

THE PRAYERS OF THE PRACTITIONER OF THE LOTUS SUTRA BY MAIYA MURPHY, DENVER

And yet, though one might point at the earth and miss it, though one might bind up the sky, though the tides might cease to ebb and flow and the sun rise in the west, it could never come about that the prayers of the practitioner of the Lotus Sutra would go unanswered. (“On Prayer,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 345)

Background: Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter in 1272 while he was exiled on Sado Island. This letter was intended for Sairen-bo, a disciple and former Tendai priest, in response to questions he asked the Daishonin.

When we start practicing Buddhism, we are offered tools to forge a bulletproof happiness. It is then up to us to use those tools to construct an optimum, joyful life. There is no ambiguity in this passage from “On Prayer.” It is a definite statement of the absolute power of chanting and the potential of people. From my experience, the confidence imbued in this passage presents just the attitude with which we must strive to put this practice to work. As our path in life may not always seem so clear, the kind of focus that Nichiren Daishonin expresses here is the quickest and most successful road to completing our goals. One of my greatest struggles in practicing Buddhism is to stop my own skepticism and doubts from impeding my progress. In the muddiest of circumstances, this quote reminds me that confident, determined prayer is the eternal starting point of Buddhist practice.

I have always had a deep sense that this practice is the foundation of my life. I was born into a family of Buddhists who, through their lives, showed me the great power of Buddhism. Thanks to my parents’ amazing talent to make this practice a joy and an oasis for me, whenever faced with difficulties, I turn to the Gohonzon. I quickly saw the great benefit of a steady practice and chanting consistently and abundantly. My first life-changing experience using this practice was, against numerous odds, to attend Yale University. Along with this great benefit came some of my greatest difficulties. But, by the end of four years, I graduated with honors, had a dear group of amazing friends, and experienced a series of life-shaping events.

During my senior year of college, I decided to apply to graduate acting school. I had always known that I wanted to be an actor. Some people tried to dissuade me from going for more schooling, saying that acting graduate school was a waste of time, and I should just go to New York and do it. But I felt that a graduate program was the best road for me. However, the programs are small, and the selection criteria sometimes incomprehensible. Some very talented actors audition for seven years before they are admitted to a program. Cherishing the great journey of getting to Yale, I knew the power of this practice and was determined to do it all over again.

I worked very hard, chanted a lot, and got called back by the majority of schools, but didn’t get in to any of the programs. I was crushed. How could this happen? I chanted intensely, worked hard and made every cause I could. I was indignant—this was outrageous! What would I do next year? Where did my prayers go?

A few months later, I moved to the New York City area, still chanting about going to graduate school. I jumped into SGI activities in New Jersey and then in New York, and felt

my personal mission for kosen-rufu click into place at the Florida Nature and Culture Center Youth Division Conference. I sincerely felt that I needed to deeply connect my goals with the goal of kosen-rufu. While there, I bought the new one-volume version of *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* and read this passage. Still unconvinced that I shouldn't be starting my first year of graduate acting school, I pondered this quote.

For a young actor just descending upon New York, whether or not you find work that you enjoy and believe in is a crap shoot. One of the most difficult tasks is to find a group of artists who share the same attitudes, aesthetic, and goals for doing theater. I had the great fortune to do some work that I truly believed was worth doing, and found a group of artists that I see as my core artistic partners for life. It was a dream come true to consistently work with so many people I trust and that inspire me.

At the same time, I got involved with the New York SGI Youth Peace Committee, the group that originated the Victory Over Violence campaign. It was a completely new direction for me. I contributed to exhibits and events that communicate Buddhist ideas to Buddhists and non-Buddhists alike. I participated in a presentation for an FNCC conference with fellow YPC members. Immediately following, in honor of United Nations Non-Governmental Organization Week, we supported several SGI-UN symposia on creating a culture of peace.

I was immensely impressed by the symposia panelists. These people who devoted their lives to humanitarian work were quiet champions. In the theater-world where performers can be all too eager to foolishly call attention to themselves, these humble servants of humanity radiated with wisdom. It was clear to me that these people are the real stars of the global stage. During the SGI-UN nonviolence symposia, the moderator pointed out that each of the panelists had a mentor and actively worked to realize that mentor's philosophy. Their mentors included people like SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mahatma Gandhi. When they spoke of their personal experiences, they each sparkled with such brilliance. This pointed to the fact that they all applied the philosophies on which they base themselves.

I continued to chant about going to graduate school, rereading about how my prayers could never go unanswered. Suddenly, I realized that since the time I had been rejected, my life had expanded greatly. I discovered my sense of mission for kosen-rufu, developed myself as an artist, found my artistic community, and discovered a new respect and passion for peace work. The scope of my life and interests was much larger than I had thought. Inspired by the panelists who have put their philosophies into practice, I realized that I actually want to be much more than an actor; I want to explore peace work, and then create a way to marry all of my interests.

As I continued chanting, summoning up conviction I wasn't sure I had, I was moved to engage my practice for others more than ever before. My prayers touched something more deeply in me than four years of school, and even a career in theater—they unearthed my bodhisattva nature and clues to my mission for kosen-rufu. This passage reminded me to go deeper than my shallow wisdom and call forth my Buddha wisdom through prayer. Even if our goals may be small, the greatness of Buddhism allows us to unearth the depth behind those desires to realize a greater happiness than we could ever fathom. In my life, the impact of striving to put a single passage into practice has had such a profound effect that I strive to follow in the footsteps of many wise, dedicated members by making my own life a map of Nichiren Daishonin's writings.