

## The Purification of Life

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There are many Nichiren Shoshu believers who have gained great benefits and life experiences through their faith and practice. Their benefits, however, are all different. The circumstances that led a person to join true Buddhism, the progress that one is making, and the individual experiences are all different. Needless to say, this difference is a result of the individual variations in people's *karma* from their past lives. *Karma* is the Sanskrit word which means latent energies residing in the inner realm of life which manifest themselves as various results in the future.

We have our parents to thank for our birth and our existence today. There is an absolute connection with our mother and father that cannot be severed. This connection in fact, is effect of our *karma* from our past lives. A person may have been born in this life as a man or a woman, someone who is rich, or as one who is burdened with problems. These are all the effects of *karma*, and are determined by causes made in previous lifetimes.

The True Law of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo expounds the fundamental significance of all forms of life. It can be likened to the sun, which benefits everyone and everything on earth. Even if their individual *karma* is different, if the people honestly pursue their Buddhist practices, they will, without fail, receive benefits and good fortune like the warm rays of the sun. Nichiren Daishonin said:

The sum of our worldly misdeeds and evil karma may be as great as Mount Sumeru, but once we take faith in this sutra, they will vanish like frost or dew under the sun of the Lotus Sutra.  
(*MW-1*, p. 253)

The following words appear in the Juryo (the sixteenth) Chapter of the Lotus Sutra:

*Shi dai ro yaku, shiki ko mi mi, kai shitsu gu soku*

This phrase literally means: “This great medicine is absolutely endowed with perfect color, smell, and taste.” The great medicine represents the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. And this passage contains the profound and important teachings of Buddhism.

Let us consider the color, smell and taste in terms of the simple matters of our daily lives. Color, or *shiki*, is another word for body or shape. Everyone has a physical body and is, therefore, able to act. The problem is whether a person will act positively or negatively. As human beings, with physical bodies, we need rules, laws or precepts to guide our physical actions. They help us know “what to do”. Thus the concept of color or physical form invariably leads to the principle of precepts.

The next attribute of the good medicine is smell, or *ko*. The smell exists, but we cannot touch it or see it. So smell signifies our mental and emotional makeup. It is the natural tendency of our life condition. You might say smell represents the way we view life and how we react to the things that happen to us.

Long ago, Shakyamuni was walking through a town with his disciples; among them were Shariputra and Maudgalyayana. There was a piece of paper on the road. Instructing one of his disciples to pick it up, Shakyamuni said, “Smell it.” It seemed that the piece of paper had been fragrant by incense. The disciple said, “It is very fragrant.” As they walked a little farther down the road, they found a piece of rope. Again, Shakyamuni instructed a disciple to smell it. It seemed that this rope had been used to tie some fish. The disciple said, “It has a fishy and unpleasant odor.”

Shakyamuni said, “Both the paper and rope essentially have no smell, but, as you see, one has a sweet aroma, and the other has a bad odor. As a result of past causes, these items are now in a situation in which they constantly possess their respective smells.”

This actually represents our mental and emotional attitudes resulting from the causes made in our past. We were born into this world according to our past causes and our deep relationship with our respective mothers and fathers. Then, through encountering various human relationships and different life conditions, we have formed a fundamental life condition, a basic life tendency. A person may have a wonderful basic life tendency like a sweet aroma. Another may have an opposite life condition. Thus we study and meditate to understand why we act in certain ways, and to regulate these inner tendencies.

The next word, *mi* or taste, signifies a person’s ability to judge whether or not a certain food is tasty. What does it mean to say that person can savor food with his tongue? It is the ability to know its authenticity and to discriminate between things that are good and those that are bad. In Buddhist terms, it means *chi-e*, or wisdom. It is through the wisdom of our Buddha nature that we can understand authenticity and make the right choice between situations that are advantageous or disadvantageous for us in our lives.

The words *shiki* (color), *ko* (smell), *mi* (taste), which, in Buddhist terminology, represent the three kinds of learning. They are Precepts, meditation, and wisdom. Precepts are intended to stem injustice. Meditation is designed to focus one’s mind and cause it to be tranquil. The function of wisdom is to rid oneself of illusions and cause one to realize the truth. Nichiren Daishonin defines the three types of learning as the Three Great Secret Laws, which is the object of worship.

When we look at the lives of people in society at large, we see that many people burdened hardships and sufferings for which they have no solution. They are unable to solve their problems because of the incomplete teachings of a religion that forms the basis of their lives.

In order to lead people who were severely suffering to attain enlightenment, Nichiren Daishonin, the Original Buddha, established True Buddhism in 1253.

The Daishonin states:

If only you chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, then what offense could fail to be eradicated? What blessing could fail to come? This is the truth, and it is of great profundity. You should believe and accept it.

(*MW*- 5, p. 110)

If we chant Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to the Gohonzon, we will be able to establish the ultimate life condition that creates a wonderful life.