

## BUDDHIST CONCEPT FOR TODAY'S LIVING (28) DELIBERATELY CREATING THE APPROPRIATE KARMA

For years, I felt confused by what I saw as a dichotomy in the teachings of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin assures us that based upon our Buddhist practice, we will enjoy "peace and security" in this lifetime and "good circumstances" in our next (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 681). He also states that it is because of our countless good deeds in the remote past that we are able to take faith in the Gohonzon in this existence.

If it were true that our connection to the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge kyo extends deep into the infinite past, as both the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin indicate, then why, I wondered, were so many of my fellow SGI members struggling with such extreme difficulties and problems? Where was all this good fortune we had supposedly accumulated?

The "Teacher of the Law" chapter of the Lotus Sutra offers a profound explanation: "Medicine King... you should understand that such persons have already offered alms to a hundred thousand million Buddhas and in the place of the Buddhas have fulfilled their great vow, and because they take pity on living beings they have been born in this human world ... Medicine King, you should understand that these persons voluntarily relinquish the reward due them from their pure deeds and, in the time after I have passed into extinction, because they pity living beings, they are born in this evil world so they can broadly expound this sutra" (*The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson, pp. 161-62).

In his *Annotations on "The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra,"* the Chinese Buddhist scholar Mia-lo used the phrase "deliberately creating the appropriate karma," (WND, 243) to describe this concept.

In "The Opening of the Eyes," Nichiren Daishonin also addresses this concept: "The more government authorities rage against me, the greater my joy. For instance, there are certain Hinayana bodhisattvas not yet freed from delusion, who draw evil karma to themselves by their own compassionate vow. If they see their father and mother have fallen into hell and are suffering greatly, they will deliberately create the appropriate karma in hopes that they too may fall into hell and share in and take their suffering upon themselves. Thus suffering is a joy to them" (WND, 243).

When SGI President Ikeda visited Sonia Gandhi in India after the assassination of her husband, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, he told her "I really hope that you can change your sad destiny into a cause for realizing an important mission in India." This conversation is captured in the book *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, vol. 2 (p. 184). Here he also explains that the greatness of Rajiv Gandhi arose from his love for the people of India.

He writes: "Not even the terrorist bombing that took his life (in May 1991) could have destroyed the love for the people that burned in Rajiv Gandhi's heart. I believe people have a mission to fulfill that transcends life and death. The lives of people who embrace a mission to which they can wholeheartedly dedicate themselves and even be willing to die for are the most sublime" (Ibid., p. 184).

The most important thing to remember as practitioners of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism — especially when facing difficulties and problems — is that we possess a profound mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth. Instead of simply viewing our unfortunate circumstances as "bad karma," our struggles, no matter how difficult, are in fact the soil for our great mission to take root.

“To simply view your sufferings as ‘karma’ is backward-looking,” writes President Ikeda in *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra* (pp. 208–209). “We should have the attitude: ‘These are sufferings I took on for the sake of my mission. I vowed to overcome these problems through faith.’”

“When we understand this principle of ‘deliberately creating the appropriate karma,’” he continues, “our frame of mind is transformed; what we had previously viewed as destiny, we come to see as mission. There is absolutely no way we cannot overcome sufferings that are the result of a vow that we ourselves made.”

The problem is that if we are deluded in our view of life and are overcome with complaint and suffering as a result of our problems, we might forget our original vow to save others by overcoming our suffering. And then we might not be able to conquer our own suffering either.

In *The New Human Revolution*, President Ikeda tells the SGI members in Brazil, many of whom were desperately poor and isolated in a new and vastly different country, that in addition to making tenacious efforts, their “daimoku must also be a pledge.”

“Prayer in Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism means to chant daimoku based on a pledge or vow. At its very core, this vow is to attain kosen-rufu.

“You may think you have just happened to come to Brazil as a result of your respective circumstances. But this is not the case,” he continues. “You have been born as Bodhisattvas of the Earth in order to achieve kosen-rufu in Brazil, to lead the people of this country to happiness and to create an eternal paradise in this land. Indeed, you have been chosen by Nichiren Daishonin to be here” (*The New Human Revolution*, vol. 1, p. 251).

It is the same for us, irrespective of where we live or our present circumstances. Once we determine to overcome our sufferings as a way to help others understand the greatness of this Buddhism and thereby lead as many people to happiness as possible, then we will be fulfilling the compassionate vows that we ourselves made in the infinite past. To make this kind of determination and advance with courage is what is most important.

“When you realize your great mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and dedicate your lives to kosen-rufu, the sun that has existed within you since time without beginning will begin to shine forth. All offenses you have committed in past lifetimes will vanish like mist, and you will embark upon wonderful lives permeated by deep joy and happiness” (*Ibid.*, p. 254).

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