

**YOUTH STUDY APRIL  
BUDDHISM & DIVERSITY  
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“...the essential teachings explain actual *ichinen sanzen*, the principle that each entity is itself a manifestation of the Buddha, originally endowed with the three properties. In other words, each entity’s individuality is as unique as cherry, plum, peach or apricot [Jpn *o, bai, to, ri*] and, just as it is, manifests itself as the Buddha who inherently possesses the three enlightened properties.” [unofficial translation of “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 784)]

Diversity. Multiculturalism. Intercultural communication. These are all words used to describe the fact that in the United States there are people from many different racial, ethnic or cultural backgrounds. Racial discrimination in many forms is a sad fact of our nation’s history.

Racism is the belief that one race is better than or superior to another. The history of racism in the United States resulted in slavery, in keeping people who weren’t European from voting or from becoming citizens, and in many different ways, denied education or employment to non-white people.

But nowadays, those old forms of racism are illegal. Today, in our schools and in many different public ways, we celebrate the many different histories and cultures that make up America. Nonetheless, there is still all too much misunderstanding, miscommunication, and even violence. Not all of it is because of racial or ethnic tensions, but sometimes, these differences keep people apart.

Is the only solution to pretend we aren’t different? To put away our cultural heritage in favor of a common “American” identity? Or should we instead become separate from one another, and only stick with people who share our background and our values?

We often hear about “diversity”; we hear that America is a “melting pot” or “salad bowl” of different people and different cultures. But how do we come together even though we are different?

When you think about it, what does diversity mean anyway? Of course it means that people are different. But race and culture and religion aren’t the only differences in the world. We also have different styles; we like different kinds of music; or have different talents and abilities. Some of us are good athletes. Some of us love music and want to perform. Some of us are private and prefer to spend time alone. Even among members of our own family, who share our racial or cultural background, we are different from one another.

The fact of our each being a unique and special person, different from anyone else, is important in Buddhism. As the quotation above says, we are as unique as “cherry, plum, peach or apricot.” But if we left it at that, we would all just be “unique” — isolated or alone. And if we said we had to come together, that — as many of you know — is easier said than done. What is the basis for our coming together?

In Buddhism, we often talk about “unity,” about transcending differences. This is an easy concept to grasp, but a difficult one to achieve. But according to Buddhism, we must build unity around a common ideal or a common goal. If a group of people

all agree to make money by washing cars, it doesn't matter if some of the people are men and some are women, some are black and some are Asian. As long as they have a common goal or common values, they can work together.

As the quotation says, "each entity" — which means each individual person — "is itself a manifestation of the Buddha, originally endowed with the three properties." In other words, though we are all different, we are all fundamentally Buddhas. The differences of age, gender, race, personal style, hair color, athletic ability, etc. — these are all part of our unique expression. But at our core, we are all Buddhas. Our Buddhahood might emerge through different talents or abilities, but we all possess it. All we have to do is make the effort to polish and develop our Buddha nature.

According to Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, the idea of "transcending differences" isn't shallow. It isn't just saying "we should all just get along." But without an awareness of what we fundamentally have in common, "unity" or "getting along" is just a nice ideal. Rather, when we realize the Buddhahood within our own lives, we recognize it in others. And based on this awareness, we can use our uniqueness — our many differences — to enrich and support one another as we all work together.

As Buddhists who develop an awareness of our own Buddha nature and the wisdom, compassion and courage that go with that, we can then become leaders in the world who can inspire others to find the true and deepest source of unity and communication.

### ***Passage for Discussion:***

Here is an excerpt from *The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, for you to read and discuss. For more information or further material to study, look at the entire "Golden Autumn" chapter, which describes President Ikeda's first trip to Chicago and explores his views on racial discrimination in the United States.

Beyond distinctions of race and ethnicity, Shin'ichi thought, all human beings are equal. This was the spirit of America expressed in its Declaration of Independence. Nevertheless, the sense of superiority and fear many Americans felt toward African Americans would not permit genuine equality.

The question boiled down to how to change people's hearts and minds. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin teaches the inherent dignity and equality of all human beings, deeming all people to be children of the Buddha and what the Lotus Sutra terms "treasure towers." Shin'ichi realized it would be vital to establish in each person's heart the profound view of the human being espoused by the Daishonin. There was no other solution to the problem of racial discrimination than realizing a human revolution in each individual. In other words, an inner reformation in the depths of people's lives to transform the egoism that justifies the subjugation of others and replace it with a humanism that strives for coexistence among all peoples.

Shin'ichi keenly sensed how vitally important it would be to achieve kosen-rufu in America.

(*The New Human Revolution*, vol.1, pp. 150-151)

***Questions for Discussion:***

1. If “all human beings are equal,” why are people treated differently?
2. Have you experienced prejudice?
3. Since there are obviously differences among people — including differences of physical ability or intelligence — then how can we say “all people are equal”?
4. Can you give an example in your own life where you prejudged someone based on some aspect (race, gender, age, dress, mannerisms) and then realized you were wrong?
5. Has your practice of Buddhism helped in any way? How is “human revolution” a solution to the problem of racial discrimination?