

BUDDHISM IN DAILY LIFE THE THREE EXISTENCES

One of the most fundamental tenets of Buddhism is the eternity of life. Human beings perceive the continuous flow of time in terms of past, present and future. These three are inextricably linked by the law of cause and effect. The Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra states: “If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present (*The Writings of Nichiren Dai-shonin*, p. 279).

While it is very important that we take responsibility for all the effects we are experiencing at this moment and not diminish our own power by apportioning blame to some third party, the emphasis in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism always is to practice the Buddhism of the True Cause; that is, to concentrate solely on the cause we are making in the present, thereby assuring that we create positive effects in the future. We are encouraged to establish firm goals, linked to the highest goal of kosen-rufu, in order to advance with a sense of purpose and hope.

It is human to become discouraged at times. If the progress toward our goals could take the shape of a straight line on a graph proceeding unhindered from bottom left to top right corner, then this pursuit could be managed totally by the intellect and we would not need Buddhism. Faith in Buddhism, however, opens our lives to a world of infinite possibility, of limitless power.

In *Space and Eternal Life*, a dialogue between eminent astronomer Chandra Wickramasinghe and SGI President Daisaku Ikeda, Mr. Ikeda states: “Buddhism expounds the principle that ‘the Universe is one’s self.’ It teaches that the human being is essentially one with the Universe and clarifies the vastness of the human mind. Spatially the infinite expanse of the Universe in the ten directions and temporally the eternal flow of time spanning the three existences of past, present and future — all this is contained in a single moment of one’s mind” (p. 6).

From the standpoint of Buddhahood, our past, no matter how murky, becomes a reason to be joyful; it is what got us here, to this moment. The future exists only in our imaginations, and we are free to imagine ourselves as happy, confident people who are winners in life.

In the 53rd installment of “The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra: a Discussion on Religion in the Twenty-first Century,” Daisaku Ikeda has this to say: “Now is eternity. Right now is the ‘beginning.’ The past is gone. The future has not yet arrived. The present moment is all that exists.

“The present in an instant becomes the past. We may say that it exists; we may also say that it doesn’t exist. This is the meaning of non-substantiality. Life continues from moment to moment. Apart from this moment, life has no actuality. One moment we might feel happiness; the next, misery.

“To view this moment of life as the direct effect of some cause made in the past is to think in terms of the True Effect. To think, in other words, ‘I did that, so this happened.’ But that perspective alone will not give rise to hope.

“The key is to view one’s life at the present moment as the cause for creating future effects. This is the True Cause that reaches the very depths of one’s being. It is not a

superficial cause.

“Temporally, our lives are rooted in the life of time without beginning. Spatially, they are the True Cause that pervades the entire realm of phenomena. This is Nam-myohorenge-kyo, the eternal cosmic life, the great principle that moves the entire universe and sparks constant development.

“Therefore, when we believe in the Gohonzon as the embodiment of that Law, chant the Mystic Law and take action, at that moment we are experiencing eternity. And it is then that the eternally pure and boundless life force that is ‘neither created nor adorned, but remaining in its original state’ (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 759) wells forth. We enjoy complete freedom in both the present and the future. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is the Buddhism of hope.”

“No matter how bad our present circumstances might be, even if it seems we are fighting a losing battle, we must stand up determined not to be defeated, and from there show actual proof of the limitless potential of the Mystic Law. Is this not the true purpose of faith?” (October *Living Buddhism*, pp. 32–33).

When we are struggling to bring about some great change in our lives, it is only natural that we start to observe our negative thoughts and responses. However, having once established during our daimoku that we definitely are going to change, then each time negative thoughts come in, we can immediately counteract them. Let’s say we have determined to treasure every person. The next time the phone rings in the middle of our favorite “soap,” we may find ourselves groaning “Oh, no!” but in the time it takes to get up and answer, we can decide, “Whoever this is, I’m going to treasure them!” It is small continual efforts like this that bring about big, dramatic changes. As President Ikeda says, this is not a superficial cause, but one that reaches the very depths of our being.

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