

Februari Discussion Topic - Buddhist compassion

Buddhism teaches which inner tendencies create negative circumstances such as violence, conflict, poverty, environmental destruction and exploitation. Human nature is the cause of the world's great problems, but it is also the solution. The opposite of this destructive aspect of human nature - in which our ego is fully and destructively expressed - and the suffering it causes, is compassion. Compassion is the very essence of Buddhism. Buddhist compassion is the desire to relieve suffering and impart joy. It is the connection with others and all living beings, and stems from the desire to see everything and everyone flourish and become happy. When we think of compassion, we often only think of pity, but pity can be very condescending. Compassion derives from equality and respect for the dignity of life - of our own life and that of others.

President Daisaku Ikeda writes, "True Buddhist compassion has nothing to do with sentimentality or mere pity. This is because sentimentality or mere pity cannot help the other person achieve victory in life; it cannot truly relieve suffering and impart joy."¹ Genuine compassion is about empowering others, helping them to bring out their strength and courage from within their lives in order to overcome their problems. It may seem like an act of compassion to solve a difficult situation for someone, but true compassion is to help that person in a way that he himself is able to overcome his problem and becomes happy. By solving someone's problem ends up making them weaker and less self-reliant. We need wisdom to encourage others in a way that suits them. Compassion and wisdom are thus closely related. Furthermore, even small acts of kindness require a degree of courage.

Nichiren established the practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo as a practical means for people to bring forth the strength and limitless potential of their humanity and live with confidence and joy. Sharing this practice with others is therefore the most essential act of compassion for practitioners of Nichiren Buddhism. To live based on compassion means that we believe in the limitless, inherent potential of ourselves and others. When we face adversity and ignorance, it is easy to lose faith in ourselves and others. This lack of trust is characteristic of the world we live in today.

To believe in and encourage the innate goodness and unlimited potential of our own and others' lives is the core of the philosophy of Nichiren Buddhism. It is also the foundation of a firm optimism upon which all people can base their actions to bring about positive change in our world.

* Do you have an experience of sharing the practice whereby the other person was able to solve his/her problem?

* Do you have an experience of developing compassion?

* Why does it take courage to tell others about Nichiren Buddhism?

¹ SGI Nieuwsbrief 7882.