

SGI-USA – Linda Johnson guidance about practicing effectively

Linda Johnson talks about some of the reasons why, when we practise, we do not always actualise that which we would like, & why. There are a few things that maybe we haven't quite gotten yet

The first thing is we seem to have some misconception about the true cause of our suffering. Esho Funi means there is no separation between my self & my environment. The reason we suffer is because we do not live this principle. It is at the core of this Buddhism & if we are to actualise our full potential as a human being, we must get this concept by living it. It is not enough to understand it intellectually. It's difficult because, as a human being, it feels like the most unnatural thing.

The moment we get into difficulty with another human being, or another human being has hurt us for any reason, the most natural thing is to withdraw, to separate ourselves from that person. It's instinctive in terms of protecting ourselves from getting hurt. And then we look at that other person as we get angry, with very judgemental eyes as to what is wrong with them. The bottom line comes down to, 'I am suffering because you're not acting right' And so, in this view of 'everything's separate from ourselves', we decide we know how to not suffer any more. We decide, 'I'm going to fix you.'

We go inside our heads & develop an elaborate strategy about how to 'fix' that person. We don't learn anything from that, and then we engage the process all over again & again. And then finally, we get to the point of taking the most drastic of actions. We decide, 'I'm out of here.' 'Either I go or you go.' But even if we do that, the same movie, after a while, starts playing again in our life.

Nichiren Daishonin explains that the reason the same movie keeps playing over & over in our lives is because we have a misunderstanding about the true relationship between our selves & our environment. Ultimately, we must come to realise that we are the screenwriters, the producers & the directors of our life & we created every moment with our thoughts & our actions, & the drama that plays out here, WE WROTE! And if you don't like it, you better change the words that you write & you change it from the inside first by thought, word & action."

"Linda Johnson gives an experience about awakening to her deep karma with women & how she went about facing it. She had to chant to see 'What is it that I am supposed to be learning from this?' She said, 'Because everything that happens to me, happens to enable me to become a better human being.'

As she was getting to that place of taking responsibility for what was going on, she had to acknowledge that whether she thought it was justified or not, the fact remained that always with women who are in positions immediately over her, her karma is that she threatens them. Even though it's the most ridiculous thing in the world because she is not interested in the position or title, she is just trying to be herself, she finally had to get to the place of owning it, irrespective of whether she thought it was fair or not. Because karma is whatever movie is playing in your life. And if she is going to change it, she better accept it as the true reality in her life that keeps getting played over.

When she was able to see the common thread with this & other situations in her life where (for whatever reason) she tended to intimidate women who were 'above' her, she decided that she had to use this situation to change her karma once & for all, so that she no longer had to live her life restricted by it. That she can't live her life not being herself. And she needs to be 'free to be me' and at the same time, take responsibility for other people to be free to be themselves. So she started chanting that she would take responsibility to become the kind of woman that could open up &

embrace other women's lives & that was her responsibility & pray 'I will take responsibility to change this. I'm going to open my boss's life. I'm going to make her feel safe. Her relationship with her boss changed immediately. The point is - we must learn to live this concept. It is hard, because we instinctively go to that place of separation & judgement. But the moment we apply this concept to our life, it's amazing how quickly things can change in our life. That's the one thing, we must get that concept.

The second thing is that she tends to see that people bring other religions into Nichiren daishonin's Buddhism. She sees way too often that we're sincerely praying for whatever we want in our lives & then whenever the obstacle hits people think, 'Whoa! What did I do wrong? I must have done something wrong - or else why would this obstacle happen? Maybe I didn't pray sincerely enough or it's a sign that something is wrong with me.' She wants us to banish those thoughts from our lives from now on. In Buddhism, OBSTACLES ARE A SIGN THAT YOU ARE DOING SOMETHING RIGHT!

She takes it a step further. She believes that whatever it is you are chanting for, when you get up from morning gongyo & go about your day - she believes that the obstacles you encounter that day are, in fact, the answer to your prayer. Meaning - every obstacle you encounter during the day is specifically tailored to you & your prayer. It is your gift from the Gohonzon to show you precisely what it is you must no longer be swayed negatively by in order to create your prayer.

Nichiren Daishonin clearly says to us that the one thing that will always stand in the way of achieving our goals is us. He talks in the goshu about us being like a lion - the king of beasts. He also says there is only one thing that can destroy the lion & that is the parasite that lives in the bowels of the lion. She says that translates into our own negativity inside of us that we get swayed by. In other words, she believes that prayers offered to the Gohonzon ought to be prayers of taking the responsibility to create that which we are praying for. The process is always the same. The process is one of winning over our own negativity moment by moment by moment. It is always us being swayed by that 'evil twin' that resides inside of us & is always busy telling us of all the things we cannot do, & it is always us being swayed by that, therefore making causes out of that (thought, word & deed) which perpetuates the same thing. We have to chant to empower our 'Buddha side' so that we are stronger than our negative side or 'evil twin.'

When we have separation eyes, viewing things as separate, we may look at things & say 'reality is telling me that I can't have this.' That is NOT Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism - reality is never telling you that you cannot have it. Reality always has a moment to moment cause & effect relationship with you & your creation through thought, word & actions - & she would suggest that if you think your environment is saying 'you can't have it,' it is merely reflecting the fact that you believe you can't have it. So ultimately we have to use prayer to change lack of belief into belief. It is always about winning over ourselves. It doesn't mean that our negative twin will shut up & you don't need to shut her up. Instead, you need to make her your best friend by looking at her as your test as to how to no longer be swayed negatively by her. And the more you use it that way & respond that way, the more you are making new causes. Because the law of cause & effect is pure, as you continue to make new causes, you must produce new results.

We're always searching for the answer to 'What do I do about this?' 'Do I turn right? Do I turn left?' Nichiren Daishonin says in the Goshu 'On attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime' STOP looking for the answer outside yourself. It only exists in one place - inside of your own life. The answer that is correct for you only exists inside of you. And so one of the reasons we chant is for you to be able to tap that wisdom inside our own life. Another reason we chant is Nichiren Daishonin says we're a Buddha, & he says the only difference between a Buddha & an ordinary human being is just the fact

that the ordinary human being has not awakened yet to the fact that they're a Buddha - that's the only distinction.

Through that gosho & many others he's trying to tell you that everything you need to confront any problem you will ever encounter in your life, you already have inside of you. It's there, & you do not have to change anything about yourself first in order to tap it. You must realise that inside your life is this inexhaustible supply of anything you need to confront any circumstance you will ever find yourself in, & you must start chanting out of that belief & conviction.

You must start living life pro-actively. You must start chanting to tap what you need when you need it. Meaning, if you're in a state of fear, you do not have to stay there & be a victim of your fear unless you choose to. Just like the theory of the ten worlds - because one condition, or feeling, or emotion is active, doesn't mean the other ones don't exist. They will always come out in response to the right cause. The right cause is always specific prayer tapped by Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

So we must chant to call up out of our life what we need when we need it to be able to win over any adversity, any circumstance we ever find ourselves in. Ultimately Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is one of freedom because it says our ability to be happy right now, right here, has absolutely nothing to do with anything or anyone outside of yourself & has absolutely everything to do with you. The circumstances in which you find yourself in life never define who you are or what you can become. How you use your circumstances in life - whether you choose to use them constructively or destructively - determine the effects you produce in your life.

She wants us to realise how incredibly powerful we are and that we are creating this movie called our life every second. It's just sometimes we're controlling it from the negative side rather than the positive side. Realising that, when you understand everything has both potentials then it means that all that's required is a slight attitude adjustment - determine to plug into the positive side of it. So we never have to get rid of anything - even fear, even doubt, even insecurity. We have this concept in Buddhism - attaining enlightenment just as we are. What that means is - when you're in that state of fear, doubt, insecurity, whatever - it's not about chanting to get rid of it, it's about chanting to plug into the enlightened side of it! So you can use it constructively for your life. Everything has a positive function to it. Everything has a negative function to it. It isn't one or the other. Which function we produce is totally & directly related to the relationship we form with it.

It's so vital that we start taking responsibility for what we want in our life - including the quality of the relationships we want in our life. We have to start with 'I must be committed to creating rather than spending my life reacting to where everybody else is, because reacting to where someone else is in the moment, from the strict point of cause & effect, means I am reacting to an effect. The only way to change an effect is with a new cause, so I must become a causal-oriented human being who spends my life focusing on the creation of my dreams rather than looking at life as something to which we merely react & respond. When we respond to where everybody else is, we merely perpetuate the status quo.

Another point -

Nowhere in the gosho does Nichiren Daishonin say 'You will see yourself in the relationships with people around you - everywhere except the SGI.' We tend to bring some misconceptions in here. We tend to associate religion with perfection. We tend to expect merely because we are practising a religion, that people ought to be perfect - and the minute they're not perfect & we find out they're human, we are profoundly discouraged. This is a practice of human revolution, of eternal growth, rather than perfection. And the friction, the rubbing up against each other, is in fact the precise

process that we must go through in order to keep growing as a human being, because without the challenges to motivate us to chant & challenge ourselves we wouldn't grow.

It's really coming to understand that every person in our life exists to teach us how to be a better human being.

In 1996 Vice President Hasegawa gave this guidance – this is guidance to change any relationship problem we'll ever encounter in life – it does not matter who it is with. It is also the guidance the President Toda gave President Ikeda on the subject. The guidance goes: “Every pain, every hurt, every frustration you ever feel on account of another human being, engrave it on your heart – never forget it. Then make sure that you never do that to a single human being.”

He said the point we most often miss is that people teach us through negative example how not to be as powerfully as people teach us through great example of how to be. He said we must understand that the reason we're there experiencing it is because it is our mission & our mission alone to find the solution to the problem. And the solution to the problem is never waiting for the other person to change. Because every time we wait for the other person to change, we have missed our own opportunity to do human revolution – every time we wait for the other person to change we are saying, 'I can't be happy until you change – making me a victim of you, & powerless.'

This Buddhism is about the Buddhism of creation. Any relationship you want in life, you must first be able to create – meaning, everything you want from another human being, you ought first to be able to give them.

We tend to want another person to give first in order to make it safe for us to give back. We have cause & effect backwards! We want the effect without first making the cause. This applies in every relationship, even in the organisation.

There's a reason the lotus flower blooms in the muddiest of swamps. It is amid the realities of our suffering that we can learn how to apply Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism & take the responsibility to free ourselves & change our environment by standing up & taking the responsibility, rather than living our life as a victim waiting for everyone else to get their act together.

The power of one – the Soka Gakkai spirit is the 'stand alone' spirit. But it's 'stand alone' spirit based on unity. Unity doesn't mean that we all look alike or think alike & all have to agree with everything. It does mean that we all share a common goal & a vision in our hearts, & that our commitment to each other is that each one of us will stand up independently – 'I will do this even if no one helps me.' That's true unity.

It is no coincidence that when you go back & re-read the message given to the women for the Feb commemorative meetings, Sensei talked about the 'Century of Women.' In that message, he says, 'American kosen-rufu will surely be a reality if you, my beloved mothers of American kosen-rufu & queens of happiness, continue to build a network of humanism brightly & cheerfully in harmonious unity based upon your strong prayer.'

He was telling us something about what to do to change the organisation – to change our life. He spends a lot of time talking about the power of prayer in this message.

When Linda Johnson was in Japan in January, Sensei defined ichinen in a way she had never heard before. What he said was, 'Ichinen means to pray without a doubt. Whenever you pray without doubt, all of your prayers will be answered. Buddhism = actual proof. If you are not showing actual proof you are not practising Nichiren daishonin's Buddhism correctly.'

Ultimately, Buddhism is only revealed in our behaviour as a human being. Therefore President Ikeda said each one of us must use the power of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to challenge our dreams, our hopes – everything we want to achieve in life & we MUST WIN because ultimately, people ought to be able to say this Buddhism is great because of you!

While Linda was in Japan, a lady gave an experience – She had developed very painful arthritis. The doctors said there was nothing they could do. Then she went to one of the vice-presidents of the Soka Gakkai & he said, 'You know, I think the reason that this has not changed for you is because you have bought what the doctors said. You have bought that you have an incurable disease. But, Nichiren Daishonin says that Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is so powerful that it can change even immutable karma – that karma you think is fixed & unchangeable. The issue becomes – do you believe Nichiren Daishonin? It's ok that doctors don't have a solution to your problem, because you do. You always have. But you've got to start chanting out of that belief & conviction that you have the solution & you've got to start chanting with that power to use Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to eradicate every bit of this painful arthritis out of your body. She thanked him & went home. Then she called him back 15 days later to thank him because she was pain-free.

Linda loves that experience because it reminds her of how, so often, we use our brain & our mind to perceive outside of ourselves. In various ways, all of us, every single day of our lives, concede defeat. We look at the environment with 'separatist eyes' & we judge what's possible & what's not possible. Those things we decide ARE impossible we never even bother to challenge with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. How can you make the impossible possible if you won't go for it?

Nichiren Daishonin says, 'Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is like the roar of a lion. What sickness could possibly be an obstacle? But he warns us that, 'The mighty sword of the Lotus Sutra will be useless in the hands of a coward.' He's constantly saying, 'You are the Buddha.' Everything you need to manifest your impossible dream in your life – every day of your life – you have always had. Wake up to it! Develop the courage to understand that the problems & obstacles you encounter in your life are PRECISELY your gifts, showing you the things you must learn to win over. You must no longer be swayed negatively by this thing in order to have that which you want & ultimately this is a process. This is a practice of ever expanding – uncovering your potential as a human being, which is unlimited. It is limitless.

The exploration of that, the discovery of that, the actualisation of that is a gift that only we can give ourselves by having the courage when we're facing deeper & darker, scarier things about ourselves. To have the courage to face it with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, with the determination & the conviction that this is precisely what we must walk through to get to the other side & that ultimately we are all chanting to become happy. Every suffering you go through – if you will face it, own it, use it, use Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to go through it – not around it, not avoid it: that suffering is, in fact, the route to your happiness. Whatever 'happiness' means to you, it ought to mean – at a minimum – a life that is no longer limited by restrictions. All the fears & all the doubt & all the insecurities in our life that we refuse to deal with, that we run from, that we avoid, we empower to get stronger. We empower it by repeating the same pattern over & over again in our life in thought, word & action. Those things that we allow to take over our life become the prisons that we construct for ourselves.

Stay connected to others & really take responsibility to change things & YOU will be empowered. Take responsibility for their breakthrough & for everything in your life. Sensei calls it 'sustained engagement.' If we truly understand that every human being equally possesses Buddha potential in their life, then even with the people our whole life wants to turn away & run away from, we must sustain our engagement with that human being until both our lives have somehow been enriched by each other to a degree that they could not have if we had run away. Your ability to learn from another human being is independent of whether you like them or not. Nothing is coincidence. I am writing this script & this person is in my life to teach me something. They're here to teach me how to be a better human being & I'd better get on with the lesson because until I learn the lesson, that person & people like them will continue to come into my life. Their whole function is to teach me this lesson. Benefit is the physical manifestation that you got the internal lesson!

We must understand that there is nothing we cannot do with Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. There is no problem bigger than that. When you pray, take the responsibility through your prayer that you will help another human being have a breakthrough. Take the responsibility for your leader to win, for your husband to win, for your teacher or your boss to win. Anything that you run from, anything that you separate from will cause you to lose all your power as a human being. Connect to your pain, connect to your suffering – in the sense of owning it & deciding that you will take the responsibility to change it. When you stay connected & take that kind of responsibility for your life - because it's the choice you made about the way to live your life – you will be empowered. You will learn that the only limitations that you ultimately have – and will ever have – are the ones you put on yourself.

This is truly a magnificent practice. Decide that you owe it to yourself to have the most wonderful life – a life in which you're able to joyfully use everything to create undeniable joy & value, a life in which you take the responsibility to create precisely the kind of life that you want for yourself. A life where you no longer live reacting to where everybody else is but instead become the kind of person that sets the example for everything you want everyone else to be.

Goethe (via President Ikeda) – a great motto – 'Rather than being swayed by others – you should sway others.'