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SACRED WORDS

As we often look at our face, we notice that our expressions change from time to time. It is either full of delight, anger or calmness, but other times it shows greed, ignorance or flattery. Anger represents hell; greed – hungry spirits; ignorance – beasts; *asura* – demons; calm – men and delight – heaven. Thus we see in the expressions of people the six realms from hell to heaven. We cannot see the four realms of the holy ones (*sravaka*, *pratyekabuddha*, bodhisattvas, and Buddhas), which are hidden from our eyes. Nevertheless, we must be able to see them even if we have look for them carefully.

Nichiren, “*Kanjin Honzon Sho*”

Analyze Your Thoughts

By Rev. Shokai Kanai

Chinese Characters and Japanese *Kanji* are based on radicals. Can you guess how many characters are related with the mind or thoughts? I counted 341 different meanings of the characters according to the Kado-kawa Kanji Dictionary.

Can you guess how many thoughts go through your mind in a minute? For instance, are you thinking about work, school, drink, food, vacation, sport, exercise, etc.? I could list over 20 different things in a minute. Our minds are just like a jumping monkey moving for here to there.

According to Buddhism there are ten stages of the mind.

1. **Hell** (the state of anger) – When one becomes very angry, his or her face becomes red; then as the anger persists, the face becomes blue. The Japanese devils or *oni* are red and blue denoting the red (flush) and blue (pale) of anger.
2. **Hungry Spirits** (the state of greed or craving) – One is unable to control himself or herself from excessive smoking, drinking, feasting, playing, gambling, etc.
3. **Beast** (the state of ignorance) – Perception and/or understanding becomes so dull and results in loss of self-control which shows lower forms of irrational behavior like animals.
4. **Fighting Spirit or asura** (the state of shouting or quarreling) – Husband and wife quarrel and become violent towards each other or parents always shouting at their children.
5. **Human Being** (the state of an ordinary person) – There is neither quarrel nor wrong doing, just an ordinary state of mind.
6. **Heaven** (the state of joy) – When we are happy, our minds are on cloud nine. When we appreciate others, our minds are more joyful.

The above six stages of the mind easily shows up on our face. When we are joyful, we look happy. When we get upset, our faces are like devils. When we are greedy, the edges of our eyes turn upward. When we act like animals, we look stupid. When we fight, our faces look haughty. In daily life the state of our minds go up and down instantly. The last four holy stages of the minds are hardly shown on our face because we have not reached those stages.

7. ***Sho-mon* or *sravaka*** (the state of scholarly) – *Sho-mon* is a person who realizes “Uncertainty of Life” through listening or studying books.

8. ***Engaku* or *Pratyekabuddha*** (the state of experience) – *Engaku* is a person who realizes “Uncertainty of Life” by his or her own experience, such as sudden death of a loved one.

9. **Bodhisattva** (the state of love) – Bodhisattva seeks enlightenment not only for himself but to help others attain enlightenment.

10. **Buddha** (the state of compassion) – The unconditional love for others in order for them to be saved. It is like the rays of the sun.

We all have these ten states of mind or thought. Our minds go up and down almost every moment. What state is your mind right now? I hope your minds are all at the higher levels.

MIND GARDEN

By Rev. Shoda Douglas Kanai

Recently, my father obtained some lotus seeds and had this dream of trying to grow lotus flowers here in Las Vegas. Well, the climate here is not suitable for such a delicate flower. Lotus fair better in wet and humid areas. Las Vegas is dry and arid. Nonetheless, he put the seeds in a jar full of water. In a few short days, the seed actually began to sprout. After a few weeks, a couple of stalks began to form. Now the fledgling flower is outside in a larger container working its way out to blossom.

The lotus flower is a very important symbol in Nichiren Buddhism since the flower represents purity of mind, body and speech. Out of muddy water, a silky smooth, brightly colored flower blooms. The muddy water of attachment and desire has no effect on the flower, even repelling it when poured over the top. So what can we do to be like the lotus blossom?

Our thoughts are extremely important. There are common phrases such as “*you are what you think*” or, “*all that we are is the result of what we have thought*”. Action cannot occur without first there being a thought. If the thought happens to be good then joy will spring forth. If the thought happens to be bad, pain and suffering will follow. Any thought big or small has an impact on you and your well-being. You may think that how can a small “bad” thought hurt. We all had some moment when someone crossed

you or made you upset. These small thoughts can accumulate into bigger thoughts which then can consume you.

Take for example a tall pine tree in a forest. This was one mighty tree among many in the forest. So mighty was this tree that it was considered the king of the forest. One day ivy stops by and asks to climb this tree's trunk in order to better see over the land. The other trees warned the mighty pine not to let the ivy grab hold since it will eventually overtake and consume the mighty pine. The mighty pine scoffed and told the rest of the trees, "how can this little thing kill me?" So the ivy was allowed to climb. Day after day, the ivy grew, wrapping itself around the mighty tree. Once the ivy hit the branch level, the mighty pine asked the ivy to stop growing. The ivy only laughed and continued to grow, choking the life out of the once mighty pine, which was useless in stopping its eventual doom. Just like the ivy any bad thought, though small can build and lead you down the path of evil.

To remedy this situation, think of your mind as a garden. We tend to the soil, making sure that enough nutrients are added. We plant our favorite flower, vegetable and/or fruit seeds. We make sure that we water everyday to help the seeds blossom. In the meantime, we make sure that we remove the weeds that may have sprung up. Once the flowers, vegetables and fruits blossom, we can share them with family and friends. And the cycle continues, planting, tending, weeding and sharing.

Thus the flowers, vegetables and fruits are the good thoughts that we have. If we cultivate the good thoughts, good things grow out. Weeds are like the bad thoughts that creep into our minds. We must remove these thoughts or the weeds will overtake the garden. Anyone who has gardened knows that it is difficult to keep weeds out without constantly monitoring the garden. So we too must constantly monitor our minds in what we think. Bad thoughts arise from ignorance and selfishness. To break away from ignorance and selfishness is the fundamental teaching of the Buddha. By dutifully reading and reciting the Lotus Sutra and chanting the Odaimoku, we can cleanse our minds of evil thought, replacing it with only good thought.

Remember to catch yourself when an evil thought appears. Try chanting the Odaimoku to yourself at least three times to calm the mind and to release the evil thought. Let us all keep our mind garden free of weeds.

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