

SIGN POSTS: Friends of the Lotus Sutra
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Now if you disobey the words of a parent, one who is easy to come by, and follow a friend of the Lotus Sutra, one who can rarely be encountered, you will not only be able to attain Buddhahood, but will also be able to lead to enlightenment the parent whom you disobeyed. (“The Three Obstacles and Four Devils,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 246)

My father has become ill. His kidneys, prostate and bladder are not properly functioning, and the doctor’s diagnosis is bleak.

When I recently went to Japan to see him, in a tiny, crowded apartment in a housing project built in the wake of the 1995 earthquake, he was bedridden, old and skinny. “He’s been rarely eating,” said my sister.

My father has always opposed my Buddhist practice — ever since I joined the SGI at 3. I remember in my childhood how my heart would start beating tremulously during gongyo when I heard him come home. In 1989, when I told him that I had joined the SGI-USA staff and would not return to Japan to take over his business, he told me that I was no longer part of his family.

This passage strikes a chord in my heart. Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Ikegami Munenaga, whose father threatened to disown him if he did not renounce his faith in the Daishonin’s Buddhism. Here the Daishonin encourages Munenaga to carry out his practice with “a friend of the Lotus Sutra,” for it will eventually lead both him and his father to happiness.

During my short stay in Japan, I did whatever I could to support my father — feeding him, talking with him, rubbing his hands and feet and bathing him. As I slept by his bed the last night of my stay, he muttered, “I didn’t know I had such a wonderful son.”

I appreciate all the SGI members I know — my friends of the Lotus Sutra. Only because they practiced alongside me through my difficult times have I become a better son.

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