

Back to the Basics

Changing Karma Every Day

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The word karma often conjures a feeling of something bad or wrong. We may hear expressions such as "That's my karma" or "What goes around comes around." Karma is most often attached to the concept of cause and effect. So a basic calculation is that if we make good causes, we will get good effects and, if we make bad causes, the effects will be bad as well. This is only a partial view of karma. Since we have accumulated many causes from the distant past, this simplistic view leaves us merely trying to figure out what good causes to make to offset every negative cause stored in our lives. But even if we were to make a goal such as "I will change this karma this year," the fact is, within this year we will continue to make new causes, both good and bad.

Nichiren Daishonin attributed his suffering to his past slander of the correct teaching. But he did not stop there. He went on to reveal how to change negative karma. He considered the view of "make a good cause get a good effect" a pre-Lotus Sutra teaching. The concept of changing karma in the Lotus Sutra focuses on the Buddha nature.

"The substance of slandering the Law is disbelief; it is not believing in the existence of the Buddha nature in oneself and others," SGI President Ikeda writes in an upcoming installment of "The World of Nichiren Daishonin's Writings" in Living Buddhism magazine. "This disbelief is what fundamentally obstructs the emergence of the world of Buddhahood. It is also the root cause of various kinds of negative karma. Eradicating this disbelief and bringing forth the world of Buddhahood represents a more fundamental causality that makes it possible for us to change our karma."

As we struggle to develop our confidence that the Buddha nature exists in all of us, it is natural to wonder, "Will I really change my karma?" or "What is wrong with that person?" Nevertheless, we try to make many positive causes, hoping that our negative karma is still diminishing. Rather than simply preach the need to "pay off our karmic debt" through good deeds, Nichiren Buddhism focuses on not giving in to our own negativity, on affirming our Buddha nature and awakening to this supreme potential of life. Changing karma is the natural result of bringing forth our innate Buddha nature.

Coming face to face with the negative aspects of our karma, such as self-destructive tendencies or self-doubt, opens the door for us to seek the unlimited potential for energy and wisdom inside our lives. It becomes an opportunity for

the teachings of the Lotus Sutra to move from theory to reality in our lives. Comparing our emerging Buddhahood to the rising sun and our negative karma to the stars, President Ikeda explains: "When the sun dawns in the east, the stars that had shone so vividly in the night sky immediately fade into seeming nonexistence.... [But] if they disappeared, it would be against the principle of causality.... When we bring forth the Buddha nature in our lives, we cease to suffer negative effects for each individual past offense committed."

Our past causes do not magically disappear, but they no longer have as great an influence on us. Imagine if the whole world had to worry about changing every negative cause, it would be an endless cycle. When would we achieve world peace?

Nichiren Daishonin shows us the potential of the Buddha nature. People are so jazzed to practice his teaching because it does not characterize people based on their currently manifested karma but uplifts them as potential Buddhas with a mission. This liberating philosophy focuses on the most precious treasure within each individual. It is precisely why we must bring forth our own Buddha nature through Buddhist practice and share with people in our environment about this great "sun" that we all possess.

In essence, bringing forth our Buddha nature through our daily practice of Nichiren Buddhism, is changing karma.