

EDITORIAL: Exploring Other Philosophies

Many teachings and philosophies seem a lot like Buddhism. If you find yourself watching a TV infomercial at 2:00 a.m., you might hear someone selling the secrets of how to unleash your personal power and succeed in life. You may think, “That sounds kind of like Buddhism — learning how to tap our innate Buddhahood to win in life....”

Except Buddhism doesn't come with a price tag.

You may also hear parables from other religions that sound very similar to Buddhist parables. Or you may admire someone like Gandhi, who found his spiritual sustenance in the Bhagavad-Gita. Even though he wasn't a Buddhist, he was an exemplar of compassionate action.

You may even feel, as many do, that all great religions, at their core, teach fundamentally the same thing.

Ralph Waldo Emerson once wrote: “So much benevolence as a man hath, so much life hath he. For all things proceed out of this same spirit, which is differently named love, justice, temperance, in its different applications, just as the ocean receives different names on the several shores which it washes.”

Indeed, it could be said that many great teachings, although we call them by different names, grow from a common spirit.

At the same time, though, Nichiren Daishonin was very strict about practicing Buddhism correctly and eschewing heresy. Considering this, what is the value of exploring other teachings?

A seeking mind is definitely a good thing. Religious tolerance is to be cultivated and cherished. Time and again, SGI President Ikeda has encouraged us to read widely and develop a broad understanding of the hearts and minds of others. So exploring other teachings can enhance our lives.

It's crucial, though, that we maintain a clear perspective.

First, as long as we are fully aware of the limits of other teachings, our exploration of them can be productive.

Second, it's important to recognize that practicing the Daishonin's Buddhism enables us to change even immutable karma. The Daishonin makes it clear that even seemingly unchangeable things such as our life span or our character are affected by prayer to the Gohonzon.

In a letter to the wife of Toki Jonin, the Daishonin writes: “Today it is as natural for a woman to change her immutable karma by practicing the Lotus Sutra as it is for rice to ripen in fall or chrysanthemums to bloom in winter. When I, Nichiren, prayed for my mother, not only was her illness cured, but her life was prolonged by four years. Now you, too, have fallen ill, and as a woman, it is all the more timely for you to try believing in the Lotus Sutra and see what it will do for you” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 230)

Positive thinking and creative visualization, for example, may be beneficial practices, but it's doubtful that they can change immutable karma, which is created by causes embedded deep in our lives. The Daishonin boldly asserts that our prayers to the Gohonzon can transform even these deepest, darkest things within us. It's all up to our prayer and actions.

But our confidence in this truth perhaps doesn't always match the Daishonin's. Sometimes, our lack of confidence may prompt us to look elsewhere to find answers to our

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problems. But if we feel that we must look outside ourselves for the power to transform our lives, then isn't it all the more timely for us to try believing more deeply in the Lotus Sutra and seeing what it will do for us?

After all, the Daishonin vows to us that everything we seek exists within the practice of his teachings. He's not exaggerating, and he's not kidding.

The Daishonin evidences his confidence when he writes: "To mix other practices with this Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is a grave error. A lamp will be useless after the sun rises. How can dewdrops be beneficial once the rain falls? Should one feed a newborn baby with anything other than mother's milk? Good medicine works by itself; there is no need to add other medicine" (MW-3, 266).

This doesn't mean that we should never take medicine nor explore other teachings. Rather, the Daishonin is reassuring us that, indeed, faith in Nam-myoho-rence-kyo is unfathomably beneficial — you can't compare it to anything else.

When we talk about different teachings on a theoretical or philosophical level, we're likely to discover many similarities among them. But in terms of their application in daily life, they differ vastly in their power and influence. Firm faith in the Mystic Law gives rise to wisdom, which enables us to evaluate other teachings from the Daishonin's perspective.

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