

Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 29

This is the twenty-ninth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the June 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

In this discussion, their fourth on the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, they discuss the doctrine of the Ten Worlds in terms of human life and civilization, drawing on a wide range of concrete examples.

29 The Pursuit of Happiness: The Doctrine of the Ten Worlds

Katsuji Saito: Last time we talked about the revelation in the “Life Span” chapter of the “True Cause” and “True Effect” of Shakyamuni’s enlightenment.

From letters received by our editorial office, it seems that our dialogue has renewed many of our readers’ sense of the profundity and grandeur of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism of the Sun and just how wonderful it is to be able to live with an awareness of life’s eternity.

Daisaku Ikeda: We are following the supreme path in life. Whether we can truly elevate our lives totally depends on whether we realize this solemn fact.

What is the purpose of Buddhism? It is to enable all people to become happy and cultivate lives of supreme joy. Tolstoy writes: “Rejoice! Rejoice! One’s life’s work, one’s mission is a joy. Toward the sky, toward the sun, toward the stars, toward the grasses, toward the trees, toward animals, toward human beings—you may as well rejoice.”¹ Our mission in life is to experience joy! This was one conclusion that Tolstoy had reached.

We who embrace the Mystic Law understand the true meaning of these words, for the Lotus Sutra enables us to cultivate in our lives “the greatest of all joys” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 788).

Takanori Endo: The state of life that Shakyamuni manifested as he meditated beneath the Bodhi tree was one of boundless joy that nothing could disturb.

Ikeda: That’s right. The expression *Shakyamuni’s attaining enlightenment for the first time in India under the Bodhi tree* has a lofty-sounding ring to it. But to put it in plain terms, it means that the sun of supreme joy solemnly rose in Shakyamuni’s heart.

A Fierce Struggle With Negativity

Haruo Suda: I once visited the place where Shakyamuni is said to have attained enlightenment, a location one sutra describes as “not far from the city of Gaya” (LS15, 221).² In fact, it is ten kilometers south of the present-day city of Gaya (located in the state of Bihar in northeast India). Because Shakyamuni attained

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enlightenment there, the spot was later named “Gaya of the Buddha” or Bodh Gaya.

Endo: In like fashion, the tree at the spot came to be called the Bodhi tree in commemoration of Shakyamuni’s having attained enlightenment there. It was originally called the Asvattha Tree, which reportedly means “place to perceive immortality,” and was revered as a tree of wisdom.

It seems that the Buddha’s followers later planted root-clippings from the tree beneath which Shakyamuni sat in meditation. They were planted across the country. So, for example, the tree standing at Bodh Gaya grew from a root-clipping taken from a tree in Sri Lanka, far to the south, that had grown from a clipping of the original tree. Further complicating things, there are some indications that the tree in Sri Lanka may not have been the original tree planted there, but a transplant grown from the original Sri Lanka clipping. That would make the present tree at Bodh Gaya the great-grandchild, as it were, of the tree under which Shakyamuni sat.

Ikeda: I, too, have visited Bodh Gaya. Shortly after becoming president of the Soka Gakkai, I made a trip to the birthplace of Buddhism (in 1961). Vowing to accomplish the “westward transmission”³ of Nichiren Daishonin’s teaching, I buried a capsule containing a copy of the Goshō “On the Three Great Secret Laws” and a stone marker at the site.

Saito: True to the vow you made then, the “Buddhism of the Sun” has today spread not only across India, but throughout Asia and other countries of the world. Considering that it took many hundreds or even a thousand years for the Buddhism of Shakyamuni to spread through Asia, this accomplishment in the course of just thirty or forty years will no doubt impress future historians as truly remarkable.

Ikeda: You, the members of the younger generation, need to follow in my footsteps. It is essential that people carry on this work.

At any rate, it was from Bodh Gaya that Shakyamuni began his struggle to lead all people to enlightenment. What do you suppose Shakyamuni’s spiritual struggle at Bodh Gaya was like?

Endo: Well, let’s see. Prior to that, Shakyamuni is said to have completely eradicated desires as a result of carrying out grueling ascetic practices. However, realizing that such practices could not lead to true happiness, he abandoned them.

Suda: He had discarded both the world of desire and ascetic practices. What, then, was Shakyamuni seeking? And to what did he awaken?

Ikeda: This is very significant.

What Shakyamuni was seeking was happiness for all. “Where does the path of

true happiness for all people lie?" he asked himself. He understood that people could become happy neither by simply allowing their lives to be consumed in the flames of desire; nor by causing pain to their bodies through asceticism.

He was seeking the path of the Middle Way that would allow people's lives to shine brilliantly. And it was with the aim of finding such a path that he diligently applied himself to his practice.

Suda: Shakyamuni is said to have spent a period of seven days sitting cross-legged in meditation beneath the Bodhi tree.

Ikeda: "Meditation" sounds calm and peaceful, but it is by no means an "easy" path. It is a fierce struggle against the pull of negativity and darkness. Shakyamuni squarely confronted, fought and defeated the "destroyer of life," a function pervading the universe. In so doing, he was able to conquer the darkness that is called unhappiness.

Saito: Buddhist texts describe how the devilish forces cunningly tried to capture Shakyamuni's mind. A devil by the name of Namuci approached Shakyamuni and whispered to him: "You are thin and emaciated, and your color is bad. Clearly you are on the brink of death. If you go on meditating in this fashion, you don't have even one chance in a thousand of surviving."⁴

Shakyamuni certainly had no guarantee that at the end of his practice he would find enlightenment. Because his was the path of a pioneer, no one knew what lay ahead. And if he were to die, that would definitely spell an end to his efforts to pursue the goal of human happiness.

Ikeda: But at the last minute, Shakyamuni recognized the devil for what it was, and loudly proclaimed: "Devil, a coward might be defeated by you, but a courageous person will win. I will fight. I would rather fight you and lose my life than be defeated and live on!"⁵ At these words, the devil immediately retreated.

Dawn was approaching. Just as Venus began shining in the eastern sky, he at last attained enlightenment.

Buddhism is a struggle with all kinds of devilish, negative forces inherent in life. Without struggling against and overcoming such enemies, there is no enlightenment. There is no true joy. There is no human revolution. There is no Buddhism. Unless we struggle with all our might against the forces of darkness and negativity, we cannot become Buddhas.

The Sun of Great Joy Has Arisen!

Saito: During the course of this struggle, Shakyamuni uttered three poems, one at sunset, one in the middle of the night, and one at dawn. As to the content of these poems, the Buddhologist Dr. Koshiro Tamaki of the University of Tokyo describes them as "expressions of the Dharma."⁶

Dharma means Law. The fundamental Law of the universe became manifest in

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Shakyamuni himself, permeating his entire being and infusing his life.

Suda: The poem he uttered at sunset goes, “When the Dharma truly manifests in a practitioner who continues to earnestly meditate, at that time all of his doubts and illusions disappear. For he has understood the law of dependent origination.”⁷

The poem in the middle of the night goes:

“When the Dharma truly manifests in a practitioner who continues to earnestly meditate, at that time all of his doubts and illusions disappear. For he has realized the eradication of all kinds of karmic relations.”

The final poem, which he spoke at dawn, goes:

“When the Dharma truly manifests in a practitioner who continues to earnestly meditate, at that time he has demolished the forces of the devil and abides in peace. He is just like the sun that shines in the sky.”

Endo: “The sun has risen in my heart!” he declares. This is a historic moment.

Ikeda: This is the dawn of the sun of joy that illuminates all humankind. Buddhahood is a state of supreme joy.

After passing a time in this state of exultation, Shakyamuni resolutely began preaching the Law. However, he found that no matter how he tried to explain the truth to which he had awakened, it was extremely difficult for others to accept the Law that he perceived in his own heart. Therefore, he sought to develop the capacity of the people by expounding expedient teachings that were easy to grasp.

It is in the “Life Span” chapter that he directly and fully expresses this sun-like state of life. The “Life Span” chapter could therefore be termed the “chapter of great joy.” It is both the climax and summation of Shakyamuni’s entire life.

Symbol of the “Universe of Life”

Saito: In the “Life Span” chapter, Shakyamuni employs an image of the incredibly vast expanse of the universe—described as innumerable “thousand-millionfold worlds” to explain the eternity of his life. This would seem to symbolize the infinite and boundless “life-space” that Shakyamuni has attained.

Ikeda: That may be so. Through the concept of universal space, Shakyamuni comes up with a vivid image of the “eternal Law at one with the eternal Buddha,” that is, of the vast state of life of Buddhahood that he perceives within himself.

Suda: In the sutra, we find this in the concept of *gohyaku-jintengo*, which Shakyamuni uses to explain the inconceivably long period of time since he first attained enlightenment. The description begins:

Suppose a person were to take five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya thousand-millionfold worlds and grind them to

dust. Then, moving eastward, each time he passes five hundred, a thousand, ten thousand, a million nayuta asamkhya worlds he drops a particle of dust... (LS16, 225)

Endo: If he had just said that his life was eternal, it wouldn't have had nearly the impact. But the description of countless thousand-millionfold worlds ground to dust causes an image to immediately spring to mind. One feels, "What an awesome state of life!" From this account, we may imagine racing across the universe in a rocket ship.

Saito: The "life-space" described in the "Life Span" chapter is a state of life of boundless joy. Each moment is joyful. Therefore, Shakyamuni's "life-time," although it is described as virtually "eternal," would seem extremely short.

Ikeda: Simply put, "life-time" may be identified with subjective time.

Endo: Yes. For instance, the state of life of Hell is a state in which there is very little joy—virtually zero. The "life-space" of a person in this state is infinitesimally small, as though confined within a tiny prison cell. The "life-time" of such a person creeps ahead with agonizing slowness.

Suda: Certainly, when you have a toothache, for example, a minute can seem like an hour.

Endo: On the other hand, Buddhahood is characterized by joy so abundant as to be well nigh inexhaustible. The "life-time" of one in this state is therefore extraordinarily fast.

Saito: The rate at which time passes differs depending on our state of life. "Life-time," in other words, is relative.

Ikeda: The greater the energy in a person's life, the more vigorously his or her "life-time" moves ahead.

On another level, it has been proven theoretically that time is relative, as we see, for example, in Einstein's theory of relativity. To illustrate, if you were to travel through the universe on a rocket ship, as your speed of travel increased, the rate of time's passage would change. This is the so-called "Urashima effect" in Japan.

Endo: That's right. What we call the Urashima effect, also known as the "clock paradox" or "twins paradox," is a hypothesis that we arrive at from the theory of relativity. It refers to the phenomenon whereby the time aboard a spaceship traveling at a rate approaching the speed of light passes more slowly than time passes on Earth. To illustrate, you could have a situation where a number of years had passed on Earth, while aboard the ship it seemed as though only a day had passed. Thus a person traveling through space at such a fantastic speed would,

upon returning to Earth, find himself dislocated in time, just as in the Japanese folktale of Urashima Taro.

State of Life Is All Important

Ikeda: That certainly is “relativity.”

In any event, the world that we perceive will be different depending on which of the Ten Worlds we presently are in. The way that we receive impressions of the world around us, both spatially and temporally, changes radically. We could call this the mystery of “state of life.”

“State of life” is the prime focus of Buddhism. Buddhism does not look at people in terms of ethnicity or race. Neither does it view people in terms of level of schooling or social standing. Its gaze is trained directly on the condition of people’s hearts, on the state of their life itself.

Does having a lot of power and influence make someone great? Among powerful people, there are not a few whose lives are ravaged by the worlds of Hunger and Animality. On the other hand, there are ordinary citizens who dwell in the joyous worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

Does graduating from a prestigious university make someone superior to others? Are people of certain ethnicity or race automatically superior? Are people of certain social classes automatically inferior? Definitely not. And yet, throughout all of human history up to the present, people have been viewed with just such prejudices. How great, indeed, are the tragedies that such thinking has produced!

Suda: The history of the twentieth century—whether we look at Nazism or Japanese militarism or the countless bloody class struggles that have occurred—is a history of tragedies resulting from such discriminatory biases.

Saito: Discrimination is the cruel product of prejudice and bigotry. We find similar discriminatory tendencies in the extreme emphasis that many people in Japan today place on educational background.

Ikeda: Buddhism, through the doctrine of the Ten Worlds, views all people in terms of the state of their life. It is therefore wholly impartial. The suffering of someone who is in the state of Hell, for example, is the same, regardless of whether the person is wealthy or poor.

Also, Buddhism recognizes the existence of the world of Buddhahood in all people as a potential. The compassion to strive to help people cultivate and manifest this state is key to the doctrine of the Ten Worlds. And the essence of this doctrine is found in the “Life Span” chapter. Why don’t we discuss the Ten Worlds from the standpoint of the state of life?

Saito: Certainly. As a matter of fact, many members have written requesting a simple and clear explanation of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds that they can use in explaining Buddhism to their friends.

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Urashima Taro and the Ten Worlds

Suda: There was a reference to the twins paradox or the Urashima effect with regard to relativity of time a moment ago. The story of Urashima Taro from which “Urashima effect” derives its name might provide a good segue to a discussion of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds.

Ikeda: Indeed. It’s a classic tale that every Japanese knows. What do we find when we view the story in terms of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds?

Endo: Well, let’s see. The story begins talking about how the fisherman Urashima Taro comes upon a couple of children who are pestering a turtle on the beach. In terms of the Ten Worlds, the state of life of the children harassing the turtle would probably be that of Animality. For, as the Daishonin says, “It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong” (MW-1, 34).

Suda: Yes. And the turtle that is being toyed with would be in the world of Hell. To get the children to leave the turtle alone, Urashima Taro gives them some money. His actions in doing so would seem to represent one aspect of the world of Bodhisattva. The children who only listen after being given money could now be said to be in world of Hunger.

Endo: Several days later, the turtle, mindful of its debt, pays a visit on Urashima. As a token of gratitude, it offers to take Taro on a tour of the dragon king’s palace.

Saito: To remember and repay one’s debts of gratitude—that must be the world of Humanity. To requite one’s obligations is proof of one’s humanity.

Ikeda: Though a turtle, it still has the world of Humanity.

Saito: Yes. By contrast, there are people who, in forgetting their indebtedness to others, descend to the level of animals. In “The Opening of the Eyes,” the Daishonin teaches the importance of requiting one’s debts, saying, “Even these creatures understood how to repay a debt of gratitude” (MW-2, [2nd ed.], 104).⁸

Suda: At the palace of the dragon king, Taro is welcomed by a princess, with whom he spends an enjoyable time drinking and dancing. Here, he is definitely in the world of Rapture or Heaven.

Incidentally, inclusion of the dragon king’s palace is thought to be indicative of the influence of Buddhist texts. The “Devadatta” (twelfth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, for example, mentions the “palace of the dragon king Sagara” (LS12, 185) at the bottom of the ocean.

Endo: Taro has such a wonderful time that he forgets all about returning home,

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and before he knows it three years have gone by. Since he is dwelling in a rapturous world, the time passes in what seems but an instant. At length, Taro informs the princess of his departure, and leaves bearing under his arm a small chest that she has given him as a memento.

When he returns back to the land, Taro is astonished at what he finds: the world is completely different. During the three years he spent in the palace of the dragon king, 300 years had passed on Earth. Earth time had left him behind and gone far ahead. This is what is meant by the Urashima effect in physics.

When he realizes what has happened, Urashima Taro becomes deeply despondent. All of his relatives are gone. He does not have a single friend. And everywhere he turns, he sees things that are strange and unfamiliar.

Ikeda: It might be said that Taro's state of life at this moment is that of Hell. Everything he sees and hears amounts to an outright denial of his very existence. There is no "place" for him in the world. In the bat of an eye, Taro's "life-space" has completely vanished.

Suda: At that point, Taro opens the little chest, which represents his last hope. Smoke comes billowing out, and in an instant Taro's hair turns white and he is transformed into a tottering old man. He suddenly fades into senility, and in a daze he sits down on the beach. This is a really dramatic last scene.

Ikeda: What world would you say he is in at that point?

Endo: That's a tough one. I see Taro, who was already in the state of Hell, as having fallen into a state of even deeper despair. But that would make it an extremely sad ending.

Suda: And it would mean that the princess had given him a really cruel gift.

Ikeda: In that light, as one interpretation, this might indicate entrance into the realm of the two vehicles, or the worlds of Learning and Realization. Nichiren Daishonin says: "The fact that all things in this world are transient is perfectly clear to us. Is this not because the worlds of the two vehicles are present in the world of Humanity?" (MW-1, 52-53). While the story itself does not say so, it might be that the aged Taro has glimpsed something of the impermanence of existence that he had not comprehended before.

Saito: The story concludes by telling us, "Those joyous days were gone forever." That is certainly not a happy ending. All the same, the ending seems to be trying to suggest that, having wandered through the realm of the six worlds, he has finally arrived at a point where he can perceive the existence of the worlds of Learning and Realization.

Suda: From another perspective, the story invites us to reflect deeply on the

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meaning of life and human existence.

Ikeda: When we internalize Buddhism’s perspective on life, we can understand the essence of anything we see or hear from a much deeper perspective. This is an important part of the reason for Buddhist study. The question “What is true human happiness?” forms the basis of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds.

Hell—A Groan of Rage

Ikeda: Next, let’s consider each of the Ten Worlds in light of the sutras and the Goshō. As the major premise, we should bear in mind that it is only with the Lotus Sutra’s revelation of the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds that we can talk about the Ten Worlds as conditions of human life. I would like to further delve into the significance of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds on another occasion. Without understanding that each world is endowed with all Ten Worlds, the beings in each of the Ten Worlds can only be understood as dwelling in distinct and separate realms, and as having absolutely no contact with or relation to one another.

Saito: In other words, because the beings in the world of Humanity—meaning us—have all of the Ten Worlds in our lives, the Ten Worlds can be understood in terms of states or conditions of life. Moreover, it is because of this that we can talk about changes in state of life.

Suda: The names of each of the Ten Worlds appear in the “Benefits of the Teacher of the Law” (nineteenth) chapter. It states:

[T]hey will gain twelve hundred ear benefits with which to purify their ears so they can hear all the different varieties of words and sounds in the thousand-millionfold world, down as far as the Avichi hell, up to the Summit of Being, and in its inner and outer parts.... [M]en’s voices, women’s voices,...voices of heavenly beings,...asura voices,...voices of hell dwellers, voices of beasts, voices of hungry spirits,...voices of voice-hearers, voices of pratyekabuddhas, voices of bodhisattvas and voices of Buddhas. (LS19, 252–53)

Ikeda: That’s right. We need to help people overcome their sufferings and become happy by using the “voices of bodhisattvas” and the “voices of Buddhas.” We cannot simply remain silent.

Endo: Based on this passage, the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China formulated the doctrine of the Ten Worlds—namely, Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Rapture (Heaven), Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood—existing in people’s lives.

Of the Ten Worlds, the six worlds from Hell to Rapture, known as the “six

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paths,” are based on the worldview of Brahmanism, which was widespread in India in Shakyamuni’s time. According to Brahman teaching, all beings dwell in places or realms that belong to one of the six paths, and into which they are born according to their past actions, or karma. The key idea is that of retribution according to the law of cause and effect; people are held to transmigrate through these six paths according to the causes they make.

The worlds from Learning to Buddhahood, known as the “four noble worlds,” represent the states of those beings who have freed themselves from this transmigration in the six paths.

Suda: Why don’t we consider these states one at a time. First there is the world of Hell. This comes from a Sanskrit term *naraka*, which literally means an underground prison.

Ikeda: A variant of this term *naraku* survives in the modern Japanese expression to *fall into the abyss*. The Japanese equivalent of Hell is composed of two characters meaning “earth” and “prison.” “Earth” means the lowest place; and “prison” indicates the state of being bound and shackled and totally immobilized. Hell is the most miserable state, one in which a person is bound hand and foot with suffering.

Endo: In “The True Object of Worship,” Nichiren Daishonin says “rage is the world of Hell” (MW-1, 52). Rage corresponds to anger, one of the three poisons—greed, anger and stupidity. I think this is referring to the state of someone who, when things do not go as he has imagined, harbors feelings of resentment and animosity toward whomever or whatever he supposes upset his plan.

Saito: Yes, only this rage does not have the positive energy to be turned toward others directly. On the contrary, it causes a person to be totally consumed by a sense of deadlock and futility, trapped in emotions that can find no outlet for expression. That’s the state of life it indicates.

Ikeda: While there are many gradations even in the world of Hell, in general Hell indicates a state in which to live is itself painful; where anything you see only makes you feel miserable. A person in this state has an extremely weak life force, and in fact approaches the condition of death. We could describe this “rage” as the groan of a life that has exhausted every possible avenue.

Endo: One can hear such a despairing groan in the tortured voices of youth who try to commit suicide or among delinquents. “Life is just too painful,” they may say. “There is no place for me in this world.”

When their “life-space” approaches absolute zero, people may come to the conclusion that they have no alternative but to die. This truly is the state of Hell. It breaks my heart just thinking of people in such a state.

Ikeda: Such people need someone—anyone—to be at their side. They need someone who will be with them and listen to what they have to say; someone who will offer even just a few words of encouragement. That’s all it may take for the flame of “life” to spring up anew in the heart of someone who is suffering deeply. Just knowing that someone cares about them causes their “life-space” to expand.

When people have a genuine sense that, no matter how difficult their present circumstances, they are not alone, but are vitally connected with others and with the world, they will be able to stand up without fail. This is the power inherent in life. It is important, therefore, that we form “good relations,” that we develop bonds with people who can have a positive influence on our lives and our Buddhist practice, or “good friends.”

“He Carried Within Himself His Own Little Hell”

Suda: Devadatta represents the world of Hell. Even though he was a disciple of Shakyamuni, Devadatta was a person of great evil who out of envy went so far as to try to kill his mentor.

Saito: In light of the law of cause and effect, since Devadatta persecuted the Buddha, we can say that he was in the world of Hell. But looking at him as an individual, we must also conclude that he must have been suffering in the most miserable state of Hell.

Ikeda: Devadatta probably felt that as long as Shakyamuni was around, nothing would go as he wished. Try though he might in his small-minded way to gain status and recognition, Shakyamuni was always there towering impossibly far above him like the Himalayas. Devadatta, far from being able to respect someone of higher attainment than himself, could not even tolerate such a person’s existence. This is the ugliness of male jealousy.

Such hatred and resentment caused Devadatta’s heart to close and freeze over like ice. This is what the mind of someone in the world of Hell is like. The feeling would be akin to that of being bound hand and foot, totally helpless to change one’s frame of mind on one’s own. This truly is none other than the state of Hell.

Saito: According to a biography of Joseph Stalin, whenever the Soviet dictator met someone who was more outstanding than him, or who possessed some remarkable ability, he was filled with violent jealousy and envy, and stung with hatred.

The author describes Stalin in these terms, “while maintaining an air of calm, he would be panic-stricken”; and, “ on the outside he wore the impression of a hard smile, while inside he was full of foreboding, carrying within himself his own little hell.”⁹

Ikeda: “He carried within himself his own little hell.” That’s a magnificent way of putting it.

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Unable to trust anyone, Stalin was constantly filled with fear and trepidation. He believed he might be betrayed at any moment. Such doubt and suspicion can in itself reduce one to a state of desperate agony. The sense of self of one writhing in the “hell of mistrust” becomes incredibly small, leaving one feeling as if their life was bottled up in a tiny space.

Of course, we can also view the jealousy displayed by Devadatta and Stalin as characteristic of the world of Anger; as well as of the world of Heaven, inasmuch as the desire to willfully manipulate others is emblematic of the devil of the sixth heaven, representing the corrupting and exploitative nature of power that is the negative side of the world of Heaven.

The world of Hell indicates a weakness and a profound inner suffering that a person feels totally powerless to change. Hell is sometimes said to exist under the ground; but in fact it is a state in which one’s life under its own weight sinks further and further down.

A person who is suffering—whether due to family discord, sickness or the flames of jealousy—and whose heart is swirling with rage at whatever it is that has brought on that suffering, will certainly not be able to recognize that the actual cause for the suffering exists in his or her life. That person lacks the life force to be able to perceive it in those terms, and, consequently, feels resentment and anger toward others.

Also, there are instances where someone may direct the flames of rage at themselves and their inability to do anything about the suffering they are experiencing. In that case, the person does not have the strength to take responsibility for their misery and resolve the situation. Instead, he feels only an unassignable resentment at his own impotence, a groan of despair.

Endo: To be without freedom—that is certainly the condition of someone who is in prison.

Ikeda: By contrast, if someone believes in the sanctity of life and believes in people, then his or her mind will be as broad and expansive as the sky—even if the person is incarcerated. This was of course true of Nichiren Daishonin, as it was of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda, the first and second Soka Gakkai presidents.

President Nelson Mandela of South Africa spent 10,000 days (twenty-seven years) living under conditions in prison that can only be described as hellish. It was his dauntless conviction that he would ultimately realize a victory for human dignity that supported him during that time.

“An hour felt like a year,” he says. Unless you have experienced life behind bars, you cannot truly understand these words. And yet, President Mandela did not lose the warmth of his gaze. This is proof of his triumph as a human being.

Saito: When people are faced with trying circumstances or beset by difficulties, they tend to think that they alone are miserable. As a result, they often will feel resentment toward others and society in general, and close off into their own shell.

The world of Hell that Buddhism describes does not indicate a set of external

circumstances or an environment that one is presented with. Rather, I think it indicates the weak life force to be buffeted about and controlled by one's surroundings, and unable to take a single step to extricate oneself.

Ikeda: That's right. It doesn't refer to anything external.

Nichiren Daishonin says:

First of all, as to the question of where exactly hell and the Buddha exist, one sutra states that hell exists underground and another sutra says that the Buddha is in the west. However, closer examination reveals that both exist in our five-foot body. The reason I think so is that hell is in the heart of a man who inwardly despises his father and disregards his mother.... (MW-1, 271)

The Ten Worlds exist within our lives. That's why apart from changing ourselves from within, there is no other way to realize true happiness.

Hunger—Enslavement to Greed

Endo: Next is the world of Hunger.

Hunger derives from the Sanskrit word *preta*, which originally meant "corpse." In Buddhism, the term came to be used to signify a realm of misery, like that of Hell or Animality, into which dead people might fall. Preta also means "ancestral spirit." In India, it was thought that many ancestral spirits were hungry and desirous of food. It seems that that's why the dead came to be referred to as "hungry spirits."

Suda: The Japanese Bon (or Urabon, Skt. ullambana) Festival, a ceremony to appease the souls of deceased ancestors who have fallen into the realm of Hunger, is sometimes referred to as "giving alms to hungry spirits (Jp. segaki)."

Saito: The Daishonin says that the world of Hunger is characterized by greed (MW-1, 52), another one of the three poisons. T'ien-t'ai says, "This state of life is full of hunger and thirst; that's why they are called hungry spirits."¹⁰ It is the state of beings who are tormented by a hunger that nothing can assuage.

Ikeda: Those in the world of Hunger are pulled this way and that by desires. Such a tendency prevents one from feeling inner freedom and produces suffering. A person becomes a slave to his or her desires.

Endo: Yes. But it seems that compared to the world of Hell, the person's "life-space" is somewhat larger, even if only slightly. The person has escaped from a state of complete captivity and hopelessness and is at least living in pursuit of something.

Suda: Desire is, after all, also a manifestation of vital energy. Only, being unable to

quench their desires, people in Hunger invariably experience severe frustration. Not having enough to eat, or lacking adequate clothing or shelter—such hunger and privation is a dire issue of the modern age.

Saito: Yet, there is hunger even in so-called affluent societies. Last year [1996], the American magazine *Newsweek* said of modern American society, “The paradox of our time is that we are feeling bad about doing well.”¹¹

Ikeda: People’s desires are limitless. There is the fundamental desire to live. There is also the instinctive desire for food, the materialistic desire for possessions, and the psychological desire to have attention, for example.

Suda: There is also the desire for power, the desire for fame, and the desire to control. People also desire to be respected and loved.

Ikeda: It’s a fact that we could not live without desires. In many cases, these desires become the energy that enables us to advance and realize self-improvement. That’s why it is said of the world of Hunger, “This path is connected with other paths and leads to both good and evil.”¹²

The real issue, therefore, is how we use desire. Those in the world of Hunger do not use their desire to create value; rather, they become its slave. On account of desire, they themselves suffer and cause injury to others. That’s why the world of Hunger is called an “evil path.”

Saito: Modern civilization could be described as a civilization of the affirmation or liberation of desire. The result is the perverse situation in which desire, having swollen to gargantuan proportions, reigns like a master to which people are enslaved.

Endo: Incidentally, Nichiren Daishonin says regarding the causality of the world of Hunger, “Those who expound teachings with impure motives will receive this retribution” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 429). In other words, he is saying that those who preach with impure motives because they are consumed by desire for fame or profit will fall into the world of Hunger. This well describes the priests of the Nikken sect.

Suda: In the same *Gosho*, the Daishonin also says, “Those who in the past cut down the soothing trees and who razed the gardens and groves for the preachers will receive this retribution” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 429). This passage also seems apropos to Nikken, who rashly cut down some 280 cherry trees on the head temple grounds.

Saito: The Daishonin condemns priests who are consumed by the desire for wealth, calling them “Law-devouring hungry spirits” (MW-4, 93). The Nikken sect, which preys on lay people while wallowing in decadence, is truly an order of

hungry spirits.

Animality—The Stupidity to Be Caught Up in One’s Immediate Circumstances

Suda: What kind of state, then, is Animality?

Saito: Originally, of course, the term refers to the state of animals such as birds or beasts. In “The True Object of Worship,” the Daishonin says, “Foolishness is the world of Animality” (MW-1, 52). Of the three poisons, it corresponds to stupidity. In human terms, those in this state are in essence so caught up in their immediate circumstances that they lose sight of the underlying principles that govern all things.

Endo: As the Daishonin indicates when he says, “It is the nature of beasts to threaten the weak and fear the strong” (MW-1, 34), Animality is the state of someone who lives instinctively, unable to make judgments as to true and false, good and evil. While it would seem that the “life-space” of those in this state is somewhat more expansive than that of those in the world of Hell or Hunger, they are still caught in an evil path.

Ikeda: They lack a sound standard for judging good and evil, a firm moral or ethical foundation. As a result, they act instinctively and without any sense of shame.

To “threaten the weak and fear the strong” is certainly part and parcel of the logic of power. It’s a psychology of survival of the fittest. It could be said that those in this state, while human, have lost their humanity.

Suda: The barbarity of war is the ultimate manifestation of the “logic of power.” Facing combat, soldiers may initially experience pangs of conscience as the consequences of injuring or even killing another person looms before them. But, such feelings are often subordinated to a fear of their superior officers. This allows them to justify the barbarous acts they may commit on the basis of orders from a superior. Their conscience becomes anesthetized. Through the institutionalization of such bestiality, forces such as the Nazis and Japan’s wartime military have gone so far as to commit large-scale atrocities—far beyond what any animal would ever be capable of.

Ikeda: The most dangerous bestiality dwells within human beings. Dostoevsky writes, “People talk sometimes of bestial cruelty, but that’s a great injustice and insult to the beasts; a beast can never be so cruel as a man, so artistically cruel.”¹³

Endo: I think that’s certainly the case. Animals will fight and kill to protect themselves and survive. But they also have a social side, in that they will care for another; although I suppose that this is probably instinctive.

There was an interesting case involving a flock of ordinary starling. It seems

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there was a group of these birds in which one member had an injured leg. Observers noted that when the group discovered a large store of food, the others in the group all waited at the site until the bird with the bad leg arrived, and only then did they began eating.¹⁴

Ikeda: From time to time we hear about cases of people who have grown up entirely in the wild.

Suda: Yes. I recall the case of a French boy who had been abandoned by his parents and grew up in the jungle. Apart from searching for food and nests, he did not show the slightest interest in the world around him. His hearing was normal, but he reportedly did not display any interest in sounds that did not have any relation to food. Also, it is said that he did not show affection or any particular attachment toward anyone.

Ikeda: People only become human if they are educated as human beings. It is not birth that makes us such. Only when one is raised as a human being does one become human. That's why education is so important.

The Japanese writer Yuyu Kiryu (1873–1941) described the world as “the path of animality.” Because there are all too few truly “human” beings, people start wars simply to prove who is strongest. We find ourselves tossed about in a society that is locked in the grip of animality.

To ensure that such are never again repeated, we have to produce a steady stream of humane people, of people overflowing with humanity. That is my conviction and my heartfelt prayer. Kosen-rufu is in a sense a great movement of human education—on the success of which the fate of humankind depends.

Suda: Those in the world of Animality are called “foolish” because, by living according to instinct, happiness forever eludes them.

Ikeda: Even though they imagine that they are moving toward happiness, in the final analysis they are heading in precisely the opposite direction. They only see what is right before their eyes, and they get lost easily and ultimately come to grief.

In the Goshō “Letter from Sado,” the Daishōnin says: “Fish want to survive; they deplore their pond’s shallowness and dig holes to hide in, yet tricked by bait, they take the hook. Birds in a tree fear that they are too low and perch in the top branches, yet bewitched by bait, they too are caught in snares” (MW-1, 34). Because they fly toward the bait that is in front of their eyes, in the end they are destroyed and undone. This is what is meant by “foolishness.”

Suda: It is certainly true that there are many people who live in just this manner.

Endo: Regarding the causes and effects of the world of Animality, the Daishōnin proclaims: “Foolish and lacking a spirit to reflect on themselves, even though they

[certain priests] receive offerings from believers, they do not do anything in return. Such people undergo this retribution [of the world of Animality]" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 430). This exactly describes the corrupt priests of the Nikken sect.

People Who Willingly Enter the Sea of Suffering

Ikeda: The Daishonin says, "warfare [occurs] as a result of anger" (MW-7, 187). The spirit of the world of Hell gives rise to war. Even with the end of World War II, Japan remained a cruel society of the three paths—Hell, Hunger and Animality.

It was President Toda who stood up alone on the scorched earth of the three evil paths and declared, "I want to eradicate poverty and sickness from the face of the Earth!" "I want to eliminate the word *misery!*" He went out among the people proclaiming: "Human revolution is the only way!" "The only way is for people to revolutionize their state of life!" And he succeeded in fundamentally pointing society in the direction of peace and prosperity.

I have followed in President Toda's footsteps. All along, I have fought with the spirit that my life and the life of President Toda are one and inseparable. And in so doing, I have put aside every selfish concern.

The Drama of Encouraging a Mother and Daughter

Endo: I once heard the following experience. It is a bit lengthy, but I would like to introduce it for the sake of our readers.

In the winter of 1957, there was a woman by the name of Tamiko Hayashi who was so worn out by the difficulty of her life that she had decided to commit suicide. Wanting to see her mother one last time before she died, she boarded a train with her last 100-yen bill in hand. This was, of course, before she took faith.

The train was bound for Ogori Station from Nagoya. Mrs. Hayashi, wearing trousers and an apron, felt ashamed of her shabby appearance and shrank from the eyes of others. With her she had her 2-year-old daughter.

Every time the train stopped at a station, vendors selling box lunches would come around. Although the mother and daughter were famished, they did not have any money to buy food.

A young man boarded the train at Maibara or at Kyoto. He was not by any means well dressed. The youth sat down directly opposite Mrs. Hayashi and her daughter. The young man opened up a thick book with a black leather binding (she later learned that it was the *Gosho*) and began intently writing something.

Whenever Mrs. Hayashi's young daughter saw someone selling box lunches, she would say, "Mommy, I'm hungry." Each time they arrived at a station, she asked for the impossible. Feeling wretched and helpless, the mother scolded her, telling her firmly, "No!"

After a while, the youth signaled a vendor and bought two box lunches. "Lucky him," thought the mother. "He can buy not just one but two. Isn't he fortunate!" The young man then handed her one and said, "Please feed this to your child." For a moment Mrs. Hayashi was speechless. What was happening seemed totally

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incomprehensible.

Around them there were many people wearing fine clothes. But they had all regarded her and her daughter with complete indifference. She thought: "But this young man, even though he is not well off himself, gave a box lunch to us, a couple of miserable strangers. It's a wonder that there could be such a person in the world." Mrs. Hayashi still vividly recalls the sense of surprise and appreciation she felt then.

It was all she could manage to say, "Thank you very much." Ashamed of her appearance, she found it impossible to say anything further. To this day she remembers what was in the box lunch. It was two-thirds rice, with the remainder side dishes and fried fish.

Also, she retained an indelible memory of the look in the eyes of the young man. "They were beautiful eyes that beamed with gentleness." The young man got off the train at Osaka. As he alighted, he told her, "Good luck!" A feeling of inexpressible warmth filled her heart. The sound of his voice, too, was unforgettable. Mrs. Hayashi looked again at the youth's eyes. "How warm they are," she thought. At that instant, her resolve to take her own life disappeared.

At Ube she met her mother and spent a month together with her. And then she returned to Nagoya. Shortly thereafter, Mrs. Hayashi heard about Buddhism from a Soka Gakkai member and decided to begin practicing. At the time, it was a rule that an offering of 500 yen had to be made to receive the Gohonzon. But Mrs. Hayashi didn't even have that much money. She worked and prayed and worked, and was finally able to receive the Gohonzon in January 1958.

The following year, on March 22, 1959, a Goshō lecture was held at the Matsuba Elementary School in Toyohashi. The lecturer was President Ikeda (who was then the general administrator of the Soka Gakkai).

Mrs. Hayashi was pregnant with her second child, and was already quite large when she went to Toyohashi. The podium was far away and she could not make out the faces of the leaders. But the moment she heard you begin speaking, President Ikeda, she felt a rush of joy: "Ah, that's the young man I met on the train! There's no doubt about it!"

The voice of the youth she heard on the train that had prompted her to give up thoughts of suicide was unforgettable to her. At that moment she made her lifelong resolve, her lifelong vow: "Even if I should be the last member of the Soka Gakkai in the world, I will always continue following Mr. Ikeda."

The daughter who received the box lunch (Misako Okada) is also practicing today and is a block leader. And the son whom Mrs. Hayashi was carrying at the time of the Goshō lecture in Toyohashi (Masami Hayakawa) is a district leader.

Unless You Go All Out, You Cannot Transform Your State of Life

Saito: That's a wonderful account. I found myself deeply moved. It is truly awesome the way you have given profound encouragement to so many people, President Ikeda. I, too, am determined to earnestly take on the challenge of transforming my state of life.

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Suda: This anecdote well illustrates how a momentary encounter can change a person's heart and even their state of life.

Ikeda: I'm really glad that Mrs. Hayashi and her daughter have found happiness. I find that I simply cannot help but try to encourage people whom I meet. That is the Soka Gakkai spirit.

At any rate, if you truly want to transform your state of life, then you have to put every ounce of strength you've got into it. There's no way you can transform your state of life if your practice is half-hearted. Painful though it may be, it is only by struggling to thoroughly polish and temper your life that you can attain a state of life of great joy. I hope that young people, in particular, will diligently strive to cultivate themselves, with the attitude: "If I don't develop myself now while I am young, then when will I do so?"

We need to strenuously exert ourselves for kosen-rufu with the spirit, "I will elevate my state of life without fail." It is by carrying out such a practice that we can come to truly understand the doctrine of the Ten Worlds.

(The discussion on the Ten Worlds will be continued in subsequent installments.)

1. Translated from the Japanese: *Leo Tolstoy, Torusutoi no Kotoba* (Words of Tolstoy), trans. Fumihiko Konuma (Tokyo: Yayoi Shobo, 1993), p. 94.
2. Editor's note: All quotations from the Lotus Sutra are from: *The Lotus Sutra*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993). For purposes of convenience, all citations from this work will be given in the text and abbreviated as follows: LS followed by the chapter number, and then the page number.
3. Buddhism spread after Shakyamuni's death from India to eastern regions gradually through China, Korea and Japan. Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism in the Latter Day of the Law in turn spreads from Japan to western regions as if Buddhism is returning to its home in India (MW-1, 114, *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 589).
4. Translated from Japanese. *Nanden Daizokyo*, ed. Junjiro Takakusu (Tokyo: Taisho Shinshu Daizokyo Kanko-kai, 1971), vol. 24, p. 154. The Group of Discourses (Sutta-Nipata), vol. 2, trans. K. R. Norman (Oxford: The Pali Text Society, 1992), pp. 45-46.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 157-58.
6. Here and below, the source is: *Koshiro Tamaki, Bukkyo no Kontei ni Aru Mono* (That Which Lies at the Foundation of Buddhism) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1986), p. 22.
7. Law of dependent origination (*engi*): The interdependence of things. It teaches that all beings and phenomena exist or occur only because of their relationship with other beings or phenomena.
8. Editor's note: Quotes from volume 2 of *The Major Writings* are from the revised edition; the page number for the earlier edition is given in brackets.
9. Translated from French: *Victor Serge, Portrait de Staline* (Paris: Editions Bernard

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Grasset, 1940), pp. 180–83.

10. *Hokke Mongu* (Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra), vol. 4.

11. *Newsweek* (U. S. version), January 8, 1996, p. 24.

12. *Kokuyaku Issaikyo Indo Senjutsubu Ronshubu*, vol. 1, ed. Shinyu Iwano (Tokyo: Daito Shuppansha, 1977), p. 114.

13. Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov* (New York: Random House, 1943, 1945), p. 283.

14. Maurice Burton, *Just Like an Animal* (London: Dent, 1978), p. 26.

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