

PERSPECTIVE
PMS, KINDERGARTEN AND SELF-REFLECTION
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Life lessons can come in any number of ways—even from a case of PMS, LaVora Perry shares.

Buddhism teaches the concept of using our negative tendencies and sufferings as a springboard to happiness.

—SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, *The Way of Youth*

I never thought I could learn anything from PMS. That’s the acronym for premenstrual syndrome, the fatigue, mood swings and other symptoms that can happen before a woman’s menstrual period begins.

So what was my PMS lesson? It started one morning when my first-time kindergartner was doing what had become “the usual.” She was whining and pouting to the tune of “I don’t want to go to school.”

Prior to that morning’s episode, I had mixed feelings about the school that my daughter was attending. I had arranged to send her to what I believed to be the best primary school in our district. It was a 10-minute drive from home. Unlike the school just blocks from us, it did not offer half-day kindergarten—which I would have preferred.

One reason I wanted my daughter to attend a public school was because I felt it would help her develop a positive attitude about our community. East Cleveland, the once loved home of philanthropist John D. Rockefeller, is an urban-like suburb on the serious comeback after years of decline. I wanted my daughter to take pride in being a resident of our historic and culturally rich city. On the other hand, I knew that there were private schools, and schools in more affluent neighborhoods, that could offer her a more academically challenging environment.

I chanted about my concerns with the determination that my daughter would have any enjoyable educational experience that would prepare her for a happy and contributive life.

However, the reality was that my daughter was extremely shy at school. Her teacher said my daughter’s shyness and refusal to speak up in class was keeping her from progressing as well as she could. When I asked my daughter why she behaved that way (she’s plenty loud at home), she said, “Mom, I’m afraid to talk at school.” I was surprised to hear her speak of fear, but grateful for her honesty. Her words reminded me of my lack of confidence as a child; so I chanted for both her and me to be courageous. I invited her to join me, and chanting together before she left for school became a morning routine for our whole family, including her 2- and 3-year-old sister and brother.

The day before the fateful PMS morning, I had explained to my daughter that my tiredness and moodiness may have been brought on by my upcoming monthly cycle. I told her that during this time, she might want to go easy on her mom. But I guess that by the next morning she had forgotten. So to my cranky daughter, I ended up blurting out without a tinge of sympathy: “Face it, you’re in kindergarten. You have to go to school. That’s life. Deal with it and stop crying to me about it, because I don’t want to hear it this morning!”

Her reaction was amazing to me. The pouting stopped immediately. But even more than

that, when we arrived at school, for the first time since the school year began, she entered her classroom without weeping, wailing and clinging to me as though I was heartlessly leaving her alone in a room full of scary monsters.

Later, I chanted about her miraculous change, which seemed to be the result of my witchy, PMS-induced remarks. In one morning, she had morphed from a fearful preschooler who could not go to school without major drama, to a confident kid who could. “OK, what just happened?” I wondered while chanting.

SGI-USA’s Vice Women’s Leader Linda Johnson’s words from a meeting last year came to mind. She said, “If you think your environment is saying that you cannot have it, it is merely reflecting the fact that you believe you cannot have it.”

I realized my attitude was reflected in my daughter’s hesitancy to go to school. For instance, all along while my mouth was saying, “Your school is great,” my mind was saying: “I didn’t know how to read in kindergarten. I had plenty of time to play and be creative, and I became a very good reader. Why doesn’t this school offer more enrichment activities instead of focusing so much on teaching kindergartners to read?” And while I said, “You’ll start liking school, just wait and see,” inwardly I thought, “My baby’s too young to be in school all day. I wish this school had half-day kindergarten.”

But as I chanted, I realized that because of PMS, I was too whipped that morning to want anything else but for my daughter to go to school and give me a break. In my weeks of chanting for her happiness, I had determined that through prayer I would ensure that her school was the best one for both of our lives. When I deeply committed to creating this reality, my daughter’s hallway crying stopped for good.

These days my daughter says that school is fun, participates in a pilot in-school violin lessons program, has two best friends in school and has been promoted to the most challenging learning group in her class.

So thank you, PMS, for being the catalyst that made me feel uncomfortable enough to move out of my daughter’s way so that she could have more room to grow. And thank you, Linda Johnson, for some guidance that has been transforming my life. And mostly, I thank my daughter for, once again, leading me to chant so that could I see my own life clearly — for being one of my best teachers.