

## BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (24) THE THREE EXISTENCES EVERYTHING IS DETERMINED IN THIS MOMENT

We often feel bombarded with one situation after another that makes us wonder, “What did I do to deserve this?” or, “Why is this happening to me?” Especially when we are struggling in life, some of us might perceive ourselves as victims who have no clue about why we are suffering the way we are.

How do we answer the, “Why me’s?” How do we improve our lives?

The renowned Chinese Buddhist scholar T'ien-t'ai (538–597) said: “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 Opening of the Eyes,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 279).

Many people seem to look at life as if it is limited to this one existence. In Buddhism, however, we view life as eternal. Therefore, our lives are not just limited to this present existence. “Causes that existed in the past” refers not only to what we did yesterday or ten years ago, but also to previous existences since the remotest past. Though some of us like to wonder and even fantasize about what our past lives must have been like, because life is more vast and profound than we can imagine, it is difficult to fathom our actual past existences.

All the causes we made in the past have accumulated in lifetime after lifetime and these causes are manifested as karma. We create our own karma. The moment we do something, say something or think something, an effect is registered in the depths of our being. As our lives meet the right circumstances, the effects of those causes take shape in various forms. These various manifestations of our individual karma are what lead to the uniqueness of our appearance, the situations we face and our lives.

“If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present.”

In order to understand our past causes, or our karma, we do not need to go to a psychic or a guru. In light of the eternal law of cause and effect, by simply looking at our life at present, we are able to understand what causes we made in the past.

Though we cannot undo the causes we made in the past, we can determine the way their effects influence our lives in the present. Reflecting on our experiences — and based on our own decisions and the actions we take — we either stagnate or advance forward. Each moment builds upon the previous one. So, how do we create the best causes for our future?

“If you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present.”

Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches us that in our present environment, regardless of how excruciating our suffering may be, we do have the power to determine our future. The actions we take at this present moment influence the outcome of our future. The greatness of Buddhism is that it shows us we are responsible for choosing how we lead our lives, and it teaches us how we can change our karma. Karma is not unchangeable like fate, which is a predestined path of what our life will be. We can change our karma based on the actions we take right here, right now. It is never too late to change our lives for the better.

For example, in the aftermath of a big earthquake, your house may have completely collapsed (with your entire family safe, of course) and you set yourself to the task of rebuilding your house. Given that you have all the resources you need to reconstruct your house, what

course of action will you take? It would certainly be easier to rebuild the house according to the original plans, but how safe would you feel when the next earthquake rolls around? You are naturally determined to try and construct your new home to withstand the next earthquake. And now due to the tragedy of losing your first house, you have an idea of what kinds of adjustments you can make to try and avoid the same problem and improve your new home. The ultimate goal would be to rebuild your house to withstand all the earthquakes to come!

Likewise, instead of repeating the same cycles of suffering in our lives, we can choose to use our struggles as a springboard to fortify our inner strength. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which encapsulates the essential spirit of the Lotus Sutra, is the greatest resource available to us for constructing an eternally indestructible fortress of happiness in our lives. Chanting this phrase is the key to fusing with the law of life that exists throughout the universe. It is the greatest cause we can make for our lives. This cause remains in our lives throughout the three existences of past, present and future.

Chanting to the Gohonzon and teaching others about Buddhism represents the greatest possible good and accords with the law of life itself. It is the way to attain a state of eternal happiness.

Though we cannot see our past or future lives, we can find clear direction on how to live in this present life based on our understanding of the causal law of life operating across the three existences of past, present and future. Through chanting, we are able to elevate our life-condition and perceive our fundamental karma. Once we realize our karmic tendencies we are able to challenge them head on.

In “On Attaining Buddhahood in this Lifetime,” Nichiren Daishonin explains: “The Lotus Sutra is the king of sutras, the direct path to enlightenment, for it explains that the entity of our life, which manifests either good or evil at each moment, is in fact the entity of the Mystic Law. If you chant Myoho-renge-kyo with deep faith in this principle, you are certain to attain Buddhahood in this lifetime” (WND, 4).

Each moment of our lives is a struggle between creating good causes and giving in to our own weaknesses and negativity. We always have the choice of taking responsibility for our future and taking action with the strong conviction that it is never too late to change our lives for the better.

Nichiren Daishonin, in encouraging Shijo Kingo to live happily in the present without dwelling on past events or worrying about what might happen in the future, says: “Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy. Regard both suffering and joy as facts of life and continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, no matter what happens. How could this be anything other than the boundless joy of the Law? Strengthen your power of faith more than ever” (WND, 681).

Happiness is not something that we will find somewhere off in the distance; it is to be found in the present. Both past and future are contained in the present, and though we know that life is eternal, everything exists in the present. There is no need to ponder too long on the “Why me’s?” since we know that we alone are responsible for our present situations. Why waste time wallowing in the misery of the unchangeable past when there is so much joy and appreciation to gain in making each moment, each day, a valuable step toward the unlimited potential of the future?

By Rika Hashimoto, based on *Yasashii Kyogaku* (Easy Buddhist Study) published by *Seikyo Press* in 1994.