

YOUTH STUDY MARCH
“ON ATTAINING BUDDHAHOOD”
THE MAJOR WRITINGS OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN, VOL. 1, PP. 3–7.

HOW DO YOU MAKE “IF ONLY” A REALITY?
BY MARK KAPLAN, SAN FRANCISCO

Do you sometimes think, “If only I could change my family, school, work or that person would just go away...then everything would be OK”? When a person or situation is getting on our nerves and making everything dark, it is especially hard to believe that WE have the power to change it...right now...in this instant. This is what is meant in “On Attaining Buddhahood” where it says: “There are not two lands, pure and impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good and evil of our minds.”

How do you make this theory a reality? In volume six of *The New Human Revolution* (pp. 26–31), a Japanese woman who moved to Iran with her husband wrestles with this very question. She did not *choose* to move; her husband’s work required it. She hated her new country and had no friends. What could she do? Shin’ichi Yamamoto encourages her:

“Ultimately, your attitude and outlook determine whether you see your situation as a painful ordeal or try to find meaning and value in it.... Nobody’s perfect. Nor is there a perfect living environment where everything will be just the way you want it.... But reality invariably never quite matches the ideal vision or image of the way you want it to be. So you end up finding fault with everything, only adding to your despair and amplifying your discontent and dissatisfaction.

“It’s kind of like looking at a plum tree expecting it to be a cherry tree.... Rather than being attached to and constrained by the idealistic standards you’ve created, you should look hard at reality just as it is, then try to discover some positive or enjoyable aspects and turn them to good account.... When you chant, you can see yourself and your environment exactly as they are. You can also bring forth strong life force, gaining the strength you need not to be defeated by your weaknesses. And more importantly, you’ll awaken to [your] mission.... People are unhappy because they don’t know how to be happy where they are.”

By constantly looking about for better circumstances, we can’t possibly appreciate the positive aspects of where we are. But when stop being distracted, dig in, and chant, the wisdom and strength to create the Buddha land where we stand emerges.

In 1993 President Ikeda gave practical advice on how to dig in: “Dig below your feet, and there you will find a wellspring. Taking care of the tasks at hand is important. The main thing is to make your goals clear and then set about achieving them one by one with steady and thorough efforts. Only through such continuous efforts can we open up the path before us” (May 1993, *Seikyo Times*, p. 46).

THE DETERMINATION WE MAKE IN OUR YOUTH
BY KEN SARAGOSA, PHILADELPHIA

Nichiren Daishonin began teaching Nam-myoho-renge-kyo in 1253, when he was 32. He wrote “On Attaining Buddhahood” just two years later. When he first began teaching, peo-

ple thought he was restating the Lotus Sutra, but gradually it became clear he was revealing a new, more profound teaching. The Lotus Sutra contains the truth of the Buddha's enlightenment, but it is within Nichiren's teachings — chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon — that we are shown the practical and immediate way to attain enlightenment *as we are*.

When Nichiren began teaching Buddhism, he was the same age as many of our SGI youth leaders. At such a young age, how was he able to establish and propagate something so significant as to change the entire world and influence Buddhist thought for centuries? Nichiren first made the determination to study Buddhism when he was 12 — today's typical age for entering junior high school. He wondered why religion, supposedly so profound and sacred, was the source of so much confusion and conflict. He asked why religion didn't have the power to help people. These questions led this 12-year-old to determine "to become the wisest person in Japan." He decided to study Buddhism and at age 16, he left his family to become a priest.

Nichiren's entire youth was spent pursuing this dream. In "On Attaining Buddhahood," he explains that enlightenment, the goal of Buddhist practice, can be attained only if you "awaken to the mystic truth, which has always been within your life." It is a mistake, he says, to seek happiness outside one's self.

Nichiren struggled in his teens and twenties to accomplish his goal. He didn't struggle because he was pressured to or because it was expected of him. He struggled because it was his determination. And the effort to achieve it enabled him to lead a life that changed the world.

We all have dreams and hopes. Nichiren's prayer "to become the wisest person in Japan" is not unlike the aspirations of many young people today — to find a cure for cancer, to become President, to inspire people through art or music. We all have dreams that would potentially change society, even alter the direction of human history. But without the effort to make them a reality, they are only dreams. It's easy to just hope that some other person will "discover" us or give us what we want. And when compared to the hard work of *actualizing* our dreams, doubting that they'll ever come true is very easy.

But Nichiren taught this Buddhism as a way of enabling us to develop our highest potential. His life illustrates the truth of his teachings. Of course, his life is exceptional, but the central teaching in "On Attaining Buddhahood," indeed, the core teaching of Buddhism, is that all of us possess unlimited potential. Everyone can lead a profound and meaningful life. And as we learn from Nichiren Daishonin, the determination we make in our youth can enable us to lead lives of unimaginable accomplishment.

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