

## BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (25) BODHISATTVA NEVER DISPARAGING ALWAYS RESPECTING OTHERS IN OUR BEHAVIOR

*"I would never dare disparage you, for you are all certain to attain Buddhahood!"* (The Lotus Sutra, trans. Burton Watson, p. 267).

Imagine the scene: You have made a sincere determination to dedicate yourself to helping others become happy. You recognize your mission to behave as a bodhisattva and you set out to take action toward that end. You approach others and let them know that you respect them and that they are valuable. However, the people don't respond to you the way that you might imagine. They beat and throw stones at you. They call you names and say you are irresponsible for predicting that they will attain Buddhahood.

What would you do?

In light of being physically and verbally abused, we might think that being a bodhisattva requires too much patience and forbearance. Many of us might give up trying to help others or acknowledge their potential for Buddhahood. But this wasn't the spirit of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Despite the ill treatment he received from the four kinds of believers — monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen — he showed reverence for every person he met and resolved to help them discover their Buddha nature.

"The heart of the Buddha's lifetime of teachings is the Lotus Sutra, and the heart of the practice of the Lotus Sutra is found in the 'Never Disparaging' chapter. What does Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's profound respect for people signify? The purpose of the appearance in this world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings, lies in his behavior as a human being" ("The Three Kinds of Treasure," *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, pp. 851-52).

As practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, we are all trying to polish our lives. As the quote above states, the most essential part of our Buddhist practice — a way to polish our lives — can be found in the twentieth chapter of the Lotus Sutra. Nichiren Daishonin explains that although Shakyamuni taught many sutras, the most important is the Lotus Sutra. Moreover, what is taught in "The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter explains the essence of our Buddhist practice.

Since Kumarajiva's Chinese translation of the passage above consists of twenty-four characters, it is often referred to as "the twenty-four-character Lotus Sutra." This represents the abbreviated Lotus Sutra. "The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" says: "These twenty-four Chinese characters that make up this passage are interchangeable with the five characters of Myoho-enge-kyo; [though the wording is different] the meaning is the same. These twenty-four characters represent the 'abbreviated' Lotus Sutra" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 764).

In a previous existence, Shakyamuni was Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. He told the story of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging to show that the purpose of his advent lay in his behavior as a human being. We see the exact words with which he showed respect to all. "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you are all practicing the bodhisattva way and are certain to attain Buddhahood" (*Lotus Sutra*, pp. 266-67).

If someone is not treating us right, it is all too easy to give up trying to encourage him and help him create a valuable life. But every human being has the potential for Buddhahood, however dormant it may seem to our own limited vision. When we recognize this in others — even in people we don't like — a phenomenal thing begins to happen. Others will change and

so will we. Although we are working for the happiness of others, a wonderful side effect is that we become even happier ourselves.

The entire teaching of the Lotus Sutra, which expounds the universality of Buddhahood, is crystallized in Never Disparaging's words. He put the teaching into practice.

### **Showing Respect to Even Those Who Are Hostile**

Despite his best efforts to respect everyone with whom he came in contact, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's contemporaries saw his behavior as strange. He didn't take time to read and recite the scriptures as other monks were doing; he spent his time bowing to people. These four kinds of believers felt contemptuous of what they perceived to be his arrogance and ignorance and treated him cruelly, ridiculing and berating him.

Interestingly, Bodhisattva Never Disparaging was never discouraged by his circumstances. When the malignity began, he would run a safe distance away — not to avoid being injured, but to prevent his attackers from creating more negative causes — and continue calling out his words of homage: “You are certain to attain Buddhahood.”

This pattern continued for years. At the time of his death, he had expiated his bad karma through continuous practice and had “the power to preach pleasingly and eloquently, the power of great goodness and tranquility” (LS 20, 268). When the four kinds of believers saw this change in him, they reconsidered their views and gladly became his followers. Because of their poor treatment of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, they were able to form a “reverse relationship” — a relationship that allows one to have a connection with the Lotus Sutra even though that person may have slandered the Law — that allowed them to encounter him again later.

This shows Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's dauntless spirit and how his efforts of many years came to fruition. He continued to respect all because he had confidence that everyone has the potential for enlightenment. Because he believed in the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and practiced according to his convictions, he attained Buddhahood. It is just as the Daishonin states: “There is a fundamental oneness of self and others. Therefore when Bodhisattva Never Disparaging made his bow of obeisance to the four groups of people, the Buddha nature inherent in the lives of the four groups of arrogant people bowed toward Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. This is the same as how when one bows facing a mirror, the reflected image bows back” (GZ, 769).

### **Translating What We Believe Into Action**

Although the four kinds of arrogant people abused Bodhisattva Never Disparaging, the Buddha nature that existed deep in their lives was respectful of his efforts. His sincere behavior transformed their inner lives without them being aware of it. He was able to translate his beliefs into concrete behavior. His example teaches us that unless we incorporate bodhisattva practices in our lives, we won't create much value. However, this does not mean that we should allow people to abuse us.

How do we apply this knowledge to real-life situations? It is important to understand that Bodhisattva Never Disparaging's behavior is an ideal. We are all persevering and working hard to be our best selves. As we continue practicing, studying and believing in our potential, our Buddha nature will expand. We shouldn't have a poor self-image because we do not see ourselves as Bodhisattva Never Disparaging. Over the long course of our practice, we will achieve our goals. The fact that we exert ourselves in our faith and SGI activities, in spite of our shortcomings, is evidence that we are following the same path of Bodhisattva Never Disparaging.

By Alexis Trass, based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study) published by *Seikyo Press* in 1994.

Title: Bodhisattva Never Disparaging (25)  
Subject: Living Buddhism 05/01 v.5 n.5 p.5 LB0105p05  
Author: Shin Yatomi  
Keywords: Attitude Behavior Bodhisattva Buddhist Concepts Dates Disparaging Encouragement Guidance  
Lotus Never Study Sutra Terms Today