

DEPENDENT ORIGINATION

THE WELLSPRING FOR A CENTURY OF LIFE, HEART AND SPIRIT



GRATITUDE

COMPASSION

COURAGE

MISSION

This course introduces one of the most fundamental principles of Buddhism – which is, that nothing exists in isolation, everything is interrelated and interdependent. It is a principle that has implications for global peace as well as applying directly to how we interact in daily life. When we reflect the principle of dependent origination through our determination and action, we can transform our lives, our relationships and live with a deeper and more enriched sense of purpose. Its ultimate significance is the awareness of our own inner transformation of the heart as the means by which peace is achieved globally.

THIS MONTH

Pre-Reading

Introductory Essay + 2001 peace proposal

Session one:

Oneness of self and environment - A life of gratitude

Session two:

Oneness of good and evil - The heart of compassion

INTRODUCTION

In Australia we value self-reliance and independence. We are staunchly anti-authoritarian and we generally have an aversion to being told what to do! Moreover, in western countries Buddhism is often perceived as “a nice ideal” but not related to reality. It is not surprising therefore that the concept of mentor and disciple can feel not only foreign to the Australian way of life but even antipathetic. The idea of relying on a mentor somehow feels like one might be at risk of losing one’s identity and becoming vulnerable to another’s use or even abuse. Especially if we cannot perceive the intensely practical nature of Buddhist principles, such as dependent origination. How can we deepen our understanding of how to meaningfully apply these concepts to our daily life? It is the life-to-life relationship of mentor and disciple that opens the path to a profound understanding of the inter-relatedness of all existence. This relationship goes beyond self-interest or ego and goes to the heart of compassion, opening the future of all humanity.

For this reason, the overall objective of this study course is to awaken in all of us a seeking spirit to understand with our lives the significance of this relationship; to understand that walking the path of oneness of mentor and disciple is not limiting but rather a life of absolute freedom where we engage in our autonomous will while simultaneously connecting with others in creative co-existence.

Nichiren Daishonin and the three Presidents of Soka Gakkai have all lived lives enlightened to dependent origination by combating fundamental darkness or ignorance that separates or destroys life. In other words, they have lived a life that expresses dependent origination or appreciation for all life as inseparable from living a life at one with their mentor. When the disciple understands that the mentor’s wish or vow is solely that the disciple share the same life condition of the mentor (in harmony with the law of life), gratitude defines this life-to-life bond. When the



VALUES

disciple determines to share the same mission, then compassion and courage are the source of hope for underpinning a century of life, heart and spirit. Acting on the belief in the sanctity of all life will then be as natural as breathing air. This is the purpose of kosen rufu!

Buddhism teaches that all life is interrelated. Through the concept of dependent origination, it holds that nothing exists in isolation, independent of other life. The Japanese term for dependent origination is *engi*, literally “arising in relation.” In other words, all beings and phenomena exist or occur only because of their relationship with other beings or phenomena. Everything in the world comes into existence in response to causes and conditions. Nothing can exist in absolute independence of other things or arise of its own accord.

“The mentor-disciple relationship is the heart of Buddhism; it is the key to limitless growth and self-improvement and the path to the unending triumph of truth and justice. I was physically weak when I was young and the doctors said I probably wouldn’t live beyond thirty. I felt that my time was limited, and I wanted to spend my youth without regrets. That’s why I advanced single-mindedly on the path of mentor and disciple. I sincerely and trustingly followed my mentor’s instructions. I acted solely in accord with the Buddha’s intent. I never entertained an ambition to be this or that or to receive special treatment. All I wanted was to protect Mr. Toda and devote my life to his service. That was my prayer. I would be satisfied if I could set an example for future generations of how a true disciple of Mr. Toda, a mentor without parallel, should lead his or her life. My mentor poured his heart and soul into fostering me, and I responded by replying to his expectations with the whole of my being. I am what I am because of that mentor-and-disciple struggle that transcends life and death.”

(September 3, 2004, Special Pullout, World Tribune, p.2)

The course has four sessions examining specific applications of dependent origination. Pre-reading materials give a basic explanation of dependent origination, an overview of the course and President Ikeda’s aspiration that dependent origination underpins a century of life, heart and spirit.

Through engaging in this course, we hope, as participants, you will:

1. Make a renewed commitment towards putting Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism into action in daily life and helping others to do the same through deepening your understanding of the oneness of the mentor and disciple.
2. Connect to and therefore embody and practise the following Buddhist values:

A life of gratitude

The heart of compassion

The spirit of courage

The mission to create and sustain a century of life through expressing our identity as global citizens

Pre Reading for the Course

We suggest you read these prior to the first session you meet as a group:

- a. Introductory Essay
- b. Excerpts from 2001 Peace Proposal

Preparation needed for the first meeting

1. Explain and outline the values and process of the study course.
2. Give every participant an opportunity to introduce themselves, perhaps giving a brief impression of the pre-reading material.
3. Choose study partners – each week one pair of volunteers will be asked to present an introduction and another an experience based on that session’s topic.
4. Emphasise the need to pre-read the material for each session and meet with study partners to prepare and discuss the topic and questions.

PRE READING INTRODUCTORY ESSAY

“No man is an island, entire of itself, every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less...any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in mankind”.

So wrote John Donne, a 17th century English metaphysical poet. His words aptly capture the concept of dependent origination, the Buddhist observation that describes the reality of life i.e. that all life is completely interdependent. Dependent Origination means that nothing and no one can exist in isolation, that all things are mutually supported and interrelated, simultaneously functioning as both cause and effect, exerting an influence on the whole. A law of life permeates the whole process. Without other entities our own existence would not be possible and for this reason, gratitude and compassion for all living beings is the supreme message of Buddhism and forms the basis of a life of value creation through determined action.

When we think about it, our identities, what we do, where we live, even what we eat has depended on countless people and experiences. Lee Stringer, an American writer who transformed his fourteen year long identity of homelessness and helpless crack addiction to one of ‘successful professional writer’, was asked by Andrew Denton: *“If you could go back and visit young Lee, what would you tell that child about the world?”* His response: *“that presumes that I might want to prevent some of the events, and I’m not so sure that I do, because we regret the hard times, we regret failure, we regret crashing into a wall, we regret mistakes, but they’re each a link in the chain to right now...I think you had to be everywhere you were, it all culminates on this moment. So I probably wouldn’t tell him anything, I’d say ‘just keep going’.”* Lee’s observation mirrors the possibilities that consistent Buddhist practice can achieve; it is possible to transform any experience so that it becomes the cause for a brilliant life. This determined life condition reflects our wisdom to recognise the potential for the transformation of all life, and in particular the

individual human life, through a change in heart or belief. All our interactions and experiences thus become causes for value creation and making the most of where we are right now! This is the significance of dependent origination.

Everything is contained in the present moment, including the past and the future. What matters is our attitude as we approach each and every moment. If we ignore the symbiotic nature of dependent origination and allow our egos to take control, the outcomes of our life decisions will be tainted by self-pride. An egoistic individual will discriminate against anything and everything, including previous negative experiences. It is the delusion of the mind that has us believing we are separate from others and from the past or future. Buddhism calls this ‘fundamental darkness’. If we believe we are able to live solely from our own power, we will be consumed by arrogance, jealousy, hatred and the desire for profit and acclaim. Believing that only our own narrow views are correct, we cease to listen to others’ opinions and may even use and bend others to our will. The consequence, therefore, of the perception of life as unconnected is a conflict in relationships. The global expression of this state of life comes in the form of war tragically played out in the twentieth century, the most violent in the history of humanity. This way of living in fundamental darkness runs counter to the notion that “all is linked”.

Ed Mitchell, the commander of the spacecraft Apollo 14 had a life changing mystic experience as he observed the earth from the moon. He saw an *“enormous force field...connecting all people, their intentions and thoughts, and every animate and inanimate form of matter for all time. Anything he did or thought would influence the rest of the cosmos, and every occurrence in the cosmos would have a similar effect on him. Time was just an artificial construct. Everything he’d been taught about the universe and the separateness of people and things felt wrong. There were no accidents or individual intentions...”*¹ Here was a scientist who had been

¹ L. McTaggart, The field,

taught to see everything objectively, that is, as separate from himself. On the moon he had a complete sea change – he could see things from an interdependent perspective. Buddhists however, have observed the symbiotic nature of life for centuries. This is why President Ikeda's words: "*A great human revolution in the life of a single individual can change the destiny of an entire nation, and also the destiny of all humankind*", are so often quoted. By virtue of the oneness of self and the environment (social and natural), transforming ourselves for the better - becoming wiser, stronger, more compassionate - positively affects everything in our environment

The starting point of the Buddhist worldview was Shakyamuni's realisation that real happiness - joy that springs from the very depths of life- can only be experienced when we transform our fundamental darkness. Fundamental darkness, the lack of belief in the potentiality of Buddhahood (unlimited creative and compassionate life force) inherent in all people's lives, inhibits our ability to connect with others. When we reveal the ninth consciousness² - the fundamental pure consciousness of life and the universe itself - by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo our whole life - mind and body - functions to enact our belief in the oneness of ourselves and others and the wider universe. We are driven by the belief in the effectiveness of our own positive reformation and how this is reflected in our community and environment and we freely share our belief in others' potential at all times. When we remain unswayed by difficulties or challenges, we open the creative potential inherent in the universe.

Through faith and determination, based on the concept of dependent origination, all human beings are able to transform 'poison into medicine' and attain a life condition that supports harmony and balance. Each individual's determination to transform, through the reality of dependent origination, contributes to the larger whole. However, because the nature of fundamental darkness is so insidious, we need mentors to guide the way. True, Nam Myoho Renge Kyo is

² Refer to Glossary, p. 14

the original mentor, but as vulnerable and fallible human beings, we need models of humanity that demonstrate what it means to live a life that is one with the original mentor.

Shakyamuni was the first to make the law his mentor and then made it his vow to enable all people to battle fundamental darkness and to do the same. Nichiren Daishonin then revealed the law as Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and thus gave humanity the practical means to live life in oneness with the law. He embodied a life of oneness with the law and so taught us the correct meaning of faith. When we ourselves practise in the way Nichiren taught we become one with the mentor and reap the benefits of the practice proportionally. Nichiren Daishonin wrote: "If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth" (*WND*, p.385). "To be 'of the same mind as Nichiren', means to cherish the same determination for kosen-rufu. When we work for kosen rufu and we stand up with the resolve to show actual proof of victory of faith, our lives overflow with benefit beyond belief. We receive benefit because we work for kosen-rufu, which is the wish of the Buddha. This is analogous to how someone who works for a company receives a salary". (Ikeda, *Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, the essential transmission to Bodhisattva Superior Practices, p.434)

Every time we chant the daimoku, we are experiencing the effects of Nichiren's actions in proclaiming Nam-myoho-enge-kyo as the law of life, and his subsequent actions to teach this practice so that by changing the innermost realities of our lives from delusion to wisdom, we can positively influence the world we live in.

In the same way we experience the effects of the contributions of the three Presidents of the Soka Gakkai. These three founding presidents revived, in the present age, the faith of the oneness of mentor and disciple with Nichiren. They have shown us how to live victorious lives because they have acted with precisely "the same mind as Nichiren" through selfless dedication to the widespread propagation of

the Mystic Law. In other words they inherited the essential meaning of faith taught by Nichiren. In order for us to continue the transmission of the law we must similarly develop a relationship of oneness with the mentor. There is no other way to actualise the reality of dependent origination.

The mystic relationship between the law of life and the lives of the people can only pass on, unbroken in any lifetime, through the oneness of the relationship of mentor and disciple. Only disciples who act in exact accord with the mentor's heart are said to be in oneness. In Nichiren Buddhism, the mentor is the practitioner of the Mystic Law par excellence; one who dedicates his life with the spirit of: "at all times, I think to myself how can I cause living beings to gain entry into the unsurpassed way and quickly acquire the body of a Buddha"³. The mentor never regards himself as a guru or in anyway superior to the disciple, rather the mentor holds unceasing faith in the disciple's capability to be 'perfectly equal to himself'. The mentor realises that his vision is dependent on the disciples' capacity to fulfill it and when the disciple actively seeks the mentor and responds to the mentor's call with the spirit of oneness, the disciple receives unparalleled joy. The heritage of the ultimate law is only possible when mentor and disciple are one.

Every time we are chanting the daimoku for kosen rufu with the same heart as our mentors' we are making causes for the enlightenment of ourselves, those around us, and the future of humanity.

In essence therefore, joy is not found by supporting the ego and resisting interdependence, but in the practice of coexistence and praying for mutual prosperity. The Daishonin's Buddhism is a teaching capable of engendering such joy. Through consistent Buddhist practice in oneness with our mentors, we will no longer reject or shut out certain persons, or groups of people by virtue of our judgement of them. Rather, we will aspire to gratefully and compassionately connect to others, as we work to transcend the deep schisms of hatred, prejudice and discrimination that have separated us from our friends, family members,

even society as a whole. The foundation for this type of life is in developing a deep appreciation for our life and environment, including those aspects that challenge us.

Chanting Nam Myoho Renge Kyo is the concrete expression of the law of the universe and unites the life of the ordinary person with the life of the original Buddha; the authentic life-condition of limitless compassion. When harnessed it can be likened to a great wind that knows no bounds. As long as this wind continues to strengthen through the power of many voices chanting in strong prayer, humankind will inevitably realise the truth that we are all one with the universe. By praying that all people can reach their highest potential and absorb the compassionate life force of the universe, we will be able to create the greatest possible value; a peaceful and dynamic society. Herein lies the path of ultimate human fulfilment. This is living 'Dependent Origination'. This is the starting point for a 'Century of Life' and is most beautifully expressed in the life-to-life bond of the mentor and disciple as President Ikeda elaborates:

"Myo, or 'mystic', corresponds to mentor; and Ho or 'law', to disciple, they are indivisible. Renge or 'Lotus Flower' symbolises the simultaneity of cause and effect. 'Cause' refers to the nine worlds and thus to the disciple, while 'effect' indicates the world of Buddhahood and the mentor. Hence, mentor and disciple are one. The mystic law and the lotus flower both express the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is the meaning of Myoho-rence-kyo.

Our challenge lies in infusing the realm of fundamental darkness with the warm, life-affirming current of compassion and working dauntlessly to create a world where people have compassion for one another based on the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination—the principle of the interconnection of all things. By doing so, we carry on the legacy of Buddhism that originates with Shakayamuni and can further build on it into the future."⁴

³ Embracing the Lotus Sutra, (WND, p. 62)

⁴ Ikeda, May-June 2006 Living Buddhism, p.83

Challenges for a New Era by Daisaku Ikeda, January 26, 2001

We have at last entered a new century. It is natural at such a time that there should be large measures of both hope and anxiety. Compared with the intellectual currents in vogue at the start of the twentieth century, what is starkly lacking today is the sense of optimism that was present then. Naturally there are great expectations regarding advances in science and technology - particularly in fields such as information and biotechnology - but there is also great foreboding.

I think that many people today harbour a profound sense of disillusionment that makes them question whether the twentieth century was really a period of advancement for humankind. This is because, while the remarkable progress of science and technology brought with it many blessings, the ceaseless occurrence of war and the unprecedented horrors of the age have cast an indelible shadow over people's hearts.

How can we dispel this dark shadow? What should be the core values on which to base human endeavours in the twenty-first century? There are certainly aspects of the twentieth century that deserve to be recognised as genuine progress and advancement.

First and foremost, perhaps, is the fact that overt imperialism and colonialism are no longer acceptable. Likewise, the United Nations has, despite its many failings, continued to function as a global political organization for the past half century, far longer than its short-lived predecessor the League of Nations.

There are fewer people who openly question democratic values. And while there is still a long way to go, the advances made by women, their emergence in all realms of society over the course of the past

century, have been truly remarkable. While science and technology have produced a distinctly mixed record, on the positive side must be counted material affluence (however grossly maldistributed) as well as progress in the fields of transport, communications, medical treatment and hygiene. These are all contributions whose importance I think no one would deny. And if we look at the degree to which humanity as a whole has access to human rights, there is a vast difference between the legal and institutional structures that existed one hundred years ago and those that pertain today.

Despite these achievements, the undeniable fact is that the twentieth century was an era stained by an unconscionable amount of bloodshed. One analyst's estimate is that twice as many people were killed in wars during the twentieth century as in the preceding four centuries put together. The past century was indeed an era of mass slaughter - of megadeath - without parallel in history. In the final analysis, it must be said that the twentieth century was an era marked by a wanton disregard for human life.

Further, a careful examination of the list of advances and progress made in the twentieth century will reveal that these were virtually all material and physical. With regard to the inner realm of the human spirit, it seems undeniable that the era was marked by regression rather than advance. Humanity's spiritual life seems to have followed a one-way path of shrinkage and atrophy, to have become trapped in what Buddhism refers to as the "lesser self" - a state of isolation that results when the ties among people and between people and the cosmos are severed.

Life, Heart, Spirit

Meeting Sir Yehudi Menuhin (1916-99) was for me a precious opportunity to share ideas in a frank and unrestrained fashion with a man whose vision and whose achievements as one of the century's great violinists, I deeply respected. Sir Yehudi was fond of referring to the words of the Native American leader Chief Seattle. Chief Seattle is said to have made a speech in the 1850s in response to an offer by white settlers to buy indigenous lands, which Sir Yehudi quoted as follows:

“If I decide to accept . . . , I will make one condition: the white man must treat the beasts of this land as his brothers. . . . I have seen a thousand rotting buffaloes on the prairie, left by the white man who shot them from a passing train. I am a savage and do not understand how the smoking iron horse can be more important than the buffalo that we kill only to live. What is man without the beasts? If all the beasts were gone, man would die from great loneliness of spirit, for whatever happens to the beast also happens to man. All things are connected. Whatever befalls the earth befalls the sons of the earth.”

Sir Yehudi stressed the relevance of Chief Seattle's words to our time - to all time. Indeed we cannot afford to dismiss the awareness and sensitivity that informs this speech as primitive animism or to view it as mere bucolic romanticism. The kind of discriminatory consciousness that would permit the slaughter of wild animals simply for entertainment also justified the forcible removal of the Native Americans from their lands and their containment in reservations. Further still, it is profoundly incompatible with the goal of bringing about a new century of life.

In its essence, discrimination is the act of throwing up barriers of difference among the phenomena that fill the universe and establishing among them a hierarchy of value, thus breaking the bonds that link and connect all things. This is then used to justify oppression and exploitation; as such, it must be condemned as a desecration of the sanctity of life itself.

An Interconnected, Interdependent World

“All things are connected.” Buddhism echoes and extends this awareness voiced by Chief Seattle. At the same time, it takes as its highest imperative the work of removing such barriers in the effort to approach the reality, the genuine aspect of life itself. This is expressed in the idea of a life-moment embracing both sentient and non-sentient existence. In other words, an essential life-moment (Jpn. *ichinen*) contains within it all phenomenal realms (*sanzen*) (*WND p.355*). This encompasses not only sentient beings, such as human and animal life, but non-sentient life such as grasses and trees, and even the seemingly lifeless mountains and rivers. Likewise, Buddhism teaches that Buddhahood - the potential for ultimate joy, wisdom, and compassion - exists in all things (*WND p.848*).

While there are more precise definitions of “life-moment” and “Buddhahood,” for present purposes it probably suffices to say that they are basically equivalent to the expansive sense of the word “life” that I have been employing. While Buddhism shares the direct appreciation of life that characterises animism, its approach differs in the following regard. Buddhism regards life in its most profound sense not as something that is simply conferred upon us without effort, but as a luminous and fertile realm that can be entered and experienced fully only through the most strenuous spiritual effort.

There are parallels to the process described by Rene Descartes (1596–1650) in his *Discourse on the Method*. In other words, in an often absurd and contradiction-filled world, a fully awakened state of life can only be attained through a process of continuous and painstaking doubt and thought, a process that utilizes the full resources of knowledge, emotion, and will. Entry into the equal and impartial realms of life can only be attained by a sensibility polished and refined through a sustained and strenuous process of seeking.

To describe these realms as impartial and equal however, does not mean to say that they are featureless

or anonymous. What I am trying to describe is what Buddhism calls dependent origination (Jpn. engi) the fact that all phenomena are interlinked, that they repeat cycles of emergence (birth) and withdrawal (death) in interrelation with each other. There are no words adequate to describe this reality, although such terms as plenitude, concentration, alertness, harmony, balance, and unity all come to mind. The Buddhist canon describes this state as “beyond all words, which neither thought nor action can convey” (Hori⁵, p.563). Even Shakyamuni Buddha in his fully awakened state felt great hesitancy before the task of attempting to convey to his listeners this profound and subtle enlightenment in a way that would not invite misunderstanding or disdain.

My own mentor, Josei Toda (1900–58), the second president of the Soka Gakkai, experienced severe persecution for his religious beliefs at the hands of the Japanese military authorities in the dark days of World War II. Imprisoned under brutal conditions, he devoted his efforts to pondering and seeking after the truth and was thus able to reach this realm of the true aspect of life itself.

During the course of his imprisonment, he determined that he would attempt to read and understand with his very being the Lotus Sutra. With focused prayer, he invoked the mantra of the Lotus Sutra some ten thousand times daily as he repeatedly read through the sutra. In the Immeasurable Meanings Sutra (Jpn. Muryogi kyo), which serves as an introduction to the Lotus Sutra, he encountered a passage that baffled him entirely. In a verse that praises the Buddha, he found the following:

In all, this verse contains thirty-four such negations. What could this Buddha be that would either remain or emerge from this tenacious process of being denied all possibility of expression?

With a focused and honed concentration of all his spiritual capacities, Toda gained the insight - and with it a grand and unshakable state of being - that the Buddha is nothing other than life itself.

His entity is neither existing nor non-existing;

Without cause or condition,
Without self or others;
Neither square nor round,
Neither short nor long;
.....
Neither that nor this,
Neither blue nor yellow,
Neither red nor white;
Neither crimson nor purple,
Without a variety of color.
(Taisho, p.385)

Reverence for Life

By sounding the deepest realms of life - the vast, vital network of interaction and interdependence - we can reawaken and restore the bonds that have become so tenuous. I am speaking of the kind of love for life that J. W. von Goethe (1749–1832) has Faust voice when he declares:
I might entreat the fleeting minute:
Oh tarry yet, thou art so fair!⁶

Once illuminated by this deepest appreciation of life, we will be able to successfully reconstruct and reconfigure the true meaning of why we live and why we die.

Only if we are able to respond to existential questions - “Why this family?” “Why this gender?” “Why these sufferings?” Will we be able to answer the ultimate question, “Why must we not kill others?” Thus a renewal of reverence for life is necessary if humanity is to find a clear direction in the new century. How do we go about doing this? Together with Faust, we must focus our efforts fully on the “fleeting minute.” For this, we must understand two things. One is that everything is contained in the present moment. The other is that the way we approach this moment is crucial and will determine the entire course of our lives.

The first of these understandings is necessary because the true aspect of life, of reality, is only to be found in this very moment. Other than the present instant, all things are to some degree virtual.

⁵ Hori, Nichiko, ed. Nichiren Daishonin gosho zenshu [Complete Works of Nichiren Daishonin]. Tokyo: Soka Gakkai, 1952.

⁶ Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von. Faust: *A Tragedy* (294; pt. 2, act 5, l. 11581–82)

This is certainly true of the future, but it can also be said of the past. The events of the past are all set in the flow and framework of such artificial constructs as daily, historical, or scientific “time.” They are not genuine reality.

As we find in the Buddhist scriptures, “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (*WND*, p.279). This is not describing a linear progression of cause and effect. Rather, it indicates that everything is contained within the present instant. C. G. Jung (1875–1961), who was deeply versed in Eastern philosophy, expressed a similar insight as he reflected on the horrors of World War II: “Even if, juristically speaking, we were not accessories to the crime, we are always, thanks to our human nature, potential criminals”.

While this may seem an abrupt form of reasoning, from the perspective of the Buddhist teaching of dependent origination it has its own very convincing logic. Awakened to this truth, we can sense the timeless bonds that connect us to those living in distant parts of the planet. We can understand and appreciate that every one of us belongs to the same human family. The limitless expansion of the self, the ability to sense that we are all bound together by innumerable unseen ties, is what Buddhism refers to as the “greater self.”

Second, our approach to the present moment is crucial because the true richness and overflowing vitality of life can only be accessed through ceaseless, moment-by-moment spiritual struggles. This attitude is the polar opposite of the indolence and passivity that signal spiritual bankruptcy.

In one famous passage, Nichiren, the thirteenth-century Buddhist sage whose teachings inspire the activities of the SGI, urges us to strive constantly to strengthen ourselves, day by day, month after month, and warns that we will fall prey to the forces of negativity if we slacken in the slightest (*WND*, p. 997). In other words, only a person who maintains the constant effort to strengthen his or her mind, who maintains a taut and awakened consciousness, who soars in uninterrupted flight - only such a person will be able to touch the lodestone of genuine reality.

This is the ideal of self-mastery that Shakyamuni expounded without cease. In contrast, a person whose mind is lax, whose attitude is passive, whose purpose is lost, will be consumed by such negative passions as fear, hatred, jealousy, and cowardice.

Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869–1948) stated: “There is no such thing as defeat in non-violence. The end of violence is surest defeat” (*Non-Violence*, p.129). This man, who never retreated a single step, is a grand exemplar and pioneer for the century of life.

Creative Coexistence and Autonomy

How can we characterise the spirit that must animate the twenty-first century if it is to be a century of life? Two of the specific indices that come to mind are creative coexistence and the autonomous functioning of the inner will. Both of these are extremely close in meaning to the key words “life” and “dependent origination” that I have been discussing. At the same time, both have been conspicuously absent from the spiritual life of the twentieth century.

In sharp contradistinction to the ideals of creative coexistence and autonomy are competition (in the purely negative sense of the word) and externally applied pressure. These are key characteristics of the totalitarian philosophies such as fascism and bolshevism that dominated the twentieth century. I believe that the pre-eminence of such ideologies was perhaps the greatest single factor in making it an age of unprecedented slaughter. The Buddhist teaching of dependent origination, which places ultimate emphasis on interrelatedness and interdependence, is essentially synonymous with creative coexistence. Further, in Buddhism the workings of life - the realm of genuine reality reached when we see past the false trappings of language and the tendency to see things as fixed, unchanging entities - are described as “the moment-to-moment spontaneous issuing forth” (Hori, p.752). Indeed, this phrase describes the essentially inner-motivated, autonomous nature of the vital force of life.

If these values can be made into the driving spirit of the age, we will be able to put behind us the nightmares of the twentieth century and realise a century of life and of peace, a peace that is much more than a mere interlude between wars.

SESSION ONE: ONENESS OF SELF AND ENVIRONMENT - A LIFE OF GRATITUDE



GUIDELINES FOR SESSION ONE

Oneness of self and environment - A life of gratitude

Aim:

To develop an appreciation that all people – both those we like and dislike contribute to our happiness, that is, to our development as a human being.

Method:

This week may be the first time people gather as a group. Ensure everybody is introduced and choose a study partner for the course so that they can meet in between the sessions to engage in dialogue and prepare presentations and experiences related to the topic.

Ask each participant to give a brief impression of keypoints they learnt from the pre-reading materials.

Discuss the questions for this week's topic.

Ask for two pairs of study partners to volunteer - one pair to prepare a brief introduction and the other pair to prepare one of the partner's experiences related to the next session's topic.

All study partners meet and discuss how the material relates to their own daily life, with those study partners selected, meeting to work on their presentations for the next session.

OVERVIEW

This week focuses on the relationship between our self and environment from the Buddhist perspective that it is only through the change within one's own heart that we can affect a change in our external environment. Through dialogue based on the material in this session, the aim is to develop an appreciation for everyone in our environment, including those we like and dislike – all of whom contribute to our happiness and our development as a human being. In turn, there is no such thing as being happy in isolation. For this reason Buddhism aims for the peace and happiness of all society. Buddhism focuses on the two aspects of the peace of the land and establishing the correct teaching or philosophy for people's happiness. This is the message of Nichiren Daishonin in his major treatise, *Securing the peace of the Land through establishing the correct teaching* (Jp. Rissho Ankoku Ron). The spirit of this is not to promote sectarianism but to secure the peace and security of people. The method to achieve peace for society as a whole is through the transformation of people's hearts, which means establishing the spirit of human dignity and deep respect for all humanity as the foundational principles of how society moves forward. When the people's hearts are transformed then the land will be peaceful.

If we are aspiring to the state of Buddhahood, we find ourselves grateful for those around us who, because of their suffering, enable us to polish our lives. This process is the transformation of our own heart and is expressed in our compassionate acts towards others. At this moment we unite in our common humanity and differences evaporate like dew in the heat of the sun's rays. In the endeavour towards realising Buddhahood, we are all equal - in fact we are all one!

STUDY PARTNER EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. *Consider a relationship you have had where you experienced significant misunderstanding and which you were able to overcome.*
 - a. *What did you learn that was significant in resolving the misunderstanding/conflict?*
 - b. *How did you develop as a person as a result of resolving this misunderstanding/conflict?*
 - c. *What will you take away from this experience in relation to future misunderstandings that may arise with others?*
 - d. *In addition what do you take from the reading material that you will consider in relation to human conflicts?*

2. *There are different kinds of joy in life - the joy of winning, the joy of accomplishment, the joy of receiving, the joy of enabling another person to become happy. Consider the effects on your life of each joy you have experienced. Which has given you the most lasting satisfaction?*

Oneness of Self and Environment

The Buddhist principle of the oneness of self and environment (*esho funi*) means that life (*sho*) and its environment (*e*) are inseparable (*funi*). Funi means “two but not two”. This means that although we perceive things around us as separate from us, there is a dimension of our lives that is one with the universe. At the most fundamental level of life itself, there is no separation between ourselves and the environment.

Buddhism teaches that life manifests itself in both a living subject and an objective environment. Nichiren wrote: “Life at each moment encompasses . . . both self and environment of all sentient beings in every condition of life as well as insentient beings - plants, sky and earth, on down to the most minute particles of dust.”

“Life” means the subjective self that experiences the effects of past actions and is capable of creating new causes for the future. The environment is the objective realm where the karmic effects of life take shape

According to Buddhism, everything around us, including work and family relationships, is the reflection of our inner lives. Everything is perceived through the self and alters according to the individual’s inner state of life. Thus, if we change ourselves, our circumstances will inevitably change also.

This is a liberating concept as it means that there is no need to seek enlightenment outside ourselves or in a particular place. Wherever we are, in whatever circumstances, we can bring forth our innate Buddhahood, thus transforming our experience of our environment into the Buddha’s land - the joy-filled place where we can create value for ourselves and for others.

As Nichiren wrote: “If the minds of the people are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure and impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.” Evil means self-centred and shortsighted actions based on greed, arrogance, fear and aggression.

The single most positive action we can make for society and the land is to transform our own lives, so that they are no longer dominated by anger, greed and fear. When we manifest wisdom, generosity and integrity, we naturally make more valuable choices, and we will find that our surroundings are nurturing and supportive. Often, we cannot foresee the long-term results of our actions and it is hard to believe that one individual’s choices can really affect the state of the world, but Buddhism teaches that through the oneness of self and environment, everything is interconnected.

Rissho Ankoku - Securing Peace for the People

Buddhism takes a fundamentally positive view of human life. Its core message is that every individual has infinite dignity and potential. If we truly understand that human life is the most precious of all treasures, we will value our own lives and those of others. From this perspective it is clear that war, as the ultimate abuse and cruelty to human beings, is to be absolutely and totally rejected and peace should be our constant goal. If society embraced this view of life’s value, preventing violence and addressing all forms of suffering would become the highest priorities of humankind, as opposed to the accumulation of material wealth and power. Those who nurture and care for life - parents, nurses, doctors and teachers - would be treated with the greatest respect. But humanity’s common curse is an inability to fully believe in or appreciate the value of our own lives and those of others. And even if we do accept this in theory, to act on it on a day-to-day basis is extremely difficult. When faced with a bitter interpersonal conflict we may still experience poisonous thoughts of jealousy and hatred and wish to harm another person or wish that they could somehow be got out of the way.

Inner Transformation The UNESCO Constitution states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed.” Likewise, Buddhism stresses that only an inner transformation of our lives, from the deepest level, can make our compassion stronger than our egotistical desire to win over or use others.

It offers us teachings and tools which enable us to effect this kind of core transformation.

Nichiren's most important treatise, entitled *Rissho Ankoku Ron*, literally "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," presented to the political ruler of the day in July 1260, was a passionate cry for a return to the original purpose of Buddhism - securing the peace and happiness of the people.

Nichiren starts his treatise by describing the turmoil he saw around him. "Over half the population has already been carried off by death, and there is hardly a single person who does not grieve." His prime motivation was a wrenching sense of empathy for the people's plight. He had taken a vow to lead himself and others to happiness, and this meant struggling to awaken and empower people to challenge their own destiny. His outspoken determination earned him a controversial reputation which persists to this day. "I cannot keep silent on this matter," he wrote. "I cannot suppress my fears." In terms of concrete action, Nichiren urged the political leaders of the day to cease official patronage of favored sects and for open public debate on the merits of the different schools of Buddhism. On a personal level, he called on the leaders to "reform the tenets that you hold in your heart." In today's terms this means transforming ourselves and our most deeply held beliefs about the nature of life.

The function of any religion or philosophy should be to give people the courage and hope needed to transform their sufferings. We need to develop the strength to engage successfully in a struggle against the forces of division and destruction within our own lives and the larger social realm. Unless empowerment for ourselves and others is our goal, we will be unable to resist and overcome the negative influences within our own lives and their environment. To create an age of peace, one in which life is given supreme value, it is vital for us to have a philosophy that reveals the wonder, dignity and infinite potential of life. When we base our actions on this belief and take action out of compassion for others, the result is a pure joy which in turn motivates us to further action. Empowering ourselves from within, our sphere of compassion becomes wider and wider, encompassing not only ourselves, our own families and nations, but the whole of humanity.

Excerpts from The World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings, vol. 1

#1

If we accept this people-centred perspective as the Daishonin's point of departure and the foundation of his concept of 'peace of the land', then the logical result of establishing the 'peace of the land' is world peace. For making the land peaceful means realising peace.

The Daishonin further warns of the two disasters of internal strife and foreign invasion. In other words, he warns of the danger of the outbreak of war. War is not only cruel, miserable, and ugly, it is the manifestation of the most hideous and wretched functions of human life. Ending war is the natural mission of Buddhism, which aims to protect the sanctity of life and seeks to lead all people to the supreme life-state of Buddhahood.

#2

The Daishonin's life unfolded with its main focus being the realisation of the concept of establishing the correct teaching in order to bring peace and security to the land. Herein lies the essence of Nichiren Buddhism.

In essence, it is not specific or unique to the Daishonin. I think we can say that this concept is also inherent in the Buddhism of Shakyamuni, and go even further to say that it is an ideal towards which all religions should aspire. It is therefore incumbent upon practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism to advance along the path of establishing the correct teaching for the peace of the land.

#3

Buddhism is the 'body'; it is the basis of everything. When Buddhism is in disarray or its teachings are lost, society falls into a state of confusion. Unless there is a philosophy in place that supports society on a fundamental level, the world will lose its foundation.

#4

The fundamental level at which the principle of ‘establishing the correct teaching’ takes place, is at the level of the heart. In other words, without a transformation in the inner life of the individual, the correct teaching cannot be established.

The Daishonin says that when we win over the fundamental evil of slander of the Law and transform the beliefs that we hold in our heart, then the threefold world – the actual world in which we live – becomes a pure Buddha land, an indestructible treasure realm. He also says that the teaching in which we should believe is the ‘single good doctrine.’ ‘Doctrine’ means a true teaching and refers namely to the Lotus Sutra. ‘Single good’ means fundamental good.

The Lotus Sutra teaches that all people can manifest the Buddha nature, and that it is the duty of those who uphold the Sutra to take action to enable others to attain Buddhahood as well. This is the wisdom and way of life of the Buddha. This philosophy and practice of the Buddha is precisely what is meant by fundamental good. In the same vein, the Daishonin’s teaching of the Three Great Secret Law is none other than the practice of fundamental good for the Latter Day of the Law.

The essence of ‘establishing the correct teaching’ lies in believing in the fundamental good that is the Lotus Sutra and in each individual establishing peace in their hearts. Only when a society that functions in accord with the fundamental good is firmly secured will a truly peaceful society be actualised. This does not mean, however, that every person in a given society must be united by faith in the Lotus Sutra. What matters is that the spirit of the great philosophy of peace expounded in the Lotus Sutra, with its teaching that all people are Buddhas, be given full play in society as a whole. On a societal level, ‘establishing the correct teaching’ means establishing the concepts of human dignity and sanctity of life as principles that support and move society.

#5

The Daishonin’s profound empathy with the people’s pain and suffering is the basis of *On Establishing the Correct Teaching*. His feelings are neither mere sentimentality nor sympathy. Enabling people to become happy is the Buddha’s mission. It is an act that requires waging a struggle against the devilish nature inherent in life that causes people to suffer. For that reason, the Daishonin conveys reality just as it is.

Our mission is to champion the cause of those who are suffering and to struggle against the devilish forces that bring about that suffering.

In the January 1957 edition of the monthly study journal *Daibyakurenge*, the Soka Gakkai second president Josei Toda wrote: “My prayer is that all my comrades in faith who share my spirit will strive to create a world, a country, a life, in which there is no use for the word ‘misery.’ The only way to rid the world of this, is never to let up in the struggle against the devilish nature that causes people suffering. That is the spirit and resolve of the Buddha. It is the spirit of a person of courage. Unless we base ourselves on this spirit, we cannot lead the way to kosen-rufu.

#6

There is no way that the Daishonin intended this ideal for Japan alone. Achieving world peace and bringing happiness to all humanity is the purpose



GUIDELINES FOR SESSION TWO

Oneness of good and evil - The heart of compassion

Aim:

To recognize that both fundamental darkness and enlightenment (that is good and evil) exist in the context of relationships, and therefore to actively seek good and caring relations and to manifest enlightenment through our interactions.

Method:

Introduce participants who are giving an introduction to the topic and experience.

Facilitate discussion on the questions for this session.

Ask for two pairs of study partners to volunteer - one pair to prepare a brief introduction and the other pair to prepare one of the partner's experience related to the next session's topic.

All study partners meet and discuss how the material relates to their own daily life, with those study partners selected meeting to work on their presentations for the next session.

SESSION TWO:

ONENESS OF GOOD AND EVIL - THE HEART OF COMPASSION

OVERVIEW

“There is no greater offence a human being can commit than denying the fundamental Buddha nature inherent in all people’s lives and slandering the Lotus Sutra- the teaching that enables us to manifest this Buddha nature- and those who spread it. Fundamental darkness...is itself the root of all negative karma”.⁷

All phenomena are expressions of the Mystic Law – including fundamental delusion (evil) and enlightenment (good). Because they are inseparable from the ultimate reality they are inseparable from each other. Therefore all of us have the potential for doing supreme good and supreme evil. A Buddha aims to recognize the potentiality for good and evil both within his/her life and the lives of others and determines to transform the destructive tendency into a creative one.

From the perspective of the Buddha, our day-to-day encounters with another fellow human being are truly significant. In each encounter there exists the potential for creating value and the potential for creating conflicts. When people rub us the wrong way, and our encounters sometimes plunge us into feelings of anger or hatred or jealousy, it might often be easier to dwell on these feelings and see the other as “evil” or wrong. On a societal scale, in the age we live in, where life is sometimes only seen as a means to an end, the general tendency could sometimes be one of “if you are not with us, you are against us”. This statement does not acknowledge the potential for

good and evil in all of us and thus does not recognise that evil can be occurring simultaneously in our own views and actions.

The Lotus Sutra predicts enlightenment for all people, including the ones we just cannot seem to get along with. Our action based on the spirit of these words is Buddhist compassion. What prevents us from a complete appreciation of the Buddha nature inherent in all people is our own fundamental darkness or ignorance. Fundamental darkness is the ignorance that the essence of our lives, “the others” and the universe are one and the same. It is this darkness that shrouds our hearts and minds and seeks to turn everyone and everything into a means.

The human heart is sensitive, multifaceted and rich, and has the capacity to achieve incredible feats. But for that very reason, it often also undergoes great suffering and torment. Likewise, the human heart can become trapped in an endless negative downward spiral. Will our lives transmigrate forever in the paths of evil, or can we succeed in moving them into an orbit of good?⁸

If we wish to create a meaningful life of value, Nichiren Daishonin encourages us to polish our lives daily and reveal our highest potential through the practice of daimoku. Daily, we are encouraged to win in our spiritual struggle to break through our own negative and destructive forces. When we are able to do this, naturally, we will be able to appreciate life’s highest potential in others. Buddhism teaches that *good and evil exist in the context of relationships* and encourages us to... *actively seek to create “good” relations*⁹. It is therefore always our responsibility to transform any relationship into a good one no matter how negatively we might initially perceive the others’ actions. We can learn from Shakyamuni’s example of believing in Devadatta’s¹⁰ potentiality for Buddhahood even though Devadatta turned against him and caused disunity among the community of Buddhist believers.

⁷ Lecture on ‘The Opening of the Eyes’ no. 13, Indigo, June 2006, p.33

⁸ Daisaku Ikeda, Lectures “On Attaining Buddhahood in this Lifetime”, [1] (SGI Newsletter, Number 6753, 1 March 2006)

⁹ Daisaku Ikeda, “The Oneness of Good and Evil” in the Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra “The Enlightenment of Evil People – The Triumph of Good”

¹⁰ A cousin of Shakyamuni who, after Shakyamuni’s enlightenment, first followed him as a disciple but later became his enemy

STUDY PARTNER EXERCISE AND DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Negative and evil states of mind arise from fundamental darkness or delusion (e.g. distrust, hatred, jealousy, fear, desire to dominate, desire to kill). What examples of fundamental darkness have you experienced in your own state of mind, and in your environment? How did this affect you? What changed when you chanted about this state of affairs? What does the experience of transcending such fundamental darkness teach you about the relationship between Buddhahood and delusion?

“The struggle against evil is a struggle that issues from the inner effort to master our own contradictions and conflicts. This should be seen as a difficult yet unavoidable trial that we undergo in the effort to create a greater and deeper sense of connection”. Discuss

STUDY MATERIAL

Good and Evil

Good and evil have often been looked upon as diametrically opposed and mutually exclusive. But in a real, practical sense, such a simplistic way of thinking is unsatisfactory. Even the cruelest of criminals may possess a strong sense of love or compassion toward his parents and children. Is such a person fundamentally good or evil?

The Buddhist understanding is that good and evil are innate, inseparable aspects of life. This view makes it impossible to label a particular individual or group as “good” or “evil.” Every single human being is capable of acts of the most noble good, or the basest evil. Moreover, good and evil in Buddhism are seen not as absolute but relative or “relational.” The good or evil of an act is understood in terms of its actual impact on our own lives and the lives of others, not on abstract rules of conduct.

Evil actions are those which are based on a narrow selfishness, the delusion that our lives are fundamentally disconnected from those of others and that we can benefit at their expense. Evil views life as a means to be expended, not an end in itself. Good is that which generates connection between ourselves and others, healing and restoring the bonds among human societies. In the context of Buddhism, good is identified with “the fundamental nature of enlightenment,” or absolute freedom and happiness resulting from profound self-knowledge. Evil indicates “fundamental darkness,” or life’s innate delusion which negates the potential of enlightenment and causes suffering for oneself and others. This inner darkness echoes with the despair that our lives are ugly and meaningless; it also drives a wedge of fear that splits the hearts of people into “us” and “them.”

A Buddha is someone who has the courage to acknowledge these two fundamental aspects of life. As Nichiren states, “One who is thoroughly awakened to the nature of good and evil from their roots to their branches and leaves is called a Buddha.” Buddhas accept their innate goodness without arrogance because they know all people share the same Buddha nature. Buddhas also recognize their innate evil without despair because they know they have the

strength to overcome and control their negativity. Unwillingness to acknowledge the potential of both supreme good and evil can stem from the fact that as individuals we are reluctant to see ourselves as either very good or very bad, hiding instead behind a collective moral mediocrity that requires neither the responsibility of goodness nor the guilt of evil. And perhaps this moral ambiguity within seems to demand quick judgement of others - those who serve our interests as "good people" and those whom we dislike as "bad people" as if to counterbalance that inner confusion with external clarity.

Some view Buddhism as a teaching of tranquillity and repose - of passivity even - whereas in fact the practice of Buddhism is not about "staying safe." It is a constant struggle to create value and change evil into good through our own efforts to confront it. Nichiren writes, "Opposing good is called evil, opposing evil is called good." Soka Gakkai founder Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, imprisoned for his criticism of Japan's wartime policies, is said to have engaged his fellow prisoners in a debate on the nature of good and evil, asking if there was a difference between not doing good and committing actual evil. If we lack the courage to confront evil acts, or tendencies toward hatred and discrimination, both within ourselves and in society, they will spread unchecked, as history shows. Martin Luther King, Jr., lamented, "We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people."

In the words of SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, "The universe, this world and our own lives, are the stage for a ceaseless struggle between hatred and compassion, the destructive and constructive aspects of life. We must never let up, confronting evil at every turn." And in the end, the evil over which we must triumph is the impulse toward hatred and destruction that resides in us all. The process of acknowledging, confronting and transforming our own fundamental darkness is the means by which we can strengthen the functioning of good in our lives.

"The daimoku of faith refers to the spiritual aspect of our practice [is]... the struggle we wage in our hearts against our inner delusion or darkness; a battle against the negative and destructive forces within us. It means breaking through the darkness clouding our Buddha nature and bringing forth the life-state of Buddhahood through the power of faith.

The daimoku of practice... refers to chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo ourselves and also teaching it to others. It means making efforts in word and deed for the happiness of ourselves and others as evidence of our spiritual struggle against inner negativity and illusion

Only by winning over our inner darkness and negativity can we be victorious in life and reveal our full potential. The same is true if we wish to savor true fulfillment in our lives. In that sense, I want to emphasize that the practice set forth in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in order to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime is the only means to conquer the darkness and delusion that are the fundamental source of human evil, and cultivate true independence, construct a solid self, and achieve a state of life of boundless happiness and peace of mind. Attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime thus becomes the fundamental purpose of an individual's life".¹¹

¹¹ On Attaining Buddhahood, Instalment 1

Two Key Teachings: The Enlightenment of Evil People and The Enlightenment of Women

The two admonitions of the “Devadatta” chapter refer to the two teachings of the enlightenment of evil people, who are represented by Devadatta, and the enlightenment of women, who are represented by the dragon king’s daughter. These are called “admonitions” because Shakyamuni admonishes the assembled bodhisattvas to realize the widespread propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day so that all people may attain Buddhahood.

It is important that we actively engage in the challenge of guiding those around us to happiness. Without this struggle, any ambition of achieving happiness for all humanity is meaningless. A religion is as good as dead if it cannot provide an answer to the vital question of how we can arouse the joy of living in the hearts of those experiencing the deepest suffering and despair, those who have lost all hope in life.

The teachings of the Lotus Sutra and the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin, with their life-affirming quality, represent a philosophy of revitalisation that views all things as having infinite value and potential. They also constitute a philosophy of hope that can inspire fresh optimism and zest for life in the hearts of those suffering intensely.

This philosophy of hope is the core of a genuinely humanistic religion, for it teaches the great path that enables us to feel deep appreciation for being alive at each moment as well as to repay our gratitude to our parents who raised us and to all those in our environment to whom we are indebted; it also makes it possible for all humankind to lead happy, fulfilling lives.

The enlightenment of evil people and women expounded in the “Devadatta” chapter is therefore a subject very closely tied to the true purpose of religion.

Opening the Way to Buddhahood for Women Of the Latter Day

Next, I would like to discuss the attainment of Buddhahood by the dragon king’s daughter.

As in the case with Devadatta, the Daishonin asserts that the dragon girl’s enlightenment does not merely signal the attainment of Buddhahood by one person, but rather indicates that all women have the potential to do so. The Daishonin writes: “When the dragon king’s daughter attained Buddhahood, it opened up the way to attaining Buddhahood for all women of later ages” (*WND, p.269*). By doing so, he emphasizes that the ability of one person to attain enlightenment assures the same potential for all people.

Everything starts with one person. As an ancient Chinese saying goes, “One is the mother of ten thousand.” Kosen-rufu cannot be achieved without an ardent desire to help another person become happy, irrespective of who they may be.

Furthermore, from a doctrinal standpoint, the Daishonin refutes the provisional Mahayana sutras that at a glance might seem to teach that women can attain Buddhahood. While acknowledging that these teachings may recognise women’s potential for enlightenment, he denounces them for limiting women to “attaining Buddhahood through transformation” – in other words, insisting that a woman can only attain enlightenment after first being reborn as a man.

In contrast, the dragon king’s daughter instantly attained Buddhahood in accord with the doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life – in other words, she manifests the life-state of Buddhahood in her present form, as a living being in the nine worlds. In short, she becomes a Buddha while retaining her form as the eight-year-old daughter of the dragon king.

The “Devadatta” chapter of the Lotus Sutra records the doubts expressed by Shariputra, the wisest of the Shakyamuni’s ten major disciples. When Shariputra

is confronted with the dragon girl's attainment of enlightenment, he is incredulous, saying that it is "difficult to believe" (*LS12, p.188*). He rather rudely interrogates her, demanding to know, "How... could a woman like you be able to attain Buddhahood so quickly?" (*LS12, p.188*).

Even Shariputra, who had received a prediction of attaining Buddhahood earlier in the Lotus Sutra, was unable to completely abandon the notion that one could only attain enlightenment after undertaking austere practices for countless kalpas. As a result, he could not suddenly accept the idea for being able to attain Buddhahood in one's present form.

What the enlightenment of Devadatta and the dragon girl shows in the beneficial power of the Mystic Law to change poison into medicine and attain Buddhahood in one's present form. It is only through this beneficial power that all people in the defiled age of the Latter Day can achieve genuine happiness. This is because the Mystic Law is the highly effective medicine that can make this a reality on the most fundamental level.

Believing in the Transformative Power of the Mystic Law

The Daishonin also describes this immediate attainment of Buddhahood as "attaining supreme enlightenment in one's present form without altering one's status as an ordinary person" (*WND, p.410*). He writes:

The heart of the Lotus Sutra is the revelation that one may attain supreme enlightenment in one's present form without altering one's status as an ordinary person. This means that without casting aside one's karmic impediments one can still attain the Buddha way. (*WND, p.410*)

"Attaining supreme enlightenment in one's present form" means that one's life, just as it is, is an entity of the Mystic Law, while "not altering one's status as an ordinary person" means that becoming a Buddha does not require changing into something or someone else.

We can summon forth our Buddhahood without altering our form as an ordinary person and give expression to our Buddha nature through our conduct. The way to genuine happiness for people of the Latter Day lies solely in this path of human revolution and the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form.

Also, the Latter Day is a time when people's lives and society are wracked unceasingly by negative causes and effects. The above-cited passage from the Daishonin's writings includes the phrase, "without casting aside one's karmic impediments" (*WND, p.410*). If one were unable to attain Buddhahood without discarding such hindrances, then it would remain an unreachable goal for people of the Latter Day of the Law. The principle of changing poison into medicine thus gives people the power to bring forth innate hope and overcome feelings of despair and helplessness in this evil age, with its endless cycle of negative causation.

The famous Indian Mahayana scholar Nagarjuna, whom the Daishonin frequently cites in his writings, declared: "[The Lotus Sutra is] like a great physician who can change poison into medicine" (*WND, p.458*). This clearly expresses the superiority of the Lotus Sutra and describes "the blessing of the single character myo" (*WND, p.458*).

In the writing "On Hearing the Buddha Vehicle for the First Time" (*GZ, p.982-84*), addressed to his lay follower Toki Jonin, the Daishoin gives an in-depth explanation of the meaning of "changing poison into medicine." He writes that "poison" refers to the three

paths of earthly desires, karma and suffering, while “medicine” indicates the three virtues of the Dharma body, wisdom and emancipation. Changing poison into medicine, he explains, is the principle whereby people living amid the negative causality of the three paths can manifest the positive benefit of the three virtues in their own lives through the power of the Mystic Law.

The three paths of earthly desires, karma and suffering describe the web of negative causation in people’s lives that gives rise to evil and suffering. “Earthly desires” include such things as the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness; they are illusions that bring about suffering. “Karma” arises from earthly desires; it indicates three categories of action – mental, verbal, and physical – that lead to suffering. These actions include the five cardinal sins, ten evil acts and four grave prohibitions. “Suffering” is the result of earthly desires and karma; it takes the form of physical and spiritual retribution, and includes the four sufferings and the eight sufferings. Because of all this, people’s lives are shackled by illusion and suffering (*cf. GZ, p.983-84*).

In contrast to the three paths, the three virtues of Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation are great benefits that manifest in the life of a Buddha; they indicate ultimate truth, pure wisdom, and a life-state of infinite freedom.

The earthly desires, karma, and suffering of ordinary people give rise to a life filled with illusion and torment, whereas the Dharma body, wisdom, and emancipation of Buddhas make for a life replete with freedom and joy that accords with ultimate truth and wisdom. The two couldn’t be more different. However, through the marvelous power of the Mystic Law, we can dramatically transform the three paths into the three virtues. This is the principle of changing poison into medicine.

The life of an ordinary person engaged in a cycle of cause and effect based on the three paths is the seed for attaining the exact opposite state of life, one that is pervaded by the three virtues. In other words, it is the seed for Buddhahood. The key to changing poison into medicine is to believe in the Lotus Sutra, which elucidates the mystic nature of life whereby the three paths are instantly transformed into the three

virtues (*cf. GZ, p.983*). It is faith in the Mystic Law that unlocks this wondrous and unfathomable power inherent in our lives.

Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, the first Soka Gakkai president, once discussed the principle of changing poison into medicine, stressing that no matter what may happen, we should always look to the future:

Our daily practice of the Mystic Law is one of changing poison into medicine. As long as we are human beings, we are bound at times to meet with accidents or misfortune, or encounter business setbacks... However, we can change any situation from poison into medicine as long as we do not doubt the Gohonzon and continue to devote ourselves to this practice, with the Mystic Law and the Gohonzon as our basis.

For example, you may fall ill. But merely worrying that it is retribution for a negative cause you made in the past solves nothing. You should say to yourself with confidence and determination, “I will take this illness and change poison into medicine! I will unlock the door to great good fortune and benefit in the form of good health!” and continue to exert yourself steadfastly in faith. This is important.

The power of the Mystic Law, with its ability to change poison into medicines, cannot only cure your illness, but enable you to experience even greater good health than before, when you finally recover.

The principle of changing poison into medicine serves as a wellspring of hope, making it possible for people to live with optimism in a troubled age.



The philosophical basis of our activities and thinking is elucidated in the treatise “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land,” written by Nichiren in 1260 as he witnessed the sufferings of the ordinary people caught up in the incessant war and natural disasters that wracked thirteenth-century Japanese society.

In this treatise, instead of using either of the standard Chinese characters for “country,” which have in their centre elements that signify “sovereign” or “weapon,” in the majority of cases Nichiren uses a character in which the element signifying “ordinary people” is central. For Nichiren, the heart of the nation is neither the authorities nor the territory, but the ordinary people who inhabit it. This same spirit animates the modern concept of human security--where the foremost aim is to realize the peace and happiness of citizens.

Throughout this treatise, Nichiren critiqued the dominant philosophies of his times; he considered that their emphasis on introverted reflection encouraged an escapist attitude and made people feel incapable of effectively engaging in or transforming society. Instead, he promoted the belief that inherent in each individual is a robust power and potential; that each individual can become the protagonist and initiator of societal transformation. This belief shares much with the contemporary concept of empowerment that constitutes the core of human development. (*Fulfilling the Mission: Empowering the UN to live up to the world’s expectations, 30 August, 2006, Peace Proposal*).