

# Jeopardy

Living is a form of jeopardy. There are dangers everywhere. Some environments are more dangerous than others, but anything can happen, even with precautions. The best way to survive is with a courageous attitude.

Our lives are constantly in danger physically. In our own homes, fires and accidents may occur. When we go out to travel, more risks exist—car, railroad, or airplane accidents. According to experts, for every 300 small mistakes that occur, one will result in a terrible disaster. If this same ratio applies in other areas of our lives, then we should be very careful not to ignore small things. We should never be careless about the causes we make.

We can improve machine technology and try to reduce human error in order to avoid serious accidents, but large-scale dangers such as earthquakes, tsunamis, tornadoes, hurricanes, and floods still occur. But even in these serious situations, there are precautions we can take.

There were people who were able to survive from the giant tsunami in east Japan because they followed precautions.

On March 11th, the coastal towns of Miyako-shi and Iwate in the northeast region of Japan were swallowed by a huge tsunami. However, all the people and the houses in the Aneyoshi district of the Omoe Peninsula, located close to the northeast end of Miyako-shi, were able to escape damage and loss of life.

This district was attacked twice before by giant tsunamis—once in 1896 and again in 1933. Only two people survived in 1896 and only four in 1933. Just after the tsunami in 1933, the people erected a monument on a hill that was about 200 feet above sea level. There is an inscription on it that states:

The houses on this high ground will give peace to our descendants. Consider deeply the disaster of a giant tsunami. Do not build a house lower than this monument!

The people in this district followed the warning and have lived at a higher elevation than this monument.

While the tsunami warning was being announced on March 11th, the people who were at the port ran up approximately a half mile toward their houses on the hill. Muddy streams carrying fishing boats rushed through, but the huge tsunami remained about 150 feet below the monument.

Mr. Kimura (age 65), Mayor of the district Residents' Association said, "Since I was a young boy, I kept in my heart our ancestors' warning: 'Do not go against the instructions on the monument.' Our village survived, thanks to the lessons from the past. The people who live on the hill have truly appreciated the teaching of our predecessors."

Here is another story. Many children were saved by a carefully worked-out plan for tsunamis in Kamaishi, Iwate, which sustained major damage from the tsunami in east Japan. Instructions titled, "*Tsunami Tendeko*" had been given to Sanriku district in Kamaishi as a plan to protect the people from a tsunami. They proved to be effective.

Since 2005, Kamaishi City has been consulting with experts in tsunami science and has educated the children in disaster prevention. One point of action taught was *tendeko*, which means to separate or scatter. This idea of *tendeko* comes from the bitter history of repeated tsunami occurrences. It instructs everyone not to worry about being separated from loved ones. Even if a parent and child are separated at the time of a tsunami, they both should individually proceed to the hillside immediately.

In the Kamaishi elementary schools, about 80 percent of the 184 students left school early, due to shortened class hours. Most schools other than those on the hillside were swallowed up by the tsunami, but all the children were safe. Hibiki Fujimoto (age 12) said, “When the earthquake happened, I was playing with a friend in a residential area close to a school. My friend and I unconsciously ran to high ground, even though I was worried about my family and my house. Later on, I was able to meet up with my family at the shelter.”

Life is the most valuable thing of all. It’s only natural that we take precautions to protect it. But our lives are still in jeopardy if we fail to attain enlightenment. The only way to truly protect our lives is to realize what the real point of life is—becoming enlightened.

Shakyamuni told a story about this in the Lotus Sutra. It is found in the third chapter and is called, “The Parable of the Three Carts and the Burning House.” Once there was a very rich man who had many children. One day, a fire broke out and spread quickly through his beautiful mansion. The father repeatedly called to his children to come out of the house, but they were so busy playing that they ignored him. So the father decided to trick them into coming out of the house. He told them that outside, he had three kinds of carts that they always had wanted. The children became very excited about the carts and raced out of the house to safety. The rich man then gave his children, not three kinds of carts, but one beautiful cart covered in jewels and pulled by a great white ox.

In this parable, the burning house represents our own world of daily life with all its risks and jeopardy. We are the children who are so wrapped up in our worldly pleasures that we don’t see life passing us by. The rich man is the Buddha, whose only desire is to help us attain enlightenment. The three kinds of carts promised by the rich man signify the provisional teachings offered by Shakyamuni. The beautiful white cart given to the children is, of course, the secret hidden in the Lotus Sutra, the Law of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

As we can see, jeopardy exists everywhere. There are many kinds of precautions we can take to protect our lives physically or mentally. But there is really only one precaution we can take in terms of faith. That precaution is to chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo with all the sincerity we can find in the depths of our lives. Then we will attain enlightenment and overcome any obstacle that threatens to shake our faith.

Please continue to practice and grow, no matter what form of obstacles may appear. Please chant the Daimoku to live life with energy and joy.