

WHAT A CONCEPT: Cause and Effect
Where Prayers and Desires Persist
By LISA JONES, Staff Writer

Most people are familiar with the concept of cause and effect, the idea that if you do something now, you'll see the result of your action in the future. Buddhism teaches that karma is created in accordance with this causal law.

We may be tempted, though, to take a mechanistic or literal view of this law. For example, if you sock someone in the arm, someone will come along and sock you; what goes around comes around.

But the Buddhist view of cause and effect is much more subtle and profound.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: "If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 172).

On one level, this passage could be interpreted as referring to a linear progression of causality in which past, present and future exist as different points in time. But on a deeper level, as the Daishonin teaches, cause and effect occur simultaneously.

SGI President Ikeda comments on this in his recent peace proposal: "Of most interest to us as human beings...are the results that will be manifested in the future. More than any other factor, these are shaped by inner causes in the present moment, that is, by the intensity of our conviction in the plane of...existential time. This is central to the Buddhist view of time in which the present moment is pivotal — in a sense, is everything.... Without this pivotal 'now,' past and future are empty and illusory."

Buddhism posits, then, that time is eternally in the present. It is without beginning or end. If we have no conviction in this, everything we say, do or contemplate is rooted in an "empty and illusory" understanding of past and future. What's more, if we try to resolve our problems from the standpoint of this illusory understanding, our temporary solutions will only compound our problems.

The eternal present is a type of *ku* (formlessness) where all phenomena and all dreams are possible. In keeping with the simultaneity of cause and effect, a dream becomes possible the instant that you dream it — even if it may seem impossible in terms of linear time or physical obstacles. Faith is a bridge between this realm of possibility and what manifests materially in our lives. Ultimately, dreams become facts where prayers and desires persist.

Of course, this isn't to say that linear time doesn't exist. All of us grow and age. Historical events happen one after another. But the perspectives of physical and historical time are inadequate in describing the Buddha's compassion, which is eternal and all-encompassing — and which is synonymous with the universe.

This compassion, expressed in the eternal present, is the basis of understanding cause and effect in the Daishonin's Buddhism.

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