

Developing Genuine Relationships With Those Around Us

SGI-USA December 2020 Discussion Meeting



What Makes a Good Life?



For over 80 years, the Harvard Study of Adult Development has tracked the lives of a cohort of 724 men, year after year. The ones who are still alive are mostly in their 90s.

The study reveals that our social connections, specifically good relationships, lead to happier, healthier lives. The more satisfied we are with our relationships, the longer we live. The more isolated we are, the more likely that our health and cognition will decline earlier in life.

- <https://www.worldtribune.org/2016/01/makes-good-life/>

Key Points

1. Having good relationships is the key to enjoying a happy, fulfilling life.
2. Buddhism teaches the importance of having "good friends in faith."
3. A core aspect of Buddhist practice is reaching out to others and contributing to our community.



Having good relationships is the key to enjoying a happy, fulfilling life

“Friendship is the most beautiful, powerful, and precious thing in life. It is your greatest treasure. No matter how successful or wealthy a person is, without friends life is sad and lonely.

“In this vast universe, we have been born together at the same time on this tiny planet. And how rare is it to find, among the [7] billion members of the human race, truly caring and honest friends who understand our thoughts and feelings without the need for a lot of words and with whom we can relax and be ourselves.”

- Ikeda Sensei, *The Wisdom for Creating Happiness and Peace*, part 2, p. 280

Buddhism teaches the importance of having "good friends in faith"

“When a tree has been transplanted, though fierce winds may blow, it will not topple if it has a firm stake to hold it up. But even a tree that has grown up in place may fall over if its roots are weak. Even a feeble person will not stumble if those supporting him are strong, but a person of considerable strength, when alone, may fall down on an uneven path.”

- Nichiren Daishonin, “Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain,” *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 598



A core aspect of Buddhist practice is reaching out to others and contributing to our community



“Meeting with people and speaking with them—our efforts to create peaceful societies by spreading the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism are in exact accord with Nichiren’s spirit and embody the heart of Buddhist practice. Those who strive toward that end will without fail bring forth the courage, wisdom and compassion of the Buddha.”

- Sensei, April 12, 2019 *World Tribune*, p. 3

Brief Experience in Faith

The Soka Gakkai is a gathering of good friends

“Our lives are determined by the relationships we form. And the SGI is a cluster of relationships of the very best kind. In a society pervaded with cruel relationships, where many people delight in others’ misfortunes, we find the greatest solidarity and peace of mind with our fellow members.”

- Sensei, *Faith into Action*, p. 126



Discussion Questions

1. How has your Buddhist practice enabled you to develop genuine relationships with those around you?
2. In today's often divisive world, what obstacles have you encountered when trying to reach out to those whose views differ from your own? How has your Buddhist practice helped you overcome such challenges?
3. Why does sharing Buddhism help us create a more peaceful society?



December Discussion Meeting Presentation Notes

Theme: "Developing Genuine Relationships With Those Around Us"

Slide 1:

- Welcome and thank you for joining today's meeting!
- Today's theme is Developing Genuine Relationships With Those Around Us!
- December is a time of the holidays and spending time with our loved ones, I hope we can all take something with us today about the Buddhist perspective of having good friends.
- Now let's get started!

Slide 2:

- Before we get into the Buddhist perspective on this topic, let's look at a study done by Harvard University.
- Harvard Study of Adult Development followed 700+ men from the time they were around 18 for 75 years.
- The results they found showed that most of these young men thought fame and wealth would make them happy at a young age but the reality was, the closer these people were connected to their families, communities and friends, the happier they were, resulting in longer, healthier lives.

(Based on this WT article: <https://www.worldtribune.org/2016/01/makes-good-life/>)

Slide 3:

- We have 3 key points for today's presentation!
- They are:
 1. Having good, positive relationships is the key to enjoying a happy, fulfilling life.
 2. Buddhism teaches the importance of having "good friends in faith."
 3. A core aspect of Buddhist practice is reaching out to others and contributing to our community.

Slide 4:

- Getting into our first key point, having good relationships is the key to enjoying a happy, fulfilling life.

- From the Buddhist perspective, “good friends” are those who support us in becoming happy and guide us to the correct teachings of Buddhism.
- Elaborating on the importance of friendship, Ikeda Sensei says: “Friendship is the most beautiful, powerful, and precious thing in life. It is your greatest treasure. No matter how successful or wealthy a person is, without friends life is sad and lonely. In this vast universe, we have been born together at the same time on this tiny planet. And how rare is it to find, among the [7] billion members of the human race, truly caring and honest friends who understand our thoughts and feelings without the need for a lot of words and with whom we can relax and be ourselves.”

Slide 5:

- For our second key point, let’s look at what Nichiren Daishonin has said about the importance of having good friends in faith.
- “When a tree has been transplanted, though fierce winds may blow, it will not topple if it has a firm stake to hold it up. But even a tree that has grown up in place may fall over if its roots are weak. Even a feeble person will not stumble if those supporting him are strong, but a person of considerable strength, when alone, may fall down on an uneven path.”
- Nichiren follows this by saying: **Therefore, the best way to attain Buddhahood is to encounter a good friend. How far can our own wisdom take us? If we have even enough wisdom to distinguish hot from cold, we should seek out a good friend.**

Slide 6:

- Our final key point for today is that a core aspect of Buddhist practice is reaching out to others and contributing to our community.
- A developmental psychologist said that one key to longevity is social interactions, sense of community. In contrast, she says that "social isolation is the public health risk of our time." (https://www.ted.com/talks/susan_pinker_the_secret_to_living_longer_may_be_your_social_life)
- Sensei touches on how our efforts to make social connections are in accord with Nichiren’s spirit: “Meeting with people and speaking with them—our efforts to create peaceful societies by spreading the humanistic principles of Nichiren Buddhism are in exact accord with Nichiren’s spirit and embody the heart of Buddhist practice. Those who strive toward that end will without fail bring forth the courage, wisdom and compassion of the Buddha.”
- So building a sense of community and developing connections with the people around us and deepening connections with those close with us is key to a happy life.

Slide 7:

Optional Slide. Please share a brief experience related to the theme.

Slide 8:

- To conclude, the SGI is a gathering of good friends.
- Sensei says: “Our lives are determined by the relationships we form. And the SGI is a cluster of relationships of the very best kind. In a society pervaded with cruel relationships, where many people delight in others’ misfortunes, we find the greatest solidarity and peace of mind with our fellow members.”

Slide 9:

- Thank you, this concludes my part of the presentation.
- Now, let’s discuss! (please feel free to utilize the Zoom breakout room feature)
- Use these questions as a starting point.