

**SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH THE EYES OF THE BUDDHA:
RECONCILING THE NEWS WITH OUR BUDDHIST VIEWS WITHOUT
SINGING THE BLUES
BY GEOFF ROHDE, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA**

Mass murder! Mass starvation! Epidemics! Economic chaos! And it is all televised! It comes to our doorstep each morning! It is on our car radio on our way to work! How can responsible citizens keep up with world events and not get depressed? How can well-informed Bodhisattvas in the Latter Day of the Law not get the blues?

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Before we discuss the news and the blues, let's first talk about a Buddha's "views," that is, the ability to see much more of, and more deeply into, the world than we can imagine. "In Reply to the Lay Priest Soya" Nichiren Daishonin states: "Hungry spirits perceive the Ganges River as fire, human beings perceive it as water, and heavenly beings perceive it as *amrita* [sweet dew]. Though the water is the same, it appears differently according to one's karmic reward from the past" (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 486). And in a letter titled "New Year's Gosho" he says, "We ordinary people can see neither our own eyelashes, which are so close, nor the heavens in the distance. Likewise, we do not see that the Buddha exists in our own hearts" (WND, 1137).

Religious traditions from around the world all use terms like Transcendent, Eternal, the One, Divine, Universe, or Ground of Being to describe every facet of existence, from heaven to hell and all stops in between. Nichiren Daishonin is in agreement with such views:

"The mystic principle that is the essential nature of phenomena possesses two aspects, the defiled aspect and the pure aspect.... These two aspects, the deluded and the enlightened, are indeed two different phenomena, and yet both are workings of the one principle, that is, the essential nature of phenomena, or the true aspect of reality" ("The Entity of the Mystic Law," WND, 417).

How is it possible to witness all the suffering and evil in the world and remain happy? Nichiren Daishonin, Shakyamuni and other sages have met this exact challenge and we can, too. In the opening lines of the Daishonin's thesis, "On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land," we read that famine and pestilence affected every corner of Japan. Oxen and horses lay dead in the streets and the bones of the stricken crowded the highways. Over half the population had already been carried off by death and in every family someone grieved. Amidst such grim reality, he writes:

"When great evil occurs, great good follows. Since great slander already exists in our land, the great correct Law will spread without fail. What could any of you have to lament? Even if you are not the Venerable Mahakashyapa, you should all perform a dance! Even if you are not Shariputra, you should leap up and dance!" ("Great Evil and Great Good," WND, 1119).

So how can we develop the life-condition and wisdom to view things through the eyes of the Buddha? How can we watch, read and listen to so much bad news without becoming depressed or angry? I have a few suggestions. First, we need to rid ourselves of any obsession with the news. Nichiren Daishonin states in many places that we must be the masters of our mind. If there are those of us who cannot step away from the news "cold turkey," then we can cut back gradually. But we need to take control!

Second, if we strengthen our faith, practice and study of Buddhism, we will develop a more robust, resilient life-condition. We can recognize obstacles that threaten our happiness for what they are and refuse to be frightened, influenced or defeated by them. There is wisdom in the famous “Serenity Prayer,” that says we should manifest the strength to change what we can, the patience to endure what we cannot and the wisdom to know the difference.

If being a news junkie makes us and our cheerful practice of Buddhism ill, why continue to watch, read or listen to so much news? Our fixation on the news could be a manifestation of inner devils hindering our practice and leading us to a state of hopelessness. We all must face and overcome our own demons. For some it is illness, poverty, anger or substance abuse. For others, obstacles may come from children, parents, spouse or career. The news—the immense misery afflicting the human race — can also obstruct our happiness.

If we feel overwhelmed by the suffering of those on the other side of the globe, why not bring happiness to those closest to us—at home, at work or even on the highways? It only takes a few moments, a bit of attention and a dash of courage to practice random acts of kindness and selfless measures of compassion. That such actions almost always go unnoticed and unacknowledged by others makes them all the more important and rewarding. I recall a scene from President Ikeda’s novel, *The Human Revolution*, in which the second president of the Soka Gakkai, Josei Toda, is riding a streetcar shortly after World War II. He overhears fellow passengers discussing ways to fashion pots and pans out of bomb shards. Rather than bemoan the devastation all around him, he praises their creativity and encourages them to do their best. Toda’s cheerful banter and hearty approval lifts the spirits of everyone within earshot. We can do the same. Bodhisattvas seek out every opportunity to encourage others.

President Ikeda writes in *Faith Into Action*: “It is important that we live cheerfully. With a strong spirit of optimism, we need to continually direct our minds in a bright, positive, beneficial direction and help those around us do likewise. We should strive to develop a state of life where we feel a sense of joy no matter what happens” (p. 135).

“The purpose of life is to be happy. We should not be pessimistic. Let us live always with optimism — joyful, strong and bright. That is why we practice the Daishonin’s Buddhism” (p. 9).

“Much human misery arises from people despairing over things that despair cannot help. We should not worry about things that no amount of worry will resolve. The important thing is to build a golden palace of joy in our hearts that nothing can disturb — a state of life like the clear blue sky above the storm” (p. 134).

If we establish and guard our own happiness first, we can lead the way for others. If we succumb to despair, we cannot help anyone, including ourselves. In “Happiness in This World,” Nichiren Daishonin says: “Though worldly troubles may arise, never let them disturb you. No one can avoid problems, not even sages or worthies. Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law? Strengthen your power of faith more than ever” (WND, 681).

Developing strong faith, consistent practice and studying Buddhist teachings stabilizes our lives and brings forth wisdom. We can achieve such a sense of self-assurance, of confidence in ourselves to overcome any obstacle, that nothing will disturb our sense of well-being, contentment and joy.

Attaining this ultimate benefit is our human revolution. But it is not possible if we cheat or take short cuts through Nichiren Daishonin’s “Life Improvement Program.” The “complete package” really does consist of applying the basics. That is morning and evening prayers, abundant chanting of Nam-myoho-rence-kyo to our spiritual satisfaction and a seeking mind to

study and understand the Buddhist life philosophy through Nichiren Daishonin's teachings, the writings of President Ikeda and other fine books. I have found, for example, that works by Seneca, Joseph Campbell, Adam Smith and others enhance my understanding of Buddhism. And it is vital to teach others to the best of our ability, either directly or indirectly by our persistent good cheer and compassionate behavior.

To experience an inner transformation — a human revolution — requires effort. The practice of Buddhism requires self-discipline both physically and spiritually. The Daishonin writes that continuing faith leads to Buddhahood. In my experience, only those who practiced wholeheartedly were able to continue in the face of obstacles and frustrations. That is how we can train our deluded minds and eyes to view things from a Buddha's perspective. President Ikeda states: "Viewing events and situations in a positive light is important. The strength, wisdom and cheerfulness that accompany such an attitude lead to happiness. To regard everything in a positive light or with a spirit of good will, however, does not mean being foolish or gullible and allowing people to take advantage of our good nature. It means having the wisdom and perception to move things in a positive direction by seeing things in their best light while all the time keeping our eyes firmly focused on reality" (*Faith Into Action*, p. 13).

In other words, the benefit of our practice is the ability to enjoy life, no matter what. Obstacles constantly beset Nichiren Daishonin, and he was witness to great suffering. But he never let anything discourage him. In fact, the greater the challenges facing him, the greater the delight he felt. Such strength of character only comes through a total commitment to, and total confidence in, faith. In a letter titled "The Mongol Envoys" he states, "While all the people of Japan lament, I, Nichiren, and my followers rejoice amid the grieving" (WND, 629).

In "The Eight Winds" he tells us: "Worthy persons deserve to be called so because they are not carried away by any of the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering and pleasure. They are neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline. The heavenly gods will surely protect one who is unbending before the eight winds" (WND, 794).

Socially engaged Buddhism is dedicated to the belief that the best way to change the external world is by changing the internal world. The solution lies within the lives of each of us as expressed in President Ikeda's foreword to the novel, *The Human Revolution*: "A great human revolution in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will enable a change in the destiny of all humankind."