

TO ACT AS FREE PEOPLE.

“The persecutions Nichiren has faced are the result of karma formed in previous lifetimes....Since my heart believes in the Lotus Sutra, I do not fear even Brahma or Shakra, but my body is still that of an animal. With such disparity between my body and my mind, no wonder the foolish despise me. Without doubt, when compared to my body, my mind shines like the moon or like gold. Who knows what slander I may have committed in the past? ...It is impossible to fathom one’s karma.”

“Letter from Sado” WND Pg. 303

In this letter, Nichiren sets out one of the most significant principles of his philosophy - the transformation of karma, not just as a concept, but through his own example and behaviour during his exile on Sado. In it, he explains that the persecutions that he has had to endure were so great because of his own past karma. He also recognises the fragile and changeable nature of our hearts, which makes people drunk with illusion so they fall into the trap of fundamental darkness. The path towards the transformation of karma requires that we overcome this inner weakness. Since the heart has, at the same time, both a weak tendency and one of great fortitude.

The human mind is subtle. It changes according to the moment and external conditions. If we allow our lives to be guided by our mind, which is by nature changeable, it will be difficult for us to advance along a safe and continuous path. Therefore, we must base our lives on the Law, and make it our master, observing the behaviour of those who practise the Law correctly and taking our example from them. From an ordinary person’s point of view, the way to enlightenment is none other than seeking the Law with a pure and sincere heart, and manifesting our Buddhahood with the same purity and sincerity.

In the phrase “Who knows what slander I may have committed in the past?” Nichiren Daishonin places himself among people who have acted against

the Lotus Sutra in the past. Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism does not consider good and evil as simple dualism. Both concepts are inseparable; ignorance and fundamental darkness cannot be separated from true enlightenment. Although the Daishonin was the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law, he was still a human being. And there are no human beings who do not have karma that has been generated from previous existences.

The phrase “It is impossible to fathom one’s karma,” reveals his concern in profoundly understanding the nature of human life with the aim of guiding all human beings to enlightenment, his deep faith in the potential of human beings and a profound understanding of human weaknesses pulsating within him.

The phrase “Iron ... becomes a fine sword” represents the transformation of karma. For iron to become a sword, it must go through a tough process. In the same way, the purpose of faith and religion is to allow us to “forge” our lives.

“My present exile is not because of any secular crime. It is solely so that I may expiate in this lifetime my past grave offenses and be freed in the next from the three evil paths,” tells us that our objective is to transform our “negative account” into a great “positive balance.”

Iron, when heated in the flames and pounded, becomes a fine sword. Worthies and sages are tested by abuse. My present exile is not because of any secular crime. It is solely so that I may expiate in this lifetime my past grave offenses and be freed in the next from the three evil paths.

“Letter from Sado” WND Pg. 303

And what makes this change possible is the Buddha nature that exists in our life. The determination to transform karma is supported by our firm conviction that Buddhahood is inherent in all human life. The key point is to have faith in the Mystic Law. Constant persistent faith in the Mystic Law is, in itself, a manifestation of Buddhahood. It is precisely by confronting and overcoming difficulties, that we can demonstrate the greatness of the Mystic Law as ordinary people. The fact that we are ordinary people is a useful means which allows us to be able to carry out this mission.

To live shackled by karma is to allow ourselves to be defeated by suffering and full of complaints. When we confront our suffering full on, with courage, we can carry out our mission, while at the same time transforming our circumstances. It all depends on our determination.

Teachings previous to the Lotus Sutra explained that suffering in this existence was a result of past negative karma, but they did not explain how to change it. This led people to resign themselves to their sufferings, and regard them as a burden. Nichiren Daishonin goes deeper and shows with his life the way that all people may attain enlightenment in this life, through the principle of fundamental cause. In this respect, Daisaku Ikeda, president of the SGI, writes the following in *The New Human Revolution*: “It is true that Buddhism teaches that he who acts against another, will receive the

corresponding negative effects. However, this is just one aspect. If this were the whole teaching with regard to karma, then people would be condemned to live under a cloud of blame and vague anxiety, without knowing what offences they had committed in other existences. It would also mean that people’s destinies are predetermined, which could easily leave them without energy and passion. It could also make them adopt a passive attitude, where their only concern is not to do anything bad.

Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism goes far beyond the structure of superficial causality. He clarifies the fundamental cause and he shows us the means to return to the pure inner life which has existed since time without beginning. This fundamental cause is to awaken to our mission as Bodhisattvas of the Earth and dedicate our lives to propagating the Law.”

In other words, each person has a mission, and each person has infinite potential. The question is how to make this potential a reality.

When a person carries out their human revolution, they give hope and courage to others, and they transmit conviction and confidence. Then, inspiration gives rise to inspiration, and it sets off a chain reaction which generates a tremendous energy of change.

By undertaking a great mission as wonderful human beings and Bodhi-

sattvas of the Earth, we can transform our negative karma into a source of happiness and encourage others to follow. To take on this mission is to overcome the disbelief that the Buddha nature exists in oneself and in others. In other words, we are carrying out this fundamental cause when we support others and share Buddhism with them.

Our karma is not a chain which ties our spirit. When we instill in our lives a sense of mission as Bodhi-sattvas of the Earth, we can live lives that are free and fulfilled.

