

June Discussion Topic - What does it mean to make a vow in Buddhism?

Living in turbulent times, people are bound to experience unexpected hardships, regrets and hopelessness. During such times, how do they find the strength to keep going?

Those who have an inner compass to guide them can regain their strength and move forward again. Buddhism offers a solid philosophy for guiding us through the most difficult times.

It also teaches us that deep down, every person has a fundamental desire: to find happiness and to help others experience that same happiness.

Nichiren Daishonin urged his disciples who were facing intense hardships to live with a sense of purpose based on this fundamental wish, which equates to a pledge, commitment or vow. The compassionate vow to lead all people to Buddhahood, or lasting happiness, serves as a vital foundation of Buddhism. It may seem idealistic or self-sacrificing to make a grand vow when we have our own struggles to deal with. But making such a vow does not require sacrificing anything. It includes developing our lives while helping others do the same.

Nichiren, too, began with a simple wish for his parents' happiness which in turn led him to deepen his vow for the happiness of all people. Likewise, as we overcome our own struggles and create fulfilling lives using our Buddhist practice, we activate our inherent Buddha nature and expand our compassion for others. SGI-president Daisaku Ikeda says: "Faith in the boundless potential of human beings as the embodiment of the Mystic Law can be regarded as the core of the Lotus Sutra. This is not only an expression of deep faith in the Mystic Law, but also of deep trust in and respect for human beings"¹

When our belief in our unlimited potential and that of others increasingly becomes our foundation, we bring forth limitless courage, wisdom and compassion from within, thereby transforming our lives. Carrying out the vow to lead all people to enlightenment means sharing the teachings of Buddhism with those around us so that they can experience this same powerful transformation and continue to create lives of absolute freedom and fulfillment. President Ikeda explains: "In Buddhism, a vow is the power by which we break the chains of our karma, free ourselves from the past, and build a life in which we look into the future with confidence."²

Fulfilling this vow – to spread Buddhism and help people realize their boundless potential – is no easy task. That is why we need an indestructible source of inspiration. By learning from a mentor who puts this vow into practice, we can develop the hope, compassion, courage and wisdom we need to keep moving forward. The disciple plays an important role in this. The bond between mentor and disciple grows stronger when the disciple stands up with the same vow. This principle is at the heart of Buddhism.

Though it may be easier to remember our vow when things are favorable, it is precisely when we face the greatest struggles that we must deepen our commitment by chanting Nam-myoho-rence-kyo and challenging ourselves. By continuously affirming this vow for the happiness of self and others, we can realize our unique mission, cultivate our strengths and experience boundless joy.

- What is your vow?
- How can you use your vow as a compass? Do you have experience with this?

¹ Vgl. Daisaku Ikeda, *Lectures on 'The Opening of the Eyes'*, 92.

² Idem.

- How do you remain true to your vow in difficult times? Do you have experience with this?