

# 7: HUMAN REVOLUTION, AND OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

SGI-UK Study Department  
Introductory Study  
Programme

## Introducing Human Revolution

In today's world where global issues are so important, many people feel a sense of powerlessness and resignation; a feeling that no individual's efforts can change the way things are. But the Buddhist viewpoint is that the world should be seen from the perspective of the individual, and that the human life contains the entire universe. That is why changing our own lives one by one will bring a change in our family, our community, and the society in which we live. It will change the age we live in, our history, and indeed all aspects of our world.

If we look for the true causes of war, we see that it is essentially caused by the human mind. War stems from the desire to control and conquer others, to have power, and from hatred and antipathy. Such is a human being in the grip of the negative force of life. World peace starts with the inner transformation of the individual, and the struggle to elevate our state of life, and free ourselves from the domination of the negative force of life.

A single sunflower contains the seeds for more than a thousand new plants. Similarly, when one brave person stands up for peace, his or her resolve spreads out into the environment in thousands of ways. Courage always brings a response. One person's human revolution can therefore eventually change the destiny of the entire human race.

## The Spirit of Human Revolution

In his writing *On Attaining Buddhahood*, Nichiren Daishonin conveys the basic spirit of human revolution: "You must never think that

any of the eighty thousand sacred teachings of Shakyamuni's lifetime or any of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions and three existences are outside yourself. Your practice of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of the sufferings of birth and death in the least unless you perceive the true nature of your own life." [WND p3]

We could summarise the spirit of this teaching as being, "It's not up to others; nor can I blame anyone else. I have to change myself first." It is a viewpoint which says, everything in life is part of our own training; it is for our benefit and development. Human revolution takes place right now, in the situation we find ourselves at this moment.

World peace starts with this inner transformation of the individual. And yes it is a struggle to develop and elevate our state of life but human revolution is the foundation for world peace and also for individual peace and happiness. It is at the heart of our Buddhist practise. It is about changing our heart and drawing out our humanity.

It is the most amazing feeling as you discover that if the cause of your suffering is within the realms of your own life then you and only you can change that aspect of your life. This is the most freeing feeling. This is human revolution and the door to your Buddhahood.

Human revolution brings into play all the principles and processes that make up the Buddhist teachings of life. Learning to be able to live our lives on the basis of correct teachings is part of our human revolution. The process is a transformation of the heart.

## Transforming the Self, Living the Teachings

When we commit our lives to chanting we embark on a journey of self-discovery and challenge. By taking responsibility for our feelings and emotions, especially those we most dislike, we come to realise we have the ability to transform our lives from within. As we broaden our experiences of chanting daimoku we get experiences of our environment reflecting the transformation of our inner lives. This could be in our family relationships, at work or in other aspects of life.

It is usually within one of these arenas that we find life can be difficult or cause us to suffer. As we continue chanting, the more we start to see our lives very differently. At first this process may seem a little uncomfortable because it is quite unique and new to us. We may or may not like what we see. Perhaps we realise we have set attitudes or opinions about others or various issues that make us suffer. It may seem that others have a problem with us. This can draw out all sorts of feelings and emotions that can make us uneasy, or uncomfortable.

Getting this kind of reaction does not mean that chanting is not working or that it is working in a negative way. On the contrary you are actually in the process of transforming exactly that which has always led you to suffer in that particular area of your life. Your chanting is illuminating an area of your life that needs to change for your own happiness. The realisation that this opinion or attitude stems from our own lives and not from others opinions of us, leads us to uncover the Buddha nature inherent in our lives. The quickest way to transform these feelings or attitude is to keep chanting until you realise the cause of these uncomfortable feelings.

However, it may be that is exactly when you find it the most

difficult time to chant. You are on the brink of changing a part of your life that always stops you from progressing or being happy. It will probably feel like walking up a hill backwards. At such times obstacles and devils arise. You will probably be able to justify why it is more beneficial to watch TV than do gongyo or chant or tell a friend about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo or study some of Nichiren Daishonin's writings. But this is exactly the time to do these things in order to break through and win over something that has always held you back. This is the time to muster a fighting spirit and to be courageous.

In his book *Seven Paths to Peace*, Daisaku Ikeda talks about human revolution in terms of self-mastery. Simply put, this means winning control over oneself, overcoming the small self that is dominated by narrow self-interest and awakening to the larger self that works for the good of all humanity. From this standpoint a major obstacle to developing ourselves is to pursue a way of life bound by our small ego or self. Expanding from the lesser self to the greater self is the path of human revolution.

Through our practice of introducing others to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, and through efforts to share Buddhism with others, we ourselves grow immensely, we can carry out our human revolution, and transform our karma. Therefore by guiding another individual towards happiness, we also guide ourselves towards happiness. The act of introducing others to Buddhism, which enables us to profoundly benefit both ourselves and others, is the formula of hope for humanity.

## Obstacles

At a time when an ordinary person attains Buddhahood, or at a time when a person is at a turning point in doing their human revolution, the negative aspect of life will always appear in some form. This is an unavoidable fact of life! Nichiren Daishonin assures us of this and asks

us to transmit it as an axiom or principle of faith so that it is understood by all those who practise.

This negative aspect is often referred to as the 'three obstacles and four devils' (in Japanese, *sansho shima*). Obstacles refer to things which appear to be outside of ourselves (but which ultimately have their origins in our lives) and the devils, or negative elements, are 'internal'. What makes these obstacles and devils serious is that if we are influenced by them we may stop practising Buddhism. They confront us at a specific point in time – usually when we are about to grow in our lives and move forward. The fact that at a difficult moment we may think that we should stop practising is a sign that it is an attack of one of the three obstacles and four devils. From a positive point of view these hindrances enable us to see a weakness in our lives so that we can chant and become stronger in that area.

The first is the obstacle of earthly desires. Buddhism teaches that our earthly desires may be transformed into enlightenment. Second is the obstacle of karma, which includes the influence of those who are close to us such as a spouse, partner or children. Third is the obstacle of retribution, which means opposition from those with power over us, such as our superiors, parents or people in authority.

The devils come from within our own lives. We create our own negativity, our own doubt, uncertainty and confusion. The first devil arises from our earthly desires. It can include egoism, craving for personal fame and riches, laziness or being dominated by force of habit. It can also arise from the three poisons of greed, anger and stupidity.

Second is the devil of weakness that can arise in our own bodies, such as an illness which will hold us back and reduce our capacity. Third is the devil which manifests as the hindrance of death. Unless we are confident that death is not 'the end', but rather another phase in the cycle of life and death – then another person's death can trigger a sense of doubt and can considerably weaken our will to practise Buddhism, even though

Buddhism is intended to relieve us from the sufferings of birth and death.

Finally the fourth devil is known as the Devil King of the Sixth Heaven who, in Buddhist mythology, works to obstruct Buddhist practice and drain our life force. This is the manifestation of fundamental darkness inherent in life. And because of this can be seen as the most challenging aspect of negativity to conquer. When influential people persuade or threaten us to stop practising this could be said to be the workings of the Devil of the Sixth Heaven.

Whatever form they take, the Daishonin advises us to take these obstacles and devils as confirmation that we are properly practising the true Law through which ordinary people become Buddhas. They offer us insight into aspects of our human revolution, ways to strengthen our lives and assurance that we are on the verge of achieving this, so long as we are neither influenced nor frightened by them. Human revolution includes experiencing this process and transforming some aspect of ourselves. It indicates the real experience of finding we have to confront something. It also includes our need to gain the inner conviction that we can win over the obstacle in question.

In Buddhism, the term 'fundamental darkness' is used to describe the ignorance and delusion inherent in human life. This is the ignorance of the fact that we all have the state of Buddhahood in our lives, at all times, latent and ready to be revealed. The aim of our great struggle for kosen-rufu, our movement of human revolution, is to transform that innate darkness into light. Our goal is to vanquish the destructive tendencies within human life that give rise to mutual distrust and hate, violence and fear. The three obstacles and four devils become an indispensable means for doing this. That is why we should rejoice when they appear.

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