

Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple of UK Newsletter

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Our Lives Are Kept Alive By The Eternal Buddha

Buddhism teaches us that the Laws of Cause and Effect and Karma lead our life. Some might say “Not at all, I drive my life by myself.” So let us think about our own life. I have three questions for you:

Were you born according to your desire?

Can you control your life as you desire?

Do you know how long you will live?

What do you think? In fact, you don't know about your own life exactly although you think your life is for yourself. The only facts you know are who your parents are, how you grew up, whom you met and how you have associated with people since your birth. So, you cannot definitely say “I drive my life by myself.” After all, we realize that we grew and lived by our parents or people's support and help. Our lives seem to be kept alive by others.

Uncertain Life

Actually, we cannot help but realize that our life is for ourselves even though we don't know about life exactly. We possess our life but we cannot control it by ourselves as we desire. Please think of your body. When we appeared in this world, we were born alone, but we don't remember the process of birth. When we die we cannot keep anything not even one penny, even if we're billionaires; and unfortunately we cannot own our body either. We have to leave all things we obtain in this world behind after death. Our body seems like ours but it is not ours. I feel my body is like a rental car which I borrowed to drive my own life around in in this world. None of our belongings are permanent in our life. How poor our life is! How about you?

Although we realize this is our own life, we cannot handle it as we wish. Although we sense it is our own body, it seems temporary. It seems like our life is kept alive by others. It is! When you accept this naturally, your mind will become mature enough to be able to believe in the Lotus Sutra properly because this heart originates from the Buddha Nature which is required for the Lotus Sutra.

Humble Mind

The humble mind as well as our lives are kept alive by others. This implies deep mercifulness. Through becoming humble and merciful in our mind we can obtain the eyes to see the truth. A humble mind is a very important element to see the truth without prejudice. Please refer to the teaching in the Lotus Sutra, Chapter 2.

“Now I will expound the Dharma to you.” When the Buddha said this, five thousand people, disciples and congregation rose from their seats, bowed to the Buddha and left because they were so sinful and arrogant that they thought that they had already obtained what they had not yet; and that they had already understood what they had not yet. Because of these faults, they did not stay. The Buddha kept silent and did not check them. The Buddha said, “Now, this congregation has been cleared of twigs and leaves, only sincere people are left.”

Being arrogant and self-conceited is called ‘Zoyo-man’. The Lotus Sutra admonishes Zoyo-man strictly. A person who becomes Zoyo-man cannot receive and understand the teachings properly, even if he meets the true teaching. In order to receive the teachings properly and hold the faith firmly requires always being of humble mind.

Rare and Excellent Teaching

When we express gratitude in Japanese, as you know, we say “Arigato”, which means “thank you”. According to language tradition, the word Arigato originated from the Lotus Sutra. The original form of ‘Arigato’ was ‘Arigatashi’. This consisted of two words, ‘Ari’ and ‘Gatashi’. Ari means ‘existence’ and Gatashi means ‘difficult’. Arigatashi means ‘it is rare or few’ literally, therefore it is valuable, special, excellent and supreme. Since olden times, the Lotus Sutra has been described as an extremely rare teaching or supreme teaching. In those days, when people expressed a thankful mind saying ‘Arigatashi’, it meant ‘I am very pleased for your rare excellent things or consideration like the Lotus Sutra’. At present, the word Arigatashi has been customized to ‘Arigato’. Why is the Lotus Sutra described as a ‘rare and excellent teaching’?

Meeting the Lotus Sutra

It seems that some people have faith and belong to Nichiren Shu unintentionally. In fact, it is not easy to see this teaching although you may think it is. The Lotus Sutra says that in order to see this teaching it requires innumerable, hundreds, of thousands of years and more, to train and accumulate merits through the circle of reincarnations.

At last we were able to meet the final teaching, the Lotus Sutra. We just don’t remember the process during reincarnating many times. Meeting the Lotus Sutra implies the closest stage to complete enlightenment. Therefore it is the final teaching. Enlightenment is one of the purposes to have the faith of the Lotus Sutra. Complete enlightenment means attaining enlightenment like the Buddha and also escaping the continuous cycle of birth and death, constant reincarnation. It is called ‘Nirvana’ (extinction).

The following is from the Lotus Sutra, Chapter 10:

“Suppose a man on a plateau felt thirsty and sought water. He dug a hole in order to get water. As long as he saw the dug-out lumps of dry earth, he knew that the water was still far off. He went on digging, and then found the dug-out lumps of earth were wet. In the same manner, know this, a man who has not yet heard, understood or practiced the Lotus Sutra, is still far from complete enlightenment. A man who hears, understands, thinks over, and practices the Lotus Sutra, will approach complete enlightenment.”

There are many people who have an opportunity to see the Lotus Sutra, but people who can develop the true faith are very few. As the Lotus Sutra teaches us, although a man at last sees this teaching, if he has not matured enough to accept the Lotus Sutra, he will not be able to receive it properly and sooner or later he will leave. This shows one of the difficulties: keeping the Lotus Sutra after having the opportunity to see the Lotus Sutra.

Teaching for Saving People

Why is the Lotus Sutra described as the highest teaching or rare excellent teaching? – Because it is the teaching for Bodhisattvas; future Buddhas, practitioners who seek enlightenment not only for themselves but for others. The teachings of Buddhism before the Lotus Sutra taught mainly that the Buddha saves suffering people with compassion. However, the Lotus Sutra teaches us mainly to save people as a Bodhisattva. The core of the Lotus Sutra is to offer compassion to others rather than receiving compassion. This is one reason why the Lotus Sutra is described as the supreme teaching. According to the teaching, we are regarded as a Bodhisattva and we require efforts to live up to the way of a Bodhisattva, because if we do not put the qualification into our deeds in daily life, it makes no difference, we are not qualified. It is most important to awaken our faith as a Bodhisattva through the Lotus Sutra. The Buddha teaches us to have an attitude as a Bodhisattva. The Lotus Sutra, Chapter 10:

“If you wish to expound this Sutra, enter the room of enlightenment, wear the robe of enlightenment, and sit on the seat of enlightenment. To enter the room of enlightenment means to have great compassion towards all living beings. To wear the robe of enlightenment means to be gentle and patient. To sit on the seat of enlightenment means to see the voidness of all things.”

Realizing we're Bodhisattvas

We are not born intentionally. Our parents cannot choose their own baby and give birth. We cannot handle our own life as we wish, although we realize it is our own life. Our life is guided by others. Under such circumstances we met the Lotus Sutra which is the most difficult teaching to see. Why? Why did we see the Lotus Sutra?

We were born along with En to the Buddha and Nichiren Shonin. (Please see note below.) We had a relationship with Buddhism from a long time ago. We met the Lotus Sutra; we were born with a special mission as a Bodhisattva, to cultivate this world in order to realize the true peaceful world or the 'Buddha world' on this earth. As you know Nichiren Shonin dedicated his life to his mission as a Bodhisattva. We do too.

It seems that our lives were guided along with others but it was not by others, it was by the Eternal Buddha. We have been guided by the Buddha and Nichiren Shonin. Our lives have been kept alive by the Eternal Buddha. We who believe in Nichiren Shu should realize we are Bodhisattvas who were guided to see the Lotus Sutra by the Eternal Buddha of the Lotus Sutra.

It is easy to complain about a lapsed society, but it is difficult to put the idea of complaint into practice. However, we should do it with humbleness, endurance and compassion as Nichiren Shonin did. Please remember we are Bodhisattvas standing at the closest stage to complete enlightenment. Let us make the effort to live up to the way of a Bodhisattva with Odaimoku.
Gassho.

Note: Basically, 'En' means a contributory cause or relationship, as distinct from a direct cause. For example, a plant is produced from a seed but there are various contributory causes and influences to the plant, such as rain, soil, sunshine, wind, etc. and these elements also connect and link with each other directly or indirectly. Usually when a Buddhist uses the word 'En', the expression implies a more spiritual connection rather than a physical reason. So when we encounter a miraculous meeting or coincidence or unexplainable happening, we express 'this is the cause of En'.

Thank you very much for your help and donations.