

July Discussion Topic - The Oneness of Mentor and Disciple

In any field, a person who aids the development of another may be regarded as a mentor. In Buddhism, the mentor-disciple relationship is of fundamental importance so that the Law transmitted by the mentor may be practised in the correct way. This is essential for attaining Buddhahood.

The foundation of the relationship between mentor and disciple in Buddhism is the shared pledge to work together for the happiness of people, to free them from suffering. Without this shared pledge and effort, the mentor would simply be an object of veneration, and Buddhism would lose its power.

The Lotus Sutra contains a vivid allegorical description of the moment when the Buddha's disciples make this pledge. The sutra describes how, during an occasion when Shakyamuni Buddha is preaching, the earth splits open and a multitude of resplendent bodhisattvas emerge. These so-called "Bodhisattvas of the Earth" are firmly resolved to continue to live out Shakyamuni's teachings after his passing, in the difficult and corrupted age to come. This grand, cinematic description portrays the profundity of the shared commitment of mentor and disciple.

Buddhism is a philosophy with the aim of empowering people. Its central premise is that each person has the innate capacity to triumph in any circumstances in which they find themselves, to surmount any source of suffering, transforming it into a source of growth and strength. It is a philosophy established on the conviction that there exist within the lives of each of us at each moment inexhaustible reserves of courage, wisdom, compassion and life force. The mentor makes the disciple aware, and continues to remind him or her, of this profound potential. The disciple is inspired by the teachings and the behaviour of the mentor. As President Ikeda writes, "A true mentor in Buddhism reminds us to strive for enlightenment and happiness for ourselves and for others." It's about the balance of having the courage to squarely confront one's own challenges, striving to grow and develop as a person, while taking action for the sake of others.

SGI President Ikeda comments: "A mentor helps you perceive your own weaknesses and confront them with courage." When the mentor-disciple spirit is lacking in our faith or in our life, it is easy to succumb to our weaknesses such as fear, arrogance, anger and complacency, and be content to seek only personal satisfaction.

The mentor-disciple relationship is a courageous journey of discovery into our own life. It is not a matter of wishing to imitate our mentor. It is the disciple who has to make the choice to seek the mentor's heart, and learn from him.

1. What does the mentor-disciple relationship mean to you?
2. How do you put the mentor-disciple relationship into practice?