

## Questions & Answers on Faith: What's Wrong With Me?

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**Q: Is there something wrong with me? Why doesn't this practice seem to be working for me?**

A: We tend to view ourselves as either good or bad, right or wrong. We have a tendency to be judgmental in this regard. But this is not the primary approach Buddhism takes in how we look at ourselves. The Buddhist view, recognizing that we all have both innate good and bad in us, focuses on strengthening our good points and challenging our weaknesses. Buddhism doesn't tell us that we're essentially good people or bad people — it says we can always become better and stronger. In "The Treatment of Illness," the Daishonin states:

The heart of the Hokke sect is the principle of *ichinen sanzen*, which reveals that both good and evil are inherent even in those at the highest stage, that of *myogaku* or enlightenment. The fundamental nature of enlightenment manifests itself as Bonten and Taishaku, whereas the fundamental darkness manifests itself as the Devil of the Sixth Heaven. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 3, p. 279)

In this passage, he teaches that human life has the potential to exhibit either good or bad according to where we are coming from within. In other words, are we coming from Buddhahood or from our fundamental darkness? That's a vital question in Buddhism. Most important is whether we can consistently come from Buddhahood in our practice.

When we feel that there's something wrong with us, that the practice isn't working because of this, it may actually be that we are waiting passively for results — thinking there's something wrong becomes an excuse! Or we are becoming overly impatient. The problem in these cases is our attitude in faith, not that we're bad people.

The overall goal of Buddhism, we should remember, is to achieve an unshakably happy state of life. This is a life strong and enjoyable even in the face of problems and obstacles, a life that seeks profound rather than shallow happiness.

In the beginning, we may assume that practicing means no problems — that if we have lots of problems there's something wrong with us — but that's not so. Life is a series of problems, whether we practice or not.

Happiness is the confidence and power to solve each one. The power of the Law is such that we can change the source of our problems and, deep within our lives, our weaknesses into strengths. Therefore, in the final analysis, Buddhism is primarily concerned with winning.

Always thinking there's something wrong with us can become a serious hindrance to our practice. Ultimately, it flies against the teaching that each of us is potentially a Buddha.

In "Letter to Gijo-bo," Nichiren Daishonin explains that the phrase "Single-mindedly yearning to see the Buddha" (*isshin yok ken butsu*), which is part of the sutra that we recite during gongyo, means "to see the Buddha in one's own mind, to concentrate one's mind on seeing the Buddha, and that to see one's own mind is to see the Buddha" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], p. 205). There are no good or bad Buddhas — rather, all Buddhas are continually striving to better themselves as Bodhisattvas of the Earth.

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