

BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY’S LIVING (23)
CHERRY, PLUM, PEACH AND DAMSON WE ARE ALL UNIQUE!
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How often do you feel that you aren’t good enough? How many times have you felt that because of who you are, you won’t be able to succeed or because of your background or lifestyle you won’t be accepted? Most people feel this way at one time or another. When we are faced with an obstacle or challenge, our insecurities rise up within us. Some of this fear is of being different, but what is important is how we express our differences and how we accept others’ differences.

Diversity is one of the greatest gifts the world has to offer. What kind of world would this be if we were all the same — if we all thought the same, dressed the same, acted the same? There would be little or no growth in society because no fresh ideas would be expressed. How would we learn and develop? SGI President Daisaku Ikeda says, “Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism deeply respects each person’s individuality, situation and character and shows the way to display one’s particular abilities to the fullest” (*Selected Lectures on the Gosho*, vol.1, p. 154).

The Daishonin states, “Cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms all have their own qualities, and they manifest the three properties of the life of the Buddha without changing their character”(*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 784). Simply put, each one of us contributes our own unique qualities through the role we play in society. The Daishonin uses the example of the cherry, plum, peach and damson flowers to make his point. The cherry flower is renowned for its beauty; many people enjoy seeing the cherry blossoms in the spring. The plum blooms in late winter — while other flowers usually bloom in the spring — and it, too, is known for its beauty. According to an old Chinese tradition, peaches are said to bring longevity and ward off evil. The damson flower’s appearance is different from the others, but it is associated with assiduousness and perseverance.

Each of these flowers is unique, that is why the Daishonin uses them as an example of how each human being is unique. As hard as it might try, a cherry can never become a plum and a plum can never become a cherry. Although each is different, they all embody the three properties of the Buddha. The same goes for ordinary people; each of us embodies the three properties of the Buddha.

The three properties of the Buddha are: the Dharma body, which indicates the fundamental truth of life, or the Mystic Law; the reward body, which indicates the wisdom of the Buddha that we develop by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo; and the manifest body, which represents the bodhisattva actions to save all people from suffering. Each of these three properties is embodied in each one of us, and through our actions, as practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, we can manifest them each day and live happy lives without ever having to change who we are.

Our lives are originally endowed with the three properties of the Buddha. In other sutras, these bodies are thought to be three separate Buddhas, but it is in the Lotus Sutra that Shakyamuni reveals that all phenomena possess each of the three properties at the same time. Since we are all endowed with the three properties of the Buddha, then each one of us is a Buddha. It doesn’t matter where we came from, what our situation might be, or how much money we make. All that matters are our efforts to reveal our Buddha nature.

Now you might be thinking, “I know I am a Buddha, but I still feel like I’m not like others. I always compare other people’s actions with what I’m doing and it just doesn’t feel like it’s good

enough.” Developing our character and sense of personal worth is important. President Ikeda says: “Do not allow yourself to compare yourself to others! Rather than comparing your every joy and sorrow to that of others, aim to surpass your limits in your current situation. Those who can accomplish this throughout their lives are true victors, the true geniuses” (*The Way of Youth*, p. 121).

Attaining enlightenment does not require us to become anything other than a human being; it is recognizing our own true value and worth exactly as we are. By being true to ourselves, we can become happy. Only we know what it is that makes us happy and only we know when we are making efforts to make ourselves happy. Comparing ourselves with others only leads to a sense of inferiority or superiority. By focusing on surpassing our own limitations — without focusing on what others are doing — we will find it much easier to grow. No matter how much we try to become like someone else, we can only be ourselves.

Each one of us plays a valuable role in society and in the movement toward world peace. “Buddhism teaches that all things have a unique beauty and mission. Every person has a singular mission, his or her individuality and way of life. That is the natural order of things” (*Faith into Action*, p. 140). The SGI is an organization where each of us is free to express ourselves in our own unique way, while striving to accomplish world peace. For the SGI to work as an organization for the people, it has to be made up of many different types of people. “Total revolution will be achieved only when people with all sorts of characters and talents fully live up to their abilities as they scale the peak of kosen-rufu on into the coming century” (*Selected Lectures on the Goshō*, vol. 1, p. 155).

The SGI is based on the concept of “many in body, one in mind.” This represents the many different individuals that make up the SGI and our combined efforts or determination to accomplish world peace. Our mission is to learn to appreciate the differences in each individual, while striving to achieve the common goal of kosen-rufu. Nichiren Daishonin uses the analogy of fish in water to explain the unity of “many in body, one in mind.” President Ikeda explains further, “‘To become inseparable as fish and the water in which they swim’ is to realize that our existence flourishes within, and even depends on, the beautiful tapestry of human relationships woven together with the people around us” (*Selected Lectures on the Goshō*, vol. 1, p. 155).

Everyone has a specific role to play in society. Our mission as Buddhists is discovering what that role is and challenging ourselves to go beyond our limitations. When we make these daily efforts, we will be contributing to kosen-rufu as individuals and as Buddhas.

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