

September Discussion Topic – The Bodhisattva Ideal and Human Rights Culture

What does the term bodhisattva mean? In short, it is a life state of compassion and altruism. Bodhisattvas make the vow to become happy themselves and help others to do the same through their behaviour. As bodhisattvas, we refuse to be held back or discouraged by the problems we encounter as a result of this challenge. A bodhisattva does not avoid the reality.

The Lotus Sutra speaks of the pure white lotus rising from the waters of a muddy pond. This stands as a symbol of our ability to manifest a pure, strong life state in the midst of the sometimes degrading daily reality of life.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “It is the heart that is important.” (WND I, 1000). The ultimate purpose of Buddha Shakyamuni’s life lies in his behaviour as a human being. That is why we regard the development and improvement of our behaviour and our life as the ultimate purpose of our practice.

While many people may at first be inspired to practise Buddhism by the desire for personal happiness, to overcome illness or some other seemingly insurmountable challenge, as their life-state expands, they naturally develop a deeper concern for the happiness of others. Perceiving the interconnectedness of all beings, they take compassionate action, including sharing with others the insights of Buddhism, so they may also tap into the same rich inner life state of Buddhahood.

President Ikeda says: “Let us not seek praise or glory for ourselves, but instead dedicate our lives to sowing the seeds of the Mystic Law for peace everywhere in the world.”

It is important that we live as bodhisattvas who rise above our “lesser self” and manifest our “greater self”, realizing that we are all connected with one another. As long as there are people suffering, we cannot be truly happy ourselves.

That is why we challenge ourselves in our daily life to act with the spirit of a bodhisattva, and why we refuse to abandon those who are suffering. We try to encourage others through alleviating their pain and supporting them. This way of behavior as human beings will undoubtedly contribute towards a culture of human rights.

- Did you experience that you developed more compassion for others through your practice, and that you make more efforts for their happiness?
- What does it mean to you to act with the spirit of a bodhisattva?