

SGI PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

AT THE DEPTHS OF LIFE—WISDOM, COMPASSION, COURAGE

My heartfelt congratulations on the opening of the 107th Annual American Psychological Association.

Of keen interest will be the rich and fruitful outcome of the continuing symposium on Buddhism and Psychology, under the theme of “Where Buddhism and Psychology Meet: Perspectives on Empowerment.” By all indication, the initial round last year on this topic of discussion has generated great interest and enthusiasm.

The idea of empowerment has centrality in the teachings of Buddhism, and with this occasion in mind I would like to share some Buddhist insights for your consideration. As Shakyamuni himself depicts in the Lotus Sutra, he lived his life in accord with the tenet “awaken in all beings the Buddha wisdom, to reveal it, to let all beings know it, and enter into it.” Indeed, from the Buddhist view, empowerment is a fundamental activity: to enable an individual first to be awakened to the existence of the dormant reservoir of wisdom at the depth of life itself; then to invoke this wisdom as one meets the challenges of life and death; and in the process, to bring forth the microcosm of one’s own Buddhahood. In other words, empowerment is equated with establishing a solid foundation for happiness in life.

In the teachings of the 13th-century Buddhist teacher Nichiren are to be found expansion and clarity on gaining access to the cosmic energy of the Buddha wisdom that is inherent to life. He expressed the essence of this cosmic energy in the mantra, *Nam-myoho-enge-kyo*, and his exegesis on the three meanings of the character *myo* indicates three aspects of what we describe as the state of Buddhahood that resides in the microcosm of one’s own life and the macrocosm of all life.

One meaning is to open, which in modern terms may be rendered as the ability to take initiative. It entails the ability, or vital energy, necessary to transcend the disconnection or even isolation of the individual from the rest of society and social life. To be involved and engage in the concerns of another is to draw from this reservoir of wisdom and participate in a dynamically expanding flow that reaches beyond one’s family, friends, culture and country, extending beyond humanity and permeating the universe.

A second meaning is fully or perfectly endowed. Here, Nichiren’s metaphor, that “one drop of the great ocean contains within it the waters of all the various rivers that flow into the ocean,” is instructive. It suggests the unifying nature of this cosmic energy that permeates equally each constituent part as well as the integral whole of life. It therefore suggests the internal resources with which to control or direct oneself undeterred by external influences. One thereby is able to integrate any circumstance or experience within a framework of one’s own self-development.

A third meaning is to revive, as in life’s intrinsic function of creativity. This highlights the vital energy that gives rise to courage and joy in meeting and winning over each challenge and obstacle, and in greeting life anew at every step of the way.

Of these three aspects, this third, the reinvigoration of life’s creative energy, nurtures the vital energies toward openness and inclusiveness. Indeed, at the depth of life are the restorative resources of wisdom, compassion and courage to sustain reform and development.

The more than 2,500-year history of Buddhism may be described as the continuing quest

to uncover and draw from the unfathomable power of the universe, what is termed here as *myo*. Thus, the mission of a Buddhist, I believe, lies in pursuing a method of practice that makes manifest this power of *myo* and makes dormant that which deprives us of life's creativity, that is, the destructive or negating nature that also resides in human life.

I understand that in recent years there is an emergent focus among Western psychologists on the means by which individuals muster the courage and capability that is linked with the creative evolution and development of humanity. Apparently, there is also new research focused on humanity's capacity for self-control. These are interests that resonate with my own—in the microcosmic power that can open the closed off self to the dynamic flows of and integration with society and the environment.

From the growing interest in the notion of empowerment within Western psychology and other fields of inquiry, I sense a rising tide of profound hope that will contribute to the deep layers of human history. Indeed, it is a source of light to explore empowerment in its relation with the cosmic power that propels the creative evolution of the universe. As a Buddhist, I feel deeply the responsibility to tap the source of life's creativity, aspire to fulfill my mission as a human being, and reflect the compassionate nature of cosmic life.

Lastly, I would like to close by expressing my expectations that this encounter between Buddhism from the East and scientific wisdom from the West will provide a mutually enriching exchange of insight into the notion of empowerment and generate new insights into the theory and practice of establishing happiness in one's life.

Daisaku Ikeda
President
Soka Gakkai International