

Questions and Answers on Faith: Karma vs. Mission

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Q: I have heard leaders say that “your karma is your mission.” I’m not sure what that means....

A: Our karma, or our destiny, allows us to see the total ledger of our past conduct. What we are at this moment is the end result of how we have lived. This view, however, tends only to be backward-looking.

Some even say that destiny, not wisdom, controls our lives. This view isn’t just backward-looking — it’s pessimistic and easily produces apathy.

Originally, destiny as expounded in Buddhism was to teach people the strictness of the law of cause and effect so that they could become mindful of their behavior, speech and intent. It was not meant to discourage or intimidate them; it was actually an expression of the Buddha’s compassion and wisdom to help people to cherish the present.

Buddhism also has the idea, though, that a person chooses to be born with a specific kind of karma to prove the greatness of Buddhism. President Toda once said: “If every aspect of our lives were perfect, we might find it difficult to mingle with those who have the various problems we had never experienced. We have taken the trouble to be born in this world, destined to have a specific problem such as poverty or illness, in order to prove the greatness of the Mystic Law. We do this by solving our karmic problems through Buddhist practice.”

Viewed from the most essential standpoint, then, it can be said that we have chosen our destiny so that we can fulfill a specific mission in this lifetime. This means, of course, that our destiny is ultimately of a surmountable nature.

When we are convinced of this point, we can tap a profound sense of mission in our lives. At the same time, we can then place our karma in the right perspective.

In Buddhism, our great challenge is to revolutionize our determination or life-condition through this correct awareness of the reality of life. Since the idea of mission by nature implies what we will do in the future, beginning with our present life-condition, it’s a positive, forward-looking thing.

SGI President Ikeda encouraged Sonia Gandhi after the death of her husband, Rajiv, saying, “Please change your fate into value, your destiny into mission.” This is the challenge we all face.

When we are too hung up on the idea of our destiny, it’s easy to wind up getting nowhere. When we focus instead on what we have to do now and continue to accumulate many “minor” good causes, we’ll eventually look back to find that we have made a “major” breakthrough in our lives. We’ll realize that we have achieved a great change in our destiny.

One characteristic of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism is that “We live for the present and future,” as is written on the Gohonzon. We are practicing Buddhism so that we can develop our life-condition to the point where we can say — with a great upsurge of joy in our lives — “I will use my life, my destiny, for kosen-rufu.”

Thus, in the end, our destiny always comes down to a very positive thing. In the end, it becomes our greatest source of joy.

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