

BUDDHIST CONCEPT: Earthly Desires Are Enlightenment What One Desires

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**Burn the firewood of earthly desires and behold the fire of enlightened wisdom.
(Gosho Zenshu, p. 710)**

When we first encounter Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, many of us are introduced to the concept of earthly desires are enlightenment. This is also the title of a letter written by the Daishonin to his disciple Shijo Kingo in 1272.

Simply put, earthly desires are enlightenment means that we can "burn" our earthly desires through prayer. In the process of chanting about our everyday desires, we become more wise and can learn many life lessons.

Living in the materialistically oriented culture of the 20th century, it is no wonder that many of us begin our practice chanting for "goodies," like new cars and jobs. However, as Richard Causton explains in *The Buddha and Daily Life*, when we see the power of this practice manifest in actual proof — the satisfaction of these various earthly desires — we start to seek a deeper happiness. Our practice naturally transforms into prayer for others and to overcome our weaknesses and shortcomings. In other words, the achievement of earthly desires inspires us to further our human revolution.

What we desire thus gradually becomes more profound — but we do not rid ourselves of earthly desires. The ultimate earthly desire is to attain enlightenment, as SGI President Ikeda explains in his "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra":

The goal is not to eliminate desires; it is what one desires that is important. Earthly desires are enlightenment. The desire for supreme enlightenment, the search for enlightenment, is enlightenment. (August 1996 *Seikyo Times*, pp. 32–33)

Recently a member explained to me how earthly desires are enlightenment had applied to his experience with overcoming the hell of chemical dependency. He told me that at the outset of his practice he was like the physician's son who drank some poison and lost his senses in the parable from the Lotus Sutra. Only through the gentle, unconditional encouragement of his friends and SGI leaders, who stood by him when all others had given up any hope of his recovery, did he find the courage to take the excellent medicine of this practice.

He explained to me that he felt his desire to self destruct was like a lump of carbon that slowly but surely transformed into a diamond-like life-condition. Now he is fully recovered and devotes much of his spare time to helping others with similar problems. So through this practice his desire to destroy himself was turned into the desire to help others.

He said his favorite passage from the works of English poet, artist and writer William Blake mirrored his experience: Blake wrote in the 16th century that "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom." In other words, our desires, tempered by faith, inevitably lead us to wisdom's palace.

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