

**GEMS: Where To Find Happiness**  
**By GREG MARTIN**  
**SGI-USA Study Department Vice Leader**

**You must never seek any of Shakyamuni's teachings or the Buddhas and bodhisattvas of the universe outside yourself. Your mastery of the Buddhist teachings will not relieve you of mortal sufferings in the least unless you perceive the nature of your own life. If you seek enlightenment outside yourself, any discipline or good deed will be meaningless. For example, a poor man cannot earn a penny just by counting his neighbor's wealth, even if he does so night and day. That is why Miao-lo states, "Unless one perceives the nature of his life, he cannot eradicate his evil karma." He means here that unless one perceives the nature of his life, his practice will become an endless, painful austerity. Miao-lo therefore condemns such students of Buddhism as non-Buddhist. He refers to the passage in the Maka Shikan, "Although they study Buddhism, their views revert to those of non-Buddhists." (The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 4)**

*Perceive the nature of your own life.* What exactly does this mean? In this passage from "On Attaining Buddhahood," Nichiren Daishonin stresses the importance of perceiving the true nature of one's life when we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Earlier in this letter, the Daishonin says that the nature of one's life means that Myoho-renge-kyo is one's life itself.

Your life is the entity of the Mystic Law — the embodiment of the principle that a life-moment possesses 3,000 realms. Your life is Buddha. The true nature of your life is that you are eternally endowed with the life-state of Buddha — as you are.

"The lives of ordinary people," SGI President Ikeda writes, "are themselves mystic. The Lotus Sutra proclaims that the human being is sublime. We must never forget this. There isn't some mystic place or wondrous mystic being existing apart from the reality of our lives..."

That's the theory anyway. But this may be the most difficult thing for a human being to believe.

Knowing ourselves very well — our weaknesses and negativity, our imperfections — it can be extremely difficult to believe that we are also Buddhas. It is this difficulty to believe, this delusion about one's true nature, that the Daishonin is describing when he writes: "While deluded, one is called a common mortal, but once enlightened, he is called a Buddha" (MW-1, 4), and "The common mortal fails to realize that he himself possesses both the entity and function of the Buddha's three properties" (MW-1, 91).

**Seeking our happiness outside ourselves cannot change our karma.**

Having difficulty believing that we possess all the qualities of the Buddha's life within us, we continue to seek these things outside ourselves: Looking for the cause of our unhappiness in the actions of others and events outside our lives. Looking for the solution to our problems and relief from suffering outside as well. Thinking that if this or that situation were changed, then we'd be happy. Or thinking that a change in the behavior of another person will solve our problem.

In the end, however, even though we may chant and recite the sutra, and even though we may have mastered Buddhist doctrine, to practice Buddhism while looking outside ourselves for our happiness is no more beneficial than counting someone else's money.

And our practice, if it is so outwardly focused, will eventually become an endless painful austerity — an EPA. Those practicing in this fashion, although they carry out the activities of a Buddhist, may, in the strictest sense, not be practicing Buddhism at all.

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Chanting is not a magic formula. Our mind of faith as we chant in front of the Gohonzon is what's important. The quality of our prayer is as important as the quantity.

Looking for absolute happiness in a change of external circumstances or the accumulation of pleasurable things is a delusion, a denial of one's Buddhahood.

And changing one's destiny and attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime with such a prayer of self-denial is impossible. Deluded prayer cannot change one's karma or bring forth enlightenment "even if you practice lifetime after lifetime for countless aeons" (MW-1, 4).

**Our prayers are answered when we believe in ourselves.**

Delusions, though, can be difficult to identify. They are subtle and blinding at times. It can be difficult to know when you are practicing but remaining deluded.

How can you tell if your prayer is misdirected in this way? EPA is the key. If your prayer about a problem, desire or situation has become an endless painful ordeal, then, according to this passage, you are looking outside yourself. You are in denial of your responsibility and power, very often trying to change the wrong person.

"If we believe that there may be a more wonderful place in some other world," President Ikeda continues, "or that there may be some method superior to that of faith in the Mystic Law, it will greatly undermine our ability to manifest the world of Buddhahood."

That is why the Daishonin encourages us, "When you chant the Mystic Law and recite the Lotus Sutra, you must summon up deep conviction that Myoho-enge-kyo is your life itself" (MW-1, 4). Our ability to manifest maximum karma-busting, Buddha-attaining benefit from our practice depends on whether we can believe in ourselves as we pray in front of the Gohonzon.

*Two in a series*

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