

BUDDHISM IN DAILY LIFE ONENESS OF BODY AND MIND

Materialists claim that the physical or material world that can be measured and touched is the only reality, whereas some spiritual traditions see the physical as mere illusion—or something inherently corrupt that exists in order to be transcended, and the spiritual as the ultimate truth.

Buddhism regards life as the unity of the physical and the spiritual. It views all things, whether material or spiritual, seen or unseen, as manifestations of the same ultimate universal law or source of life defined in the Nichiren tradition as Myoho-renge-kyo. The physical and spiritual aspects of our lives are completely inseparable and of equal importance. Nichiren Daishonin expressed this in a letter to one of his followers titled “Opening the Eyes of Wooden and Painted Images,” stating: “A person can know another’s mind by listening to the voice. This is because the physical aspect reveals the spiritual aspect. The physical and spiritual, which are one in essence, manifest themselves as two distinct aspects” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 86).

A person’s inner emotional state will be revealed in his or her physical appearance. The feelings of someone in a happy and optimistic mood can be read in their face; there may even be a skip in their step. In contrast, the painful gait and drawn features of a person weighed down by suffering can communicate his or her inner torment even from a distance.

Our inner mental state also affects the physical functioning of our bodies. The most dramatic manifestations of this are laughter and tears, physical signs of our inner feelings. Mental or psychological stress has been linked to a range of illness from skin disorders, allergies, asthma and ulcers to cancer. Depression and hopelessness lower the body’s resistance, making us vulnerable to a variety of afflictions. On the other hand, a positive determination to overcome illness can “inspire” our organs and even individual cells toward health.

As SGI President Daisaku Ikeda writes: “When our determination changes, everything will begin to move in the direction we desire. The moment we resolve to be victorious, every nerve and fiber in our being will immediately orient itself toward our success. On the other hand, if we think, ‘This is never going to work out,’ then at that instant, every cell in our being will be deflated and give up the fight.”

True health and genuine happiness must encompass both the physical and the spiritual. Many of the experiences of SGI members relate to improved health, physical or material conditions. Through the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they also realize the inseparability of the spiritual and physical aspects of their lives. Over time, this is revealed in both a feeling of physical well-being and a growing clarity and purity of the mental and perceptive processes. What are referred to as the conspicuous benefits of Buddhist practice relate primarily to the physical and material planes. Most crucial in the long term are the inconspicuous benefits of sustained Buddhist practice—increased self-awareness, wisdom and compassion for others. The ultimate inconspicuous benefit, of course, is enlightenment.

Buddhism views a living being as the harmonious coming together of what it terms the five components. These are: the physical aspects of life and the senses; perception, which integrates the impressions received through the senses; conception, by which we form

ideas about what we have perceived; volition, the will that acts on conception; and consciousness, the function of discernment that supports the functioning of the other components. Life is the force or energy that keeps these five components functioning together as a harmonious and integrated whole.

Modern medical science is only beginning to explore the subtle interconnections between body and mind, between the physical and spiritual aspects of life. Ultimately, Buddhism views both physical and spiritual aspects as vital manifestations of the life force that is inherent in the cosmos itself.

As Nichiren Daishonin writes in “On Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime”: “Life at each moment encompasses the body and mind and the self and environment of all sentient beings in the Ten Worlds as well as all insentient beings in the three thousand realms, including plants, sky, earth, and even the minutest particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the entire realm of phenomena and is revealed in all phenomena” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 3).

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