

If I Doubt the Practice, Can I Get Benefit?

I received a question this week “A while back I read in the World Tribune, ‘you must trust the Gohonzon wholeheartedly, or you will not gain benefits no matter how much you chant.’ Can you please explain?”

Let’s first discuss what the Gohonzon is. The Gohonzon was created by Nichiren as a focal point. He knew that most people would need a focal point as he didn’t want to be worshiped. He gave us this representation of our connection with the infinite part of ourselves so we would be reminded on a daily basis that we have this infinite capacity within us, just as he had. Trusting the Gohonzon wholeheartedly means trusting your infinite capacity.

The reason you might not get benefit if you don’t trust the Gohonzon has to do with the power of our minds. The way I see it, we have two sides to this wonderful mind of ours. We have our infinite side, our Buddha nature, where we connect with the universe. Mentally, through our intuition, we have the capacity to receive answers and to know anything we need to know with this side. There are no limitations. Our intuitive side can know anything, things man has never discovered. This side will guide us perfectly if we listen to it. It’s how I wrote my first book.

Then we have our human side, the side which was born into this world, has learned the teachings of generations about how the world works and has been taught to work through the senses and the intellect in the world of materiality and limitations. The intellect can’t know more than what mankind has already learned.

As Einstein says:

“The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant and has forgotten the gift.”

Man is the only creature on earth that doesn’t perfectly fit into his environment by instinct. He has to create his own environment. He has been given this incredible mind which is one with the creative power of the universe to create anything he wants. The way we think produces results of a like kind. We have not been taught this in our schools and by society. We’ve been taught to explain what is happening in our lives by looking at our circumstances.

Now let’s look at what Buddhism teaches.

As Daisaku Ikeda says,

“In accordance with the principle of 3000 realms in a single moment of life, pessimistic thoughts or feelings take form, just as they are, in reality, producing negative results. People who have negative thoughts create effects for themselves that perfectly match their thinking. So it’s important to be optimistic.” Faith into Action, pg 10

I don't think an occasional thought creates those results, but rather when we dwell and focus on the negativity. Sometimes we can have these kinds of thoughts without being really aware of them. How can we notice them and change them. One way is through your feelings. Our thoughts give rise to our feelings. If you are anxious, or fearful, notice that and then notice what you have been thinking.

Let's take an entrepreneur starting a business thinking, "I don't know if I have what it takes." The feeling would be anxiety. So if he/she notices the anxiety and then the thought. It could be changed to, "I have everything I need within. With that connection I am more capable than I realize. Then notice what happens to the feeling. It will dissipate.

Ikeda says:

"I want you to understand the subtle workings of the mind. How you orient your mind, the kind of attitude you take, greatly influences you and your environment." Faith Into Action pg. 8

For example if you go into a situation with a defeatist attitude, that is what you will project to everyone around you. You're also projecting it to the universe and in accordance with the law of 3000 realms, you will receive like results.

Let's say you notice one morning that you are starting the day with a negative attitude. Sit in front of the Gohonzon with the intention of bringing out your Buddha nature and raising your life condition.

What should we do then if we have doubts while chanting? Notice them and then deliberately refocus them so you give the Gohonzon, your connection with the universe, the opportunity to work. For example, instead of thinking to yourself over and over, this isn't going work, reframe it. "I am one with the infinite power of the universe which can answer any question and find a way around any problem."

In the *Clear Mirror Guidance* Ikeda says:

"If you practice faith while doubting it's effects, you will get results that are, at best, unsatisfactory. This is the reflection of your own weak faith on the mirror of the cosmos. On the other hand when you stand up with strong confidence, you will accrue limitless blessings. While controlling your mind, which is both extremely subtle and solemnly profound, you should strive to elevate your faith with freshness and vigor. When you do so, both your life and your surroundings will open wide before you and every action you take will become a source of benefit. Understanding the subtle workings of one's mind is the key to faith and to attaining Buddhahood in this lifetime."

My Dear Friends in America, pg. 99

Understanding and working with the subtle workings of one's mind is particularly challenging when our outward circumstances seem to support our negative thinking. We have been born into a world where we learn about limitations and to look to our circumstances to determine what we can do. We

have not been taught, by our parents and our teachers or by the knowledge handed down the generations about how things work, to understand the power we have within to change any circumstance to create the results we want.

Everything is created twice, first in thought and then as a thing. We know this, but we don't understand the power of it. We know that for a house to be built, an architect must first imagine it in thought, then create a blueprint and then finally the physical house. We know this about physical things but don't realize this same principle works with our lives as well.

As Nichiren says:

“If you want to understand the causes that existed in the past, look at the results as they are manifested in the present. And if you want to understand what results will be manifested in the future, look at the causes that exist in the present” (WND-1, 279).

He's saying we have the power to consciously create our lives as we wish them to be. We can also create a life we don't want by accident if we are not aware and being conscious about what we are thinking.

If we look at his life we see this. Even though he didn't see the results he wanted in his immediate circumstances, he never gave up. He remained committed to his efforts. He believed with absolute conviction that the causes he was making would manifest as effects in the future. He envisioned that there would come a day when the Mystic Law would flourish and people throughout the world would chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. And, of course we know, his belief has been validated.

What we are doing with our training in Buddhism is to go against everything we have been taught about how the world works. We're being taught not to look at our circumstances but to look to the power within that can find a way around any circumstance. So we all need to be patient and understand that this enormous degree of change is going to take time and support from one another. It's why it's called a practice.

Summary:

We discussed that we are one with the creative power of the universe, and that what we think consistently will manifest over time. Understanding how the mind works is important as it goes against what we have been taught by society about how the world works.

Comments: As always, I love hearing from all of you, so keep the comments and ideas for topics coming.