

# TOPIC 8: UNITY, AND ONENESS OF MENTOR & DISCIPLE

## Unity in Buddhism

In many of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, the principle of unity is stressed again and again. Unity starts with the individual. He writes: 'Even an individual at cross purposes with himself is certain to end in failure.' [WND p618]

We all know what it is to be 'at cross purposes' - those feelings of indecision, confusion or vagueness where we become incapable of taking the next step and our goal, whatever it might be, seems to evaporate, never to be achieved.

The opposite of being 'at cross purposes' is to be focused on our aim, confident that we will not deviate from our path towards it, and ready for any obstacle that may appear to try and hinder us.

Life, however, is about more than not being 'at cross purposes with oneself.' Nichiren Buddhism is not a religion where the individual attains enlightenment in an isolated state. Indeed one of the original meanings of the world 'bodhisattva' was someone who would delay entry into nirvana in order to lead others to the goal of enlightenment. The Buddha reveals the compassionate aspect of the bodhisattva state, and therefore lives in society in order to have a vehicle for his or her compassion.

Therefore, although Buddhism starts by considering the individual, we quickly go on to see a community of people who believe in the same core principles and who wish to continue in their practice, developing themselves and improving their world.

This very famous quotation explains the importance of unity among people who practise Buddhism: 'All disciples and lay supporters of Nichiren should chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo with the spirit of many in body but one in mind, transcending all differences among themselves to become as inseparable as fish and the water in which they

swim. This spiritual bond is the basis for the universal transmission of the ultimate Law of life and death. Herein lies the true goal of Nichiren's propagation. When you are so united, even the great desire for widespread propagation can be fulfilled. But if any of Nichiren's disciples disrupt the unity of many in body but one in mind, they would be like warriors who destroy their own castle from within' [WND p217].

What, then, is this spirit of 'many in body, but one in mind'?

## Many in Body, One in Mind

As we look around at our neighbours, our colleagues, even our families, we can see that while there are clearly similarities between some groups of people, there are also enormous differences. Around the world, the cultural and language differences can appear insurmountable. Yet, Nichiren Daishonin urges us to find unity. How?

His teaching is very practical, and it accepts that we are all very different; in fact we are each unique. What we are asked to do is to learn to respect other people's unique characteristics and differences. This becomes much easier to do when we look beneath the surface and recall that everyone has the Buddha state deep in their lives, even if it is latent and not yet apparent.

So first we accept that we are all different ('many in body'), and then we consider that we share a common goal, or are 'in one mind'.

This does not mean that we all have to 'think the same.' Rather, we who chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo all share the same high ideals of attaining Buddhahood, and seeing the widespread propagation of Buddhist

SGI-UK Study Department  
Introductory Study Programme

philosophy throughout the world so that society becomes based on fundamental respect for life, rather than on greed, anger or foolishness.

Buddhism therefore has no intention to suppress our individuality; indeed, we are encouraged to display our own unique qualities to the full, which will add to the rich variety that makes up our society. Nichiren expresses this by pointing out that different sorts of fruit are perfect in themselves, and a pear, for example, should not try to be, or to taste like, a plum. All of our own individual talents and characteristics are necessary for us to realize our goal of kosen-rufu. The essence of the unity of many in body one in mind is to learn how to transcend the differences; to develop respect for the life of another, even if we do not like them.

You may wish to pause for a while to consider other permutations of 'mind' and 'body'. For example, what would a society be like that is based on 'one in body, many in mind'? We will quickly come to see Nichiren Daishonin's wisdom in stressing that we should aim for the unity of 'many in body, one in mind', especially when we consider that at the centre of his teaching is the Gohonzon, with its expression of the highest state of life, Buddhahood, which we can all experience ourselves and reveal in our lives and environments.

This leads to another important principle – that of the oneness of mentor and disciple. This is also sometimes referred to as 'the mentor and disciple relationship'.

## The Oneness of Mentor And Disciple

As we develop an interest in Buddhism, it can be very easy to think that we understand how to practise, and perhaps decide to study or chant

less. But in order to maintain correct faith, it is necessary to go back again and again to the examples of Nichiren Daishonin and his disciple Nikko Shonin so that we are able to perpetuate the pure flow of the Daishonin's Buddhism on to future generations. We are therefore fortunate that we have so many of Nichiren Daishonin's writings, and can read his words of encouragement that he wrote to people who had similar struggles and difficulties to us, even though they lived hundreds of years ago.

There are many examples in society of the relationship between a teacher and the student, or the master and the apprentice, but the oneness of mentor and disciple is a principle which has profound significance in Buddhism.

The mentor is the Buddha enlightened to the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. The disciple is a person who is in the process of becoming enlightened to the Law. The mentor teaches the disciple in order that the disciple may become equal to the mentor in understanding and experience and even go on to surpass him in his or her achievements in society. Both mentor and disciple are therefore equal before the Law and they are united in their approach to the Law, seeking to become enlightened to it. Disciples should share the same responsibility and commitment to the Law as the mentor. Recently, Daisaku Ikeda said: 'The Daishonin urges his followers to practise 'just as Nichiren' and to 'spread the Lotus Sutra as he does.' Disciples who wait for the mentor to do something for them are disciples of the pre-Lotus Sutra teachings. True disciples of the Lotus Sutra are those who struggle just as the mentor does.' [World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings, Part 8]

Therefore we can consider that Nichiren Daishonin is our mentor in terms of our practice of Buddhism. He provided the Gohonzon for us to see our inherent Buddhahood, and gave us a practice to follow. His own life, too, is an inspiring example of the potential force of our Buddhahood from which we can learn so much

President Ikeda, too, demonstrates how to practise Buddhism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He has pointed out that those who have a mentor in life are truly fortunate. The path of mentor and disciple is one that leads to personal development and growth. Those without a mentor may appear free and un beholden to anyone, but without a solid standard or model on which to base themselves, their lives become aimless and wandering.

Reading the novels *The Human Revolution* and *The New Human Revolution*, which are accounts of the development of the Soka Gakkai, and the SGI, we can see how Daisaku Ikeda has continually applied the principles of Nichiren Buddhism in order to achieve wonderful victories in all areas of his life. He has worked as a disciple of President Toda, who in turn was a disciple of President Makiguchi

The mentor wishes the disciple to achieve more than the mentor. It is the disciple who chooses the mentor. The disciple chooses to struggle to grasp the heart of the mentor, to understand the mentor's true intent.

If we wish to see the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism established in our society, enabling more and more people to reveal their highest life condition, then we will find ourselves choosing our mentor in order to be able to be the people who stand up in our own communities and take action for the sake of others, as ambassadors of Buddhism and acting as representatives of Nichiren Daishonin and Daisaku Ikeda.

Nichiren Daishonin's writings are full of examples of the incredibly strong links between himself and his followers. In letters written to Shijo Kingo, the samurai who accompanied him to the attempted execution at Tatsunokuchi Beach, for example, we can feel the bonds, not just of friendship, but of the mentor and disciple: 'Over and over I recall the moment, unforgettable even now, when I was about to be beheaded and you accompanied me, holding the reins of my horse and weeping tears of grief. Nor could I ever forget it in any

lifetime to come. If you should fall into hell for some grave offense, no matter how Shakyamuni Buddha might urge me to become a Buddha, I would refuse; I would rather go to hell with you. For if you and I should fall into hell together, we would find Shakyamuni Buddha and the Lotus Sutra there.' [WND p850]

Even though Nichiren Daishonin lived more than seven hundred years ago, we can experience his encouragement through his writings and through prayer to the Gohonzon. The law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and the principles of Buddhism are as applicable now as they were in 13<sup>th</sup> century Japan, and this is the time for us to apply them in our lives and see the improvements that occur, not only in ourselves, but also in society as a whole. This represents the best action to fulfill the mentor's wish, and see the establishment of kosen-rufu across the world.

**Introductory study  
programme materials  
Version 2.0 for use from  
July 2004**

SGI-UK, Study Department,  
Taplow Court, Taplow, SL6 0ER,  
UK