Treasuring Diversity

<http://www.sgi.org/about-us/buddhism-in-daily-life/treasuring-diversity.html>

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The question of how we are to live in a diverse world has perhaps never been more pressing than now. If humanity is to survive, it is imperative that we find a way to accommodate worldviews and value systems different from our own. The alternatives of either isolated withdrawal into our separate spheres or a uniform set of values imposed by economic and technological forces can hardly be termed viable. Increased contact and interaction among the world's diverse cultural traditions seems inevitable.

How can we learn not to be threatened by difference? How can we learn to communicate successfully with those whose vision and understanding of the world differ from ours? Diversity can either spark conflict and violence or mutual creativity and progress. How can we assure that the latter is the case?

In this connection Daisaku Ikeda has written, "The Buddha's teaching begins with the recognition of human diversity.... The humanism of the Lotus Sutra comes down to the tenet of treasuring the individual."

According to Buddhism, each individual is a unique manifestation of the ultimate truth. Because each of us manifests this truth in the form of our particular, individual character, each of us is a precious and indeed indispensable aspect of the living cosmos.

In his writings, Nichiren uses the metaphor of different flowering trees--cherry, plum, etc.--to express this principle. Each blossoms in its unique way, with its own special character. Together, they create a brilliant seasonal portrait of vitality and beauty. Nichiren describes this as each "manifesting its true nature" (Jpn *jitai kensho*).

### Infinite Possibility

In Nichiren Buddhism, enlightenment is not a matter of changing ourselves into something which we are not. Rather, it is a matter of bringing forth those positive qualities we already possess. More precisely, it is developing the wisdom and vitality to ensure that the unique characteristics that form our personality serve to create value (happiness) for ourselves and for others. The quality of impatience, for example, can either be a source of irritation and friction or a driving force for prompt and effective action.

The key here is the belief that each person is a unique manifestation of a universal life force. As such, each person is seen to possess infinite possibility and inherent, inviolable dignity and worth. Yet, compared with the supreme, universal treasure of life we all share, distinctions of gender, ethnicity, cultural or religious background, etc., are of only limited significance. As this understanding takes root, we can learn to overcome excessive attachment to differences and related feelings of aversion or fear.

Just as each individual has a unique character, a unique experience of life, each culture can be understood as a manifestation of cosmic creativity and wisdom. In the same way that Buddhism rejects any hierarchical ranking of individual humans, it adopts an attitude of fundamental respect toward all cultures and traditions.

The principle of adapting the precepts to the locality (Jpn *zuiho bini*) reflects this. The practitioners of Buddhism are encouraged to take a flexible, open approach to the cultural context in which they find themselves. Thus, as they uphold the Buddhist principles of respecting the inherent dignity and sanctity of human life, they follow local customs and practices except when they are directly contrary to those core principles.

Accordingly, SGI organizations worldwide work to develop the kinds of activities that will be most appropriate to their cultural setting and will make the most lasting contribution to their respective societies.

The original purpose of Buddhism is to awaken people to the infinite value of their own lives and, by extension, the lives of others. Ultimately, our ability to respond creatively to diversity hinges on our ability to develop a palpable sense of the preciousness of life itself, and of each individual expression of life.