

July Discussion Topic – The Two Kinds of Faith

Nichiren Buddhism teaches us to summon forth our life force and, through our own will and effort based on a foundation of strong, self-motivated faith, challenge ourselves resolutely to overcome our difficulties. Everything is determined by our faith. When confronted with illness or some other adversity, do we let our faith slide, or do we press forward without retreating a single step? The essence of faith is to keep moving forward without ever regressing. Everything is determined by our heart, our spirit of faith.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: Today there are people who have faith in the Lotus Sutra. The belief of some is like fire while that of others is like “flowing water. When the former listen to the teachings, their passion flares up like fire, but as time goes on, they tend to discard their faith. To have faith like flowing water means to believe continuously without ever regressing.”(WND-1, 899)

Mr. Toda once said: “Have faith that is like ceaselessly flowing water. Stagnant water becomes putrid because it stands still. The same is true of our lives: not advancing is regressing.”¹ One cannot attain Buddhahood if, though one practices eagerly for a time, one later gives in to doubt and strays from the path of faith.

“Faith like fire” corresponds to the faith of those who, when they listen to the teachings, are inspired to strive actively in their Buddhist practice, just like a fire burns brighter when logs are added, but who lose enthusiasm for their practice as time passes, just like a fire eventually burns out. This kind of faith is not self-motivated, but stimulated by external influences. That’s why when the fuel or inspiration runs out, their passion is extinguished. As a result, they are susceptible to being swayed by other external influences and “tend to discard their faith” (WND-I, 899).

“Faith like flowing water,” on the other hand, corresponds to the faith of those who have an inner-generated seeking spirit for attaining Buddhahood. Such people continue to press forward unflinching, remaining steadfast in their Buddhist practice, refusing to be deterred by any external influence. It is important to always renew our determination in faith, challenge ourselves, and win over every obstacle, continuing to grow and move forward. This is faith like flowing water.

Kosen-rufu is an unprecedented struggle to transform the karma of humankind. We need to steadfastly maintain a powerful, lifelong passion to dedicate ourselves to fulfilling the great vow for kosen-rufu. Otherwise, our faith will be eroded and destroyed by devilish functions that seek to obstruct our progress in our Buddhist practice. There’s no need, therefore, to be swayed by every passing situation. Just as no storm goes on forever, no difficulty continues without end.

It’s important to always remember the joy and gratitude we first felt when encountering the correct teaching of Buddhism, and to return to that source, that starting point, whenever we face some difficulty or adversity. We can positively transform all hardships through the great power of the Mystic Law, lessening the effects of any form of negative karma and changing poison into medicine.

- What does faith like flowing water mean to you?
- Do you manage to maintain faith like flowing water in the face of difficulties?

¹ SGI Nieuwsbrief 9254.

- How do we develop a faith like flowing water and do you have an experience with that?