

**PERSPECTIVE: Lessons of Death**  
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After 16 years of practice, I moved from one side of Chicago to another. At my new discussion meeting, I met a wonderful, vibrant young woman. At that moment, we embarked upon a journey that would change my life forever.

She encountered a cancer that recurred often and challenged her many, many times. When it was thought the illness was conquered once and for all, she and her husband came to me for guidance about having children. This was nine years after our first encounter.

After a long discussion, my final words were: "Something wonderful awaits you. I feel it in my heart." Within days, the cancer resurfaced with a vengeance. I had no idea this was the wonderful challenge that awaited them.

It was wonderful because I really believe that earthly desires are enlightenment, and I knew that, no matter what, they would win. Ultimately, she brought out the greatest amount of courage and determination. Everyone who knew of her life and situation was encouraged by her strength and commitment to victory in every circumstance.

When she died, she was so strong and her death was so natural, there was an element of beauty and grace. This was the victory she created through her courage, character and commitment.

Because of her and her husband, I learned some profound lessons. I learned about confronting a life-and-death matter. I learned about challenging my Western notions of death as "bad" and "prolonging life at all costs." I learned that when I trust the Gohonzon and open my life to the Mystic Law, I can see beyond the surface of the situation and view it with the eye and mind of a Buddha.

The following lessons I learned left me more free from worry and feeling absolutely fortunate.

- *In every moment of life, we experience struggles: good vs. evil, the Buddha nature vs. fundamental darkness. It's the way the universe works. Fighting against illness is simply another aspect of this struggle.*

This is a wonderfully simplistic thought. This is how it works! I think I've been afraid in other situations because I was in denial, not understanding these situations are normal.

- *Victory means the illness hasn't prevented the patient or his or her loved ones from chanting for personal happiness or the happiness of others.*

I had always assumed victory meant eradicating a problem. I understand now, however, that continuing to practice, despite these problems looming prominently in my life, I achieve the absolute victory I'm fighting for. This really expands my understanding that Buddhism is concerned with winning. Simply: If I don't continue, I've lost.

- *We all face death. Even if your partner dies because of an illness, you will have to take care of yourself and live your life to the fullest for both your sake. If you don't go forward, not only will you suffer, but the person who is ill will suffer also. We each have a special mission to move forward with SGI President Ikeda for the sake of world peace. By advancing courageously, we can demonstrate the greatness of this Buddhism.*

This clarifies for me the connectedness President Ikeda talks about in his poems. And it further clarifies my challenges as normal, reasonable and, if viewed correctly, not overwhelming at all.

• *We each must live a victorious life and complete our mission for the sake of our loved ones and ourselves.*

Everyone handles such things differently. There are no rules about when to go to activities, how much to smile, whether to cry or not cry, etc. We can just be ourselves and do our best to stick close to the organization.

• *In the Gosho, the Daishonin wrote that every person has a fixed life span and karma. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the Daishonin said we can live beyond that fixed life span. And if we should exceed that life span by even one or two days, that's a tremendous benefit.*

Like everyone else, I want to live a long, healthy life. This lesson further impressed upon me how lucky I am to chant and survive — no, not just survive but to prosper and live in these turbulent times.

I am so thankful I met this young woman. Because of her and her husband, I understand even more passionately the connection between efforts and attitudes in the challenge to live. They have truly changed my life forever. I wish everyone such meaningful relationships based on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

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