

EXPERIENCE—CATHY ROBINSON, LONG ISLAND, N.Y. THE KEY TO BREAKING THROUGH DEADLOCKS

After overcoming numerous obstacles, Cathy Robinson appreciates the importance of abundant daimoku.

When I began to practice, in my early 20s, stressful events were a constant. I went through a divorce, suffered through repeated encounters with men that left me feeling rejected and endured the suicide of my 49-year-old mother and the early death of my father at age 53. I was an only child with no close family and this wave of loss filled me with a sense of panic and loneliness that I could fill only with hours of chanting daimoku. I literally could not leave my house before chanting many hours and would anxiously return to the Gohonzon, desperate to refill the void that threatened to overwhelm me.

After my parents' deaths, I made the determination to change both the unhealthy mental as well as physical karma that had plagued my family for generations. My leaders and friends supplied heartfelt support that enabled me to continue.

After months of chanting at least three hours each day, I learned to put the Gohonzon in the center of my life, rather than a man. With this new attitude, I unknowingly met "Mr. Right" while attending a class in college. I introduced him to Buddhism, and after dating for a short time, we became engaged and married. Ned and I have been married now for 18 years. I went on to receive a master's degree and become an elementary school teacher.

My next major struggle was trying to have a baby. We tried desperately, wanting so badly to have a full, happy family with a child. Month after month, we were disappointed.

After having tried every medical strategy to become pregnant, my husband and I decided to seek encouragement from our SGI-USA leaders. We spoke with someone who instructed us to chant with 100 percent faith and confidence and not to be swayed by medical opinion. This senior friend in faith had been diagnosed with incurable lung cancer and had been given six months to live, but he was not influenced by the doctor's diagnosis and chanted seven hours a day. At the time we met with him, seven years had passed since he was diagnosed and he was in good health, continuing to chant abundant daimoku—three hours every day.

After our meeting, I changed my attitude in front of the Gohonzon and began to chant with total confidence. One month later, I became pregnant. Although the pregnancy was ectopic (with the fertilized ovum developing outside the uterus) and ended quickly with surgery, I was still hopeful. I knew I could become pregnant. I went back to the Gohonzon with my prayer for a healthy baby. Six months later, at the age of 40, I again became pregnant with a boy, now a healthy, active 9-year-old.

I had begun to notice a pattern. Each time I succeeded in breaking through a deadlock, it always followed a period of time in which, motivated by a major problem, I was chanting enough daimoku to feel completely happy and fulfilled inside, before the problem showed any sign of changing. Wasn't it after I had finally felt that I could live securely and happily even without a husband, that I met my husband, Ned? And hadn't it been after I realized that even without a baby I could live a fulfilled, happy life that I gave birth to Teddy? I came to the conclusion that I had to be happy in order to be able to attract happiness.

This was a theory I would soon have to put to the test.

A few years later, I began experiencing severe pain in my left shoulder. I attributed this to the effect of a minor car accident I had. However, no matter what I tried, I was unable to rid myself of the pain. I contacted a doctor and was immediately sent for a MRI. The tests revealed that I had a tumor on my spine that would leave me completely paralyzed if I did not have surgery right away.

I emerged from surgery with a brace from my chin to my waist, screaming: “I’m choking! I’m choking!” This brace remained in place for the next four months, 24 hours a day.

The night after the surgery, as I lay immobilized in my hospital bed chanting, I realized that I was in the process of fulfilling my vow to change my family’s long-term karma of suffering from mental and physical illness. My father had died choking from a rare disease called schleraderma. My mother made her first of many unsuccessful suicide attempts by jumping out of a window, at the age of 48, my exact age at the time. She was rescued by a policeman and treated for her physical injury with a neck brace and walker. This obstacle was no coincidence. I felt with 100 percent confidence that my prayer to change my family’s unhealthy karma was being realized.

Although the tumor had been removed, doctors had to determine whether or not it was malignant. I did my best to stay positive, but I began to lose confidence and became frightened. But with the encouragement of fellow members, friends, neighbors and relatives, I was able to carry on, chanting all the way.

The test results came back confirming that the tumor was cancerous. I was diagnosed with lymphoma. With the neck brace still in place, 24 hours a day, I underwent chemotherapy and radiation.

The months went by and finally the treatments were over. The brace came off last April, and the tests came back showing that the cancer was gone. Even in spite of my own doubts, I had won.

For me, the key to winning has been continual efforts to chant enough daimoku to establish a high life-condition—high enough to go beyond my mental and emotional boundaries.

In the letter “On Curing Karmic Disease,” Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Even if one has committed grave offenses...the retribution can be lessened in this life. Thus, illness occurs when evil karma is about to be dissipated.” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 631). Intellectually, I knew these words to be true. I just had to prove it.

Based upon my precious experiences, challenging threatening waves of suffering and the wondrous ability I have gained to change poison into medicine through my practice, I have determined to spend the rest of my life helping others—members and non-members alike—to understand the profundity of Buddhism. I am determined to help spread Buddhism, so that many other people can also change their unhappiness into absolute happiness.