

Winter Always Turns To Spring

Myoichi, one of Nichiren Daishonin's disciples, was a woman whose husband had died. She had two children and one of them was sickly. Even though things were so tough for her, she sent gifts to Nichiren.

Nichiren was concerned for his disciple and wanted to make sure Myoichi didn't give up on her Buddhist practice. So he wrote her a beautiful letter to encourage her, putting hope and confidence into her heart.

This letter is called "Winter Always Turns to Spring." The title comes from a famous passage: "Those who believe in the Lotus Sutra are as if in winter, but winter always turns to spring. Never, from ancient times on, has anyone heard or seen of winter turning back to autumn. Nor have we ever heard of a believer in the Lotus sutra who turned into an ordinary [unenlightened] person." (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol.1, p. 536)

With this, Nichiren points out a very simple fact: Winter is always followed by spring. This is a law of nature. And just as night is followed by day, and Tuesday is followed by Wednesday, these are things we can count on. Nichiren wants us to have the same confidence about our lives. We all have tough times that can feel like winter. But when we use our practice to win over our problems, we're like the sun breaking through, and we experience a spring like condition. In fact, it is because we experience winter that we can really enjoy spring.

In a lecture about this letter, SGI President Ikeda gave this explanation: "Let us take the example of the cherry trees that bloom in spring. The flower buds first form in the summer, and then enter a period of dormancy [like being asleep] in autumn. These buds must go through the cold of winter before they can begin their full-fledged growth toward blossoming - a period known as 'breaking dormancy.' The chill of winter is necessary for the buds' development. The buds, once awakened from their slumber, begin to swell further with the rising temperatures of spring and eventually flower." (January-February Living Buddhism, p.62)

Although Nichiren wrote this letter to Myoichi, it is as if he is encouraging us. He wants us to have confidence that when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we bring out our Buddhahood. When we are waiting for something big to happen in our lives, or when we have a problem that seems to be taking a long time to win over, we can use his letter as encouragement. At those times, if we can remember Nichiren's words and make sure we are facing our lives with chanting, hope, confidence and courage, we will definitely turn our winter into spring.

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