

## **Oktober Discussion Topic - The oneness of mentor and disciple is the foundation of Nichiren Buddhism**

If we look at the history of Buddhism we see that it has always been based on the oneness of mentor and disciple.

The historical Buddha Shakyamuni had ten major disciples. Following Shakyamuni's guidance and using their Buddhist practice, they developed their own unique characters and qualities. With the awareness of their inherent Buddha nature, they engaged in a selfless struggle to spread the humanistic teachings of Buddhism.

When president Ikeda talks about the profound bond between mentor and disciple he says: "The mentor-disciple relationship in Buddhism starts with the compassion of Shakyamuni Buddha to teach his disciples the path to enlightenment, and the seeking spirit of his disciples to try to understand his teaching. In short, it is a spiritual bond that depends on the self-motivated will of the disciple."<sup>1</sup>

Nichiren Daishonin says: "If mentor and disciple are of different minds, they will never accomplish anything" (WND-I, 909). In other words, the mentor-disciple relationship ultimately hinges on the commitment and actions of the disciple.

Having a mentor allows us to fully develop our lives: "Whether in academics, the martial arts or any other discipline, when you study something and seek to master it, you need a mentor, a guide. A mentor is particularly indispensable to learning about Buddhism, which teaches the true value of life and the proper way to live. To lack a mentor in this area is to lack a concrete model of how to live as a human being."<sup>2</sup>

Nichiren Buddhism is based on the conviction that within the lives of each of us at each moment there is an inexhaustible source of courage, wisdom, compassion and life force, or Buddhahood.

The mentor makes the disciple aware, and continues to remind him or her, of this profound potential. It's about the balance of having the courage to squarely confront one's own challenges, striving to grow and develop as a person, while taking action for the sake of others.

"Kosen-rufu is possible when disciples embrace the same spirit as their mentor. Without the solid pillar of the mentor-disciple relationship, it is all too easy to be swayed by one's own emotions and the trends of the times, and one will readily cave in and give up when one's faith is challenged."<sup>3</sup>

We then easily give in to weaknesses such as fear, arrogance, anger and laziness and seek only personal satisfaction.

"Because we all share the mission of Bodhisattvas of the Earth, we are able to chant Nam-myohorenge-kyo, the essence of the Lotus Sutra. Because we chant with our vow for kosen-rufu, we can realize happiness for both ourselves and others. Because we practice Nichiren Buddhism ourselves and teach others to do the same, we can carry out our human revolution, becoming individuals who take action for the benefit of others. Our prayers, which were originally focused on ourselves alone, naturally evolve into prayers infused with the same vow as our mentor."<sup>4</sup>

Josei Toda, second president of the Soka Gakkai, once said: "Once we embrace faith in the Gohonzon, it will be no problem for us to attain Buddhahood ourselves. But when I think about our families, our country and our turbulent world in the 20th century, I wish to rid the earth of all suffering and misery. This is what kosen-rufu is all about. Won't you join me?"<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Living Buddhism*, november 2017, 61.

<sup>2</sup> Daisaku Ikeda, *The New Human Revolution*, deel 17, 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Living Buddhism*, november 2017, 55.

<sup>4</sup> *Idem*, 56.

<sup>5</sup> *Living Buddhism*, augustus 2020, 4.

- When have you seen the importance of having a mentor in your life?
- Why is having a mentor important in times of great difficulty? Do you have an experience with that?
- What does it mean to you to share the same vision and heart as the mentor? Why is this an important part of our Buddhist practice?