

FROM THE GENERAL DIRECTOR THE ANSWER LIES IN FAITH, PRACTICE AND STUDY

Many of us are still reeling from the shock of September 11 and the reality that our nation is now involved in military action against terrorism. In the days and months to come, it is important that all of us gain a deeper understanding of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism and engage in heart-to-heart dialogue with people around us. By developing conviction and a more profound perspective, we as SGI members can gradually transform the fear and despair that fill the hearts of so many. Our earnest efforts can ignite a light of hope that will illuminate our path in the days to come. Therefore, I want to discuss how it is even more crucial right now that we strengthen the three essential aspects of the Daishonin's Buddhism: faith, practice and study.

We may be feeling insecure and anxious, but we cannot allow our confidence in our Buddhist practice to be shaken. We all share the same concerns of freedom and security for everyone. In "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings," the Daishonin states, "The single character of faith is the sharp sword to cut through the fundamental darkness" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 751). This sentence sums up why it is important to develop faith right now. Everyone possesses fundamental darkness that can manifest itself at any time. Faith allows us to banish from our lives that which leaves us feeling hopeless and powerless. The solution to the evil of terrorism lies in faith in the Daishonin's Buddhism.

If our Buddhist practice is the foundation of our lives, then to leave doubts unchallenged makes us susceptible to fear. The deeper our faith, the happier we are. Faith is more than belief. It means to have a flexible spirit, an open mind and a pure heart. SGI President Ikeda has said that faith will dispel the dark clouds of doubt, anxiety and regret and open our hearts toward something great.

Faith is believing in our Buddha nature, and further, that all people possess a Buddha nature. It is a conviction that we can change our perception and see the equality of all people. When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we gain the wisdom to take appropriate action, which is a manifestation of our faith. When we change the environment, that is faith. When we go through human revolution, that is also faith. As the Daishonin says: "To have faith is the basis of Buddhism. The fourth volume of Great Concentration and Insight states, 'Buddhism is like an ocean that one can only enter with faith'" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 832).

In 1981, President Ikeda wrote a poem, "To My Beloved Young American Friends." In it, he talks about faith:

Faith is —
to fear nothing
to stand unswayed
the power to surmount any obstacle.
Faith is the source from which
all solutions flow
Faith is the engine that propels us
in the thrilling voyage of life,
a life victorious and transcendent
(*Songs for America*, p. 69).

There is much we can do to eradicate terrorism by way of our practice. In the fourth silent

prayer of gongyo, we “pray that the great desire of kosen-rufu be fulfilled.” This is a broad prayer that spurs us to think of ways we can make world peace a reality. One of the ways to bring about world peace is to consider how each of us can make a positive impact on our families, friends, co-workers and neighbors. A change in each of us brings about a change in the environment. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is a powerful means to open up our lives to possibilities for change that we might not have considered. In order to make a difference, we have to start with ourselves.

Nichiren Daishonin understood how essential the practice of Buddhism is, and he encouraged the hypothetical questioner to whom “The Selection of the Time” is addressed by saying: “Therefore, I say to you my disciples, try practicing as the Lotus Sutra teaches, exerting yourselves without begrudging your lives! Test the truth of Buddhism now!” (WND, 583–84).

Global citizens think of other people — not only the people in their immediate environment, but also people all over the world. This is where our practice for others makes a difference. When we help others unlock their potential and become happy, a far-reaching effect is created. The SGI exists in 177 countries and territories in the world. Even though we number only 12 million members, if each of us has the conviction that what we do is significant and that we should help others see their potential for enlightenment, think of how many more millions of lives we will impact.

November is the month we hold district general meetings to celebrate the founding of our organization. We can use these meetings to expand our circle of friends who also dedicate themselves to attaining world peace. Let’s make our meetings a “garden of dialogue” where our ideas for peace can take root in the hearts and minds of our members and guests. It is our grass-roots work that will create a harmonious society, eventually changing its destiny.

In order to make a difference in the world and build our conviction, we must study the Daishonin’s Buddhism thoroughly. Studying gives us a fresh perspective and refreshes the way we practice. Study is an aid to our faith and practice. When we understand how our lives work and why things happen the way they do, we will not waver in times of crisis. With study, we can overcome doubts and dispel the devilish functions inherent in human life.

President Ikeda often talks about the importance of study and why we should do it. In a speech he remarked: “What is the purpose of study? It’s to enable us to gain some practical ability or knowledge so that we can contribute to society and to the happiness and welfare of many people” (*Faith into Action*, p. 168). Contributing to society and the welfare of others has always been our mission. Our understanding of Buddhism makes it easier to discuss our philosophy with others. President Ikeda further says, “Leaders who are genuinely committed to realizing kosen-rufu will read the Goshō every day, even if only a line or a paragraph, and make it a living part of themselves” (May 5, 2000, *World Tribune*, p. 8). We are all leaders when it comes to the realization of kosen-rufu. Study is one of the best ways to express that pledge.

By strengthening our faith, practice and study, we will transform feelings of despair to feelings of hope and joy. Our philosophy puts us on the correct path of human revolution. At this crucial time, we can do so much to establish the absolute dignity of life. We should engrave in our hearts Nichiren Daishonin’s words: “Life is the foremost of all treasures. It is expounded that even the treasure of the entire major world system cannot equal the value of one’s body and life. Even the treasures that fill the major world system are no substitute for life” (WND, 1125).

Let’s all grow together based on our faith. Please enjoy your district general meetings with the knowledge that your efforts will make a difference in the world.

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