

BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (22) "PEACE AND SECURITY" IN THE HERE AND NOW

Most people wish to lead a peaceful and secure existence, living free of problems and worries. Often they live in a future of "whens": "When I retire, I'll start enjoying life," "When I own my house, I'll feel secure," "When I find my soul-mate, I'll be a complete person" and so forth. It is one thing to work toward goals and dreams, but it is quite another to escape into future fantasies and become absent from the present.

One of the negative effects of such an attitude is we deny ourselves happiness today by postponing its possibility into an elusive future that may never arrive. In other words, we sometimes believe — consciously or unconsciously — that we cannot be happy right now because something is missing from a set of external conditions that we think essential to our happiness, be it an ideal partner, money or whatever. The problem is that those external conditions are bound to change and remain forever in the state of flux. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, however, offers a different perspective on life and points the way to establish an inner strength that allows us to enjoy happiness in the here and now, regardless of our external conditions.

In the second, "Expedient Means," chapter of the Lotus Sutra, the basis of the Daishonin's teaching, Shakyamuni states that all people possess the potential for Buddhahood, that is, a supreme state of life full of compassion and wisdom. In subsequent chapters, Shakyamuni's disciples such as Shariputra and Mahakashyapa begin to understand the true meaning of this teaching. In the fifth, "Parable of the Medicinal Herbs," chapter, Shakyamuni explains the benefit derived from understanding the Dharma or Law that reveals the universality of Buddhahood: "Once these living beings have heard the Law, they will enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences, then they will receive joy through the way and again be able to hear the Law" (*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, p. 99).

Among the Daishonin's followers in thirteenth-century Japan who knew of this passage were those who expected to "enjoy peace and security in their present existence" through their Buddhist practice. Contrary to their expectations, however, the Daishonin and his followers continued to experience governmental persecution because of their faith. During the Daishonin's exile to Sado Island, many questioned the validity of his teaching. He had been subjected to attempted execution and exile to this cold northern island and appeared to them very far removed from the "peace and security" expounded in the Lotus Sutra.

After the Daishonin's return from exile, the focus of persecutions shifted from himself to his followers. In 1275, Shijo Kingo, one of the Daishonin's staunch believers, was facing severe harassment from his lord and fellow samurai warriors because of his faith. Kingo wondered why his life was so full of trouble and worries despite the Lotus Sutra's promise of "peace and security." Kingo reportedly said to one of the Daishonin's senior disciples: "I have been practicing the Lotus Sutra correctly since last year, when you told me that those who embrace this sutra will 'enjoy peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences.' Instead, however, great hardships have showered down on me like rain" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 471). When the Daishonin heard about Kingo's comments, he wrote a letter to his beloved disciple to remove his doubts. In it, he states: "To accept is easy; to continue is difficult. But Buddhahood lies in continuing faith. Those who uphold this sutra should be prepared to meet difficulties" (WND, 471).

Here the Daishonin points out that the true meaning of “peace and security” as expounded in the Lotus Sutra is not the absence of life’s problems. Rather, to enjoy “peace and security” means to develop the inner strength that allows us to overcome any obstacle we may face and enjoy every moment. We reveal and further strengthen our innate Buddhahood through daily practice. In the course of our progress, it is natural that we face obstacles, fears and doubts from time to time. Furthermore, to practice Buddhism in a non-Buddhist society is not easy; we are sometimes confronted with misjudgment and prejudice from family and friends. But what is important, as the Daishonin explains, is “continuing faith” through difficulties.

In a subsequent letter in 1276, the Daishonin reiterates this point to Shijo Kingo: “There is no true happiness other than upholding faith in the Lotus Sutra. This is what is meant by ‘peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences.’ Though worldly troubles may arise, never let them disturb you. No one can avoid problems, not even sages or worthies” (WND, 681). The goal of our Buddhist practice is not to eliminate life’s problems; rather, it is to develop a state of inner life so strong that our sense of “peace and security” is never disturbed by any hardship. The key to developing such inner strength lies in our faith in the Gohonzon and our belief in the existence of Buddhahood in our lives as well as in the lives of others. This is why the Daishonin declares: “There is no true happiness other than upholding faith in the Lotus Sutra.” When we develop our faith as the Daishonin encourages us, facing life’s hardships becomes a joyful challenge through which we develop our character instead of a painful struggle that results in misery and loss.

In this sense, the Daishonin states, “The arrival of difficulties should be regarded as ‘peaceful’” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 750). He also states: “To spread the Lotus Sutra, after all, should be regarded as what is meant by ‘peace and security in their present existence and good circumstances in future existences’” (GZ, 825). As we exert ourselves in the faith, practice and study of the Daishonin’s Buddhism while communicating its greatness to others, we are experiencing “peace and security” now and building a stronger foundation for future happiness. With the Daishonin’s Buddhism we can create true happiness in the here and now instead of chasing after an elusive shadow of imaginary happiness for the rest of our lives.

We practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism so that each day we may reach the destination of a happy life in the present. Through living each day to our utmost while challenging our difficulties, we can polish our humanity and experience an unsurpassed sense of fulfillment. This is the irreplaceable treasure of faith. True happiness is much closer to us than we may think.

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