

**BACK TO THE BASICS
DEPENDENT ORIGINATION
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It is not in spite of but because of other people that we can grow and develop as human beings. SGI President Ikeda explains that “according to the Buddhist concept of dependent origination, all entities exist because of mutually interdependent relationships, and without other entities, one’s own existence would not be” (*Space and Eternal Life*, p. 168).

Buddhism thus teaches that all phenomena in the universe, including our lives, are brought into existence through a web of interconnected causes and effects that make up the totality of all phenomena—the entire universe at any given moment. Our lives are never separate from everything else that is going on in the universe.

Our individual life and environment are similar to a body and its shadow, which can never be separated. They are not fundamentally two separate existences.

From this perspective, we can see the futility of viewing things passively and negatively, as in attributing the cause of our suffering to external circumstances or other people. This would be similar to a person blaming his own shadow for following him around.

For example, we could blame our parents and the way we were raised for the problems we are experiencing in adult life. Even if our parents did horrible things to us, finding the “guilty party” for our problems does not help us in the least to become happy. It can even hurt us further. When we attribute the cause of our suffering to someone else—and do not take responsibility for our own destiny—we limit our inherent potential to grow, to change and to overcome any past trauma we experienced.

Our parents’ very existence and the specific circumstances they provided us with ultimately made it possible for us to manifest our individual traits and be born in this world as human beings. For this reason, Buddhism teaches that we are truly indebted to our parents.

By giving in to the view that we are fundamentally separate from other people, we shape every aspect of our lives in a deluded way. We obscure the profound meaning and unique mission that we possess, which we can discover only through our relationship to the world and other people. Nichiren Daishonin explains it this way: “One who studies the teachings of Buddhism must not fail to repay the four debts of gratitude. According to the Contemplation on the Mind-Ground Sutra, the first of the four debts is that owed to all living beings. Were it not for them, one would find it impossible to make the vow to save innumerable living beings...” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 43).

Indeed, if it were not for the influence of other living beings and the various conditions that surround our lives, both positive and seemingly negative, we simply could not have appeared in this world or may not continue to live in it as human beings. Ultimately, it is a result of the karma we ourselves have created through our thoughts, words and actions and that are manifested in our own unique environment, that our birth in this world is made possible.

When the sobering realization occurs that we alone are fundamentally responsible for the reality of our lives, a bright ray of hope begins to stream through the veil of darkness. For we realize that it is only through our own causes we make that we can change the suffering in our lives into happiness. This is the point of departure for profound change and growth. Based on our strong practice of faith, we can develop sincere appreciation for

everything—both good and bad. We can come to realize that, in fact, everything in our life is functioning in no other way than to point us in the direction of absolute happiness. There is always some courageous action that we can take in response to even the harshest circumstances, opening a bright path to the future.

As we continue to bring forth our potential of unlimited wisdom and life force through chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and dedicating our lives to kosen-rufu, we utilize all the circumstances in our lives as the impetus to develop ourselves further. Dependent origination is the magnificent stage upon which this great drama—the life of a Bodhisattva of the Earth—unfolds.