

A Religion of Human Revolution—Part 6

Hope—Changing Karma into Mission Is the Way of Buddhist Practice in the Soka Gakkai

Lecture presented by Antonio Choi
SGI Canada Study Department

Hi everyone. Happy New Year, and welcome to the “Year of Soka Victory—Toward Our 90th Anniversary”. In this month of January, we will be studying Part 6 of “A Religion of Human Revolution” from President Ikeda’s lecture series “The Buddhism of the Sun— Illuminating the World.” The theme of this instalment is “Hope—Changing Karma into Mission Is the Way of Buddhist Practice in the Soka Gakkai”.

In life, challenges and difficulties are unavoidable. Many people experience life problems one after another, sometimes feeling as they have reached a deadlock. We may feel that we will never overcome our suffering. On the other hand, people are always questioning how to face and overcome their obstacles and hardships.

President Ikeda asserts that “there is no adversity that we cannot overcome through faith in the Mystic Law, which is a source of limitless hope and the power to keep moving forward”. In this installment with hope as the theme, we will learn about the Buddhist way of life for changing karma or destiny into mission,

Let’s read the first Gosho passage from “Lessening One’s Karmic Retribution”, which was written shortly after the Tatsunokuchi Persecution where the Daishonin was almost beheaded.

If one’s heavy karma from the past is not expiated within this lifetime, one must undergo the sufferings of hell in the future, but if one experiences extreme hardship in this life [because of one’s faith in the Lotus Sutra], the sufferings of hell will vanish instantly. And when one dies, one will obtain the blessings of the human and heavenly worlds, as well as those of the three vehicles [the worlds of Learning, Realization, and Bodhisattva] and the one vehicle [the world of Buddhahood].
(WND-1, 199)

The principle of “lessening one’s karmic retribution means that through undergoing hardships for the sake of the Lotus Sutra, the negative effect of heavy karma destined to continue into one’s future existences can be expiated by receiving it in a lighter form in this life. In this letter, Daishonin states that such karmic suffering will “vanish instantly” in other words, that it can be extinguished immediately, right now. Nichiren Buddhism is a great teaching of hope, assuring us that we can transform any karma or destiny immediately, just as we are.

President Ikeda teaches us that the greatest sources of hope are “Gohonzon”, “mentor-disciple relationship” and “comrades”. He says,

As long as we continue exerting ourselves earnestly in faith together with the Soka Gakkai and united with our fellow members in the spirit of “many in body, one in mind,” there is no steep hill of difficulty we cannot surmount. No suffering will defeat us. We can overcome any problem. That is the benefit of “lessening one’s karmic retribution.

As we practice this Buddhism, things may happen that make us question or doubt the power of faith. But we should be reminded that difficulties arise because our practice is correct, and the kosen-rufu movement is advancing. President Ikeda explains,

Difficulties arise because our practice is correct. As the Daishonin’s words “The wise will rejoice while the foolish will retreat” (WND-1, 637) indicate, the important thing is whether we courageously stand up to the challenges that arise in our path or shrink back in fear and run away from them. What matters is our attitude in faith at a crucial moment.

Moreover, encountering difficulties in the course of those efforts is an indispensable path for strengthening our lives and building a state of eternal happiness. Hardships become important opportunities to forge our lives. President Ikeda says,

All people and all societies must deal with problems and difficulties. A complete absence of difficulties is an impossibility. But such challenges are what make us genuinely strong. We need to fight and win based on faith, feeling ever-greater delight the tougher the going gets, just like the Daishonin.

Let’s read another Goshō passage from “The Opening of the Eyes”

I have been condemned to exile, but it is a small suffering to undergo in this present life and not one worth lamenting. In future lives I will enjoy immense happiness, a thought that gives me great joy. (WND-1, 287)

This passage is the conclusion of the Daishonin’s treatise “The Opening of the Eyes”, which was written during his exile on Sado Island. Here, the Daishonin conveys the incredible joy he feels amid adversity, teaching us that if we maintain our fighting spirit when we encounter difficulties, we can establish a state of absolute happiness that is indestructible throughout the three existences of past, present, and future.

Here, President Ikeda discusses the meaning of encountering obstacles from a deeper perspective. “The Opening of the Eyes” teaches the principle of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma”. This principle describes the action of bodhisattvas who make a vow to be born in the troubled age of the Latter Day of the Law so as to save living beings. They willingly shoulder the suffering this entails and set an example of struggling

with and triumphing over that suffering to teach people the power of Buddhism. President Ikeda says,

Instead of simply regarding their sufferings as the result of their negative karma, they choose to see them as problems they have voluntarily taken on to fulfill their mission, as challenges they have vowed to overcome through their Buddhist practice.

The teaching of “voluntarily assuming the appropriate karma” points to such a major transformation of our state of mind, our deep-seated attitude toward life. To live with the resolve to change karma into mission is the essence of transforming one’s karma or destiny.

President Ikeda teaches us that hope is the power to believe in the future. It is the wellspring of courage for taking on challenges. He says,

We all inherently embody hope. Our practice of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, the heart of the Lotus Sutra, is the driving force that allows us to create hope. That is because the power of daimoku is limitless.

From the moment we start chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we can transform our state of mind and open the way to a new, hopeful tomorrow. Chanting resonant daimoku as we advance, we never succumb to despair.

Our Buddhist teaching of human revolution has the power to transform despair into hope. It is a solid philosophy that allows us to transform our life state and that of those around us, as well as to transform the land in which we live and even the karma of humankind as a whole.

I would like to conclude this month’s study podcast with President Ikeda’s encouragement “let us expand our courageous dialogues to build a future of hope.”

Thank you for listening.