

Faith & Practice

A few days ago, I was following a comment regarding another minister's blog that was posted on Facebook. A person expressed her doubts of her faith within Nichiren Shu. She felt that there was a lack of direction and that the Odaimoku or meditation is used as magic and does not deal with suffering mentioned in the Four Noble Truths and that we do not address the core Buddhist teaching of karuna and prajna, compassion and wisdom respectively. She also had difficulty understanding the Lotus Sutra being the hardest to practice, which in turn could be a self fulfilling prophecy.

I do not know the exact details of her situation, of which she alluded to briefly in her comments, but from her situation, she is in deep pain, trying to find answers to why she is where she is in life. Throughout the discussion, it appeared that Nichiren Shu was not right for her and she will most likely leave our sangha. This is unfortunate, but Buddhism is a way of practice, so for her right now is not the time to hear the Lotus Sutra and practice the Lotus Sutra. At least she was able to hear parts of it so that in her next life, she will be ready to commit to study and practice.

She mentioned that the Odaimoku and meditation is only used as magic instead of trying to get to the core of our suffering. She wants to know why we suffer and the causes her suffering. Answers to this question are personal. She will have to figure that out for herself. I cannot tell her the specifics what the cause of suffering are, only that ignorance is the cause. The Odaimoku can be used to help find that answer. She was told to continue to practice and chant. After doing so, she still did not find the benefit. Well, I believe that if her heart and mind are full of questions, then they will always be filled with questions. It is the same as your mouth moving and chanting comes out. You do not

gain the meaning or capture the essence of the Odaimoku if you only go through the motions. That is why I stress chanting with the body. I use the special hand motions for the Odaimoku during shodaigyo so that you will be able to internalize the Odaimoku and gain the magical benefits. With a calm mind, you can reach the 9th consciousness, where the Buddha resides and find your answers.

To address the fact that the Lotus Sutra is the hardest to practice, it is. Sakyamuni Buddha only revealed this sutra in the last stages of his life. The people were not ready to receive this teaching. It was only after years of study and practicing through expedients that the people gained the understanding to hear the Lotus Sutra. To be told that one day you will become a Buddha is not easy. We are all striving to attain enlightenment, but for many not assured. That is why there are other sects that seek salvation in other worlds, such as Amida Buddha's Pure Land to the West. The Lotus Sutra assures us that everyone will attain enlightenment and we do not have to go to other worlds, since Sakyamuni Buddha is the Eternal Buddha and makes his home here on this world. Thus where the Eternal Buddha lives, it is a Pure Land. We live in this world, we will become Buddhas.

Will we become Buddhas overnight? Some might, but due to our past karma, we cannot escape the bonds of birth and death. This is where faith and practice comes in. Faith is difficult to maintain. There are many questions that we have and want answers to. We want to know exactly what to do and how to do. Unfortunately this is the easy way, having others tell us the answers. Faith is letting go of wanting direct answers and placing your trust within the teachings. We may not understand now, but by coming to Sunday Service and to study classes, you are slowly beginning to open your mind. The fog that

was covering your eyes, are beginning to dissipate. You are making yourself better. This is practice. By chanting and studying the Lotus Sutra over and over, we begin to live it. The Lotus Sutra becomes part of us, which we in turn will want to share our knowledge to others. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

We all have concerns of trying to find answers to our questions. Why are we here? What is the cause of my suffering? We are all on a journey in trying to find salvation. It may take many lives to figure out and quench the causes of suffering. Just know that by placing your faith and practicing with the Lotus Sutra, you are much closer in attaining salvation.