

July Discussion Topic – The Shared Vow of Mentor and Disciple

The essential aim of Buddhism is to awaken in all people the ability to reveal their enlightened potential, their own inner source of indestructible happiness. This aim is crystallized in the “vow” of Buddha Shakyamuni found in the Lotus Sutra: “I took a vow, hoping to make all persons equal to me, without any distinction between us” (LSOC,70).

This was his vow to help all living beings attain Buddhahood.

Both the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin make clear, however, that Buddhist practice is not complete if we simply seek personal benefit. It is when we make the Buddha’s vow our own and strive for both ourselves and others to attain Buddhahood that we can enjoy the highest life state of happiness. Taking action based on this spirit is known as the “oneness of mentor and disciple.” By following the example of a mentor who embodies this vow, and learning from him, we can bring forth the hope, compassion, courage and wisdom that we need in order to advance. This, of course, is quite a challenge. It involves activating our strengths—our Buddha nature - for example, bringing forth courage when cowardice is comfortable, or finding compassion when indifference is the norm.

Nichiren wrote many letters to his disciples and demonstrated throughout his life that dedicating oneself to this vow would invariably invite obstacles and opposition, both from the ignorance or negativity in one’s own mind and from those around us. In his letter ‘The Opening of the Eyes’, the Daishonin expressed his great vow as follows: “Here I will make a great vow. (...) Whatever obstacles I might encounter, so long as persons of wisdom do not prove my teachings to be false, I will never yield! (...) This is my vow, and I will never forsake it!” (WND-I, 280-81)

When we decide to share this vow for the happiness of the people with our mentor, we call forth the courage to manifest the wisdom and the unlimited power of the Buddha that are inherently present in our lives. A power that we did not even realize existed within us. Our vow represents the eternal victory through which we change our karma into our mission. When we seek the guidance and encouragement of our mentor, pray to apply it, and take action based on this prayer, we can continuously transform all our suffering into joy, and find inspiration to move both our lives and society forward.

1. What does the shared vow of mentor and disciple mean to you?
2. How do you stay true to your vow when you meet with obstacles?