their situation, they can see it as lessening their karmic retribution. The Daishonin strictly clarifies the matter by telling them to cast off any thoughts that they might have to the contrary and thus empowers them to take action. Through his guidance both the brothers and their wives were able to unite in faith in order to resolve this problem, demonstrating the principle of many in body, one in mind (*itai doshin*).

Of course, we’re going to experience problems, and those problems may not feel like “minor sufferings,” but by practicing correctly we learn that we can change our circumstances. Instead of feeling anxious that the next problem will be more difficult, through

seeking and learning from others, we can understand the *why*, and not falter in our determination. If we develop the habit of chanting, studying and seeking guidance, we learn to pick ourselves up when we are temporarily knocked down by our immediate circumstances.

President Ikeda says that to chant daimoku requires courage. Studying also requires courage, as does going to our leaders for guidance. He also states that “if people follow only their own subjective opinions and personal whims, they will become divided, both in body and mind, and find themselves in a whirlpool of complaints, discontent, hatred and jealousy” (*Selected Lectures on the Goshō*, p. 156). By having a “great seeking spirit” like the Daishonin says, through chanting, studying and asking for guidance, we can take the appropriate action to overcome our problems. “The Buddha’s lifeblood flows in the actions of people not those who act divisively or egotistically, but within the lives of those who chant daimoku and advance together toward the common goal of kosen-rufu” (*Selected Lectures*, p. 151). By taking the appropriate action, we can win over our situation. Our success then becomes the success of the members in our district, chapter and down the line until we become united in our successes, with the spirit of “many in body, one in mind” necessary to realize kosen-rufu.

SNEAK ATTACK BY MARK KAPLAN, SAN FRANCISCO

As practice progresses and understanding grows, the three obstacles and four devils emerge vying with one another to interfere.... Reverently make this teaching your own and transmit it as an axiom of faith for future generations (MW-1, 145).

Devils have a way of attacking in the least expected ways, at the least expected times — unless you’re a Buddhist. As a Buddhist we have been trained to expect obstacles. Nichiren Daishonin repeats something like this in many of his writings, because, as was pointed out in the April 4 (p. 2) *World Tribune*, people quit when obstacles catch them by surprise.

But as prepared as we might be, the obstacle of the moment is guaranteed to be specially designed to confuse and stop us. This writing is full of examples of people who put out tremendous effort to follow the way, but compromised at a crucial moment because they were not masters of their minds, and lost sight of the big picture. As Nichiren writes to the Ikegami brothers: “This world is the province of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. He causes [people] to drink the wine of greed, anger and stupidity, and feeds them nothing but poisoned dishes that leave them prostrate on the ground of the three evil paths” (MW-1, 136). This “devil” will confuse your mind if he can.

In the end, the Daishonin says the only defense is courage and the attitude that “whatever trouble may occur, consider it as transitory as a dream and think only of the Lotus Sutra” (MW-1, 147). To me this means having the determination to go through anything for the sake of our convictions, to blast right through no matter how rocky the path gets, and not look for a short cut, because, inevitably, when we are about to break through, that short cut, that compromise, is a devil in disguise.

Applying this principle to this writing, the short cut for the younger brother would have been to pretend to abandon faith and inherit all the father’s prestige and wealth. The unexpected obstacle for the older brother was to suddenly have his father and (potentially) his brother turn against him after 20 years of practice. But both brothers persevered unflinch-

ingly and everyone, including their father (and even including us today who are learning from their example), won in the end.

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