

YOUTH STUDY MAY
“LETTER TO THE BROTHERS”
THE MAJOR WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN, VOL. 1, PP. 131–48

AS FEARLESS AS NICHIREN DAISHONIN
BY PATRICIA FORD, KANSAS CITY, MO.

Yet you must grit your teeth and never slacken in your faith. Be as fearless as Nichiren when he faced Hei no Saemon. (MW-1, 140)

This letter to the Ikegami brothers was written from the depths of Nichiren Daishonin’s heart to encourage them never to give up their faith.

Under the influence of Ryokan, leader of the Ritsu sect, the Ikegamis’ father disowned the elder brother, Munenaka, for practicing Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism. The younger brother, Munenaga, then stood to inherit the father’s wealth and social position. Thus the two brothers were being pitted against one another. Disownment in Japan was a serious matter in the 13th century. The elder son, Munenaka, would lose everything if he did not obey his father.

Here Nichiren Daishonin encourages the brothers to persevere no matter what, even in the face of family strife. He encourages them to have the kind of faith he had when he faced Hei no Saemon at Tatsunokuchi and was nearly beheaded.

Even when confronted with death, Nichiren Daishonin never recanted. Instead, he chanted and pushed ahead undaunted, triumphing in the end! By doing so, Nichiren Daishonin showed his disciples that through correct faith and practice, one could overcome any problem.

Fear is one of the greatest obstacles in our practice. Having the courage to chant and take action despite fear is a challenge we must all face at sometime in our lives. Hardships arise as a test of faith. Gandhi said: “Fear is not a disease of the body; fear kills the soul. If we let our spirit wither and die, we lose. And that only strengthens the hand of our would be oppressors” (Jan. 8, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 9). When we have a problem, rather than backing away, this is the time to chant seriously. And what better time than now!

FEEL UNAPPRECIATED? KEEP GOING!
BY MARK KAPLAN, SAN FRANCISCO

You two brothers are like the hermit and his disciple. If either of you gives up halfway, you will both fail to attain Buddhahood. You are like the two wings of a bird or two eyes of a man. (MW-1, 146)

Have you ever felt like Shariputra, who, out of compassion, gouges out his own eyeball to help a demon? The demon sniffs the eyeball, throws it down and steps on it (MW-1, 137). You think, “What’s the point?” “Could I really be on the right track here?” “Am I really helping anyone?”

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin encourages two brothers and their wives to unite in faith in the face of severe family circumstances. In his message to them, we can learn something about the importance of developing deep unity with other people in our SGI organization.

Although it is easy to become discouraged when our sincere efforts only seem to result in

being misunderstood or unappreciated, President Ikeda reminds us that “All our efforts for kosen-rufu — even if they sometimes seem in vain, even if they are a struggle — have great meaning and value for our lives. They steer us in a positive direction. This is the power of faith” (March 5, 1999, *World Tribune*, p. 4).

Unfortunately, Shariputra did not understand this wisdom and, though he continued practicing for himself, he stopped helping others. When we become discouraged with the SGI or someone in the organization, it is NOT the time to retreat. “You may hate this world, but you cannot escape” (MW-1, 139). Only by confronting your specific situation with courage and resolution can you change both your specific circumstances and the karma of the greater world. This was the message that Nichiren Daishonin wished to convey to the Ikegami brothers. This is our mission.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin was determined to preserve unity in the brothers’ family. Their father was determined to split the brothers apart, and their wives could easily have been discouraged or swayed themselves. Therefore, though the Daishonin could have written four different letters to each of the brothers and their wives, he addressed *all four* in one letter, doing everything he could to pull them together. That’s why he says in this writing, “If either of you gives up halfway, you will both fail to attain Buddhahood.”

It is often said that the worst cause someone can make is destroying the unity of the believers. In our personal lives, too, the worst devil we can face is one that threatens our unity. When faced with personal conflict, if we simply complain or give up, we will not win and neither will other people involved. We are all on the same quest. By persevering in the face of conflict, our persecutor becomes a positive influence to help us grow. We grow, they grow, the entire organization grows.

If we want to grow as individuals and as an organization, I feel each one of us, especially young people, have to be prepared to be temporarily misunderstood or unappreciated. We sometimes come up with good ideas that are not always embraced immediately. But we must continue, gain the trust of those around us, and show what we mean, no matter how long it takes.

As President Ikeda writes, “[V]arious kinds of misunderstanding or resistance may be met with.... But such is the destiny of those who introduce something new. It is by overcoming those negative forces...that the movement for kosen-rufu will be carried forth” (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 76). “Only when one fights and wins over dire circumstances will his victory shine brilliantly in history” (March 1990 *Seikyo Times*, p. 15).

DID YOU KNOW? BY ULISSE GALLO, CHICAGO

It took Winston Churchill three years to finish the eighth grade because he had trouble learning English.

Ironically, years later, Oxford University asked him to give the address at their commencement ceremony. His address was only three words long: “Never Give Up” (from *Chicken Soup for the Surviving Soul*).

We never know the impact our individual victory will have in our own lives or on others. By not giving up in the eighth grade, Winston Churchill laid the foundation in his life that would eventually earn him the respect of the entire world.

FYI

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Subject: World Tribune 04/23/99 n.3239 p.11 WT990423p11

Author: Patricia Ford, Mark Kaplan

Keywords: Attitude Behavior Brothers Ford Kaplan Letter Mark Patricia Study Tribune World Youth

The Ritsu Sect was founded by Dosen, as he is commonly known in Japan, who lived from 595–667A.D. Its teachings are based on the Vinaya or monastic rules. The Vinaya is thought by many scholars to be one of the earliest teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.

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