

What a Concept: Compassion ('Jihi')
The Universe Is Compassion
By LISA JONES, Staff Writer

Buddhism teaches that the universe itself is compassion. In this sense, compassion goes beyond mere ethics or virtues; it predates social institutions and surpasses human emotion. Compassion is like a great field in which the flowers of wisdom grow. In light of the Lotus Sutra, wisdom generates compassion and vice versa.

SGI President Ikeda explains: "The universe gives life to all things, causing them to come into being, to change, and to repeatedly undergo the cycle of birth and death.... This universe is itself the entity of the Buddha." When we live our Buddhahood, we naturally express compassion. Some of us are like irrigation ditches, so to speak, or roaring rivers or parched stream beds, depending on how much we tap into and express compassion.

Strictly speaking, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is the crystallization of compassion, and chanting it to the Gohonzon is compassion's ultimate expression. Nichiren Daishonin writes, "If Nichiren's compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-renge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity, for it has the beneficial power to open the blind eyes of every living being in the country of Japan, and it blocks off the road that leads to the hell of incessant suffering" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 4, p. 272).

On a practical level, compassion is concern for those who, in light of the karmic law of life, are acting now in ways that will contribute to their being weak or unhappy in the future. For example, the Daishonin urged his followers to speak out against authoritarianism, even though he knew that by doing so they would become targets of repressive violence.

Gandhi, too, urged his followers to stand firm even when attacked by soldiers. It may seem perverse that the Daishonin and Gandhi led their followers into harm's way. But both men understood that engaged resistance was the only way to eradicate greater future suffering and change the people's destiny.

In Japanese, the word for *compassion* is *jihī*. *Ji* means affection; it connotes true friendship and pure parental love. *Hi* means to grieve; it connotes mercy, affection and grieving for others' suffering. In Buddhism, *jihī* means simply to take away suffering and give joy.

In terms of emotion, compassion is similar to unconditional love. But it is impartial and strictly accords with cause and effect, while love can be partisan and blind to causality. Compassion is primal and neutral. It's like temperature: It can be increased or decreased, but there's nothing objectively good, bad, right or wrong about it. When based on good-natured emotion rather than the Mystic Law, compassion can misguide people toward suffering instead of joy — in this case, it's referred to as the devil of mercy or shallow compassion.

Buddhists don't have a monopoly on compassion; all people can develop their capacity to express it by making a conscious effort to do so — and chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo is arguably the most direct way. The first step, though, is to realize that no matter how compassionate we may think we are, we can and must manifest more compassion toward ourselves and others. The Daishonin exemplifies this spirit: "The individual sufferings of all people are ultimately my own" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 758).

Six in a series

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