

**UNDERSTANDING WHAT IT MEANS TO PRACTICE
EXPERIENCE: SANDRA L. WINKLER,
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The Daishonin repeatedly urges his followers to exert themselves harder, to redouble their efforts. He says in “A Ship to Cross the Sea of Suffering,” “You should therefore strive in faith more than ever to receive the blessings of the Lotus Sutra” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 9). Benefit is something we have to win for ourselves. No one can give it to us.

The day dawned sunny and bright. I was filled with excitement as I completed gongyo and began packing for my trip to Dover, Del., to attend a summer conference.

I was introduced to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism in 1984, and had known the district leader of Dover, Del., since she began her practice. Over the years, we had grown to really like each other, having many long-distance, late night telephone conversations. Usually these conversations were about our love lives — or lack thereof.

Because I really liked this lady, I went to Dover only to support this major effort her district was undertaking. Little did I know how my attitude toward my Buddhist practice would change! Though I have always had a very strong practice — chanting many hours of daimoku, introducing many people to Buddhism and subscribing to and reading all the publications, still I only looked for material benefits — most significantly, a boyfriend and a big promotion on my job.

Months before the conference, my sister, Evelyn — who in the ’70s had been salutatorian of her high school graduating class and had graduated *summa cum laude* from a major university — began practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism.

For many years, this had been my dream because Evelyn had become very depressed over a divorce that had occurred many years before. Since it was taking my sister so long to overcome the pain of the divorce, I knew practicing this Buddhism would be the answer to her happiness. For that reason, I was determined to share it with her, teach her gongyo, take her to activities and encourage her to subscribe to the publications.

It has only been a few months since my sister began her practice, but she does gongyo incredibly well. This has come about because, in addition to attending numerous weekly activities, my sister and I recite slow gongyo twice a week.

Due to working so diligently and sincerely with my sister and another person I had introduced to Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, my life-condition was high and my spirits soaring. So, going to the conference started out being just a “fun” thing to do.

There were many lectures held at the conference over the weekend: The Spirit of Volunteerism, Improving Our Relationships and Propagating Buddhism Through Shakubuku. Somehow, as I listened, I knew the path that I had been traveling in terms of my practice was the correct path.

As one lecturer spoke of volunteerism, I thought about the community activities with which I had become involved. The relationship lecture spoke about looking at our own behavior and having a relationship with ourselves. Yes, I had begun doing that. And, finally, when the lecturer talked about propagation, I thought of the many discussion meetings our district had had, and the guests I always managed to bring. In addition to the guests, I thought of my sister, who was practicing because I did not give up on her.

I thought: “Yes, this is it! This practice is not about getting a boyfriend, though I would like to have one. It is not about getting a big promotion at work, though I would like that

also. This practice is about doing what you can do to lead people to this wonderful practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and ultimately to their happiness.”

Because of my sincere efforts over the years, there are currently two more people in my family practicing—my daughter for 10 years and my sister for six months.

Since that wonderful conference my friend's district sponsored, along with her husband—(yes, over the years, she overcame her inability to find the perfect mate)—I have vowed to continue my sincere practice, and to lead many, many people to the Gohonzon.

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