

**A PATH REVISITED
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‘As Bodhisattvas of the Earth, we can use our past difficulties to fulfill the mission that is ours alone,’ Matilda Buck writes. ‘Past pain can help pave the path to happiness.’

I recently returned from a weekend holiday in La Jolla, Calif., a picturesque beach town where I lived as a very young girl and have continued to visit every summer. It’s where I have felt the deepest pain and the deepest happiness.

As my husband and I walked the familiar path through town, memories and feelings washed through me: There was the spot where my mother would meet her friends for drinks while I sat at a table with five maraschino cherries lined up neatly on a cocktail napkin, dreading how the alcohol would change her; the schoolyard where the big boys used to steal the Hershey bar from my lunch pail. Here was the beach where I told my children’s father that I wanted to end our marriage; the beautiful cove where my friends and I floated for hours on inner tubes. Over there was the tiny Chinese restaurant where I first met President Ikeda in 1974.

On this walk, I thought about how happy I am today, and how every one of my experiences in La Jolla — especially the painful ones — have made me a sensitive person, have shaped me into a seeking person. What once were causes for my sadness have been transformed into treasures, personal treasures and treasures to be shared.

I owe that transformation to my Buddhist practice, which taught me to view my life from the perspective of my deepest identity as a Bodhisattva of the Earth. To transform our karma, to live powerfully, to become profoundly happy, it is important that we seek this perspective. Too often we can only see our lives from their most transient aspect: what we aren’t yet and what we don’t have. We see ourselves only as common mortals.

Here’s the truth: We are common mortals, but we practice Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, and this is what our founder says: “Now, no matter what, strive in faith and be known as a votary of the Lotus Sutra, and remain my disciple for the rest of your life. If you are of the same mind as Nichiren, you must be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. And if you are a Bodhisattva of the Earth, there is not the slightest doubt that you have been a disciple of Shakyamuni Buddha from the remote past. The sutra states, ‘Ever since the long distant past I have been teaching and converting this multitude’” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 384).

In another Goshō, “Letter to Jakunichi-bo,” he writes: “It is extremely rare to be born as a human being. Not only are you endowed with human form, but you have had the rare fortune to encounter Buddhism. Moreover, out of the Buddha’s many teachings you have encountered the daimoku, or the title, of the Lotus Sutra and become its votary. Truly you are a person who has offered alms to a hundred thousand million Buddhas in his past existences!” (WND, 993).

In these passages, the Daishonin is telling us of our deepest identity—great bodhisattvas who strive in the human world.

Why does he say that it’s great to be born a human? Only humans can reflect on past, present and future; can get beyond being merely instinctive or reactive. We can make

thoughtful choices. We can chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. We can choose a mentor. We can live with an ideal. These are only some of the things humans can do, that each of us can do.

Even more amazing, we have met the ultimate teaching.

In fact, the Daishonin tells us that to have met the ultimate teaching is proof that we have made profound efforts and created good fortune to get where we are today.

In a sense, he tells us we should remember our greatness, but often we feel something else: our unworthiness, lack of fortune based on current circumstances. We collect “evidence” that we must be bad, that we made bad causes. Of course, we have made good and bad causes in our lives, but the Daishonin is talking about our foundation. We should look deeper than our problems today to this deeper cause, our deeper identity as Bodhisattvas of the Earth, votaries of the Lotus Sutra. With this view, which is validated over and over by the Daishonin, we can challenge the view many of us have deep down—that of guilt or blame or hopelessness. These are not our deepest foundation; they don’t have to produce our most lasting effect.

Psychologists tell us that our emotional foundation is formed in our earliest childhood. Often, when we see that our family is not a healthy one and that we have certain encumbrances because of our early environment, we feel victimized or blame our parents. But the Daishonin tells us, “Hell is in the heart of a person who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother” (WND, 1137).

From the higher perspective of a votary of the Lotus Sutra, we can appreciate our parents even if they were not perfect parents. Because of them, we were born as humans and survived as humans. They gave us life so that we can live out our mission to become happy. Our experience with them made us unique so we can be unique in our contribution to others.

The “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” states that “With regard to the Buddha in the world of Treasure Purity: When one sets aside the literal meaning of the sutra’s words and interprets it from the viewpoint of inner enlightenment, then the world of Treasure Purity is one’s mother’s womb. One’s parents are therefore the carpenters who build the treasure tower. The treasure tower refers to the five wheels of five elements that compose our bodies...” (*Unlocking the Mysteries of Birth and Death*, pp. 29–30). Here, the Daishonin is saying we are the treasure tower, so certainly our parents are related to this! Close relationships function to help us do our deepest human revolution as we work to appreciate the humanity that is in everyone’s life. And for many of us, it is work to do this, but living with blame weakens us, obscures our mission, and makes us live reactively. It drains us of the spiritual energy that we need to change old patterns. As Bodhisattvas of the Earth, we can use our past difficulties to fulfill the mission that is ours alone. Past pain can help pave the path to happiness. This is what I felt so deeply as I was walking in La Jolla.

When we chant each day, why not consciously remind ourselves of the meaning in all that we have experienced; remind ourselves that we can use it all positively. In *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra*, volume 2, SGI President Ikeda had this to say: “People who have not experienced painful struggles or suffering cannot understand the hearts of others. Only if one has tasted life’s bitterness can one lead people to happiness. To simply view your sufferings as ‘karma’ is backward looking. 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,' 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'' (pp. 208–09).

What an empowering view of our lives — our childhood, our current circumstances, our weaknesses, our strengths. If we pray from the point of view that we will use every aspect of our life to accomplish our desires, then truly our karma becomes our mission. Our parents become our great teachers. We can appreciate each part of the path that we have chosen and that without fail leads to our deepest happiness.