

Buddhist Basics: The Equality of All Beings
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In *Buddhism, The First Millennium*, SGI President Ikeda tells the story of when Shariputra and several other disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha went to visit a lay believer named Vimalakirti, who had been ill.

Toward the end of their visit, a goddess suddenly appears and scatters flowers on everyone. Shariputra, known as “foremost in wisdom,” is alarmed to see that the flowers are sticking to him. He tries to pull them off.

The goddess laughs, “Why do you try to pull the flowers off?”

“Because such flowers are not appropriate on the person of a monk!” he says.

The goddess points out that the flowers have no preconceived ideas about what is appropriate or not. The flowers, she says, are sticking to him because he still has preconceptions and remnants of discriminatory thinking, which are based on delusion. Further, she implies that Shariputra still fears the eternal cycle of death and re-birth. And because of this fear, his senses of sight, smell, hearing, taste and touch are sources of delusion.

She’s right, of course, which irritates Shariputra. So he taunts her, “Goddess, why don’t you change out of your female form?” (You have to remember — his was a society in which women were considered impure. In his mind, no one would ever *choose* to be a woman.)

Without skipping a beat, the goddess takes Shariputra’s form and turns him into a woman.

Shariputra is horrified.

The goddess then quotes Shakyamuni: “In the equality of all beings, there is neither man nor woman.”

In relation to the Mystic Law, everyone is equal. Buddhism teaches that we can free ourselves from the type of thinking that puts people into hard and fast categories such as male/female, black/white or gay/straight. These categories are fluid and transient — they may last for a lifetime but are not eternal. In the Buddhist view, one form or category is neither better nor worse than any other.

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