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**Never Concede Defeat**

I began suffering from chronic depression in 1971, right after my high school graduation, when my only sibling was killed in an accident in Africa.

I developed tremendous guilt about being alive, because I believed that my older sister was a much better person than I. Abusing alcohol and illegal drugs was how I coped.

Eventually, I was so tormented by this guilt that I dropped out of college for a time and attempted suicide. It took me seven years after graduating from high school to receive a bachelor's degree in journalism.

I became a quiet, trustworthy workaholic, who was professionally very successful. But after hours, I was a wild and crazy drunk and a drug addict. This lasted for 16 years.

My life hit rock bottom in early 1987, while I was living in New York. During an argument with a man I was dating, he pointed a gun at my head. Terrified as I watched my life flash before my eyes, I made a deal with the universe: If I survive this, I thought, I will change my life forever. He pulled the trigger.

And the gun jammed.

A year later, I was introduced to the Gohonzon. Six months after that, my sponsor became my husband.

As I started chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, I could see things I needed and wanted to change. And as I chanted and participated in kosen-rufu activities, I developed the motivation to change them. It was to be a journey of change that would last nine years.

Despite my professional success, I lacked self-esteem and belief in my abilities. The more I chanted, however, the more I began to believe in my potential. I began taking classes that re-ignited a smoldering dream to be a creative writer. In addition, I realized I wanted to live without the crutch of alcohol or drugs. As Nichiren Daishonin says in the Goshō "On Attaining Buddhahood":

Even a tarnished mirror will shine like a jewel if it is polished. A mind which presently is clouded by illusions originating from the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror. But once it is polished, it will become clear, reflecting the enlightenment of immutable truth. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 5)

In 1991, three years after receiving the Gohonzon, I returned to school full-time to study play writing. I began my journey of sobriety the next day. I have been sober for more than six years and eleven months.

Two years into my sobriety, my husband and I separated, and I finally came face to face with the chronic depression that my alcohol, drug abuse and co-dependency had been masking for years. My leader encouraged me: Chant to be happy, to overcome your emotional suffering and to create value at your job, so that you can achieve your mission.

I had to drop out of school to return to work in public relations. I was also a women's division district chief. With daimoku and determination, I developed a reputation for being an accessible, helpful and compassionate manager and leader.

A new job brought me to Los Angeles in May 1994. However, I began to regret leaving New York. As my workload intensified, my depression deepened. Although I did morning and evening gongyo every day, because of increasing job responsibilities and worsening depression, my daimoku and participation in SGI activities became inconsistent.

In September 1995, my father-in-law, Herb Graves, died. He had more than filled the gap left by the death of my father the year before we met. Herb was also my first district chief. After his death, I began the worst tailspin of my life.

It hurt to talk to people about anything other than work, let alone about my suffering. I spent most of my weekends in endless crying binges, rarely answering my telephone at night. I stopped returning the calls of people who left messages. I also didn't open any of my mail, letting birthday and holiday cards accumulate for two years.

Even though I had money in the bank, my bills were always delinquent. I gained weight and developed a myriad of health problems. Worse, my desire to commit suicide returned, and I wrestled with those demons on a daily basis. I realize now that my life had absolute protection from the Buddhist gods during that period, and I have so much appreciation for surviving that world of Hell while remaining steadfast to my determination to stay sober.

The turning point for me came when I read the following guidance from SGI President Ikeda, which appeared in the February 1996 *Seikyo Times*:

Being born as a common mortal is the karma we have taken on so that we may demonstrate the power of the Mystic Law. For that reason, it is inconceivable that we cannot overcome any of the problems that confront us. We are all leading players who have taken our place here in this trouble-filled *saha* world in order to act out the drama of kosen-rufu.

It was a lightning bolt that woke up my life. I made a determination to overcome my depression, so that I could prove the validity of the Law and get on with my mission.

Within a month, I found a wonderful, deeply compassionate and caring therapist. I chanted daimoku to have a life-to-life connection with her, so that I could learn what I needed to know to overcome my suffering. I also made a determination to be active in my district and reach out to the members with whom I was practicing.

The next nine months were a roller coaster ride between the worlds of Hell and Realization. I dealt with new flashbacks of childhood sexual abuse that I had buried deep within my subconscious; I agreed to my husband's request that we divorce and took responsibility for filing the papers; and I successfully navigated several crises at work. Through it all, I kept chanting.

And after overcoming each obstacle, a new spark of light appeared. Although the veil of depression remained, I was more hopeful that a total breakthrough was not only possible but imminent.

On New Year's Day 1997, I made three determinations: to overcome my depression once and for all; to leave my job and go back to being a full-time writer; and to re-establish a friendship with my former husband, with whom I hadn't talked in nearly a year.

I launched a daimoku campaign and increased my kosen-rufu activities. I went on home visits with my leaders. I also read everything I could find about depression and natural remedies.

I changed my diet, cutting out wheat products and taking super blue-green algae. That was the first time the physical manifestations of my depression abated, and I was excited. Next, I increased and regulated my exercise program, and another layer of fog lifted. Then, I gave up all caffeine products.

It felt like a breakthrough, but none of the results were long-lasting, and the darkness, although not as thick as before, kept returning. I continued to chant for total victory.

I accomplished important milestones in my life. I left my job in May, and I am now writing full-time again. And in July, my former husband and I had a heart-to-heart dialogue for the first time in three years.

The depression, now manageable, was still getting in the way of my creative work. I was having a hard time focusing; I was listless and felt a lot of anxiety.

Earlier this year, I participated in chanting sessions at my leader's home every morning for two weeks. After one session, a member shared with me some guidance she had

received from SGI Women's Division Chief Yumiko Hachiya: "No matter how impossible your reality may appear, you must never concede defeat."

The next morning, I re-determined that I was going to break through my depression by the end of 1997, and I placed that "never concede defeat" guidance on my altar. Two weeks after the chanting sessions ended, I got very ill. The diagnosis was hypoglycemia.

I read everything I could get my hands on about this incurable but manageable disease. Also known as low blood sugar, hypoglycemia is the opposite of diabetes. In a book titled *The Low Blood Sugar Handbook* is a list of 60 symptoms related to hypoglycemia. The word *depression* jumped out at me as if it were flashing neon. Alcoholism, lack of focus, allergies, backache and muscle pain, anxiety and digestive problems — all conditions I have suffered — were also on the list. I began to cry and immediately said Nam-myohorenge-kyo three times with appreciation.

I've been negligent about taking care of myself in the past, so I made a determination in front of the Gohonzon to follow the nutritionist's directions and exercise daily, no matter what. Every obstacle in the world challenged me on that determination, and in less than one week, I failed to follow an important instruction — to eat regularly. The crash I felt was horrible. I had a raging, blinding migraine until the next day.

But by the end of the same week, I also had the breakthrough for which I had been chanting! For one day, my depression totally, completely and positively lifted. I am still trying to find the words to describe the deep, spontaneous and total joy I felt when I realized I wasn't depressed. For the first time in a very long time, I really *wanted* to be alive! That night, I chanted daimoku with MUCH appreciation for my breakthrough, and I re-determined that I would have both the life-condition and the courage to continue to be victorious every day in the fight to feel good and be healthy.

My heart is overflowing with gratitude and appreciation for President Ikeda. Because of his example, I am determined to be a writer and teacher whose work not only pays tribute to the sanctity of all life but also stands as a testament to the potential and power of the human spirit.

I encourage all of you today to stand up and do battle with the karma that you, as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, have chosen. Chant daimoku. Study and follow President Ikeda's guidance. Read the Goshō. Take action.

And most important: Never, never, ever concede defeat.

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