

**THE POWER OF LIFE'S ETERNITY
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The following article is reprinted from the June 1998 issue of the SGI-Canada publication's New Century supplement 'World Beat.' Dr. Yoichi Kawada, director of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy at Soka University in Tokyo, lectured on the Buddhist view of death at the Toronto Culture Centre, April 2, 1998.

Dr. Kawada, Director of the Institute of Oriental Philosophy at Soka University in Tokyo, started chanting in 1961 when he was a medical student plagued by chronic kidney problems. During this period, a time of political turmoil, he joined other students in demonstrating against the military security pact between the U.S. and Japan. He also had an avid interest in psychology and Buddhism and read widely on both subjects. During that time his kidney problems reached a life-threatening level. He was finally able to regain his health after a year and a half of practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism.

Although he joined the Soka Gakkai to learn more about the Lotus Sutra, it was his landlady's dedication to doing gongyo with him every day for a month until he could do it on his own, that an indelible impression on him, forming the basis of his faith. Two years after his health had improved, he heard Daisaku Ikeda speak on the Lotus Sutra and was extremely impressed by his lectures. Several years later he participated with SGI President Ikeda in a dialogue leading up to the book *Dialogue on Life* and continued working very closely with him for the next three years. These opportunities formed the foundations of his faith.

Dr. Kawada interviewed the rector of Moscow University, Anatoly Loganov, as part of two published dialogues with President Ikeda. Professor Loganov's view on the role of religion in society changed between the two meetings, the first of which took place before, and the second after the Gorbachev era. Initially he put forth the Marxist position that religion is an opiate that dulls people's view of reality; at the second meeting, he said religion is absolutely necessary for people to be able to live humanely. In this later exchange, Professor Loganov also said he had come to understand karma in terms of the indestructibility of energy, a theory central to physics. He could understand how our individual karma survives physical death as energy and is absorbed back into the universe, remaining there as a potential to be manifested again when conditions are appropriate. In Buddhism this karmic continuity is called karmic inheritance. Dr. Kawada pointed out that Professor Loganov came to this understanding after an in-depth study of Buddhism, particularly writings of President Ikeda, and having his questions on Buddhism answered by President Ikeda.

Using the Buddhist teachings of the nine consciousnesses, Dr. Kawada explained that what we commonly call consciousness is a collective of our five senses, that processes information in our environment, along with a sixth component that integrates this sensory input, distinguishing between objects and forming coherent images. It is this integrating component that Buddhism refers to as our sixth consciousness. When we are asleep, this consciousness and the accompanying five senses become latent and we enter a state called the *mano* consciousness, which corresponds to the unconscious state.

In the earliest stages of dying, the five senses are the first to lose their capacity to function, with sight being the first to go. Hearing, however, remains, even in a deep state of

coma. Health care professionals who work with dying patients report it is not unusual for individuals in a coma to show discernible responses to soothing or familiar sounds. As the dying process progresses, the person goes into a state where the normal responses of the nervous system no longer exist. At this stage the waking consciousness referred to earlier recedes into the *mano* consciousness; here there is still an awareness of self as an individual entity. Death is the transition from *mano* consciousness to what is called the *alaya* consciousness or karmic storehouse. At this stage the dying person's energy level is too low to be manifest either in the *mano* or *alaya* consciousness and is incapable of acting upon or interacting with the world outside itself. It is the *alaya* consciousness which survives physical death. The karmic energy created by our thoughts, deeds and actions in this lifetime survives in a latent state but possesses the potential to become manifest again given appropriate circumstances.

Near-death experiences occur at the level of the *mano* consciousness. Reports by individuals include both "out-of-body" and the "tunnel" experience in which they travel through a dark tunnel leading to either a large field or a bright light at the end of it. Individuals having had near-death experiences have also related the phenomenon of having their lives "flash" before them. Here the *mano* consciousness experiences the major emotional experiences or karmic causes of the person's life. In his "Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra" President Ikeda said the systematic examination of near-death experiences by western scientists since the 1970s offers good evidence to support the idea that our lives do continue in some form beyond physical death.

Dr. Kawada then pointed out that the transition from life to death is depicted in both Japanese and Greek mythology as the crossing of a river — the River of Three Crossings in the Japanese tradition and the River Hades in Greek myth. In the writings of Nichiren Daishonin, references are made to demons that wait on the other side of the river to strip the dead of all their clothing. In his "Discussions on the Lotus Sutra" President Ikeda says these are symbolic of the uselessness of our worldly attachments — to power, status, wealth — in death. In a treatise entitled "Admonitions on Preparation for Death," Nichikan Shonin, the 26th high priest, describes how a person's strong attachments can make the transition from life to death a difficult one. Attachment may take the form of the dying person's concern for the well-being of loved ones. The SGI family can make such a person's transition easier by offering assurances that loved ones will be well taken care of by the organization's members. Nichikan Shonin recommends we continue praying for a person even after death because his or her life can still benefit from our chanting. He explains that upon death the person's life merges with the karmic flow — *alaya* consciousness — of the universe, so our chanting will always reach that person.

In a dialogue with President Ikeda, Professor Johan Galtung, founder of the International Peace Research Institute, asked him: If Buddhism refutes the views of both scientific materialism that after physical death nothing survives and of other religions which posit the eternity of an individual soul, then what is it that survives physical death? After hearing President Ikeda's answer to this question, Professor Galtung said that, having spoken to many other Buddhist scholars and read many treatises on the subject, he considered President Ikeda's explanation the clearest and most comprehensible he has ever had.

Elaborating on this explanation, Dr. Kawada said the term "karmic storehouse" can be misleading if we perceive it as some kind of repository. It can be more accurately perceived as a powerful and vibrant river of karmic energy flowing at the deepest levels of

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our lives. When we are alive there is a constant circulation between this “river” and our individual consciousness and *mano* consciousness. Karma constantly manifests in our consciousnesses in the form of thoughts, words, and actions, which in turn create more karmic energy for the *alaya* consciousness. The *alaya* consciousness is also the source of the vital energy that enables the components of our bodies to function as a single integrated living entity. This interaction forms the principle of dependent origination. The *alaya* consciousness of each individual interacts with that of others, influencing and being influenced by them. This creates a web of karmic influence which embraces the entire universe. The SGI’s movement, based on the belief that a great human revolution in the life of a single individual can transform not only the destiny of a society but that of humankind, is rooted in this principle of dependent origination.

If we look at the dependent origination of the *alaya* consciousness in terms of time, we continue right up to the moment of death. He said that although the reality of life’s eternity may be philosophically difficult to accept, if we view the process as we do a flowing river, we realize that at any moment we cannot identify any individual portion of the water in that flow; we recognize it as a single integrated flowing body of water. In the same way, interaction between the karmic energy flow of the *alaya* consciousness and our individual life consciousness moves forward as an integrated entity. This view of life’s continuity is unique to Buddhism.

When we recognize this continuity of our individual *alaya* consciousness and that of all humanity, then we realize that by developing the qualities of the Buddha and the Bodhisattva — compassion, wisdom, altruism — in our individual lives, we can positively influence the karmic reality of all humanity. However, the conditions that prevail in our everyday world are more likely to induce the lower life-conditions of Hell, Hunger, and Anger than to encourage the development of our Buddha nature; so the practice of merely sitting quietly in meditation to accomplish this is likely to prove futile. In order to change our karma, he said, the entire cycle of interaction between our consciousness and the *alaya* consciousness must be embraced by the ninth consciousness or pure life condition of our Buddha nature. The unique practice of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism provides a powerful means to accomplish this.

Buddhism’s precise and profound explanation of life is what distinguishes it from all other religions. The Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin is itself unique, in that by inscribing the Gohonzon, the Daishonin made manifest the life-condition of the Buddha — the ninth consciousness — in concrete form. By connecting with the Gohonzon, through prayer we can enable our Buddha nature to emerge into our *alaya* consciousness. The Daishonin’s Buddhism is accessible to people from all walks of life; this is what makes it the Buddhism of all the people — the means for all people to benefit and gain enlightenment.

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