August Discussion Topic - Earthly desires lead to enlightenment

Our sufferings are caused by illusions, instinctive desires and destructive impulses which are inherent in human life. They are indicated as ‘earthly desires’. At the root of all earthly desires are the three poisons of greed, anger and foolishness. Early Buddhist teachings were focussed on extinguishing these ‘poisons’. In order to be freed from suffering and attain enlightenment, it was thought that one had to extinguish all earthly desires.

Nichiren Buddhism, which is based on the Lotus Sutra, teaches us that our desires are an integral part of life, and that they are one with and inseparable from enlightenment. As long as we live we will have desires, illusions and impulses. Eating, sleeping and love are all to enjoy and necessary to survive. Therefore we do not strive to extinguish our desires, but rather transform them into enlightenment. Without it Buddhahood would be a kind of superhuman state of life that is unattainable and far removed from us.

Life, shrouded in darkness with all suffering, is as if in a dark room. All we have to do is turn on the light to see everything clearly. The room will always be the same whether it is light or dark. The same goes for our life, which remains the same in essence, whether it is deceived or enlightened. We need something to create light, which we do by reciting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. By doing so, we become aware of our innate Buddha nature and strengthen it. We draw forth the wisdom that enables us to transform our desires and hardships into value. In this way we transform our suffering and hardships into “the fuel” we need to draw forth our limitless wisdom, compassion, courage and conviction, making us even wiser and stronger and better able to help the people around us. We change from ordinary people who are trapped in their desires into people who manifest the enlightened aspect of all things.

President Ikeda says: “The Mystic Law [Nam-myoho-renge-kyo] is the fundamental principle that allows us to draw forth the limitless power we inherently possess. It enables us to change earthly desires, or deluded impulses, into wisdom - just as spring sunshine can melt ice and snow to create a flowing stream.”

- How can we use our earthly desires and hardships as ‘fuel’ towards our enlightenment?
- Do you have an experience with transforming your earthly desires?

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