

Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 30

This is the thirtieth 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 July 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

In this discussion, their fifth on the “Life Span of the Thus Come One” (sixteenth) chapter of the Lotus Sutra, they continue to discuss the Ten Worlds, focusing on the worlds of Anger and Humanity. Buddhism teaches that people’s lives and society are inseparable. From this standpoint, the distortions in the age and in society reflect distortions in people’s lives. The doctrine of the Ten Worlds can be understood as a “mirror” for observing and channeling the negative tendencies in life in a positive direction.

30 Turning a Society of Anger Into a Society of Humanism—The Doctrine of the Ten Worlds

Katsuji Saito: Shall we continue our discussion of the Ten Worlds? Last time we talked about the three evil paths of Hell, Hunger and Animality. Today let’s start with the world of Anger.

Daisaku Ikeda: I hope we can really study this in earnest. The purpose of Buddhist study after all is to expand one’s state of life. And the doctrine of the Ten Worlds is like a mirror. As we gaze into it, we can see the true aspect of our own lives. It also enables us to perceive correctly the lives of others and society, and understand what we can do to contribute to others’ well-being.

Haruo Suda: Yes. In contrast to the three evil paths, the worlds of Anger, Humanity and Heaven (or Rapture) are termed the three good paths. Together these make up the six paths.

Takanori Endo: What seems odd to me is that while the world of Anger is considered one of the four evil paths when grouped together with Hell, Hunger and Animality, it is also considered as one of the three good paths. How can it be both good and evil?

Ikeda: We will need to give that some thought. Perhaps we can begin by considering the fundamental meaning of these terms.

Anger—The Arrogance To Look Down on Others

Endo: “Anger” (Jp. *shura*), in the “world of Anger,” derives from the Sanskrit term *asura*. In ancient India, *asura* originally represented a class of benevolent deities. But in later mythology, they came to be regarded as contentious demons who ceaselessly fight with gods.

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Suda: Nichiren Daishonin explains that the world of Anger is characterized by “perversity,” meaning a mind that is fawning and crooked (MW-1, 52). An example of perversity can be seen in the case of a disloyal person who hides his or her true feelings while making a show of loyalty. Such behavior is certainly “fawning and crooked.”

Endo: The word *anger* calls to mind the image of someone standing with a proud and confident air—certainly the opposite of fawning.

So it can also be said that, at first glance, someone in the world of Anger might even appear to be humble.

Ikeda: Indeed, and therein lies a problem. Anger is fundamentally an arrogant state of life.

But arrogance can be understood in any number of ways; Buddhist tradition, for example, identifies seven or nine types of arrogance. Nonetheless Anger, in essence, indicates one’s attachment to the illusory assumption that they are better than others.

Those in the world of Anger think of themselves as the most wonderful people. The energy of the world of Anger is directed toward sustaining and enhancing this image. To ensure that others think of them in similarly glowing terms, they can never reveal their true feelings, but act in a fawning, obsequious manner.

Endo: In other words, the person’s inner feelings and outward appearance are out of accord. As a result, the person says things that are not in his heart. This is a tendency we do not find in people in the three evil paths. It is a fairly sophisticated, even intellectual, operation.

Saito: In the *Maka Shikan* (Great Concentration and Insight) the Great Teacher T’ien-t’ai of China says of those in the world of Anger that there is a discrepancy between what is in their hearts and how they appear outwardly. He comments:

Since those in the world of Anger desire in every instance to be superior to everyone else and cannot bear to be inferior to anyone, they belittle and despise others and exalt themselves, like a hawk flying high and looking down on the world. At the same time, outwardly they seek to display the virtues of benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. While manifesting a mind of minor goodness, they follow the path of Anger.¹

In their hearts, they cannot tolerate the existence of someone more capable or more respectable than themselves. They cannot truly respect others, because they believe that they alone are worthy of respect. A burning desire to surpass all others is their exclusive focus.

Outwardly, however, they do not give the least hint of such an obsession. They conduct themselves as virtuous people of benevolence, justice, propriety, wisdom and fidelity. By so doing, they try to convince others that these are their true

qualities, and may even come to believe this themselves.

Endo: They may even delude themselves into believing they are better than others because they are “so humble.”

Suda: There is clearly a great disparity between what is in their hearts and what we see. Fundamentally, people in the world of Anger are dishonest.

Ikeda: Those who abandoned their faith and betrayed the Soka Gakkai, turning against their fellow members, were all people whose lives were entirely consumed by such a state of Anger. We must never allow ourselves to be deceived by appearances.

Saito: As the phrase *fawning and crooked* suggests, their hearts are genuinely twisted.

Ikeda: That’s right. Since their hearts are crooked, they can see neither themselves nor others correctly. Looking at things through the “distorted lens” of arrogance, they think they are larger than life. As a result, they neither desire to learn from others nor are they capable of honest self-reflection, both of which are the means to grow as human beings.

In the “Ongi Kuden” (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings), Nichiren Daishonin cites a passage from the *Hokke Mongu Ki* (Annotations on the Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra) regarding the difference between “arrogance” and “self-importance”: “‘Because they conceal their failings, flaunt their virtues,’ refers to arrogance. ‘Incapable of self-reflection’ refers to self-importance” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 718).

Saito: Hiding one’s own faults while advertising one’s virtues is “arrogance.” Arrogant people haughtily suppose that they have attained the effects of Buddhist practice when they have not. Such attachment to one’s own arbitrary views and the inability to self-reflect is certainly “self-importance.”

Ikeda: The “Expedient Means” (second) chapter of the Lotus Sutra says that the people of an impure age are “arrogant and puffed up with self-importance, fawning and devious, insincere in mind” (LS2, 37).² In other words, while having a strong sense of self-importance and inflated pride, their minds are crooked. And they are dishonest and insincere. This well describes the state of affairs in society.

Suda: In modern Japanese, the term originally meaning “self-importance” has an entirely different connotation. For example, mothers often scold their children by saying what literally translates as, “Show some self-importance!” by which they really mean, “Be patient!” This is a remarkable change of meaning. The intention is certainly not to encourage children to develop an overweening sense of self-importance.

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Fear of Exposure

Ikeda: At some point, the term *self-importance* came to mean “suppressing self-importance,” or “persevering.” I wonder why that happened. Perhaps it has to do with the way arrogant people can summon forth a tremendous amount of energy or will power to protect their inflated self-image.

Saito: It would be wonderful if such people could channel that energy into self-improvement. But unfortunately they use it merely to protect the “illusory image” to which they are so attached.

Ikeda: That is the misery of the world of Anger. The hearts of those in this state are always filled with fear—fear that their true nature will be exposed. In the “Letter from Sado,” Nichiren Daishonin says: “An arrogant man will be overcome with fear when he meets a strong enemy, just like the haughty ashura who shrank and hid himself in a lotus flower blossoming in Munetchi Lake when reproached by Taishaku” (MW-1, 35).

On the other hand, one with the heart of a lion king is totally fearless. That’s because such a person is concerned not with protecting himself, but with protecting the Law and the people.

Endo: Someone in the state of Anger has a sense of self that assumes gargantuan proportions: “An ashura stands 84,000 *yojana*³ in height, and water of the four oceans comes no higher than his knees.”⁴ While so enormous in size that even standing in the ocean, the water only comes up to its knees, this is still only its subjective sense of self, not its true form.

Suda: An arrogant person labors under illusions of personal grandeur. But when the person’s arrogant illusions are shattered by the presence of someone possessing genuine strength—such as the god Taishaku, in the above example—the person becomes so small that he can even conceal himself in a lotus flower on a pond.

Endo: A person in such a state is like a punctured balloon.

Saito: Looking at things in this way, the *ashura* would seem to embody characteristics found in a great many people today. I am struck in particular by the strong similarities between Buddhism’s depiction of the world of Anger and Dr. M. Scott Peck’s analysis of “evil” in his book *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil*.

Endo: I’ve read that, too. His main point is that the corrupt individual who casually tells lies is definitely not an exception, but appears in all walks of life.

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Saito: That's right. The characteristic of such people, according to Peck, is that "deep down, [they] feel themselves to be faultless."⁵ He also says:

Utterly dedicated to preserving their self-image of perfection, they are unceasingly engaged in the effort to maintain the appearance of moral purity. They worry about this a great deal.... While they seem to lack any motivation to be good, they intensely desire to appear good. Their "goodness" is all on a level of pretense.⁶

Suda: In other words, outwardly they display a mind of minor goodness.

Endo: A little earlier we discussed the energy of "self-importance." In this connection, Peck writes that one is "struck by the extraordinary willfulness of evil people."⁷ He also says: "They are likely to exert themselves more than most in their continuing effort to obtain and maintain an image of high respectability. They may willingly, even eagerly, undergo great hardships in their search for status."⁸

Ikeda: The problem is that such efforts all emerge from their egoistic hearts. Buddhism teaches that the heart is most important. Even if two people are making comparable efforts, the resulting effects will differ greatly if one person is motivated by some value transcending the self, such as good or beauty, or the well-being of others, while the other is solely motivated by ego.

From our standpoint, faith means determining that one's fundamental objective in life is to advance kosen-rufu, and then thoroughly dedicating oneself to that cause.

By contrast, those whom I mentioned earlier who abandoned their faith and actually betrayed the Soka Gakkai had succumbed to the mistaken notion that the organization for kosen-rufu somehow exists to help them further their own private interests. Full of arrogance and unable to respect their fellow members, such people have used the organization, used their positions, and used me personally in an attempt to flaunt their supposed greatness.

Saito: And when you have seen through their pretenses, President Ikeda, the tendency of these people has been to react with strong personal animosity toward you.

Suda: They ought to have sincerely self-reflected, but instead they began attacking you out of bitter resentment.

Endo: Doesn't that psychology also spring from the desire to protect a self-image that is based on illusion? In the book that I mentioned a moment ago, Dr. Peck says, "The evil attack others instead of facing their own failures.... Instead of destroying others they should be destroying the sickness within themselves."⁹ Such people, he says, "are characterized by their absolute refusal to tolerate the

sense of their own sinfulness.”¹⁰

Suda: That certainly is the image of someone who cannot self-reflect. As a result of this inability, the person feels deep resentment toward others.

Saito: Up to now, we have tended to identify anger with a strong desire to prove oneself better than others. This may actually offer a profound insight into human nature. Could it be that anger is some fateful side of human nature that is directly linked with self-awareness?

The three evil paths are states of life in which people are completely overwhelmed by their environment. But those in the world of Anger have one foot free; they have a self that is in some degree sheltered from the influence of their environment or immediate circumstances.

Suda: That’s probably why Anger is not counted as one of the three evil paths.

Saito: But there is a strong tendency for people, the moment they gain such subjective self-awareness, to become dominated by the desire to be better than others.

Ikeda: How can this tendency be overcome? That is the jumping-off point for entering the world of Humanity. Ultimately, it is when we learn to channel the energy that had formerly been directed toward winning over others into winning over ourselves that we enter the world of Humanity.

But before we begin discussing the world of Humanity, why don’t we give some thought to the state of envy that is a great hallmark of the world of Anger?

A “Society of Envy” Will Decline

Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?

Medicine King, you should know that after the Thus Come One has entered extinction, if there are those who can copy, uphold, read and recite this sutra, offer alms to it and expound it for others, then the Thus Come One will cover them with his robe, and they will also be protected and kept in mind by the Buddhas who are now present in other regions. Such persons possess the power of great faith, the power of aspiration, the power of good roots. You should know that such persons lodge in the same place as the Thus Come One, and the Thus Come One pats them on the head with his hand. (LS10, 164–65)

Ikeda: Nichiren Daishonin, describing his contemporaries [in thirteenth-century Japan], says, “their thoughts [are] filled with jealousy” (MW-6, 177). Indeed, the same could be said of people today.

A country that is dominated by envy—and this does not only apply to Japan—is

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sure to decline. That's because people in such a society, rather than respecting those who have achieved some measure of success or attainment, desire only to drag them down. The ancient Greek city-state of Athens offers a good example.

Endo: The practice of ostracism well illustrates the deep-seated envy and jealousy that permeated Athenian society, and the destruction that it wrought. In the name of constraining tyranny, there was a system in which people could vote to determine that someone was a potential tyrant and have that person banished from the city.

Suda: In fact, President Ikeda, you once introduced a passage from Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks*, that explained what a nefarious system this was.

In one instance, an illiterate man approached Aristides, a person of exemplary virtue. The man, unable to write and not realizing to whom he was talking, asked Aristides to write the name *Aristides* on the sherd, naming him as the person he wished to have banished. Aristides asked the man if Aristides had ever done him any injury. "None at all," the man replied, "Neither know I the man; but I am tired of hearing him everywhere called the Just."¹¹ Upon hearing this, Aristides, saying nothing, returned the sherd with his own name on it. And he was banished.

Plutarch writes:

The spirit of the people, now grown high, and confident with their late victory, naturally entertained feelings of dislike to all of more than common fame and reputation. Coming together, therefore, from all parts into the city, they banished Aristides by the ostracism, giving their jealousy of his reputation the name of fear of tyranny.¹²

Ikeda: This is an important historical lesson.

As the country prospered, the people became conceited and swollen with self-importance and lost the spirit to respect others. When someone even slightly better than the norm appeared, the citizenry would try to pull the person down out of envy. As a result, people of the highest caliber disappeared from Athens, with only people of inferior ability remaining.

Eventually, Athens found itself without people who could manage the affairs of state. It declined, and finally was defeated in war. And so the curtain fell on Athens' glorious history.

Saito: Jealousy is truly fearful. As we've seen, it can destroy a country.

What is the true nature of envy? There is a great deal of research on the subject, but the Japanese philosopher Kiyoshi Miki writes: "A person feels envy toward someone who has a higher standing, or a more fortunate situation than he.... Moreover, envy prompts a person not to try to improve his own position, but rather to try to drag others down to his own level."¹³

It Is Better To Be Envied Than To Be Envious

Ikeda: Rather than seeking to elevate themselves in order to become a better person in their own right, they try to drag the other person down. Such arrogance is of no benefit whatsoever to anyone under any circumstances. Even if one pursues this course with all one's might, no good will come of it. Injuring others won't improve one's own lot in the least.

The chief concern of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds is the pursuit of happiness. No true happiness can be found in the desire to be better than others that is characteristic of the world of Anger. People in this state are constantly chafing at those who are better than them, while fearful that their true nature will be exposed. To cover up their cowardice, they enviously try to drag others down. But, in truth, the more they do so, the more miserable they themselves become.

Suda: Why is that?

Ikeda: When someone is envious, it is actually because he or she is inwardly aware that in some regard the other person is superior. There is a saying that envy is a [perverse] form of praise; to be envious of someone is to inwardly recognize the person's superiority. But this is something those in the world of Anger want to avert their eyes from.

Suda: They make no attempt to assess just how petty their own lives are. When it comes to this, it turns out they have a good deal of pride.

Ikeda: This pride makes those in the state of Anger miserable. The more they realize the superior qualities of others, the more they envy and resent them; and, consequently, the more they become aware of the dreariness and pointlessness of their own existence. The angst that they feel at this awareness compels them to turn on others with added fury. It's a vicious circle.

In truth, to the extent that we can genuinely respect what is lofty and admirable in others we can develop good qualities in ourselves. Goethe laments of his contemporaries who were engaged in scholarly and literary activities: "True greatness is hateful to them; they would fain drive it from the world, so that only such as they might be of importance in it."¹⁴

Saito: It is certainly the case that no good comes of envy. As Kiyoshi Miki writes: "Envy is constantly very busy. I don't know of any emotion that is at once as busy and yet as unproductive as envy."¹⁵ He is describing the power of envy that drives people to spend their time doing all kinds of pointless things.

Ikeda: What do you suppose causes a person to reach such a point? That is the crux of the matter.

Endo: A little earlier we said that someone in the state of Anger is cowardly. Is it

perhaps the case that the roots of envy are also to be found in a lack of self-confidence?

As evidence, people who are envious have a hard time recognizing that they are attacking others out of envy. Instead, they invariably find some pretext to justify their actions. That's because the moment they recognize that they are jealous, they must recognize that they are inferior to the other person. And for someone who seeks to always be better than others, this can be unbearable.

Saito: Therefore, people who are envious always don a mask of righteousness.

Suda: Certainly. Unscrupulous journalists are a good example. These are people who think nothing of lying to bring someone down. Moreover, outwardly they always strike an upstanding pose, pontificating about social justice, freedom of speech and so on. When they find someone to pick on, they employ every base means available to them to injure the person. The conclusion is decided from the outset.

In the view of one critic, such journalists are not reporting facts, but merely making up stories and mass-distributing them.

Endo: How many people have had their human rights violated by such unethical individuals! It would seem that persecution by the tabloid media is the modern equivalent of Athenian ostracism. If nothing is done about the situation, it seems to me, contemporary society is sure to decline, as did ancient Greek society. For the more outstanding someone's actions, the more these people will envy and try to drag the person down.

False Equality

Saito: It seems to me that the existence of malicious and base tabloid journals is symptomatic of a society that is steeped in envy. Conversely, it is the sentiment of envy swirling through society that makes it possible for such malice to exist in the first place. Isn't a false egalitarianism a key ingredient in the soil from which it emerges? By "false egalitarianism," I mean the negative sense of equality that demands that everyone be lined up shoulder to shoulder in perfect conformity.

Suda: You're suggesting that this kind of equality produces the envy that prompts people to try to pull down anyone who stands out.

Ikeda: Certainly, it may be that such conformism is at the root of the phenomena in Japanese schools of bullying. If a student is in some way different from others, he or she is immediately singled out for harassment. In such an environment of conformism, unless one gets in with the majority, one will become a social outcast.

In a sense, envy directed toward those who stand out and bullying are both products of conformism. In that light, it is very interesting that Athens was the birthplace of democracy.

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Suda: I guess the pursuit of equality under democracy intensifies envy because it tries to force everyone into a mold.

Ikeda: Of course, that's not true equality. True equality starts from the recognition that each person is unique—like cherry, plum, peach and damson blossoms.¹⁶ Equality is for each person to be able to fully manifest his or her individuality; and democracy impartially gives all people this opportunity.

If people are evaluated based on a rigid set of criteria in the name of democracy, then those who do not meet the criteria of that system effectively have no ground on which to stand.

Saito: Japan's current education system functions in large measure to establish a ranking of individuals on the basis of achievement in tests. We live in a society in which success in life or happiness means entering the top schools and working at the leading companies, where academic credentials are the key determinant. Under the circumstances, while it might appear that people are being treated equally, that is not in fact the case, and there will always be winners and losers.

There is no medicine for curing the sense of defeat felt by those who lose. The "winners," on the other hand, will automatically feel superior to others in all areas, even though their only real success may be in having done well on examinations.

Suda: It would seem that this is the soil from which envy and bullying grow.

Endo: In the past, being a "good" student didn't count for anything at all in the society of children. Rather, it was things like being able to throw stones well, or knowledge about insects that could win one a certain measure of respect and status among one's peers. No wonder there was little tendency in such an environment for children to gang up on those who were good at studying.

Ikeda: Conformism is narrow-mindedness. Envy and bullying, and the cruel struggles of the world of Anger are born of such narrow-mindedness.

What is needed is the broad-mindedness to respect others. The ultimate articulation of such broad-mindedness is the Lotus Sutra, which explains that all people possess the world of Buddhahood. And its ultimate expression is the world of Buddhahood.

Conformism is a major issue not only in Japan but around the world. The tendency is for people to make economics their sole standard of value, and to classify countries as "advanced" or "developing" on that basis. But if we change the standard, the map of the world changes entirely. For example, if we viewed the countries of the world instead in terms of degree of family harmony, or degree of respect for nature or some other criterion, then the ones that qualified as "advanced" and "developing" would be completely different.

In the twenty-first century, it will be imperative that the peoples of the world learn to respect one another based on a pluralistic outlook.

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A Bulwark for Protecting Human Rights

Endo: This is a necessary word of caution for Japan, in particular, since the Japanese have a strong tendency toward conformism. The combination of a tradition of collectivism with conformism is a sure recipe for fascism. It produces an unwillingness to tolerate people's individual refusal to go along with the majority, which amounts to trampling on their human rights.

Suda: To put it another way, in Japanese society the more everyone is the same, the more comfortable everyone feels. The psychology is analogous to that of a group of people all jaywalking together; because of their number, they don't feel afraid.

Ikeda: Because of the very real danger that Japan may again slip into nationalism, this is the time when we have to really fight hard to foster individuals who possess sound conviction.

Saito: Nationalistic elements in Japan attack the Soka Gakkai precisely because it has become a "bulwark" for the protection of human rights.

Ikeda: We have to struggle bravely with the indomitable spirit of lion kings. The Lotus Sutra enables us to manifest the power of bounding lions. Only Bodhisattvas of the Earth and Buddhas are able to manifest "the lion's ferocity" (LS15, 218).

Toward evil, we have to fight with the intensity of *ashura* or a charging demon. Buddhism is victory or defeat. We have no choice but to win. When we thoroughly exert ourselves for *kosen-rufu*, the life of *ashura* manifests the function of Buddhahood. This is the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The Buddhas and bodhisattvas existing throughout time and space heartily applaud when they see such valiant, dedicated efforts.

On the other hand, to fight solely for oneself is lowly and base. To look down on and harm others based on one's ego is the nature of Devadatta. Those who are dominated by the spirit to be better than others are themselves miserable.

Saito: In that position one is certainly miserable.

I suppose that Devadatta, who became Shakyamuni's arch enemy, had the deep-seated desire to be "better than" Shakyamuni. And toward that end, he soiled his hand with all kinds of evil machinations. Still, Shakyamuni was perfectly calm and self-possessed. Every time he saw Shakyamuni's composure, Devadatta must have been filled with chagrin and driven further down the path of Anger, as though reminded of his own pettiness. In the end, he tumbled into a state of life of Hell.

Suda: Devadatta advocated practices¹⁷ more severe than those advocated by Shakyamuni, and maintained an upright and humble appearance. This is the working of a "mind of minor goodness."

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Ikeda: Those in the world of Anger deceive themselves and deceive others; they live a life of lies built upon lies. They are neither able to experience true fulfillment nor expand their state of life. Clinging to their own puny illusory sense of self while making a false show of strength, they lead a pitiful existence.

Endo: Another passage in the book we talked about a moment ago, *People of the Lie*, reads:

Forever fleeing the light of self-exposure and the voice of their own conscience, they are the most frightened of human beings. They live their lives in sheer terror. They need not be consigned to any hell; they are already in it.¹⁸

Ikeda: An arrogant mind is always bobbing this way and that. It never knows a moment's calm. People who are envious try to upset the lives of others while their own lives are in fact in the throes of the wildest of fluctuations.

The Daishonin describes the befuddled vision of the enemies of the Lotus Sutra, saying: "Those who are unable to reflect on their own errors, being overcome with envy, have their eyes spinning around in their heads. However, it seems to them that the mountains themselves are heaving" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1453). A great mountain is unmoving. Those who nevertheless make a great commotion as though the mountains were heaving and shaking reveal that their own eyes are agog.

Saito: The "mirror" for discerning this is the doctrine of the Ten Worlds. Many people, influenced by those filled with envy whose eyes are turning over and over, cannot correctly judge the greatness of a large mountain.

Ikeda: That is indeed the state that the sutra describes where it says, "Since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?" (LS10, 164).

Our examination of the world of Anger has become quite lengthy, but this is perhaps inevitable because, as the sutra says, hatred and jealousy abound. It is a subject with a great deal of relevance to the state of affairs in the world today.

Humanity—The Path of Self-mastery

Saito: This brings us to the world of Humanity. In contrast to the world of Anger, which is characterized by the desire to be better than others, the world of Humanity indicates a state of life of victory over the self. When I first heard this, it struck me as quite a revelation.

Ikeda: Strictly speaking, the world of Humanity is the first step toward attaining a state of self-mastery, the culmination of which is to be found in the worlds of Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

Citing a familiar Buddhist concept, the Daishonin says, "Those who devote

themselves to the three treasures and uphold the five precepts, will be born again as human beings" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 430). The teachings of both the three devotions¹⁹ and the five precepts²⁰ signify the effort to advance along the correct path in life. When we follow this path, our life becomes stable; we are not tossed about this way and that the way someone with an arrogant mind is.

Broadly speaking, the teaching of the three devotions indicates a spirit of faith. Haughty people in the world of Anger cannot recognize anyone as better. They cannot bow their heads to anyone. But as a result, in the final analysis they become the slaves of their own arrogance and captives of evil. Those in the world of Humanity, by contrast, humbly and most sincerely respect those of higher attainment and ability, and, consequently, accrue inner wealth.

The teaching of the five precepts is not something that seeks to bind our life from without. They could be described, rather, as a standard or vow that is internalized, a path in life. When we understand that breaking the five precepts produces the effect of suffering, and become able to control ourselves with our own intellect, we are in the world of Humanity.

Suda: In Sanskrit, *human being* is signified by the term *manusya*, which means "thinking being" or "one who thinks." From that standpoint, I guess that intellect is the key condition of humanity.

Nichiren Daishonin says, "The wise may be called human, but the thoughtless are no more than animals" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 240).²¹ Beings in this state possess a greater ability to correctly discern the good and evil of things than do those dwelling in the three or the four evil paths.

Saito: T'ien-t'ai cites "the ability to widely recognize causes in anticipation of future effects" as the distinguishing characteristic of Humanity. In other words, to dwell in the world of Humanity means to understand the principle of cause and effect to a certain degree.

Endo: The May issue of the *Daibyakurenge* carried an interview with Professor Sallie King (of James Madison University in Harrisonburg, Virginia) on Buddhism's philosophy of human rights. The article contained a discussion of the five precepts.

Professor King noted, for example, that if one were to undertake the first precept of Buddhism, not to harm others, it would obviously be for the other person's good. But such restraint would, at the same time, also be in one's own interest. Because, as she rightly points out, the karmic consequences of such an act would accrue to the perpetrator. In this sense, the Buddhist perspective of human rights, which has, at its foundation, the good of all people, is quite different from that in the West.

Ikeda: The modern significance of Buddhism becomes all the more clear. Buddhism clarifies the path of fulfillment for both oneself and others; it reveals the correct path in life for human beings. Because we are advancing along the correct

path, we lead stable lives, realizing progressive improvement and growth.

Regarding the state of Humanity, in the Gosho "The True Object of Worship," the Daishonin says, "calmness is [the world] of Humanity" (MW-1, 52).

Suda: It is a state of calm and tranquillity, as when one takes a moment's rest after a hard day's work.

Endo: For me, I associate the "calmness" that the Daishonin speaks of with the last scene in the novel *Shin Heike Monogatari* (New Tale of the Heike), by the popular Japanese writer Eiji Yoshikawa (1892–1962).

It is the scene where Abe-no-Asatori and his wife, Yomogi, peasants who have observed the continuous struggles between the Minamoto and Taira clans for hegemony over a half century, have an intense discussion. While viewing the cherry flowers of Mount Yoshino, and looking back on the tumultuous past, the couple feel an acute sense of happiness.

When it comes to human happiness, where we are at right now is the happiest point that can be reached.... Why, even so, do people all shed blood and fight over rank and power?

There is no use comparing individual differences in talent, or the different professions and missions that people pursue in life. Those who thoroughly dedicate themselves to their work in life are all respectable; that's what is important. There is no difference among them as human beings.²²

To me, this ordinary elderly couple that had miraculously managed to survive in an age rife with war represents the world of Humanity.

Ikeda: That's a famous scene. While perhaps ordinary and unremarkable, they display a splendid radiance as human beings.

Those in the world of Anger vie with one another in their quest for status and power, spilling blood and doing injury to one another. But the two of them lived true to their hearts. Without comparing themselves to others, they strove to follow through on their own path. Even in a society characterized by Anger, those who persist in following such a path attain the peace of mind, the world of Humanity.

Peace of mind or calmness are definitely not something that can be gained without diligent effort. Unless we make steadfast effort, our state of life will inevitably be colored by our environment or those around us.

Suda: Certainly, the tendency is for someone in the world of Humanity to quickly be pulled down into one of the three evil paths or the world of Anger on account of external influences of various kinds. This is evident in our everyday lives. It is extremely difficult to maintain a calm and tranquil self. At the slightest thing, one may become downcast or filled with rage.

Living Humanely Makes Us Human

Ikeda: That is precisely the challenge of leading a humane existence. And this is all the more difficult because this is the Latter Day of the Law and we are surrounded by negative influences. For precisely this reason, to live as human beings we need to follow a path of continuous advance. This path is none other than our Buddhist practice.

When a top stops spinning, it falls over. It is only stable when it is rotating at a high speed.

It is not being born human that makes one a human being. Isn't it the case that we only become human when we make tenacious effort to live as human beings? In the early twentieth century, there was an episode in which two girls who had been raised by a pack of wolves were rescued by residents of a small village near Calcutta, India. The girls were about 2 and 8 years old at the time. When they were found, while their features were human, in their actions and activities they were no different from wolves. During the day, they would sleep in the corner of a dark room, or would lie perfectly still without moving in the least. At night, they would prowl around the vicinity, and would howl aloud repeatedly. They could neither eat with their hands nor stand up on two feet.

Saito: I heard about that. Later, various efforts were made to somehow help them behave as humans, but until their deaths their habits as wolves reportedly stayed with them largely unchanged.

Ikeda: That's right. Pitifully, the younger of the two children died shortly thereafter. And while the elder girl lived another nine years, even at the age of 17 she reportedly managed to use only four or five words.

Saito: It may be that being born as a human being means nothing more than that one has the potential to become human.

Ikeda: That's why education is so important. We need humanistic education to become human beings.

Endo: Come to think of it, I once heard the following episode. A child returned home after getting a perfect score on a test. Right off the bat his mother asked him how many children in the class had gotten perfect scores. When he answered that many had, she replied, "Then it's only natural that you should have gotten a perfect score."

Suda: A child, it seems, can never do well enough.

Endo: Often parents don't try to see what their children have learned or how they have developed. Instead, they are concerned only with how their children compare to their peers. This approach would seem to lend itself to producing

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people who dwell in the world of Anger.

Ikeda: It is becoming increasingly difficult to lead a simple, humane existence. In terms of the structure of the doctrine of the Ten Worlds, the world of Humanity is right in the middle. From that vantage, one can either ascend to higher states of life, or descend into the lower worlds. It could be said, therefore, that Humanity occupies the central position.

For precisely that reason, Nichiren Daishonin repeatedly says things like, “Since you have had the rare good fortune to be born in the world of Humanity, you should strive to attain a still higher state of life.”

For What Purpose Were We Born As Human Beings?

Suda: Yes. For example, in one Goshō he says, “Those who are born in the three evil paths are more numerous than the particles of dust on the earth, while those who are born as human beings are fewer than the number of dust particles one can place on his fingernail” (*Goshō Zenshu*, p. 70).

Endo: He also says, “Now I have already obtained birth in the human realm, something difficult to achieve, and have had the privilege of hearing the Buddhist teachings, which are seldom encountered. If I should pass my present life in idleness, then in what future life could I possibly free myself from the sufferings of birth and death and attain enlightenment?” (MW-5, 101).

Ikeda: Therefore, it’s important that we really exert ourselves earnestly while we are hale and hearty. To the extent that we courageously take action for kosen-rufu, we solidify within our lives the path leading to eternal happiness.

In Buddhism, the human body is called the “correct vessel of the noble paths”—that is, it is the vessel of the Law for carrying out Buddhist practice. When we fill that vessel with the great life of the world of Buddhahood, we realize the true significance of our having been born as human beings.

Saito: In that sense, can we perhaps say that the meaning of Humanity lies in striving to attain a still higher state of life?

Elevating the State of Life of All People

Ikeda: Yes, I think so. A higher state of life would mean the worlds of Heaven, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood.

At any rate, there is something extremely profound and mystic about the function of state of life. Whether or not we are aware of it, our state of life to a great extent determines our actions, thoughts, relationships and path in life, as well as our emotions.

State of life, moreover, is not only a property of individuals. A society, too, has state of life, the Ten Worlds. Kosen-rufu is not only a struggle to change the state

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of life of individuals, but a movement to change the state of life of an entire country, to elevate the state of life of humankind. It is a grand and unprecedented experiment.

I am reminded of certain words of Shozo Tanaka. [The legislator Tanaka (1841–1913) made a name for himself as a friend of the people in the Ashio Copper Mine Incident, which resulted in widespread environmental damage. He devoted his life to opposing abuses of people’s rights by the authorities.]

In his later years, he said: “A nation is like a person. A person is not necessarily respectable because he is stout. He is respected for his knowledge and virtue. A nation is like a person. A person is respected not because of his physical strength but because of his intellect, no matter how lean he is.”²³

Victimizing the people both at home and abroad, Japan, in racing ahead along the path of Anger toward the goals of developing a rich nation and a strong military, became arrogant and lost its spirit. It lost sight of the path of humanism.

Tanaka declares: “Japan still sustains its body, but has lost its spirit. Japan no longer exists.”²⁴ He wrote these words four months before his death. Thirty-two years later, Japan ceased to exist as a sovereign state.

It is because we do not want this tragedy to be repeated that we are crying out to our compatriots: “Abandon arrogance! Humbly pursue the path of humanism!”

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

1. *Gosho Zenshu*, p. 430.
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 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. *Yojana*: (Skt) A unit of measurement used in ancient India, equal to the distance that the royal army was thought to be able to march in a day. Approximations vary as widely as 9.6, 16 and 24 kilometers.
4. Nichikan, “Sanju Hiden Sho” (The Threefold Secret Teaching).
5. M. Scott Peck, M.D., *People of the Lie: The Hope for Healing Human Evil* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 73.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 78.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 77.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 74.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 71.
11. Plutarch, *Lives of the Noble Greeks*, ed. Edmund Fuller (New York: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1959), p. 99.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 98.
13. *Miki Kiyoshi Zenshu* (Collected Works of Kiyoshi Miki), “Jinseiron Noto” [Thoughts on Life] (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1966), vol. 1, p. 267–68.
14. Johann Peter Eckermann, *Words of Goethe* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, 1949), p. 129.

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15. *Miki Kiyoshi Zenshu*, *ibid.*, p. 270.
16. Buddhism teaches that each of us has our own unique personality and mission. In the *Gosho*, it states: “Cherry, plum, peach or damson blossoms—all, just as they are, are entities possessing their own unique qualities” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 784).
17. Devadatta sought to present himself as surpassing the Buddha and to gain recognition in society by advocating five practices. As detailed in the *Shibunritsu*, they were: to wear robes of rags; to seek food only by begging; to eat only one meal a day; to always sit out in the open; and to partake of neither salt nor the five flavors.
18. Peck, *People of the Lie*, p. 67.
19. Three devotions: Devotion to the three treasures of the Buddha, the Law and the Samgha, or community of Buddhist followers.
20. Five precepts: Prohibitions against killing, stealing, illicit sex, lying and consumption of alcohol.
21. 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.
22. *Yoshikawa Eiji Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Eiji Yoshikawa) (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1982), vol. 39, p. 213–14.
23. *Tanaka Shozo Zenshu* (Collected Works of Shozo Tanaka) (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1979), vol. 11, p. 131.
24. *Tanaka Shozo Zenshu*, (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1977), vol. 13, p. 446.