

**WHEN WE FACE DISAPPOINTMENT
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Ever feel defeated? 'It is in this moment of very human emotion,' Matilda Buck says, 'that we can pro-foundly strengthen our faith. Faith that is not challenged doesn't have a chance to grow.'

One of my favorite letters from Nichiren Daishonin, and one of the shortest and most humanistic, is "Happiness in This World." In just two paragraphs, the Daishonin tells us that we all have the power of the Buddha within our lives. It is with that self-identity, he says, that we should view the events in our lives. He also tells us that strengthening our faith is the key to happiness: "There is no true happiness other than upholding faith in the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by 'peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences.' Though worldly troubles may arise, never let them disturb you. No one can avoid problems, not even sages or worthies" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 681).

But what do we do when we are disturbed by our "worldly troubles"? It may be that we prayed and made every effort toward a certain goal, but did not achieve it. It may be that some heart-wrenching problem has recurred. Sometimes we are so disturbed that we don't even want to chant or talk to anyone. It is only human to feel disappointment, hurt, loss of hope—even betrayal.

I believe it is in this moment of very human emotion that we can profoundly strengthen our faith. Faith that is not challenged doesn't have a chance to grow. The secret is to seize that moment of suffering and disappointment from the perspective of a Bodhisattva of the Earth and do something great.

It takes courage to change our mindset, but we can. "Attaining 'peace and security in this life' doesn't mean having a life free from all difficulties," SGI President Ikeda tells us, "but that whatever difficulties arise, without being shaken in the least, you can summon up the unflinching courage and conviction to fight against and overcome them. This is the state of life of 'peace and security in this life'" (*Learning from the Gosho*, p. 241).

Recently, a young woman in the Midwest applied for admission to Soka University of America, Aliso Viejo. At first, she was reluctant, but eventually she put her heart into the application. It was a challenge in every sense of the word. When she wasn't accepted, it was a blow. She thought to herself: "It must be for the best. After all, everything is a benefit." But in her heart was a whole different message, one of stinging rejection. Her confidence spiraled downward, her self-image crumbled. As she chanted about the situation, righteous anger began to seethe. "I really worked hard," she recalled with a defiant sense of pride. The result was that she cemented her resolve to find the deeper meaning of what she was experiencing. She wouldn't settle for defeat. That attitude alone is a victory. She doesn't know the final outcome yet, but her mindset is one of seeking.

A young man in California was sure he would be accepted to SUA, AV. He was stunned when it didn't happen. Was he misled? Was he wrong about the direction he thought his life would go? One thing was for sure—this experience made him realize that he had had a very narrow view of his future. Avenues are beginning to open that he'd never recognized before.

This is not the first time (nor will it be the last) that these young people have faced disappointment. When I see how they respond, how they deal with their disappointment, how they become stronger individuals with a clearer sense of purpose, it fills me with hope as well. As the Daishonin says, “No one can avoid problems” — so it’s not a question of eliminating disappointment from our lives, but rather using it to deepen our faith and strengthen our self-identity.

I would like to share some guidance from SGI Vice President Yasunori Takimoto and his wife, Suzuko. I asked them how they both overcame fourth-stage cancer, and they described four determinations that they made. I realized that the heart of their message addresses all obstacles: illness, relationships, work and, of course, our own internal battles, like disappointment or hopelessness.

- 1) Through this experience, I will become someone who does not doubt the Gohonzon, no matter what happens.
- 2) As a Bodhisattva of the Earth, I have the mission to experience this, and as a Bodhisattva of the Earth, I have the mission to create a victory.
- 3) I will share the power of Buddhism with others, even as I grapple with this experience.
- 4) I won’t let my spirits stay down. I won’t make a place in my life for negativity to settle.

I want to comment on the last point about making a place for negativity in our lives. Feeling depressed, hurt or feeling rejected are natural human feelings, especially in response to a setback. But how we process them is important. If we see something disappointing as evidence that we can’t win and we then feel it is emblematic of our whole life, we are making a home for negativity to settle. It’s better to take the situation and isolate it — to put it in quarantine. We can say: “Yes, I’m disappointed about this situation, but it is not the totality of my life. I will chant about it, it will not pull my entire spirit down.”

These points may seem simple, but they are hard to master. When we do, and when we take the perspective of a Bodhisattva of the Earth, we will find tremendous meaning in all we experience. Most important, we will become people who truly experience peace and security, because every setback becomes a step forward, and every disappointment becomes a source of the most profound growth and strength.