

May Discussion Topic – The simultaneity of cause and effect

Buddhism teaches that the law of cause and effect is the basis of all phenomena. Positive thoughts, words and actions create positive effects in our lives, leading to happiness. Negative thoughts, words and actions on the other hand - those that undermine the dignity of life - lead to unhappiness. This is the general principle of karma.

In Buddhist teachings other than the Lotus Sutra, Buddhist practice is understood as a gradual journey of transformation. This is a process in which, over the course of many lifetimes, the essentially flawed and imperfect common mortal gradually molds and transforms his lifestate into the perfect life state of Buddhahood.

The Lotus Sutra offers a completely different view on the attainment of Buddhahood. It is not necessary to make a fundamental change in our nature to manifest our Buddha nature. In fact, it is a misconception to think that Buddhahood is somehow distant from our ordinary daily reality. The Lotus Sutra clarifies that both Buddhahood and the other nine worlds¹ are inherently possible life states present in a single moment of life. Through faith and practice, the world of Buddhahood, which is otherwise dormant, is manifested and the nine worlds retreat into a state of dormancy. The nine worlds (“cause”) and the world of Buddhahood (“effect”) are in fact equally inherent possibilities existing simultaneously in our lives.

It can be compared to a video game. The traditional view on attaining enlightenment or Buddhahood is like a game character who gradually overcomes his innate flaws, accumulating useful skills while successfully passing through the higher levels of the game. The Lotus Sutra’s view on attaining Buddhahood is that the game character already possesses all possible skills from the beginning, but only needs a tool to activate them. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with faith in one’s inherent Buddhahood could be compared to activating these skills.

By practicing Nichiren Buddhism we manifest the potential of Buddhahood here and now, just as we are. Besides, the more we call forth our hope and compassion, we can positively change even our weaknesses and shortcomings and become a source of understanding and encouragement to others. However, this does not mean that we completely and permanently overcome our illusions. By calling forth our Buddha nature - which is characterized by courage, wisdom, compassion, and life force - we can overcome our problems, positively change our reality, and attain Buddhahood.

Buddhism is about living confidently and courageously in the here and now. The most important aspect here is to believe in our inherent Buddha nature. When we have full confidence in our Buddha nature and our ability to transform and overcome any kind of suffering, problems become challenges to be welcomed rather than avoided. This sense of confidence and determination in the face of difficulties is itself a manifestation of our Buddha nature and, in accordance with the principle of the simultaneity of cause and effect, assures our success in life.

* Have you been able to change something positively through the workings of the law of cause and effect?

* Do you fully rely on your Buddha nature to overcome your problems and have you experienced this?

¹ The principle of the “Ten Worlds” describes our inner state of life in which we find ourselves at any moment. The world from hell to Buddhahood, between which we constantly move, depending on our reaction to our environment and circumstances.