

## Attaining Buddhahood in This Lifetime

The purpose of Buddhist faith and practice is to achieve the life state of a Buddha. By chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon with faith and striving to carry out practice for oneself and for others, anyone can achieve the state of Buddhahood or enlightenment in this lifetime. Nichiren Buddhism calls this important principle “attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime.” It contrasts with the general belief in Buddhism, set forth in sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, that becoming a Buddha requires countless lifetimes of difficult practices.

Nichiren Daishonin says: “If votaries of the Lotus Sutra carry out religious practice as the sutra directs, then every one of them without exception will surely attain Buddhahood within his or her present lifetime. To cite an analogy, if one plants the fields in spring and summer, then, whether it be early or late, one is certain to reap a harvest within the year” (“The Doctrine of Three Thousand Realms,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2, p. 88).

Some may wonder, *What does this have to do with me?* Most of us in the West, after all, have never given a thought to becoming a Buddha or attaining Buddhahood. Buddha, however, means “awakened one” and describes a condition of inexhaustible wisdom, life force, courage and compassion. In that respect, we could say becoming a Buddha simply means becoming a person who exhibits these qualities, a person who is deeply happy and fulfilled.

Attaining Buddhahood does not mean becoming something special or different from what we are. Nor does it refer to a transcendent state or entry after death into some pure realm removed from this world.

Regarding attaining Buddhahood, Nichiren says: “‘Attain’ means to open or reveal. It is to reveal that the beings of the Dharma-realm are Buddhas eternally endowed with the three bodies.<sup>1</sup> ‘Buddhahood’

means being enlightened to this” (*The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, p. 126). So, attaining Buddhahood means opening and revealing the Buddha nature that we already possess. We need not go somewhere special to do this. It is within the realities of daily living that we build a life condition of absolute happiness, which cannot be upset or destroyed by external circumstances.

Nichiren states, “Each thing—the cherry, the plum, the peach, the damson—in its own entity, without undergoing any change, possesses the eternally endowed three bodies” (OTT, 200). As this passage suggests, attaining Buddhahood means giving free and full play to our unique inherent qualities and leading a dynamic and most fulfilling way of life. The term eternally endowed in the above passage can also be translated as “uncreated.” This means that a true Buddha is someone naturally endowed with all the qualities of a Buddha, and who displays these qualities just as he or she is, without any pretention or embellishment. To attain Buddhahood also means not only to remain unswayed by difficulties or hardships but also to use them as fuel for purifying and strengthening one’s life.

Buddhahood is not a goal that we arrive at some point along the way. Rather, it means to devote ourselves to overcoming negative tendencies or influences and creating good based on the Mystic Law; it means to wage a continued struggle for the happiness of people. One who genuinely engages in this ongoing challenge can reveal the life condition of a Buddha. SGI members who fight tirelessly for *kosen-rufu*, therefore, can rightly be called Buddhas.

## Relative Happiness and Absolute Happiness

Second Soka Gakkai president Josei Toda taught that there are two kinds of happiness: relative happiness and absolute happiness.

Relative happiness speaks of a condition in which one’s material desires or immediate personal wishes are satisfied. While there is no

limit to what we can hope or wish for, there is always a limit to what we can have materially and how long we can hold on to it. For example, we may get something we want at this moment, but the fulfillment we enjoy from getting it will not last. Through effort and planning, we may develop and adjust our circumstances to our liking, thinking this is happiness. But should those circumstances change or disappear, so will our happiness. Such happiness is called relative because it exists only in relation to external factors.

In contrast, absolute happiness means that living itself is happiness; being alive is a joy, no matter where we are or what our circumstances. It describes a life condition in which happiness wells forth from within. It is called absolute because it is not influenced by external conditions. Attaining Buddhahood means developing absolute happiness.

Beyond the troubles of just getting by in life, we often face unexpected problems. Happiness does not depend on whether or not we have problems, but how we perceive and deal with them. To cite an analogy, a person of little strength and experience who encounters a steep mountain path will view it as a daunting obstacle. But a strong, experienced hiker can confidently ascend a steep trail even while carrying a heavy backpack, enjoying the view along the way. In a similar way, one who has firmly established a life condition of absolute happiness can confidently face any difficulty. Problems can even become an impetus to bring forth a powerful life force, enabling one to calmly and confidently overcome any challenge.

For a strong mountain climber, the steeper and more rugged the mountain, the greater the enjoyment. Likewise, a person who has developed the wisdom and life force to overcome hardship will find society, which is rife with problems, to be a place for the creation of value and fulfillment.

SGI President Ikeda states: “Ultimately, happiness rests on how we establish a solid sense of self or being . . . Happiness does not

lie in outward appearances nor in vanity. It is a matter of what you feel inside; it is a deep resonance in our lives” (*My Dear Friends in America*, third edition, pp. 478–79). In addition, the things that constitute relative happiness, such as possessions, relationships or circumstances, all disappear upon death. Absolute happiness, however, which is the life condition of a Buddha, exists on the level of life that is eternal and transcends life and death. It is a benefit that we can carry with us lifetime after lifetime.

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the Soka Gakkai's monthly study journal*

## Notes

1. Three bodies: A concept set forth in Mahayana Buddhism to organize different views of the Buddha appearing in the sutras. The three bodies are: The Dharma body, the reward body and the manifested body. The Great Teacher T'ien-t'ai maintained that the three bodies are not separate entities but three integral aspects of a single Buddha. From this viewpoint, the Dharma body indicates the essential property of a Buddha, which is the truth or Law to which the Buddha is enlightened. The reward body indicates the wisdom, or the Buddha's spiritual property, that enables the Buddha to perceive the truth. The manifested body indicates compassionate actions, or the physical property of a Buddha used to carry out compassionate actions to lead people to enlightenment.