

BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (20) POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LAW

When you first encountered Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, what was your response? Did you happily accept most of what you heard and join the SGI right away? Or did you knit your brows in disbelief? Were you born into the practice? If so, you probably didn't make conscious decisions about practicing until you were much older. Perhaps you accept what you have heard about this Buddhism but choose to support the SGI without becoming a member. Whatever the circumstances that led us to where we are, there is no doubt that we all have a deep connection with the Daishonin's teaching based on the Lotus Sutra.

The Daishonin always encouraged his followers to introduce others to this practice. Most of us have done that with various levels of success. Some people understand and accept Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism right away, while others oppose it or even disparage it. Introducing others to Buddhism sows the seed for their future happiness, even if they don't take faith now or not at all in this lifetime. According to the attitude people take when they first encounter the teaching of the Lotus Sutra, they can form either a positive relationship or a negative relationship with it.

The Lotus Sutra enables those who have a connection with it to attain Buddhahood, even if that connection might not be considered positive. In "Persecution by Sword and Staff," the Daishonin recounts the story of a woman in India who, in a fit of rage toward her husband, trampled the Lotus Sutra that he had been studying. She later died and fell into hell. It is interesting to note that her feet did not. The Daishonin goes on to say, "Though the wardens of hell tried to force them down by beating them with iron staves, her feet remained outside of hell as a result of the relationship, albeit a reverse one, that they had formed with the Lotus Sutra" (WND, 962). The benefit of your relationship with the Lotus Sutra lies in the fact that you will most certainly attain Buddhahood in the future, regardless of what kind of relationship you have.

There is an all-encompassing compassion in this principle. All people possess a Buddha nature, and the important thing is that the Lotus Sutra is a catalyst for bringing it out. Relating to the Lotus Sutra in any way is a good cause for enlightenment. Simply hearing a teaching is enough to lead us in that direction.

The "Devadatta" chapter of the Lotus Sutra perfectly elucidates this principle. Devadatta was a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha who was extremely jealous of him. He tried to kill Shakyamuni by setting wild elephants loose, and attempting to roll a boulder on him. He also spent much of his life creating a rift in the Buddhist Order and trying to destroy the community of Buddhists. Despite this, Shakyamuni predicts in the Lotus Sutra that Devadatta will most certainly attain enlightenment. Shakyamuni was very strict with Devadatta, but imagine the enormous compassion it takes to see the Buddha nature in someone who is trying to kill you. Further, the Daishonin says: "Whether by following it or opposing it, they will attain Buddhahood through the Lotus Sutra. This is the message of the 'Devadatta' chapter" (WND, 964).

This principle is further expounded in the "Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Bodhisattva Never Disparaging goes among the people and vows to everyone he meets that they will attain Buddhahood. However, the people respond to him with

hostility. They throw stones at him and try to beat him with sticks. Despite these attacks, he continues to tell the people, “I would never dare disparage you, because you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!” (LS20, 267). Because of this determination to respect all people, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging later attains enlightenment and leads everyone he comes in contact with on the same path.

There are two lessons we can take from “Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.” First, we should understand that bodhisattva practices hold the key to our happiness. If we want to bring out our innate Buddha nature, we must see that same potential in others as well and help them bring it out. The next lesson is that no matter how a person responds to the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, you have nevertheless sown the seed of their happiness, and he or she will become enlightened. It is as the Daishonin says in “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light”: “It is because the Lotus Sutra saves those who oppose it as well as those who follow it. This is the blessing of the single character *myo*, or mystic” (WND, 457–58).

Some of us probably know people who have had a negative relationship with the Daishonin’s Buddhism. They could be friends, coworkers, spouses, parents or children. They may have been abusive toward us because of our practice. Even though we might have encountered a painful situation, our compassion for these people allows us to continue our bodhisattva practices. If someone has an incorrect notion about our faith or is critical of it, it is nevertheless important to have genuine dialogue with them. Doing so is a practice of compassion and our friends and family will blossom as a result. In many cases, these are the people who end up joining the SGI or becoming a supporter.

What is important is to speak the truth of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, the truth of people’s Buddha nature. It is important to dialogue with those in opposition to the practice, warmly encouraging them at times and strictly pointing out their mistaken views at other times.

We need not be overly concerned when one shows a negative relationship. When we speak with respect for everyone’s innate Buddhahood—no matter how indifferent they are—the Buddhahood in their lives appreciates our efforts and will respond accordingly.

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