

**BACK TO THE BASICS  
BRAVE AND VIGOROUS PRACTICE  
BY GEOFF ROHDE, SACRAMENTO REGION LEADER**

Stretch it out, hold it, hold it. Lift those weights, one more rep, you can do it.” It would be great to have a personal trainer to goad me into better physical condition and a healthy diet. I find it so hard to exercise consistently and much easier to skip the gym, drink coffee and dunk biscotti. That is why I am overweight and under-muscled.

And then there is elevating my life-condition and strengthening my determination to work for others’ happiness—even more arduous. This requires what the Lotus Sutra calls a brave and vigorous practice. Shakyamuni describes his continuous bodhisattva practice over many lifetimes in the “Expedient Means” chapter: “A Buddha has personally attended a hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million, a countless number of religious practices. He has exerted himself bravely and vigorously, and his name is universally known” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 23). This is actually Shakyamuni’s encouragement to us to practice with the same spirit.

Deepening our faith, strengthening our daily practice and developing flexibility and patience with other people require hard work, but this is the brave and vigorous practice that Shakyamuni talked about. Visiting fellow members, attending meetings or even being positive with people at work, at the store, on the freeway—this is how we can make it real.

SGI President Ikeda has taught that unless we courageously challenge ourselves like this, with the spirit to accomplish more today than yesterday, we can never break the iron shackles of our destinies. The obstacles and devils that hold us back are ultimately within, and the real victory is winning over our own weaknesses and passivity.

Sub-zero self-esteem, depression, anger, greed, stupidity—these all come from inside us. In challenging ourselves to overcome inaction and to bravely exert ourselves for other people’s happiness, we overcome all of these. And we find that the life of the Buddha is indeed within.

Nichiren Daishonin set a great example for us by maintaining a brave and vigorous practice. He had confidence in himself, no matter the obstacles that came his way. The worse the obstacles, in fact, the braver and more vigorous his practice became.

When he was exiled to Sado Island, for instance, he wrote that “only by defeating a powerful enemy can one prove one’s real strength. When an evil ruler in consort with priests of erroneous teachings tries to destroy the correct teaching and do away with a man of wisdom, those with the heart of a lion king are sure to attain Buddhahood. Like Nichiren, for example. I say this not out of arrogance, but because I am deeply committed to the correct teaching” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 302). The “correct teaching” is brave and vigorous practice based on the Mystic Law. The benefit of practicing the correct teaching is developing “the heart of a lion,” Buddhahood.

This is the great challenge of our practice. Those who excel in any field are those who come to love the challenge. When we engage our whole life and sincerity with the practice, we find that chanting, studying and lifting the spirits of others are a delight.

Practicing with this spirit of brave and vigorous exertion assures us unending growth. As President Ikeda has often said, the darkness of despair and anxiety will vanish from our hearts, and the light of hope will shine forth.

This spirit to courageously shine a light into our own darkness and the darkness around us is the true spirit of faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism.