

Buddhist Basics: A Solid Sense of Identity

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Long ago, there was a young genius who could master any art or skill once he saw how it was done. He resolved to master all the arts of the world.

So he traveled, learning everything.

In one country he met a bow maker who could instantly turn an animal's horn into a beautiful bow. Amazed, the young genius became the bow maker's disciple and mastered the art. So he set out again. He came to a big river and saw a boatman skillfully guiding a boat. The genius became the boatman's disciple, and soon his skill surpassed his master's.

The genius continued to travel and learn. After a while, he found no art or skill that he had not already mastered. He concluded that he had nothing left to learn, yet he felt unsatisfied.

Shakyamuni Buddha had been observing all this. He transformed himself into a Buddhist monk and appeared in front of the genius.

"Who are you?" the genius asked.

"I'm a man of self-control."

"What does that mean?"

The monk said: "A bow maker controls the horn. A boatman controls the boat... And a wise man controls himself. Just as a huge rock is never moved by the wind, the steadfast mind of a wise man is swayed neither by slander nor by admiration."

The genius was delighted to become the Buddha's disciple and learn self-mastery.

The Japanese author Eiji Yoshikawa once wrote: "Rather than worrying about your future, thinking, 'Perhaps I should become this, or perhaps I should become that,' first be still and build a self that is as solid and unmoving as Mount Fuji."

Likewise, Buddhism teaches that to find satisfaction in life, we each must establish our own solid sense of identity, unswayed by what others may say or do. We can develop ourselves in this way by practicing the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin.

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