

BACK TO THE BASICS
DOUBT VS. FAITH
BY RIKA HASHIMOTO, LOS ANGELES

Muster your faith, and pray to this Gohonzon,” Nichiren Daishonin writes. “Then what is there that cannot be achieved? There can be no doubt about the sutra passages that say, ‘This sutra can fulfill their desires, as a clear cool pond can satisfy all those who are thirsty,’ and ‘They will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences’” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 412).

The phrases “peace and security” and “good circumstances” tend to make us think that if we reach a certain point in faith, we will live a life of ease and comfort. Everything will get easier and more comfy.

But is this the real meaning of the Daishonin’s statement?

Actually, he explains elsewhere that “one should regard meeting obstacles as true peace and comfort” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). Enjoying “peace and security” and “good circumstances” means enjoying obstacles.

The fact is that we are always going to be faced with difficulties. Even those of us who have sincerely practiced Buddhism for many years will continue to encounter obstacles. We may even face bigger obstacles as we progress in faith.

It all comes down to how we perceive our obstacles — and deal with our doubts. It can be easy when facing hardship and difficulty for doubt to creep into our hearts. However, the Daishonin says, “If you do not question and resolve your doubts, you cannot dispel the dark clouds of illusion, any more than you could travel a thousand miles without legs” (WND, 1031).

When we try to resolve our doubts by seeking a deeper understanding of our circumstances, seeing everything in our lives from the perspective of faith, we are able to expand our lives in manifold ways. We are able to overcome our obstacles.

It is when we apply Buddhism in our lives from moment to moment — to every kind of obstacle that can come up — that we see growth and advancement, that we are able to build conviction in faith. Without these efforts on a continual basis, our foundation in faith remains weak and unstable.

This is why SGI President Ikeda emphasizes the importance of viewing things from the perspective of faith, especially at crucial moments in our lives. It is often at crucial moments — when we suffer a setback we were not expecting, for instance — that we give in to doubt. President Ikeda explains, “What we do, how we act, at the crucial moment is what determines ultimate victory or defeat” (May 18 *World Tribune*, p. 11).

Difficult times are our crucial opportunities to grow. These are the times we can learn through our experiences and deepen our understanding of ourselves, Buddhist philosophy and the mentor–disciple relationship.

Through the examples of the Daishonin and the first three Soka Gakkai presidents, we can see that those living with unshakable conviction in faith can accomplish even the impossible. This means us, too.

The Daishonin encourages one of his leading disciples that diligence in faith is the path of a victorious life: “Carry through with your faith in the Lotus Sutra. You cannot strike fire from flint if you stop halfway. Bring forth the great power of faith, and be spoken of by all the people of Kamakura, both high and low, or by all the people of Japan, as ‘Shijo Kingo, Shijo Kingo of the Lotus school!’” (WND, 319).

Real happiness in life lies in establishing this true inner strength to continue — the life-force we develop through unremitting efforts to develop our lives for kosen-rufu.