

PERSPECTIVE: MY HEART'S RELEASE
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The Florida Nature and Culture Center is like a wonderful song that you just can't get out of your head. On my third trip to FNCC for the Fourth Annual Culture Department Conference, the song began days before I left. It's not easy to write an FNCC experience because FNCC is not so much about doing as it is about being. Nevertheless, I shall attempt to capture my most recent experience of being there.

From the moment I boarded the plane with a fellow member from Pittsburgh, the non-stop dialogue began. Animated discussions picked up in the van as we excitedly made our way to the Center. Being the only SGI Buddhist psychologist in Pittsburgh, I could not wait to join with other members of the healing arts division. Thursday proved to be a wonderful warm-up to a weekend of intense, enlightening and humorous dialogue with everyone I encountered. That night I fell asleep easily and quickly, probably due to a last-minute dip in the jacuzzi.

I have been deeply immersed in my work as a psychotherapist and in my study of Buddhist psychology. Since there are few psychologists in the SGI, I found it necessary to go outside of SGI publications to satisfy my enthusiasm for this subject. Little by little, I have been able to link the growing body of works written by Western Buddhist psychologists with SGI President Ikeda's guidance and Nichiren Daishonin's *Major Writings*. Much of my time at FNCC was filled with wonderful discussions on this subject. I was having a great time!

It was during Culture Department Advisor Masao Yokota's lecture that doubt began to creep in. Mr. Yokota, as always, was lucid, concise and uncomplicated. Buddhism is about friendship. It's about how we treat one another as human beings. He said we don't create friendships with other people for any other reason than that this is the best way to live as human beings. Examples from his personal experiences with President Ikeda illuminated how we can live as kind, thoughtful human beings. I was moved to stand up and ask a question. I told Mr. Yokota how much I appreciated him sharing his personal experiences with President Ikeda since I do not have that kind of relationship with him. I told him of my passion for Buddhist psychology and my frustration in not finding the resources that I need in the SGI or in President Ikeda's writings. I said that I realized President Ikeda is not a psychologist, and perhaps I was being unrealistic in my expectations. I wondered if it might be part of my mission to give expression to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the realm of psychology. I inexplicably found myself expressing my lack of confidence. Mr. Yokota's response was heartfelt and compassionate. I honestly don't remember everything he said, so deep were the emotions I was experiencing at that moment, except this. He said, "President Ikeda is not a psychologist, but he is such a great human being there is so much we can learn from him."

Later in the hallway, I thanked Mr. Yokota again, and he warmly smiled at me and said: "Please be confident. You are a pioneer!"

The organizers of the conference had told us the first night that they hoped every single person would get exactly what he or she needed. My encounter with Mr. Yokota gave me exactly what I needed. I felt refreshed and encouraged and ready to return to my work with a renewed determination and new appreciation of President Ikeda.

On the plane home, I was reading Richard Hayes' book, *Land of No Buddha*, a collec-

tion of essays on Buddhism in the West. Richard Hayes is a professor of Buddhist Studies at McGill University in Canada. In the spirit of the weekend, I chose to read his essay “What is a friend?”

I was stunned when I came across this paragraph: “Buddhism has in common with some of the ancient Greek and Hellenistic moral philosophies that it bases the discussion of proper human conduct entirely within the domain of what we can observe in this world about the effects of our conduct on the beings around us. While acknowledging that human beings do perform actions in the hope of gaining some kind of future rewards beyond the present life, the Buddha emphasized that good actions performed in the hope of gaining a better birth in some future life were worth only a fraction of good works performed out of motivation of simple *metta*, (friendship), that is friendship or goodwill towards other be-ings. The Buddha said, “Monks, whatsoever grounds there be for good works undertaken with a view to rebirth, all of them are not worth one sixteenth part of that goodwill (*metta*) which is the heart’s release; goodwill alone, which is the heart’s release, shines and burns and flashes forth in surpassing them all.”

Indeed, spending four days at FNCC with so many wonderful friends, I found my heart’s release!

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