

August Discussion Topic – The Eight Winds

How we would love to avoid our problems and focus entirely on a life full of fun and joy. Yet the reality is different. Difficulties, illness, loss and disappointments are all part of life. When we are confronted with them, we are reminded of just how fragile life can be.

Practicing Buddhism does not mean that problems disappear. It does, however, mean that we set in motion an inner process of change – human revolution – enabling us, regardless of our circumstances, to develop a state of deep and indestructible happiness.

The eight winds are the four favorable winds of prosperity, honor, praise, and pleasure; and the four adverse winds of decline, disgrace, censure, and suffering. Generally, we welcome the four favorable winds and seek to avoid the four adverse winds. Yet prosperity, honor, praise and pleasure can also bring us out of balance, because they offer only a temporary form of happiness.

Life, after all, has its ups and downs. When we allow ourselves to be carried away too much by success and recognition, or by setbacks and criticism, we can easily lose our direction. Compliments can make us complacent, whilst sadness, guilt or disappointment can cloud our view of reality. If we allow ourselves to be swept away by any of these eight winds, even our faith can begin to waver. What they all have in common is that they all come from influences outside ourselves.

Nichiren Daishonin writes: “Worthy [wise] persons deserve to be called so because they are not carried away by the eight winds: prosperity, decline, disgrace, honor, praise, censure, suffering, and pleasure. They are neither elated by prosperity nor grieved by decline. The heavenly gods will surely protect one who is unbending before the eight winds. (WND-1, 794–95)

From Buddhist perspective, true happiness does not depend on external circumstances. Therefore, none of the eight winds can serve as the foundation for genuine happiness. Absolute happiness – the life state of Buddhahood – means that you experience a profound sense of fulfillment and joy in being alive, regardless of one's circumstances.

SGI-president Daisaku Ikeda says: “A wise person who is impervious to the eight winds could also be called a person who never gives in to defeat. (...) Those who keep moving forward tenaciously, refusing to be discouraged or defeated by even the most painful trials and hardships, without fail win in the end. Those who never give in to defeat, who possess an invincible spirit, are never gloomy or downcast. Be positive and undefeated. Always hold your head up high, look to the future, be self-assured, challenging everything confidently and positively with an invincible spirit.”¹

- Which of the eight winds do you recognise most in your own life? How does it influence your thinking, actions or Buddhist practice?
- How can we develop our faith to be strong enough to not be swept away by the eight winds? Do you have any personal experience with this?

¹ SGI Newsletter 9028.

- Which of the eight winds is currently having the greatest influence on your life? Can you give an example of this?