

June Discussion Topic - The Middle Way

The Middle Way is a quest for a way of life that brings the greatest value to our existence and enlightens the suffering in the world. 'The Middle Way' is found in the constant effort to use our Buddhist wisdom to overcome our challenges.

Shakyamuni's life is an example of the meaning of 'The Middle Way' as the path between two extremes. Shakyamuni, born a prince, enjoyed a life of comfort and pleasure. But out of dissatisfaction with the pursuit of relative happiness, he searched for a more lasting truth. During a period of extreme ascetic practice, depriving himself of food and sleep, he brought himself to the verge of physical exhaustion. Realizing the senselessness of this, he began to meditate with the deep determination to find the truth of existence, which he did not find during his ascetic lifestyle or his luxurious life. The moment he rejected the two extremes of self-destruction and self-indulgence, Shakyamuni became aware of the true nature of life; its eternity, its deep source of boundless lifeforce and wisdom.

Nichiren Daishonin describes life as an "elusive reality that transcends both the words and concepts of existence and nonexistence. It is neither existence nor nonexistence, yet exhibits the qualities of both." (WND-I, 4) In other words, life itself is the ultimate expression of the harmony of contradictions. Like the lotus flower that blooms unsullied by the muddy waters in which it grows. Nichiren stated that human beings possess the life condition of Buddhahood, a limitless potential they can bring forth to overcome their confusion and difficulties. He encouraged them to become aware of the inherent dignity of life and strive to make this the guiding principle of their actions.

From this perspective, following 'The Middle Way' is not a compromise between extremes. We can courageously face life's challenges - recognizing the causes and seeking solutions - while summoning the transformative power and wisdom of our Buddhahood, through which we create harmony. Moreover, 'The Middle Way' is not the same as what is considered "normal" in society. It transcends subjective values and is about something much more fundamental; our humanity. On a social and political level, 'The Middle Way' can be seen as respecting the dignity of life and placing its importance above political or economic ideology. The vision of the Soka Gakkai is that when people make efforts in this way and positively change their lives, they will move society toward happiness and harmonious coexistence. President Ikeda writes that "The Middle Way is a process of influencing society through our way of life, while being constantly aware of your own actions to ensure that they are in accordance with humanity."

* What does 'The Middle Way' mean to you?

* Are you aware that your actions have an influence on society? Do you have any experience with this?