

Augustus Discussion Topic - Awakening to the Interconnectedness of Life

This month's discussion topic consists of a number of passages and key points to explain the Buddhist principle of "The Interconnectedness of all Life"

"The fundamental Buddhist concept of dependent origination teaches that, at the most profound level, all life is interconnected—that nothing exists in isolation. Simply put, it means that the real nature of individuals or events can only be correctly understood in the context of their connections with others."

(August 2020, *Living Buddhism*, 14)

"No person or thing exists in isolation. Every being functions to create the environment that sustains all other existences. All things are mutually supporting and interrelated, forming a living cosmos, what modern philosophy might term a semantic whole. That is the conceptual framework through which Mahayana Buddhism views the natural universe."

(Daisaku Ikeda, *My Dear Friends in America*, third edition, 345)

"When individuals cannot grasp or appreciate their connections with others, it gives rise to a sense of isolation, mistrust, hostility or apathy. It leads to a society based upon fragile human relationships ... Discrimination in any form can be seen as a symptom of what Buddhism regards as the human tendency to create division and fractures based on superficial distinctions."

(August 2020, *Living Buddhism*, 14)

"In its essence, discrimination is the act of throwing up barriers of difference among the phenomena that fill the universe and establishing a hierarchy of value, thus breaking the bonds that link and connect all things. This is then used to justify oppression and exploitation; as such, it must be condemned as a desecration of the sanctity of life itself."

(Daisaku Ikeda, 2001 Peace Proposal)

Key Points

- 1. What is the Buddhist view on the interconnectedness of all life?*
- 2. The "greater self" comprehends being an integral part of the web of life.*
- 3. We restore the dignity of life through dialogue.*

The “Greater Self” Comprehends Being an Integral Part of the Web of Life

“Breaking free from patterns of division, hatred, discrimination and mistrust requires a strenuous spiritual effort. ...

Buddhism teaches that because of life’s profound interdependence, the sufferings of others are also our own. Thus, the work of helping others develop their highest potential is integral to developing this potential in ourselves. Conversely, by harming others, we also harm ourselves. This view of life makes it impossible to build our happiness on the suffering of others.”

(August Living Buddhism, 14–15)

Restoring the Dignity of Life Through Dialogue

“Dialogue starts from the courageous willingness to know and be known by others. It is the painstaking and persistent effort to remove all obstacles that obscure our common humanity. Genuine dialogue is a ceaseless and profound spiritual exertion that seeks to effect a fundamental human transformation in both ourselves and others. Dialogue challenges us to confront and transform the destructive impulses inherent in human life.”

(Daisaku Ikeda, Sept. 28, 2007, *World Tribune*, 2)

“Most needed today is dialogue that helps us to reflect on our own beliefs and presumptions, and challenges us to transform the inner biases that make it easy to identify people as “the other,” as separate or different from us. Through such discussion, we break barriers and develop a new level of humanity.” (August 2020, *Living Buddhism*, 16)

The Bodhisattva Way Enables Us to Benefit Both Ourselves and Others

“When we look after and care for others—that is, help others draw forth their life force—our own life force increases. When we help people expand their state of life, our state of life also expands. That is the wonderful thing about the bodhisattva way. The practice for benefiting others is one and the same with the practice for benefiting ourselves.”

(Daisaku Ikeda, *The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace*, part 1, 104)

Questions

- President Ikeda says that true dialogue helps us reflect on our own biases and prejudices, which results in the fundamental transformation of both ourselves and others. What prevents you from connecting with those you feel are different from yourself?
- How can the Buddhist principle of dependent origination change our perspectives through times of divisiveness and disunity?

