

Questions and Answers on Faith: How Does Buddhism View Sickness?

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Q: What does Buddhism have to say when Buddhist practitioners become ill?

A: First, Buddhism views sickness as something inherent in life and therefore unavoidable. It is part of the cycle of birth, old age, sickness and death.

Yet Buddhism urges us to awaken to the fact that illness is not something permanent in life — it is a temporary phenomenon — and that it can be a meaningful event in one's eternal life.

When we fall ill, we tend to see the current sickness as the only thing that matters, and therefore we can become its slave, perceiving it as an immovable wall or foreboding obstacle separating us from happiness. Some people who are ill may even lose the will to live out their existence joyfully.

However, when we realize that becoming ill is only a natural phase of our lives — and that it can be an opportunity to build an even more solid foundation of happiness in ourselves — then, we can tap the courageous spirit to face the illness and battle it, as Nichiren Daishonin states, “From illness arises the mind that seeks the way” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 280).

Therefore, the important thing when it comes to this problem is to have strong will to triumph over the “devil of sickness.” This is the faith with which you can say to yourself: “I will defeat my sickness! I will change poison into medicine!”

In other words, often times, sickness itself is not the real problem. If we are defeated in our life-condition by sickness, *that* is the problem.

SGI President Ikeda says: “In life, you may, by rights, become sick from time to time. However, as you practice to the Gohonzon, you will come to realize that you are now sick because being sick now is the most natural thing for your life at this moment. In other words, you can consider your sickness to be the sickness of *hon'nu* [a natural illness that accords with the rhythm of the Law]. Put another way, if your life-condition remains healthy through the practice of faith, you will never be swayed by your sickness. You will never fall into painful agony due to your illness. Rather, as you go through your current sickness, you will find your true self or absolute happiness solidifying.”

In the “Medicine King” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, there is a phrase that reads: “This sutra can save all living beings.... It can cause living beings to cast off all distress, all sickness and pain. It can unloose all the bonds of birth and death” (*The Lotus Sutra*, p. 286).

Lecturing on this passage, Nichiren Daishonin states, “In view of the enlightened vision of the essential teachings of the ‘Life Span’ chapter, ‘cast off all distress, all sickness and pain’ means to have a clear awareness that all our sickness, pain and distress are natural parts of our lives that occur as they should” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 773).

Finally, President Toda gave the following encouragement to a person struggling with a serious illness: “A human being has a body that has the potential of developing all kinds of disease, including stomach cancer and tuberculosis. Likewise, we innately possess the ability to cure sickness in the body. Curing our own illness is just like the person who has climbed a slope and will surely climb down it. I can say this with conviction based upon the philosophy of Buddhism.”

He added: “Faith is not something we practice out of formality. Chant Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to the Gohonzon with all your heart — with a burning desire in your heart to

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overcome your sickness. No sickness will remain uncured if you chant with the type of determination to offer your entire life from now on for the cause of the Gohonzon, that is, for kosen-rufu, for the peace and happiness of all humanity.”

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