

**PERSPECTIVE  
WHAT IS PRIDE?  
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**Jacci Ybarra says that pride emerges ‘when we sincerely endeavor to become our true selves.’**

Often within the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community, there is plenty of discussion on what exactly pride is, and what we all have to be so proud of.

Yet an even greater question might be, what is pride from a Buddhist perspective? The concept of “gay pride” did not exist in Nichiren Daishonin’s time, however, there is a wealth of information to be found in his writings and in SGI President Ikeda’s writings regarding pride and confidence in our ability to win in daily life.

The concept in Buddhism of “attaining enlightenment as you are” made me think about all those times when I or other people I know have been absolutely devoid or even bereft of anything resembling pride. I’m sure there have been times when we haven’t been so proud of things we’ve thought, said or done. Or questioned why pride should even be important.

One definition of pride that resonates with me, however, is: “A proper sense of personal dignity and self-worth; what is fitting for one’s position or character; honorable self-respect.”

As a lesbian, I’ve had many experiences where I’ve felt unworthy or undeserving. Sometimes I’ve felt this way because of how others viewed me, and other times I found myself feeling this way because I believed that I was undeserving and unworthy!

So, as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people, what can we be proud of? Our sexuality, who we love, what we do in bed? Well honestly, if you know me and my sense of humor, I’ve got to say that if you have the fortune to love someone and to actually have someone, other than yourself, in bed—well then, straight, gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered, that’s something to be proud of!

But that’s not the only pride I’m talking about. On another level, in order to be successful in all aspects of our lives, in order to make our dreams come true, we must look deeper to find a source of pride. Perhaps it’s in our psyches, or in what we perceive to be our own true essence as human beings, here in this place, at this time.

When we look at society, we often see a propensity to label or categorize people. We do it ourselves. To understand or have a point of reference for other people, we have to define them. And, we are not always generous in our definitions of others. Generally, that’s because of our limited ability to see another person’s true self. Okay, so what is our true self, which is the basis of our source of pride?

A first attempt to define our true self might begin with where we came from, where we originated. Some of us came from perfect, Leave It to Beaver-type families, others from a virtual “house of chaos.” Both types of origin bring with it experiences that have formed our own self-image. Add to that experiences we’ve had growing up—environmental influences.

Next, we add where we’re going—our goals, our dreams, what we hope to achieve with our lives. Simply put: We are the totality of where we’ve come from and where we dream

of going. But it is exactly that self-image that can limit us. How? By the messages we've learned and often replay in our own heads. Things like: I'm too fat or too thin; I'm too young or too old; I'm too smart for my own good or maybe I'm just too dumb.

We set ourselves aside, often out of fear, often out of habit—habit borne out of our past experiences. Then hope, confidence and pride fly out the window. Yes, we are essentially molded by our past, but not necessarily defined by it. This is where Buddhism steps up to the plate.

Buddhism speaks of developing one's true identity or Buddha nature. I'd like to share with you some encouragement I received a couple of years ago about "On Offering Prayers to the Mandala of the Mystic Law." In this writing, Nichiren Daishonin mentions the four great bodhisattvas. (A bodhisattva is a being who aspires to attain Buddhahood and carries out altruistic practices in order to achieve that goal.) Each of these four great bodhisattvas fulfill a specific function or role. First is Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who indicates true self. Next is Boundless Practices, who indicates eternity. The next is Pure Practices, who indicates life's inherent purity. The last is Firmly Established Practices, who signifies happiness. These functions or values, known as the four virtues, are innate within our lives. You don't need to seek them or ask some external being to give them to you. They have been inherent in your life from the very beginning. These four virtues—true-self, eternity, purity and happiness—are inherent in our lives and have been from the very beginning. So, the question then becomes, how do we uncover or unlock these functions in our lives?

By endeavoring to attain enlightenment through chanting to the Gohonzon, we can reveal or uncover a supreme state of life from within. We don't have to rely on or ask anyone else to do it for us. Each of us is truly the only one who can open up our own great potential. So then, what is it that is covering up our inherent Buddhahood? It is the cloud of doubt, hopelessness and fear. When we overcome them, we can uncover the great potential that exists within us.

If this great potential lying within is our true self, how does it relate to pride? Well, I can honestly say from my own experience that when we develop faith and confidence in this great potential, when we sincerely endeavor to become our true selves, we literally flower with potential and the possibilities for our goals and dreams become limitless.

President Ikeda shares the following: "A small heart gets used to misery and becomes docile, while a great heart towers above misfortune. True happiness is not the absence of suffering; you cannot have day after day of clear skies. True happiness lies in building a self that stands dignified, proud and indomitable like a great palace—on all days, even when it is raining, snowing or stormy." Lastly, I've often heard, through the course of my practice in this Buddhism, that a candle can light up a place that has been dark for a billion years. Whether that darkness exists in our own hearts or in those of others, we can become that light that shines so brilliantly. It is my greatest wish, that we all can all develop such a life. Be proud and shine bright!