

## BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (10) • HAPPINESS IN THIS WORLD •

*This world is a place to enjoy a state of life in which, whatever the circumstances or conditions, one can enjoy life with confidence and vitality, with courage and dignity, like the lion who is king among all other beasts.*

We practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, in reciting the sutra with our practice of gongyo, read the phrase "*shujo sho yuraku*" a number of times each day. It appears in the "jigage" or verse portion of the "Lifespan" (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra. This phrase is translated in English as "where living beings enjoy themselves at ease."

Simply stated, it means that the world where we live is, as it is, a "Buddha Land." The place where we live and work, eat and sleep, is a place to enjoy and be at ease. For this reason, it is often expressed as "happiness in this world."

Experience tells us that, while the real world offers some enjoyment, living in it entails many difficulties and hardships. And in fact, many perceive Buddhism as having little to do with fun or enjoyment, but as teaching a strict regimen of practice and discipline. To such people, these words from the "Life Span" chapter might come as a bit of a surprise.

What specifically then does this phrase "where living beings enjoy themselves at ease" have to teach us? The word "enjoyment" for most of us brings to mind some sort of play or recreation. And the Chinese term translated as "enjoy" in this phrase can also be rendered as "play." For most of us since our youth, play has always been a fragile opportunity, punctuated with pleas from our mothers or fathers, such as, "Stop playing and do your homework!" And clearly, no one has much use for an adult who does nothing but play all day, whatever the sport or pastime.

On the other hand, the idea of "work hard, play hard" is a tradition in our culture. "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy," a well-used saying made somewhat infamous in the movie *The Shining*, is part of America's healthy work ethic. A branch of psychotherapy known as "play therapy" recognizes that play can enhance emotional growth in children and even adults. And few would question the fact that play in the form of sports promotes physical development and a capacity for teamwork.

Thus play or enjoyment has its positive and negative value. On one hand, it suggests a break from the daily routine, an opportunity to ease the stress and tension that living brings. But to make it integral to that daily routine seems a contradiction. Play, when it becomes the rule rather than the exception, can actually become burdensome. It is as Shakespeare wrote, "If all the year were playing holidays, To sport would be as tedious as to work" (Prince Henry, in *Henry IV*, Pt. 1, act 1, sc. 2.).

In addition, when facing a difficult problem, it's hard to genuinely enjoy oneself, even if there is time to do so.

Going back to the Lotus Sutra, in the third chapter, "Simile and Parable," we find the passage, "The sons at that time danced for joy, mounting the jeweled carriages, driving off in all directions, delighting and amusing themselves." This is from the Parable of the Great White Oxcart. The sons in the parable indicate ordinary people of the world, and the "jeweled carriages" drawn by white oxen are the Lotus Sutra. The father, who brings the great cart to lure his children out of a burning house (this world, filled with suffering) represents the Buddha. The above-quoted passage means that the function of a Buddha

and of the teaching of a Buddha is to enable people who are engulfed in the “flames” of suffering to freely enjoy life without any encumbrance or restriction.

Nichiren Daishonin writes to his followers Shijo Kingo and his wife, “Wherever your daughter my frolic or play, no harm will come to her; she will move about without fear like the lion king” (WND, 412). “Frolic or play” here suggests a state of life in which, whatever the circumstances or conditions, we can enjoy life with confidence and vitality, with courage and dignity, like the lion who is king among all other beasts. It is a far more substantial kind of enjoyment than can only be had by taking off of work, school or leaving behind other responsibilities. It is the ability to tackle our work with energy and composure, lacking any sense of insecurity, restraint or restriction. This free and self-assured state of life is what the Daishonin means by “frolicking and playing,” and it is also what the sutra indicates by “enjoying themselves at ease.”

The Chinese and Japanese term for “hell” is directly translated as “earth prison.” The idea of a prison suggests a state of restriction and restraint, where all freedom is gone. The state of “enjoying oneself at ease” is the exact opposite of this.

Nichiren Daishonin associates “enjoyment and ease” with enlightenment. He states, “There is no true happiness for human beings other than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.” (WND, 681) “Happiness” here is a translation of the term *yuraku*. This is the same word which, in the context of the sutra, is rendered “enjoy themselves at ease.”

When we chant daimoku to the Gohonzon, which was inscribed for the happiness of all humankind, we bring forth the innate condition of Buddhahood. This enables us to “enjoy ourselves at ease” wherever we are and in any circumstance. The purpose of life and Buddhism is not merely to create “enjoyable” circumstances. Rather it is to create within ourselves the ability to enjoy all of life to the fullest and be at ease under any circumstances.

It is natural that we face problems, challenges, setbacks and disappointments in life. But faith in Buddhism means that when such things occur, we chant daimoku with persistence and determination. This gives rise to wisdom, with which we can move things in a positive direction. Concerning living in this world, which is full of both suffering and joy, Nichiren Daishonin said, “Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life, and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens” (WND, 681). Buddhism nowhere teaches of a life that is free from pain or troubles, or that life should be just a succession of favorable circumstances. In fact, such a life does not exist; even if it did, as Shakespeare suggests, it would probably become quite tedious.

Instead Buddhism encourages us to step confidently into a world and society intertwined with joys and sufferings, and to develop a condition of life to fully enjoy all we encounter. This state of life—the capacity to “enjoy ourselves at ease” unperturbed by external ups and downs—is what Soka Gakkai second president Josei Toda often called “absolute happiness.” It is absolute because it is self-created. We create it. It is not dependent on something or someone else. The purpose and goal of daily Buddhist prayer and practice, and of our activities to teach Buddhism to others, is to create such an inner world of profound enjoyment and ease. □