

**PASSAGES TO VICTORY (5)
FACING THE INEVITABLE
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Particular passages from the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin have become favorites of those who practice his Buddhism. This series introduces some of those passages and the people whose lives they have impacted, proving that it is, indeed, a living Buddhism.

“If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-enge-kyo. Chanting Myoho-enge-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life... Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your life” (“On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, p. 3).

BACKGROUND: This letter was written to Toki Jonin in 1260, two years after Nichiren Daishonin established his teaching of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime” is one of the writings that focuses most clearly on the tenets of his Buddhism. It reveals the concrete practice for attaining Buddhahood, namely chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

Difficult situations will arise in our lives from time to time. When they come along, we can make one of two choices: we can retreat or face our problems head-on with the determination to resolve them. A situation arose where I thought I was attacking a problem head-on, but it took years for me to see that I was actually avoiding the inevitable.

I was diagnosed with fibroid tumors in 1992. Surgery was recommended, but at that time, I chose trying to heal myself through making lifestyle changes and my Buddhist practice. I didn’t like the idea of having my body cut open. However, I wasn’t always consistent with those changes or my practice. Meanwhile, my tumors were getting worse.

Finally, one day three years later, I passed out at work. I was admitted to the hospital and it was discovered that my blood count was low and dropping quickly. I needed a blood transfusion. The doctor informed me that I needed to have the tumors removed; they were causing me to bleed profusely. I had to be placed on medication for seven months to build up my blood count so I could have surgery. The side effects of the medication were intense. I went through a menopausal state, gained thirty-five pounds and became depressed.

I finally accepted the fact that my way of healing myself was not working and had my first surgery in January 1996. Afterward, my doctor told me the tumors were covering the area where a baby would sit and that was causing the excessive bleeding. Even if had wanted to, I could not have gotten pregnant. I had to go through the same procedure the next month to remove more tumors and correct the cause of bleeding from the first surgery.

The surgery did not affect my business (I own a hair salon) because it was an outpatient procedure and I only had to be off my feet for a few days. I felt no pain and everything seemed

to return to normal. However, I still had other tumors and once the medication I was taking wore off, they would have to be removed too.

In 1997, I started to feel pain in my stomach. I saw my doctor for a routine visit and he said to me, “Kim, you’re going to have to make a decision about this soon because the tumors are growing and they have to come out.” The longer I waited, the larger the fibroids became. I again tried to resolve this problem without more surgery, but I wasn’t consistent with my regimen.

When I saw my doctor in May 1999, he was more concerned than he had been in the past, particularly about my ability to conceive. He was unsure about my health and the outcome of additional surgery. Consequently, I lost confidence in him and became even more firm in my decision not to have another surgery.

In December 1999, I felt pain like I had never experienced in the pit of my stomach while doing sit-ups. This time, another doctor examined me. This doctor shared my views on holistic healing, which was important to me. He determined that the fibroids were the size of a five-month-old fetus! I was worried but my new doctor was encouraging and confident. We seemed to be in accord spiritually; I felt like I was talking to a Buddhist. He convinced me that it really was time I had the surgery. Afterward, he said he would start me on a natural-herb treatment to rebuild my body and health. He was confident I could become pregnant later. My other doctor thought I might have to have a hysterectomy.

We set a date for surgery in February 2000 but because of my finances, I decided to wait until September. I wanted to catch up on my bills before adding more. By September, my bills were still not current and I had been unable to save any money. I rescheduled surgery for October 6, 2000.

I had no idea what to do about my financial situation. I sat in front of the Gohonzon and said to myself, “I am ready to let go of these emotions and negative energy.” I wrote down my goals and chanted. My first goal was to have the best medical team. My second goal was a successful surgery—that they would only have to remove the tumors and not my uterus. My third goal was to return to work within six weeks and fulfill my financial obligations. Little did I know that at that moment, the day of reckoning was upon me.

There were thirty-seven benign tumors present, but only thirty-five could be removed because the other two were so deep inside me, it would have been too risky to attempt to remove them, but I was able to keep my uterus. I had a great medical team and returned home in four days. I received tremendous support from friends, family and SGI-USA members.

But I was dealing with more than my physical problems. Two weeks later, I became so depressed that I wished I were dead. Not only did I have to deal with the effects of having major surgery, but I was also facing severe financial problems. My mortgage and utility payments were late. The payroll for my business was late and so was my car payment. I had also broken up with my boyfriend. I was used to being in control and I felt like my whole world was falling apart. I was angry that I had so much suffering at one time. It was not until I received a visit from my SGI-USA leaders, Michael and Valerie Ewing, that I began to understand what was happening.

Michael read passages to me from “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime” and Valerie explained significant points so that I could grasp their meaning with my life. She was very warm and encouraging and shared her own struggles. I was struck when she asked me why I doubted the power of the Gohonzon. A deeper understanding of my nature came to me.

For the first time, I saw that it was because of my own arrogance and foolishness that I had delayed the surgery I needed years ago. I saw my life repeating that of my mother. She had

been beset with financial and health problems and I thought if I simply relied on my practice and myself, I wouldn't have to face the same karma. However, Buddhism teaches common sense. I was treating my practice as if the Gohonzon would bestow my wishes like magic. I saw how frustrated I had become when after so many years, I was still struggling with the same issues; all the while I was compromising my practice.

I knew I had to deepen my faith if I was to change my karma. It was hard to accept that I was experiencing the effects of causes I had made, but I felt immeasurably better knowing I could turn my situation around. I made a determination to really see myself as a Buddha and respect my life.

Once I determined not to be defeated, things started to change. I practiced steadily and studied the *World Tribune*, *Living Buddhism* and President Ikeda's guidance. I read and reread the passage from *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* quoted above; I was determined to show actual proof.

My life is different now. I have compassion for people — something I lacked before. I cherish those who love me, especially my mother. She was there for me throughout my struggles and I have a new appreciation for her. Most importantly, I understand how important it is to use my practice first to challenge my problems head-on.

I hope that I can positively affect others with my new outlook. I am the lion king that President Ikeda so often talks about. I can say that I am enjoying my struggles and have awakened to my true self. Best of all, my health is in order. I will keep chanting and showing actual proof of the validity of this practice with my life.