

Buddhist Basics: You Got Personality

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This series uses various stories to illustrate points about Buddhism.

Imagine a gallon jug of red ink. This represents all of your undesirable personality traits, let's say. All your ugliness and unpleasantness. And there's a lot of it...let's suppose.

So you decide to do something about it.

You pour the ink into a garbage can full of white paint. You mix it around a little. The paint turns pink. Then you take that pink paint and dump it into a Jacuzzi full of white paint. (You just happen to have lots of white paint and increasingly larger places to pour it, of course.)

The paint still looks a little pink. So you bail the paint from your Jacuzzi into your swimming pool full of white paint.

At last, you're proud to say that you no longer see even a hint of pink.

The gallon of red ink is still in there, but it doesn't matter much anymore.

This is kind of like what happens when we practice Buddhism. Instead of denying or trying to get rid of the things we don't like about ourselves, Buddhism teaches us the means by which we can expand our lives. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and doing our best, we can become so full of wisdom and compassion — like an ocean of white paint, so to speak — that our “ink” virtually disappears.

Josei Toda once encouraged a member by saying: “You don't have to worry about changing your personality. All you have to do is chant daimoku and live the best you can. Then, very naturally, you will see the negative aspects of your personality disappear, leaving you with the positive ones. You must have a clear purpose and work for the betterment of society.”

In other words, our personality doesn't determine our happiness or unhappiness. Rather, the substance of how we live — the degree to which we can expand our hearts and develop our wisdom, courage and compassion — matters most.

Two in a series

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