

## **BATTLING FUNDAMENTAL DARKNESS BY DAVID EISENBERG, SAN FRANCISCO**

Believers in the Lotus Sutra should fear those who attempt to obstruct their practice more than they fear bandits, burglars, night raiders, tigers, wolves, or lions – even more than invasion by the Mongols. This world is the domain of the devil king of the sixth heaven. All of its people have been under the rule of this devil king since time without beginning. (“Letter to the Brothers,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, 495)

**Background:** Nichiren Daishonin wrote this letter to the Ikegami brothers, Munenaka and Munenaga. Their father was a follower of Ryokan, one of the leading priests who opposed the Daishonin. The father disowned Munenaka, creating a situation that made it nearly impossible for him to survive economically and socially. Though vehemently opposed to the beliefs of his two sons, the brothers eventually succeeded in converting their father to the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

When I first read “Letter to the Brothers,” I instantly identified with the two brothers because I, too, had struggled for many years with my father over my Buddhist practice. I began my practice as a teenager and my father, with whom I had not lived for several years after my parents’ divorce, was dead set against this new development in my life. I believe that although deep in his life he could accept that Buddhism was valuable, he wasn’t prepared to admit it at that time. I also began practicing with my mother and sister, and I’m sure he felt that he would lose his children to her and her new religion! He tried everything he could think of to discourage me from practicing. While his opposition helped create a difficult and stressful time for me, I certainly was not in the tenuous position of Munenaka and Munenaga, the recipients of “Letter to the Brothers,” who literally had their survival threatened by their father’s hostility toward the Daishonin’s Buddhism.

I was, however, still immature and really didn’t possess enough of an understanding of Buddhism to explain myself to my father without getting into a big fight. Many times he would engage me in debate, often trying to confuse me or back me into a corner. During those exchanges, he would ask loaded questions or query me for documentary proof that I simply did not yet have. I was often intimidated by these arguments and had a very difficult time maintaining control and poise. I remember storming out of his house or a restaurant on several occasions, so angry and frustrated I was shaking.

### **There are forces that will oppose our practice**

According to the Buddhist concept of the three obstacles and four devils—forces that oppose one’s practice—the third obstacle is that of opposition from one’s parents. My father was a manifestation of this principle. It would actually take me quite a few years and many experiences in faith before I could understand the significant role he played in the development of my practice.

For the past twelve or thirteen years, I have been very involved as a youth division leader in the SGI-USA, participating in activities, commemorative events and behind-the-scenes efforts. Through those activities, I have seen so many aspects of my life change and develop and I have so much appreciation for the fortune I now have in my life. But that does not mean I have not experienced setbacks and struggle! It is precisely when I am struggling the most that I read “Letter to the Brothers” and am reminded about how precious my Buddhist practice is and how I must not allow obstacles or difficulties to sway me from striving toward enlightenment.

In this letter, Nichiren Daishonin goes into great detail to explain to the brothers how valuable our practice is and what a tragedy it would be to abandon it. The Daishonin gives the brothers many examples of terrible causes, the consequences of which are still not as harmful as abandoning the Lotus Sutra, imploring them to not give up. The Daishonin’s great concern and care for these two young men literally leaps off the page. I was so touched by that compassion when I first read “Letter to the Brothers.” I quickly realized that it was my nature to get frustrated when I didn’t receive quick results and that deep in my heart, I harbored doubt about the Gohonzon. Of course, when things were going smoothly, or when I was involved in a big activity where I could get caught up in the rhythm of the event and benefits were just rolling in, I was fine. But at those times when I had to work hard to elevate my life condition and big problems appeared, I was whining and complaining inside.

In “Letter to the Brothers,” Nichiren Daishonin goes on to say, “The great demon of fundamental darkness can even enter the bodies of bodhisattvas who have reached near-perfect enlightenment and prevent them from attaining the Lotus Sutra’s blessing of perfect enlightenment. How easily can he then obstruct those in any lower stage of practice!” (WND, 496). I understand that it is part of my fundamental darkness—blindness to the true nature of my own life—to be so easily swayed by problems and difficulties. Because of this, I have made a serious determination to fight through all obstacles and use my victories and fighting spirit as a source of encouragement to others. This means sharing those struggles, which in and of itself is my human revolution.

## **Taking responsibility for his life**

Over these past few years, I have had to look inside myself and see if I am really behaving as a disciple of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda and Nichiren Daishonin. That was not always easy, and as I learned, I cannot really look if I am not willing to see what’s there. As I chanted daimoku and challenged myself to understand President Ikeda’s spirit, I came to realize that I had to courageously develop my sense of justice and the willingness to stand up for what is right. I had to do this even if that meant someone might not like me or I might not be popular. That also meant I had to be willing to be challenged and not always be right myself. One thing I have learned is that I have the potential to be both authoritarian toward others and to give in to authoritarian behavior myself. I believe that in order to truly develop our lives, we must make a commitment to ridding ourselves of this authoritarian nature, both in how we treat others and how we allow ourselves to be treated.

After several years of total estrangement from my father, we have repaired our relationship and treat each other with mutual respect and appreciation. I say mutual because I realized that over the years, I was not simply the victim in our relationship

difficulties. His opposition to my practice was very real and he did many things to try to disrupt it. He wasn't able to respect the choice I was making. However, I can now see how I used my practice to exclude him from my life and hurt him. I had to acknowledge my role in our problems before I could even begin to repair the relationship. Now I feel a great sense of appreciation toward him. My Buddha nature was also able to grow through this process.

I believe that our human revolution is an internal battle between our Buddha nature and our fundamental darkness. President Ikeda is constantly encouraging us to develop our intellect and our ability to perceive the true reality of all circumstances. When we do this, we cannot be fooled and are able to recognize why we experience difficulties and what we need to do to change our suffering into joy. He reminds us that Buddhism is win or lose. Any situation or circumstance can become a victory or defeat. It is up to us to decide which it will be.

In *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda says, "Many negative and evil states of mind arise from that fundamental darkness, including distrust, hate, jealousy, the desire to dominate others and the impulse to kill. Nam-myoho-renge-kyo cuts this fundamental darkness off at the root and allows the light of true wisdom—that is, fundamental enlightenment or the inherent Buddha nature—to illuminate our lives and thus transform hate into compassion, destruction into creation, and distrust into trust. We also call this human revolution" (*World Tribune*, 8/28/98, p. 5).

More than ever I am determined to challenge my life and my fundamental darkness through continuous practice. I have seen a direct connection between my personal growth and the effect I have on those around me. As my sense of mission grows and I find greater capacity in my life to work for the sake of others, I know that I will show unquestionable actual proof of this great philosophy. If I am to encourage others to fight for their dreams, I myself must be in the forefront of that battle. President Ikeda has shown that all of our dreams can become reality. All we have to do is believe it in our hearts.

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