

## WHAT A CONCEPT: Many in Body, One in Mind ('Itai Doshin')

### What an Un-Concept

By LISA JONES, Staff Writer

Surprise! *Itai doshin*, often translated as many in body, one in mind is *not* a Buddhist concept. Rather, it's a Chinese/Confucian/Taoist concept that Nichiren Daishonin adopted to encourage his followers and clarify his teachings. *Itai doshin* can also be translated as different bodies, same heart, and denotes the strategy by which individuals as well as groups can be victorious in any endeavor.

The Daishonin wrote the letter "On *Itai Doshin*" to one of his followers after the Atsuhara Persecution, during which three of them had been killed. His followers were outnumbered by adversaries, yet the Daishonin encouraged them to develop a unity that no outside force could disrupt. He wrote: "Even an individual at cross purposes with himself is certain to end in failure. Yet a hundred or even a thousand people can definitely attain their goal if they are of one mind" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 153).

It's important to note that *one mind* means one intent or one cherished, shared goal rather than everyone thinking the same thing. An individual may appear to be one "unified" being, yet he or she may have ambivalent thoughts and feelings that stand in the way of his or her wholehearted devotion to a purpose. Further, *many in body* implies that even though a group may appear at first glance to be disorganized or discordantly diverse, it may, in fact, be profoundly unified because each person shares a fundamental sense of mission.

When the Daishonin emphasizes unity, then, he means it on the individual level as a unification of one's heart, mind and body — or thought, word and deed. On another level, individual unity could be summed up as the conviction that your life, the Daishonin's life and the Mystic Law are of the same nature. On the group level, *itai doshin* implies a sanctuary of shared trust, so to speak, in which each member of the group is free to fully express his or her individuality.

In "Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life" the Daishonin writes: "All disciples should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with one mind (*itai doshin*), transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation" (MW-1, 23). In other words, the concept of *itai doshin* illustrates the most important Buddhist teaching.

There's a story in which Shakyamuni's followers have gathered and are talking openly about the practice of Buddhism and the greatness of the Law. One of the practitioners turns to Shakyamuni and asks, "Is all of this talking part of Buddhism?" Shakyamuni replies, "It is the entirety of Buddhism." The essential teaching, then, is that Buddhism exists only in heart-to-heart exchanges. Only through such spiritual bonds is Nam-myoho-renge-kyo transmitted. The lifeblood of Buddhism, then, is harmonious unity.

In music, harmony doesn't mean that everyone plays the same note but that two or more tones sound simultaneously. And unity does not mean uniformity. SGI President Ikeda underscores this point when he writes: "Now is the time for you to realize that through relations mutually inspiring and harmonious, the 'greater self' is awakened to dynamic action...blossoms in delightful multitude exude the fragrance of each person, each ethnicity, in precise accord with the principle of 'cherry, plum, pear and damson.'"

*Twenty-one in a series*

Title: What An Un-Concept

Subject: World Tribune 10/23/98 n.3214 p.2 WT981023p02

Author: Lisa Jones

Keywords: Answers Body Buddhist Concepts Doshin Itai Many Mind Questions Terms Tribune Un-Concept World