

PERSPECTIVE
FEELING THE SUFFERING OF OTHERS FAR AWAY
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‘I am beginning to realize that regardless of how remote or seemingly indirect a phenomenon may be,’ says Harsh Mishra, ‘it is very much a part of my life.’

You must have heard about the deadly earthquake in Northern India with tens of thousands of lives tragically coming to an end, leaving millions of friends and families grieving. My heart wept as I heard stories about mothers’ desperate search for their lost children in the rubble.

After practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism with the SGI for the last nine years, only now am I beginning to realize that regardless of how remote or seemingly indirect a phenomenon may be, it is very much a part of my life and therefore draws a response from me. In our pursuit of developing the qualities of global citizens, as SGI President Ikeda has encouraged us, we are learning this Buddhist truth.

This profound concept first occurred to me on Feb. 11, 1992, the day I decided to practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism. I was invited as a guest to the SGI Youth Peace Culture Festival in New Delhi, India. When President Ikeda spoke, I was touched by the way he spontaneously embraced Indian people and their culture as if it were his own. It seemed as if he cared more for Indian people than many of the Indians themselves. In a recent message to Indian SGI members, too, he expressed his deep feelings of concern for the victims of the Gujarat earthquake.

As his disciple, I try to follow the same path, a path that embraces all humanity without any distinction. There is this ancient Sanskrit saying in India: “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.” It means, “The entire planet earth is my neighborhood of close relatives.” We are learning this spirit within the SGI.

In my own case, chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo gradually brought back and refreshed these basic principles of humanity I had forgotten. As a young child in the small townships of India, I witnessed the poverty and caste-based discrimination in Indian society. Not conforming to these notions in my young mind, I resented being restricted from playing with other kids who came from poor and lower caste families. I felt angry with the elders who placed such unreasonable demands on me.

Ironically, I thought that those deprived kids were so happy and free and that I was the one imprisoned. In my following years of formal education and building a well-paying career, I slackened in my resolve to feel that freedom—until it was rekindled when I encountered Buddhism. Now, when I chant, I feel confident that I will grow to be able to contribute to others’ lives even more significantly.

While many people take action to support those in the midst of unfortunate miseries, we SGI members also have a special role, one that is different from any charitable trusts or social work force. While our contribution may include any of these actions, we more importantly help create the spiritual context within which such efforts can freely grow and be encouraged in society.

I feel thankful to you, my fellow SGI members, for advancing our movement. Having grown up amidst the visible adversities of the rural settings of India, I can identify to some

degree with the struggle of these people. My hope is that some day, our movement of human empowerment will reach every struggling life in each unknown corner of the world, whether it's a rough neighborhood of Philadelphia, the earthquake-devastated villages of Gujarat, India, or a malnourished infant in Ethiopia.

I will challenge myself to aspire for more than just my own comfort. We must never get exhausted in keeping every suffering life in our prayers and taking individual action for an end to this suffering.