

October Discussion Topic - **Everyone Is a Buddha**

Buddhism teaches that all life contains the potential for enlightenment and that each person is a Buddha worthy of the utmost respect. We may readily agree with this point when we think about people who support us or share similar viewpoints. However, when faced with individuals who make us suffer, are cruel and unreasoning, or hold views starkly different from ours, we may seriously question whether everyone is a Buddha.

Yet, Nichiren Buddhism teaches that beyond our current or past actions, weak character traits or negative tendencies, each of us has a Buddha nature and that we have the potential to change and grow. Faith in this point drives our Buddhist practice, which helps deepen our belief in our own and others' improvement.

Bodhisattva Never Disparaging is a figure from the Lotus Sutra who exemplifies this spirit. He famously approached every person he met, saying: "I have profound reverence for you, I would never dare treat you with disparagement or arrogance. Why? Because you will all practice the bodhisattva way and will then be able to attain Buddhahood." (LSOC, 308)

He sought to awaken each person to their inherent Buddha nature. Unfortunately, people sometimes responded negatively, shouting abuses and throwing sticks, stones and tiles at him. Undaunted, Never Disparaging continued to revere them, first retreating to a safe distance and then proclaiming they would attain Buddhahood. In addition to teaching us to believe in the Buddha nature of all people, Never Disparaging exemplifies the spirit of perseverance.

Because he was determined to awaken everyone he encountered to their Buddha nature, bodhisattva Never Disparaging revealed his enlightenment and eventually led even those who had tried to harm him to Buddhahood. In other words, every encounter—positive or negative—is an opportunity to deepen our belief in the Buddha nature of each person we meet, as well as our own.

Challenging ourselves to believe in the Buddha nature of others simultaneously awakens our enlightened nature, helping us tap into our inherent wisdom, compassion and courage to create value in any situation.

Ikeda Sensei wrote: "All human beings possess the Buddha nature. Life is the greatest treasure and no one is unimportant or worthless. When we become aware of the principle of respect for the dignity of life, it changes the way we look at ourselves and others, as well as our relationship with them."¹

By acting compassionately and sincerely in this way, we receive great benefit and lay the foundation for respect and peace in our family and in society as a whole.

- Do you believe that everyone possesses the Buddha nature?
- How do you put the spirit of bodhisattva Never Disparaging into practice and do you have an experience with that?
- Have you come to respect yourself more by the realization that you are a Buddha? Do you have an experience with that?

¹ Encouragement of Ikeda Sensei, 'For My Friends', August 2, 2022.

