

TOPIC 9: BUDDHISM EQUALS DAILY LIFE

DAILY LIFE AND CHANTING

Many of us may have been conditioned during our upbringing to see things to do with a religion or a teaching primarily in spiritual terms so that a distorted view of Buddhism as being 'other worldly' is formed. Yet Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that the spiritual and physical/material aspects of life are inextricably linked. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and practising Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, in the face of day to day realities with its ups and downs, gives us a powerful means to draw out our Buddhahood. We find the key to our happiness in the middle of our daily lives! This is one meaning of 'Buddhism equals daily life'.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism does not simply provide a means to view the world in a theoretical way. It is not as if by coming to understand about the ten worlds, or cause and effect that we just have a new pair of glasses through which to look at the world. It is much, much more than this.

In a letter called The Gift of Rice Nichiren Daishonin says, "...in the end secular matters are the entirety of Buddhism" (WND,1126). In other words, each human being's life, moment by moment in any 'secular' area of life, is in one of the ten states and they can at any moment experience any other of the 9 worlds. If we carefully observe people going about any kind of 'secular matter', we will find the mutual possession of the ten worlds at work. This is true for all the principles of life that Buddhism explains. We will find them working within our daily reality. How we live, in relation to our moment by moment daily reality, works on the basis of these fundamental life principles. As we chant and practise, we experience

our daily lives in a different way and this is a very profound thing: through this inter-relating of our lives and our daily realities we become Buddhas!

We naturally find ourselves chanting about our day to day realities. And in the extreme of a life threatening situation my chanting will be from my whole life and it will influence the life threatening reality. With more time, and under less pressure, I may be aware that, for example, a distant aunt is suffering and decide to chant for her happiness. There may be many other aspects of my daily reality where I may feel my happiness is related in such a way that I feel I want to chant about that aspect.

However we will also find that through our sincere chanting, we find ourselves changing, inside, in how we react, in how we see ourselves, in how far we treasure ourselves and in many other respects. The things we started by chanting about may come to be seen by us as all related to something inside and as we change that 'something' our experience of all these other things changes too. Because we change, how we cause the world to come to us changes profoundly.

As we continue to practice we start to take up the challenge of changing ourselves and doing our human revolution. And we find that we seek to live a life of fundamental respect towards ourselves and all living beings. This does not mean that we cease to try, for example, to 'get our own way'. But the basis on which we pursue our desires changes. We learn to trust this different way to live, based on the Mystic Law. This is not just about wishful thinking or trying to be nice. Human revolution is a far more profound change whereby we, the 'ordinary being' through overcoming our negative tendencies and expanding our lives, we more and more become the Buddha.

THE BUDDHA AND THE ORDINARY BEING

In a letter called 'On Attaining Buddhahood' Nichiren Daishonin writes, "If the minds of living beings are impure, their land is also impure, but if their minds are pure, so is their land. There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.

It is the same with a Buddha and an ordinary being. When deluded, one is called an ordinary being, but when enlightened, one is called a Buddha. This is similar to a tarnished mirror that will shine like a jewel when polished. A mind now clouded by the illusions of the innate darkness of life is like a tarnished mirror, but when polished, it is sure to become like a clear mirror, reflecting the essential nature of phenomena and the true aspect of reality. Arouse deep faith, and diligently polish your mirror day and night. How should you polish it? Only by chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo". (WND, 4)

Thus there is no substantial difference between the ordinary human being and the Buddha. The difference lies in our minds and in our actions. In other words we reveal Buddhahood in our present form as we are. We cause this through our Buddhist practice and through developing faith in Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

It is very important to appreciate that the original aspiration in Buddhism has always been the desire to become happy together with others. Buddhism has always taken the view that this is the pure and eternal wish of all people in the depths of our lives. This thought is originally and equally inherent in the lives of the Buddha and ordinary people alike. A person who becomes awakened to and who lives in accord

with this spirit is a Buddha. And all ordinary people, just as they are, can attain the state of Buddhahood by having profound confidence that we are Buddhas just as we are.

It may be hard in our society to see this principle of Buddhahood manifesting itself in daily life as anything but an unattainable ideal. Few would take issue with the idea that respecting others is, in theory, the correct way for human beings to behave. But when it comes to specific individuals whom we know, various emotions arise making it a real challenge to put this principle into action.

Buddhism regards ignorance or delusion as lying at the heart of this problem. Probably everyone has succumbed at some point to doing the very opposite of what is good, knowing it is wrong. Fundamental ignorance or delusion, which is the force which gives rise to evil, exists in every human life. And as the passage earlier made clear, people can break free of this ignorance and manifest their Buddha nature or inherent enlightenment. The important thing is that we believe in our potential, strive to reveal our Buddha nature, grow as human beings, becoming happy and helping others to do the same. Irrespective of how people treat us, the important thing is to chant with an unwavering belief in the Buddha nature of everyone, ourselves and other people. This in itself can be extremely challenging, involving a real change of heart. But to take action based on such a state of life is proof of one's humanity as a Buddhist.

To live a life of true human dignity is certainly difficult. Life is continuous change. Nothing is constant. The four sufferings of birth, old age, sickness, and death are an eternal theme from which no one can escape. Amid this harsh reality, people yearn from the depths of their beings to live with dignity and for their lives to have meaning, and they make efforts toward that end.

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism

teaches that it is our fundamental attitude to problems and the suffering which usually accompanies them that determines the extent to which we win or lose in creating a happy life.

When we look at the lives of great people of the past, we find that they remained undefeated by life's hardships, by life's pounding waves, and that they held fast to hopes that seemed fantastic dreams to most. Moreover, they let nothing stop or discourage them from realising those aspirations. They were able to do this because their hopes themselves were not limited to personal desire or self-interest, but were based on a wish for the happiness of humanity. This gave them extraordinary conviction and confidence.

We experience one suffering after another. We are assailed by hardships. That is the reality of life. But each of us possesses the power to face and overcome all these obstacles. The point is whether we believe this and are actually able to manifest this strength. To be defeated by suffering and filled with complaint is to be shackled by our karma. It is by squarely facing our suffering that we are able to transform it into something that is part of the purpose of our lives. By overcoming it our ability to achieve our purpose in life becomes strengthened. It is by challenging and overcoming difficulties as ordinary people that we demonstrate the greatness of the Mystic Law.

TAPPING THE POWER OF THE LAW

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism enables us to free ourselves from the sufferings of birth and death. But to achieve this we must "perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings." This means tapping the limitless power of the Mystic Law inherent in our lives. This is the passage in which the Daishonin

says this,

"If you wish to free yourself from the sufferings of birth and death you have endured since time without beginning and to attain without fail unsurpassed enlightenment in this lifetime, you must perceive the mystic truth that is originally inherent in all living beings. This truth is Myoho-enge-kyo. Chanting Myoho-enge-kyo will therefore enable you to grasp the mystic truth innate in all life". (WND, 3)

When we are able to do this infinite power wells from our finite existence. As a result we are able to break through any deadlock. We can't put the blame on others. Everything comes back to us.

The life-state of someone who has attained Buddhahood can be described as one of 'great hope'. This great hope stems from inner confidence in one's ability to attain Buddhahood and one's grasp of the meaning of life, as well as conviction in the inherent ability of all people to become enlightened. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches that the purpose of life is to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime. This takes place in the midst of our day to day reality where Buddhism truly equals daily life. He writes:

"A person of wisdom is not one who practices Buddhism apart from worldly affairs but, rather one who thoroughly understands the principles by which the world is governed"
(WND p1121)

In other words, to practise Buddhism means to value society; it means to contribute and work for society's benefit. This too is what it means to say that 'Buddhism equals daily life'.