

EDITORIAL: Desperately Seeking a Change of Karma

Nichiren Daishonin promises that we can change our karma, our destiny, through Buddhist practice. For instance, in a 1275 letter to Nichigen-nyo, the wife of Shijo Kingo, he tells her that “the bad luck of your thirty-third year will turn into the happiness of your thirty-third year... You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 5, p. 158).

At the time, 33 was thought in Japan to be an unlucky age for women, and Nichigen-nyo thought trouble was on the way. The Daishonin wanted to assure her that whatever karma she felt she was going to suffer from would definitely turn into her happiness. He makes similar promises to his followers throughout his letters and thus to all of us. We can reverse our bad luck, he says — whether it’s in relationships, health or finances.

Unfortunately, though, changing our deepest karma takes time. The Daishonin wasn’t telling Nichigen-gyo that she would change *all* her bad luck that one year; he was encouraging her to keep moving down the long road to happiness. His message was “Keep chanting, keep hoping, keep moving your life in a positive direction this year.”

SGI President Ikeda recently explained that “it takes a great deal of time and effort to overcome sufferings of a karmic nature, whose roots lie deep in causes we made in the past.” One way of looking at our karmic sufferings, then, is this: Since they come from causes we made in the past — even in past lives — we have to reach deep into our lives to change them. The deeper those sufferings’ causes are, the longer they take to reach.

It’s human nature, though, to want to change our lives all at once. Today! Now!

And many times, we may approach our Buddhist practice desperately seeking that change — the quick fix, some call it. We might chant more, go to more meetings, study Buddhism more. Which is all great, unless we then let impatience get in the way of the progress we’re making, or we just burn out. It can be a big letdown, for example, when we “throw ourselves into activities,” and everything doesn’t immediately turn around.

We know how hard we’ve been working at faith — so where’s the payoff?

Again, Buddhism teaches that the fundamental change we’re hoping for only comes about over time, only through the accumulation of daily efforts over a long period. There is no quick fix.

At the same time, Buddhism teaches how important it is for us to enjoy changing our karmic sufferings. Since it may take a while, we might as well enjoy it. The Daishonin essentially asked Nichigen-gyo, “Why don’t you enjoy your 33rd year, making it a great year for changing karma?” The same principle applies to us all. If we feel that “This year I’ll change karma” or even “Today I’m going to change karma,” we’re sure to enjoy ourselves more than if we’re obsessing about why the payoff is slow in coming.

There may be few overnight successes in Buddhism, but the Daishonin teaches that every day and every night is another chance for us to change things — another *enjoyable* chance.

From the long-term perspective, we *will* change our karma. The Daishonin promised that, in the end, everything would turn out for the best if his followers continued to practice. “You will grow younger, and your good fortune will accumulate” — that’s a guarantee from him to each of us.

Growing younger. Accumulating good fortune. When he puts it like that, the Daishonin sure makes changing karma sound like a lot of fun.

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Title: Editorial: Desperately Seeking a Change of Karma

Subject: World Tribune 03/27/98 n.3184 p.2 WT980327p02

Author:

Keywords: Basics Change Desperately Editorials Karma Opinion Seeking Tribune World