

How Does Buddhism Look at Relationship Issues?

I've had a number of questions regarding how to chant about relationship issues. Sometimes these issues are some of the hardest ones, since everyone's emotions run very high, whether it being falling in love with someone who is in a relationship with someone else, to divorcing when there are children involved. I think there are some important Buddhist principles to keep in mind when dealing with relationship issues.

From a Buddhist perspective, it is impossible to build personal happiness on the sufferings of others. Let's say you have become involved with someone who is married to someone else. If there is a marriage involved, you are trying to build your happiness on the sufferings of the rejected party. That is creating a cause for your own future on the sufferings of someone else. This negative cause will come to fruition in your own life when the time is right. This is true of the person being unfaithful to their marital partner as well.

Remember the law of cause and effect. When we think a thought, speak something, or act we are setting a seed deep in our lives that is going to produce an effect when the time is right. In other words we are creating a future effect for ourselves. When we create negative causes we will reap negative effects. When we create positive causes we will reap positive effects.

Far better to let the two people in the relationship come to terms with either separation or reunification and stay away from the relationship until that decision is worked out. The fact that you are dealing with a difficult relationship situation is the result of your own past seeds which are now coming to fruition. When we understand this this we know that this is our curriculum and there is something to be learned here. The basic principle here is that it was your destiny to encounter a problem like this and that to resolve it you need to strength your faith.

This may be very hard for the person outside the marriage, but we all recovered from broken hearts one way or another and wouldn't you want a relationship that is really yours, rather than one where you share your lover with someone else or know you have been the instrument of hurt. And, can you really trust a person who has been unfaithful to their marriage vows, not to be unfaithful again when you are with them?

One of the most difficult and potentially hurtful to the individuals involved is a divorce when children are involved. Parents can become enraged with one another and don't think about how this affects their children. But the children are the real victims of their parents' behavior. Children are saddened when their parents fight. They have heavy hearts and don't forget the incidents. They also frequently think that it is their fault.

Children are very perceptive. Most of the time they don't tell the adults in their lives what they think and what they have observed, but they absolutely are aware of what is going on. When I

was a family therapist, parents would tell me their children didn't know what was going on, right after the children had told me everything. That's why parents must be keenly aware of what they do in front of their children. If they must fight it would be better to go off where the children can't see and hear them.

One of the saddest situations is when one parent tries to alienate the other parent from the child or take the child away from the other parent. Losing a parent would be devastating to the child. Either way it is the child that suffers the most because children love and need both their parents, regardless of what the parents think of one another. If the parents could keep their eye on the fact that no matter how they feel about one another they both love their child and don't want to hurt them, children would come out of these situations better.

As Mr. Toda pointed out, fathers don't realize that when they get angry in front of their children they frighten them and alienate them, while even though mothers get angry, their children stay close to them.

A Buddhist perspective. All of our life circumstances exist so that we will grow spiritually. When we overcome obstacles with our faith we grow towards enlightenment. Part of that means not trying to hurt other people but rather to behave in positive ways in our interactions with others. Your children will see this and particularly if the other parent is not behaving well they will notice and remember how you both behaved.

This is part of learning to master the mind so that we take charge of our thoughts and emotions rather than having them master us. Instead take all of these emotions to the Gohonzon where you can chant your way through them. And of course, chanting about the situation regarding the difficult other is the way to come out on the other side with a positive resolution. After all, we have the practice to turn poison into medicine.

The following gosho passage teaches an important principle applicable to illness but also to all other troubles we undergo in life. Nichiren says,

“And could not this illness of your husband's be the Buddha's design, because the Vimalakīrti and Nirvana sutras both teach that sick people will surely attain Buddhahood? Illness gives rise to the resolve to attain the way.” WND 927

With this passage in mind we could say to ourselves, “This situation is the merciful consideration of the Gohonzon intended to awaken me to faith. Now is the time for me to muster strong faith. Now is the chance for me to change my destiny.” When we are so determined we enter a higher and broader state of life.

It does no good to harbor a grudge against someone else thinking that you are having a hard time due to that person. Better to consider them a good influence for further strengthening your faith and doing your human revolution and realizing that it is your destiny to suffer in this way due to past causes.

Summary:

1. Today we discussed the Buddhist principle of cause and effect. When we suffer from problems in this lifetime it is our destiny created by past causes.
2. That problems including difficult people, are the means for strengthening our faith, which are the steppingstones to enlightenment.
3. Problems are the opportunity for working to master our minds.
4. Our life is our curriculum and there is always something to be learned from our circumstances.

Comments: I love hearing from you to know what you are thinking and what you want to hear about. Keep them coming.