

**CHANGING PAST MISTAKES  
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**Ashvaghosha was prepared to behead himself in order to pay for his past offense, saying, “I have been my own worst enemy, leading myself to hell.” But Punyayashas admonished him, saying, “Do not behead yourself! Instead, use your brains and your mouth to praise Mahayana teachings.” (“Curing Karmic Disease,” *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], pp. 216–17)**

Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to Ota Nyudo to encourage him when he was sick. He tells Ota that it is his karma that has manifested as this illness, and that he can rid himself of it through having faith in Nam-myoho-rence-kyo.

The Daishonin gives examples of various people who experienced similar struggles in order to overcome their past ignorance and unhappiness. He suggests that Ota’s illness is an opportunity for change and is cause for rejoicing.

The above quote is an example of one bodhisattva who wanted to behead himself in order to make up for his past mistakes. This particular sentiment rang true to me, as it perfectly described the pain and humiliation I can feel when I realize that my present unhappiness is the direct result of causes I’ve made. It can often feel debilitating in the heated moment of recognition and I, being prone to dramatics, always want to take some major course of emotional action — not unlike beheading myself.

Punyayashas told Ashvagnosha to “use your brains and your mouth” to make up for your past mistakes. And the Daishonin encourages Ota to use his faith in the Gohonzon and his wisdom to overcome his suffering. Looking at my life, chanting about it and recognizing the potential to use my stupidity for good, to learn and change and not be defeated by my ego, which is reeling from the blow of not being perfect, is the beginning of real and lasting change and a much deeper happiness.

**WT**