

After 9/11, and especially after David Aoyama's death in that event, more than anything I wanted to be healthy so I could devote my life to world peace. One day several months ago I called my best friend and sponsor, Ida Jones, crying. I had just had it with being sick, always being tired, and feeling helpless about my future, facing the same early death as both parents.

My mother died a few years ago from diabetes complications. When she was in the hospital, shortly before her death, we were talking about her personal affairs and abruptly she said, "I want to change my karma." I was shocked; until then she always had seemed uninterested in Buddhism.

Ida encouraged me to finally really challenge my health karma, to change not only my own, but that of my mother. It took her awhile to convince me, but she did. She asked me if, at the end of my life, would I like to know that I fought my best and overcame my health challenges, or regret that I never really tried.

Ida reminded me of the tremendous health benefits I'd received already. Fifteen years ago I'd found a hypnotist to help me stop smoking. More recently I'd discovered how drinking enough water could help treat asthma and control blood sugar.

Also, doctors had detected potentially pre-cancerous polyps in my colon and cervix and safely removed them. They'd discovered a possibly pre-cancerous abnormality in an esophogal biopsy and treated it. I'd found an excellent psychologist who ensured I was medicated when I had severe depression (so I could live to tell this story!). These are just to name a few of my tremendous health benefits.

The day following our conversation, Ida attended a meeting at which a new member with diabetes gave an experience telling how she chanted for "total victory" in her health and how her blood sugar normalized and her doctor discontinued her medication! I was even more motivated.

Last fall I made a trip to Ireland that changed my life, in that ultimately it changed my priorities and outlook regarding my health. Bad things kept happening during the trip – the weather was miserable, I got so sick that I had to see two doctors, and one wanted to put me "in hospital," and I had a couple of very stressful logistical mix-ups.

But this was my once-in-a-lifetime trip to Ireland and I vowed to not let anything make me unhappy there. I prayed like that every day, to enjoy myself no matter what and have the best time of my life. And I did! Better yet, I truly amazed myself that I was strong enough to make that happen. I felt really strong.

When I returned home, I thought, "Why just have that philosophy for two weeks? Why not for my entire life? I don't have to wait until I'm healthy to be happy ... I can be happy right now and still work on it, right?" Right! That is absolute happiness.

I started to feel happy **now**. That made all the difference in how I approached my daily life and Buddhist practice.

I also was encouraged by Matilda Buck when she visited Chicago and spoke about determination, prayer and action. She said if you have all three, there is no way your prayer won't be answered. I realized that I really needed to strengthen all three.

Another person who inspired me, with his defeat of lymphoma, was my friend and senior in faith, Pascual Olivera. I figured if he could get up and chant and pray to fight his terrible illness, in spite of overwhelming suffering, I could do it, too, no matter how tired I was!

Well into my "total victory" campaign, I found my favorite Gosho quote to date, and it has become my "campaign slogan":

"The wonderful means to truly putting an end to the physical and spiritual obstacles of all living beings is none other than Nam-myoho-renge-kyo." (Nichiren Daishonin, *The Wonderful Means of Surmounting Obstacles*, MW p. 842.)

In my journey toward total victory in health, something that I didn't even consider important immediately came to the forefront. A couple of years ago I met a wonderful ear, nose and throat doctor, Dr. Michael Friedman. He told me I have obstructive sleep apnea, which I already knew; I just did not consider it to be important.

The Greek word "apnea" means "without breath." Sleep apnea causes people to stop breathing repeatedly while they sleep, sometimes hundreds of times during the night and sometimes even for a more than a minute. Obstructive sleep apnea is caused when the soft palate – the tissue at the back of the throat – blocks the airway when the throat muscles are relaxed during sleep.

This can cause high blood pressure, heart disease, weight gain, high blood sugar, depression and extreme fatigue, due to lack of quality sleep. People with sleep apnea rarely get deep sleep and the light sleep they do get is fragmented with frequent waking, often without them even knowing it.

The ENT doctor told me all of this and I didn't really take him seriously. I thought he was just another doctor who spoke myopically from his field of specialty and considered his treatments a panacea.

I did have a sleep study, though, and it showed I woke 41 times in three hours. I couldn't believe it. I thought I woke up only twice!

I tried using the cpap (continuous positive air pressure) machine after that, to treat the apnea, but found it too cumbersome and annoying. I dropped the subject; there was no way I could sleep with that thing on my face and I did not want surgery (to carve away part of the soft tissue).

Then, after I started praying for “total victory in my health,” I found everyone in my environment was talking to me about sleep apnea! One doctor told me that people who have it treated find that it changes their lives. My primary physician echoed that. I had another sleep study. A co-worker who uses a cpap told me about how it improved his life.

Although it was very difficult to get used to sleeping with the cpap mask on, finally after trying again and again, I was able to sleep the majority of two nights with the machine. Immediately I was a completely different person. Actually I was the person again that I remembered from so long ago.

It is amazing how things can erroneously be assumed to be a way of life, or “just how things are,” or attributed to getting older. I had back the positive outlook and energy that I’d taken for granted so many years ago. I was more motivated and interested in life.

I called my doctor and asked if something was wrong with me, because I thought I felt so hyperactive, kind of nervous all the time. He said, “That’s what it feels like to get sleep. Get used to it!”

I felt really rested, really good, and really energetic. Instead of sleeping until the last possible second, I got up early in the morning and worked out. When I got home from work I could chant for awhile and do some chores instead of just going to bed. I felt better on four hours of good sleep than I had ever felt on 12 hours of bad sleep!

On the weekends, I used to only be able to do one SGI activity or personal chore or errand a day before becoming exhausted and needing to take a four-hour nap. If I tried to do more, it would become very stressful. Now I can do activities all day **and** work in my yard **and** run errands, and still have energy left to chant or do whatever I want to do, and be relaxed and enjoy all of it.

Although Paxil was necessary for awhile while I was suffering from depression -- in order to keep me alive, chanting, and in therapy -- now I have been able to eliminate it and no longer have depression. I’ve seen a moderate change in blood pressure. My doctor tells me I also might expect further lowered blood pressure, lowered blood sugar, and elimination of fibromyalgia.

Sometimes, though, the cpap machine was not effective due to nasal and sinus problems. I went back to the ENT doctor, who discovered I have a deviated septum, a polyp, and buildup in my sinuses. He suggested surgery. This time I listened to him!

On New Year’s Eve I chanted for five hours and “total victory in my health” was one of the major issues on my mind. Next thing I knew, I was in the hospital because doctors thought something was wrong with my heart. I had an echocardiogram stress test that showed my heart is fine and I was released. (I have been in the hospital thrice more since that New Year’s Eve!)

It didn't take me long to figure out that little drama was a special gift to me from the compassionate universe. I got to see what my destiny could be. It could be following in my mom's footsteps -- hospitals and poor quality of life and early death. I cried in appreciation for getting to see it so clearly and know that I really want to change it.

Shortly after that hospital visit, I was in the hospital again for the sinus surgery, and it was successful. In addition to enabling constant use of the cpap, the surgery has eliminated debilitating headaches and chronic sinus infections. My health is even more improved.

My surgery was on January 17, the third anniversary of my mother's death. At first that kind of freaked me out, but then I understood the significance of the shared date; while I'm changing my health karma, I also am helping my mother to change hers. (And "coincidentally," the date I shared this experience at my district meeting was on her birthday.)

I still have asthma, diabetes, anemia, fibromyalgia and hypothyroidism, any one of which in itself can cause extreme fatigue and illness if not controlled. Although I slowly but surely approach the ages at which my parents died, my life is far from over. I have enrolled in an M.S. Degree program in Information Technology and Privacy Law, and I want to adopt a baby. I need to be healthy!

If I didn't have my Buddhist practice, I don't think these things would be possible. I suppose I would feel hopeless and overwhelmed in the face of all those health challenges. Instead I am filled with hope and will use this recent success as a springboard to achieve total victory in my health, and enjoy my life in the meantime.