

EXPERIENCE — JOSEPH CHOO, HONOLULU THE ABSOLUTE POWER OF PRAYER

Five years ago, my father, George Choo, was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease—the degeneration of the central nervous system—coupled with Parkinson's disease, a progressive nerve disease marked by tremors. For those five years, my father required 24-hour care. My mother, who worked at night, was the care-giver during the day, and my wife, Kumiko, and I took care of him at night. We provided loving care, while devoting ourselves to SGI activities. In May of this year, my father's condition worsened. He needed professional care and was placed in a nursing home.

On July 16, my father aspirated his food, which went down the wrong passage and lodged in his lungs. I received a call at work and was informed of his condition. I called my wife, who immediately called her friends and leaders in the SGI. They began chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo for my father.

An ambulance was summoned, and when I arrived the paramedics were frantically working to revive him. Eventually he was transported to the hospital with respiratory failure. I was informed that en route to the hospital, my father's heart stopped three times, but fortunately he came out of it.

In the emergency room, they determined that he was in critical condition and transferred him to the intensive care unit. He was so weak that he could not breathe on his own and was placed on a ventilator and a life-support system. Due to the trauma, he was infused with one set of drugs to keep his heart beating and another to lower his unbelievably high blood pressure (250/125). He also had a fever of 104 degrees.

As my father lay unconscious during this ordeal, hooked up to tubes and wires, and convulsing from all the drugs, my wife—who has been practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism for over 39 years—and I were chanting for his recovery. We knew that of the senses, hearing is the last to go. We chanted for eight or nine hours next to my father's bedside; his condition remained the same.

The next morning, I woke up relieved that we had not received a late night call from the hospital, and resumed chanting for my father. Kumiko and I then returned to the hospital and continued chanting at my father's bedside. He remained unconscious and in very critical condition.

My mother informed me that my father had a living will—a legal document signed a decade earlier—asserting that his life not be prolonged artificially. As I read it, I was overcome with unspeakable grief. It broke my heart to realize that this was the state my father was in, explicitly described in the will. He did not wish to be kept alive.

As family members gathered in the waiting room, the ICU doctor approached. He gave us a clinical report about the gravity of my father's condition, complicated by pneumonia, and asked us to make a decision about my father's living will. As laypersons not familiar with medical terminology, this crucial decision to remove my father from the life-support system was exceedingly stressful. Our minds raced and naturally we had questions. The doctor, rather callously we thought, urged us to make a decision, explaining that since my father had a living will, legally and ethically he was not responsible to explain the details of my father's condition. We were incensed by his demeanor, but afraid if we challenged him he would not do everything possible to save my father.

After briefly conferring with family members, we notified the doctor of our decision to

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honor my father's request. He told us that when someone as weak as my father was removed from the machines, they usually pass away quickly. My father could not breathe on his own, and his heart could not beat without the drugs that were being administered throughout his body.

My father was immediately taken off all life support, and the family gathered around his bedside. My wife and I never stopped chanting as we held his hands. I pleaded in his ear to chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Given the gravity of the situation, I demanded my sister and brother chant too. For the first time in their lives, they did so. Within 15 minutes, my father stopped breathing and passed away. We continued to chant, knowing how important it was for him to continue hearing our chanting as he crossed the threshold from life to death.

A few minutes later, I noticed faint breaths from my father. We continued chanting and watching over him. Ten more minutes passed, and I noticed that his breathing was getting stronger. I called the nurse, who took his vital signs and discovered that his heart rate, which was 29 just prior to his death, was up to 49–52 beats. His blood pressure normalized. The nurse couldn't believe it. We continued to chant and noticed that as the hours passed, his condition, though extremely critical, was stabilizing. My father actually opened his eyes, which he not done for two days, and even regained strength in his grip.

The doctor informed us that the provisions of the living will would still be enforced. He would no longer have access to life support and would be placed in a regular hospital room where he would be treated like a regular patient.

In this critical state, my father was transferred. We continued to chant. After many hours, we went home to rest and wait for the inevitable call from the hospital.

The next morning, once again relieved that there was no emergency call from the hospital, I called to check on my father's condition and was informed by the nurse that my father was conscious, lucid and able to answer questions! After chanting, Kumiko and I went to the hospital and were astonished to find him sitting up in bed and talking.

A short time later, the doctor who had so insolently informed me the day before to plan for my father's funeral walked in. He saw my father sitting up in bed and asked how he was. My father responded that he was okay. The doctor said: "Amazing. This is amazing." I told him that it was amazing because we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, and many SGI members also chanted for him. The doctor said the chanting must have really helped because it was amazing that my father was still alive.

Within a day, my father was able to eat solid food, which the doctor thought would never be possible. Within five days my father was discharged from the hospital to a rehabilitation program.

I wrote this tremendous experience in a letter to SGI President Ikeda on July 19, to share our deep appreciation for the Gohonzon and for all the SGI members who chanted for my father.

On Aug. 1, my father peacefully passed away. I am extremely grateful to the SGI for the wonderful memorial service. What I want all the SGI members to know is that because of our prayers to the Gohonzon, my father was able to live two extra weeks after being taken off life support. He didn't just merely survive, he actually thrived. He was able to eat, talk, laugh and sing. As Nichiren Daishonin states, "One day of life is more valuable than all the treasures of the universe" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 231).

I began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism more than 13 years ago, and I can confidently say I really appreciate my father. This experience proved to me that the power

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of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is absolute, and that by chanting sincerely to the Gohonzon, you can overcome any obstacle in life.

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