

## **EXPERIENCE—JERRY SHUBERT, ANTELOPE, CALIF. BUDDHISM IS WIN-WIN**

### **Jerry Shubert helps his wife, Mitsue, recover from kidney failure and peritonitis.**

About four-and-a-half years ago, my wife's kidneys failed and she had to go on dialysis. This consisted of being connected to a dialysis machine at the hospital for three hours every other day of the week; the machine pumped the blood out of the body, washed it and pumped it back in again. Because Mitsue has a small body frame, this proved to be a very violent process for her. Her blood pressure would drop excessively, she was nauseous the entire rest of the day, and she would not feel "normal" until the following day. And that's how it went for one-and-a-half years — one good day and one bad one every other day of the week. We were literally held prisoners in our immediate environment. Prior to Mitsue's illness, we did a lot of traveling because I was financially secure. Our idea of fun was to lock the front door, get in the car and go and come back whenever we felt like it. All of that changed due to her illness.

About a year and a half ago, we graduated to home dialysis. What a difference! The "washing machine" was placed in her stomach, so the blood never left the body. There were no blood pressure drops and no nausea. As a matter of fact, I would "plug her in" around 10:00 p.m. and by 7:00 the next morning, when I "unplugged" her, she could resume normal living. The machine was very portable. We got back to traveling and going out, and it was a great life — with limitations, of course.

During the second week of April last year, Mitsue developed peritonitis. She was taken to the hospital and had to have an emergency operation. I was told that this condition was extremely dangerous, and her entire stomach had become infected. Therefore, anything inside the stomach, like the catheter, which enabled her to do home dialysis, had to be removed immediately. Also, at that time they would assess the damage.

The doctors reported extensive damage in the stomach walls, i.e., tears, scrapes, torn cartilage and lots of scar tissue. The pain from all this would be excruciating, and they would have to give Mitsue morphine and high-performance drugs so that she could live through it. It seems, as well, that a white mass developed on the right side of her brain that could cause mental problems. As a result of all this, she was to remain in the hospital for an indefinite time.

It was impossible to carry on a conversation with her because she really went "loony tunes." Most of the time she did not know where she was. The nurses attempted to exercise her by walking her down the corridor, holding her up in addition to using a walker. Mitsue would walk with her head downward and, unable to lift her feet, would shuffle along for a short distance before having to rest. The situation was gloomy, to say the least.

While all of this was going on, my SGI family really helped me. People called on a daily basis. And the great thing was that many of them did not just say, "I will chant for her," but instead would inform their group and chant together just for my wife. I have a brother and sister who are both Jewish and another sister who is Catholic, and they all said they would pray for my wife. Now there was no way that I was going to miss out on all that, so I managed to chant a couple of hours every day.

Finally, on the 14th day of Mitsue's hospitalization, the doctor said that she would be

released. I immediately responded that it would be great finally to bring her home. I will never forget what the doctor then said to me: “You don’t understand, Mr. Shubert. I’m not talking about sending her home. I’ve told you before how dangerous her condition is. She almost died on the operating table. If we had performed the operation 15 minutes later than we did, she would be dead now. This white mass that developed on her brain and made her mentally unfit is irreversible! As far as her physical ability is concerned, don’t expect too much there, either. You can’t handle the situation! We have to put her in a nursing home.”

I’ve been chanting for 39 years, my wife for 40. In that time, there are certain truths that you learn about Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. The first is to believe in the Gohonzon — with absolute, faithful, unimpeachable trust. The second is that this Buddhism is not a “count-your-blessings” religion. This Buddhism is not a “be-thankful-for-what-you’ve-got” religion. It is win or lose. (I actually take it a step further, and say it’s a win-win religion). I simply would not accept the fact that she would not improve. I would not accept the fact that my wife’s illness would cause her imminent death. This religion is really about how we handle problems and, with ultimate trust and faith in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, we come out in better shape than before we had the problem.

So, I somehow convinced the doctor to “put me to the test.” He let my wife come home for a week or so, to see if I could handle her or not. Mitsue was released from the hospital on a Monday afternoon. There were daily chanting sessions going on in my home as well in other people’s homes and at the community centers. Although Mi-tsue could not join us the first two days, she did make a few appearances in front of the Gohonzon after that. On the following Sunday, only six days later, at her request, we drove to the Ikeda Auditorium in San Francisco. We attended a ceremony and when they called out our names, with only the use of a cane, she walked up to the stage! It was truly great! A lot of the people attending came up to her and wished her well, and there were many smiles.

About a week later, we had a follow-up meeting with the doctor who had proclaimed her illness irreversible. She walked into his office using only my arm as support. He was carrying on a normal conversation with her. He kept shaking his head. Then he sent her down to have a CAT scan of her stomach area. While we were waiting for the results, he said to me that he was amazed at her incredibly fast recovery and wanted to know what I had done. I immediately responded, “What you are witnessing doctor, is the raw, unbridled power of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.” He said that he had heard that phrase before and wanted to know its meaning. So, of course, I began to tell the doctor about Buddhism. When the results from the CAT scan came back, he looked at them several times and, after consulting with another doctor, confirmed that there were no signs of an infection anywhere! There was no scar tissue anywhere! Her stomach looked perfectly normal! Wow! It doesn’t get much better than this! Now I don’t want to downplay the seriousness of this disease. It is a maiming disease, a deadly disease. But we have the Gohonzon and we have this wonderful SGI organization, which I believe is synonymous with the word *family*.

I would like to quote my favorite passage from Nichiren Daishonin, which states, “Employ the strategy of the Lotus Sutra before any other” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1001).

The strategy of the Lotus Sutra is our faith in the Gohonzon. With regard to this, SGI President Ikeda states: “We must pray and make efforts. Then it is important to have the unshakable confidence to leave everything else to the Gohonzon. When we genuinely devote ourselves to the Mystic Law, we can bring forth infinite wisdom and strength,

making the impossible possible. When we encounter a difficult problem or situation, for which there seems no solution, we must first decide that ‘I will overcome this problem,’ or ‘I will resolve this situation,’ and then pray earnestly to the Gohonzon” (Feb. 7, 1997, *World Tribune*, p. 10).

Although Mitsue is still undergoing dialysis three days a week at the hospital, we no longer fear the deadliness of her disease. She and I are back to traveling once again but on a limited basis. Her illness has caused us to live one day at a time with no regrets; we appreciate life fully, day by day.