

Questions and Answers on Faith: In This Lifetime vs. As We Are

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Q: What is the difference between “attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime” and “attaining Buddhahood as we are”? How are these concepts related to each other?

A: Both concepts stem from the Lotus Sutra and talk essentially about the same thing. But if we are to pinpoint one difference, attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime involves length of practice, while attaining Buddhahood as we are refers to the manner in which we reach enlightenment.

In the provisional teachings, lifetime after lifetime of austere practice was deemed necessary for bodhisattvas to attain Buddhahood. The Lotus Sutra offers a big contrast to this by elucidating the attainment of Buddhahood in this lifetime.

Shakyamuni Buddha teaches here that because of the enormous beneficial power of the Law one can achieve enlightenment — in this lifetime — through believing it, practicing it and studying it.

Similarly, Nichiren Daishonin asserts that “all the votaries of the Lotus Sutra, if they practice Buddhism exactly as expounded by the Buddha, can attain Buddhahood in this lifetime without a single exception” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 416). “Practice Buddhism exactly” can be construed to mean to have faith in the Gohonzon and devote ourselves to practice for ourselves and others exactly as taught by the Daishonin.

Attaining Buddhahood as we are means we can reach enlightenment without changing our identity as common individuals. The pre-Lotus Sutra teachings regulate that one can attain Buddhahood only by changing his or her current identity into something else. A common person had to first “become a bodhisattva” before he or she could reach Buddhahood. Moreover, 52 stages of bodhisattva practice had to be fulfilled one by one on the way to Buddhahood. Naturally, in the course of such a long, austere practice, one would have to go through an identity transformation. (Also, in the Daishonin’s Buddhism, the ten worlds signify 10 different life-conditions, while in the provisional teachings, they are characterized as different beings, such as hungry spirits, animals, *asuras*, human beings, heavenly beings, voice-hearers, *pratyekabuddhas*, bodhisattvas and Buddhas.)

In the provisional teachings, therefore, one cannot attain Buddhahood as long as his or her identity is that of a common individual. But the Lotus Sutra expounds attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime; we *are* bodhisattvas and we *can* attain Buddhahood while still being common people.

Both these concepts show the great beneficial power of the Gohonzon in enabling us to attain Buddhahood as we are in this lifetime. And the key to attaining this lies in our sincere faith in and assiduous practice to the Gohonzon. Citing the Gosho passage “If you think the Law is outside yourself, you are embracing not the Mystic Law but some inferior teaching” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 3), SGI President Ikeda says that “nothing is stronger than a powerful determination coupled with faith and practice. The Daishonin is telling us that the determination with which we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo reaches out to the entire universe and makes all things possible.”

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Title: In This Lifetime vs. As We Are

Subject: World Tribune 03/20/98 n.3183 p.5 WT980320p05

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Keywords: Answers Concepts Enlightenment Faith Lifetime Questions Study Terms Tribune World