

## WHAT A CONCEPT: DEED, WORD AND THOUGHT ('SHIN KU I')

### Buddhist Ethics in a Nutshell

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It's reasonable to trust that our actions, or causes, result in commensurate effects. Buddhism explains that we create our karma by making causes through thought, word and deed; that is, by what we intend, what we say and what we do.

First of all, the patter that runs through our minds — what we commonly call thought — is not necessarily an expression of intent. We need not meticulously censor the thoughts that go through our minds for fear of making bad causes; it's natural to think freely and entertain ideas without judging them. An intentional pattern of thought, however, such as nursing a grudge, is a "thought" cause.

From one point of view, thought causes are less powerful than speech causes, which are less powerful than deeds. From another view, the intent behind a cause is more significant than the outward appearance of the cause. Nichiren Daishonin writes, "Misfortune comes from one's mouth and ruins him, but fortune comes from one's mind and makes him worthy of respect" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 272). "From one's mouth" means one's speech; "from one's mind" means one's intent.

From yet another point of view, there is no separation between thought, intent and action; rather, our life encompasses all these things at each moment.

With regard to speech, it's OK for us to speak freely and express ideas and feelings. Once we utter our thoughts, though, that's different. If you mull over the idea of marrying someone, for example, it's one thing.

But once you say that you will marry him or her, that speech is a definitive act. For better or worse, what we say has the power to define us. Conversely, if we have good intentions about upholding justice, say, but *fail to speak* out against injustice, our intentions become a weak cause for good. Further, the Daishonin argues that failing to speak out against injustice is actually a bad cause. Silence is as powerful a cause as speech.

From one view, the significance of deeds can be evaluated in terms of their impact on others. If you give a panhandler money, regardless of why, the fact remains that you gave someone money. From another view, a deed's significance is determined by its motivation rather than its outward appearance. For example, giving someone money may seem like a generous deed, but if it's done out of guilt or obligation it's arguably a self-centered act.

Recently, in *The New Human Revolution* (Feb. 20 *World Tribune*), SGI President Ikeda writes: "You can always fool others.... But we cannot fool the uncompromising law of cause and effect that governs all life. All pretense is vain, since our present attitude and actions will become clearly manifest as future results."

According to the Daishonin, the most profound cause we can make is wholeheartedly chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. This practice encompasses thought, word and deed — our intent to be in rhythm with the universe, speaking the Mystic Law and determinedly living our Buddhahood.

The Daishonin writes: "The sum of our worldly misdeeds and evil karma may be as great as Mount Sumeru, but once we take faith in this sutra, they will vanish like frost or dew under the sun of the Lotus Sutra" (MW-1, 253).

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