Life Manifesting the Ten Worlds

Nichiren Daishonin states the following in the Gosho, “The True Object of Worship” (“Kanjin no honzon-shō”):

When we look at a person’s face, at times he appears joyful, enraged, or calm. At other times, we may see the appearance of greed, foolishness, or flattery in his face. Anger is a manifestation of the world of hell, greed is a manifestation of the world of hunger, stupidity is a manifestation of the world of animality, flattery is a manifestation of the world of anger, joy is a manifestation of the world of rapture, calmness is a manifestation of the world of humanity. These six paths all exist in the physical appearance of his face. The four noble worlds are dormant, and are not revealed in the face. However, a careful search would show that actually they are there.

(Gosho, p. 647)

The following is a poem written by a Buddhist in olden times:

One’s mind is, indeed, a mind that bewilders the heart. The mind works on the heart—do not relax your guard on your mind.

This poem explains that the mind of enlightenment and that of delusion coexist in our hearts. It eloquently expresses how these two minds conflict with each other. The first part, “one’s mind, indeed,” describes a deluded mind, and the next “mind” indicates an enlightened mind. The third mention of the “mind” refers once again to a mind of delusion. The minds of enlightenment and delusion are expressed alternately here.

I am certain that you are all aware from experience that this conflict between good and evil actually takes place within our own lives. The principle of the ten worlds explains this in great detail. In particular, the doctrine of the mutual possession of the ten worlds (jikkai gogu) is described in the Lotus Sutra. It is a wonderful doctrine that reveals how everyone is able to attain enlightenment through this teaching. We will study one aspect of it here today.
The principle of the ten worlds is a way to categorize the life conditions that we possess into ten states. These ten worlds consist of hell, hunger, animality, anger, humanity, rapture, learning, realization, bodhisattva, and Buddhahood.

Of these, the world of hell (jigoku kai) is the most miserable life condition. As the Chinese characters for hell (jigoku) reveal, it indicates a state in which we feel as though we are trapped in an underground (ji) prison (goku). In the opening Gosho passage, the Daishonin teaches that “anger is a manifestation of the world of hell.” Anger is an emotion of bitterness or resentment that has no outlet. It is a condition in which we are strongly attached to things that we cannot possess and blame others for it. As a result, we fall into the world of hell and suffer.

The world of Hunger (gaki kai) is a life condition of suffering in which our various desires go unfulfilled. The Daishonin explains that “greed is a manifestation of the world of hunger.” It is a state that we descend into when we only focus on satisfying our own desires without regard for others.

The world of Animality (chikushō kai) is a state in which we, like animals, are entirely controlled by instinctive desires. We will fall into this life condition if we live an egocentric lifestyle and have no caring for other people. The Daishonin teaches that “stupidity is a manifestation of the world of animality.” This is a life condition in which we are entirely consumed by immediate gains and are unable to develop a correct perspective and judgment on things. The life conditions of hell, hunger, and animality that thus far have been described comprise the “three evil paths” (san aku dō).

Next is the world of anger (shura kai). Asura is a famous deity of contentious demons known for their fighting. Those in this life condition possess a spirit of superiority over others, and their nature is such that they always must be better than others. The Daishonin states that “flattery is a manifestation of the world of anger.” Those steeped in this life condition are full of jealousy and resentment toward those who are superior to them. When this world of anger is added to the three evil paths, they are collectively known as the “four lower worlds” (shi aku shu).

Next is the world of humanity (nin kai). This is a life condition in which we are able to live in peace and tranquility as humans. The Daishonin explains that “calmness is a manifestation of the world of humanity.” Our presence of mind functions to control us, based on good reason and logic. However, in order to maintain a life condition of peace and tranquility, it is necessary to discipline our own lives. In society today, we all are encouraged to live a dignified life appropriate to humans. We must be deeply mindful of our debts of gratitude. It is important for us to tackle all matters with great aspirations for self-improvement.

The world of Rapture (ten kai) is a state that transcends the normal presence of mind of people. Traditionally, the world of rapture was thought to be inhabited by heavenly beings and celestial maidens. Humans who performed remarkable good deeds were reportedly reborn into this heavenly world. The Daishonin teaches that “joy is a manifestation of the world of rapture.” Rapture refers to a life condition
that is full of happiness. The greatest joy (literally “arriving at the heavenly peak” [uchō ten]) signifies the absolute pinnacle of happiness, but conversely, it also can signal the opposite—a period of decline. Thus, the joy of the world of rapture never lasts for a long time.

What has been described thus far, from the world of hell to that of rapture, is known as the “six paths” (roku dō). I am certain that you can understand that these represent the life conditions that we all experience in our daily lives. However, our life condition is never static. It is constantly moving from one world to another within the six paths. This is known as the “transmigration of the six paths” (rokudō rinne). The “six paths” is a term that describes the place where each person lives—the world in which an individual resides.

Those of us born into the world of humanity only tend to see the people in the world of humanity. However, there are people who reside in the lower worlds of hell, hunger, animality, and anger. Furthermore, there are also those who live in the world of rapture. When we speak of the worlds ranging from hell to rapture, we refer to the life conditions in which these people reside.

After we die, in what life condition—or what world—will we be reborn next? The determination of the world into which we will be reborn depends on our actions and practices during our current lifetime, based on the Law of cause and effect. This is explained by principles such as the transmigration of the six paths and the circle of transmigration (rinne tenshō), which explain that we were born into the world of humanity in this life, but our behavior in this life will determine the world into which we will be reborn in the next life. You may be familiar with the story of Maudgalyayana, which is told every year during the Urabon Ceremony. He saved his mother, who had descended into the world of hunger. The story warns us that, if we live a life of greed during this lifetime, we will then fall into the world of hunger after death.

Be that as it may, regardless of the world into which we are reborn, based on the transmigration of the six paths, we will be born into a life condition of suffering. Even if we are born into the world of rapture, the joy that we experience will be short-lived.

Consequently, the act of Buddhist practices is expounded as a means to liberate ourselves from the sufferings of the transmigration of the six paths.

There are four life conditions that are above the six paths. They are the worlds of learning (shōmon kai), the world of realization (engaku kai), the world of bodhisattva (bosatsu kai), and the world of Buddhahood (bukkai). These are known as the “four noble worlds” (shishō). These four noble worlds can be achieved through Buddhist practice, to overcome the suffering of the transmigration of the six paths. Of these, the worlds of learning and realization are called the two vehicles (nijō). The Buddhist practices for these are focused on the achievement of salvation for oneself, based on the Hinayana doctrines. The Chinese characters denoting learning literally mean to hear (mon) the voice (shō) of the Buddha, and the corresponding practices are based on the Buddha’s teachings. In the world of
realization, people seek enlightenment on their own, based on their own wisdom. However, neither one of the worlds of the two vehicles enables people to attain true enlightenment. Those in the worlds of learning and realization are self-satisfied in their own lowly form of enlightenment and are never motivated to seek salvation for others. Their world typifies egocentrism and therefore, they are severely admonished by the Buddha.

The next world, bodhisattva, represents a life condition in which people aim to achieve enlightenment through Buddhist practices based on mercy. Those in this world operate on the principle of “not only pursuing the attainment of enlightenment, but also carrying out the benevolent act of saving others” (jyōgu bodai geke shujō). Thus, bodhisattvas seek to rise and become Buddhas (by attaining enlightenment). They reach out to teach the multitudes below them who are suffering. They live by their vow to benefit themselves and others.

The final world is that of Buddhahood. It indicates the life condition of the Buddha who has achieved enlightenment through Buddhist practice. It is a life condition of absolute happiness. The Buddha’s enlightenment represents a life condition in which all phenomena are contained within the single true Law of Myoho-Renge-Kyo, transcending time and space. This supreme life condition of the Buddha is inherent within our hearts and minds as common mortals. However, the forces of earthly desires in our hearts are extremely strong, making it difficult for us to manifest the Buddha nature within our own lives. Consequently, we are unable to free ourselves from the suffering of the transmigration of the six paths.

An explanation of the ten worlds, such as this, becomes rather complicated. Let me briefly summarize. Thus far, I have explained that there are ten types of life conditions within our lives. We are typically situated within the transmigration of the six paths, as we go from one to another of these six worlds of delusion. We perform the Buddhist practices to free ourselves from this cycle of delusion. By doing so, we can attain the life conditions of the four noble worlds—particularly the world of Buddhahood.

Thus, although we were born into the world of humanity, our lives contain all ten worlds—the entirety of the six paths and the four noble worlds. As I mentioned earlier, in addition to the world of humanity, there are nine worlds in which people reside. Those of us in the world of humanity may descend into the world of hell, as a result of our actions and behavior in this lifetime.

Consequently, the ten worlds exist within the world of humanity. In the same way, the ten worlds are also inherent in each of the other nine worlds. This is known as the mutual possession of the ten worlds (jikkai gogu). Thus, the life condition of the Buddha is inherent in each of us in the worlds of hell, hunger, animality and so on. Conversely, the Buddha also possesses the life condition of hell as well as the other nine worlds. When the ten worlds are multiplied by the ten within each world, there are a total of one hundred worlds. Although there are numerous Buddhist scriptures, this doctrine of the mutual possession of the ten worlds is only expounded in the Lotus Sutra.
The doctrine of the mutual possession of the ten worlds is extremely important. Even those in the world of hell can achieve salvation precisely because the life condition of the Buddha is inherent in the lives of the people in all the nine worlds, from hell through bodhisattva. To achieve salvation, those who have descended into the world of hell need not work themselves up through the ranks of hunger, animality, and so on. Even those in the world of hell can directly attain Buddhahood from within that world, if they manifest the life condition of the Buddha. By contrast, the life condition of hell is inherent in the life of the Buddha. Therefore, the Buddha is able to understand the suffering of those who have fallen into the world of hell.

Based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra, we can see how various life conditions are inherent in our lives. Indeed, we can only marvel at the fact that our hearts and minds are truly mystical. Based on the Buddha’s wisdom, these conditions have been clearly revealed as the ten worlds.

The Buddha characterized these wondrous life conditions as being mystical. Furthermore, he further established the doctrine in which he revealed this truth as the mystic Law (Myōhō). The Buddha used the lotus flower as a metaphor to symbolize this principle of truth. The lotus plant sends forth its pure-white flowers from within a muddy swamp. Based on this, the Buddha demonstrated how Buddhahood and the other nine worlds inherently coexist within our lives. He expounded that our lives itself are the mystic Law of the Lotus—Myoho Renge.

The Buddha presented this doctrine as the teaching that he expounded, and he concluded it with the word for “sutra”—kyō. What, then, is the teaching called the Lotus Sutra (Hokekyo), consisting of twenty-eight chapters? Please understand that the Lotus Sutra is a teaching that provides a detailed explanation of Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

Our master Nichiren Daishonin expounded that Myoho-Renge-Kyo represents the essential source of our lives and the fundamental doctrine of the Buddha’s enlightenment. As such, he was the first to propagate the Daimoku of Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo to all people. “Nam” means “devotion.” Therefore, the Daimoku manifests our spirit of devotion to the precious doctrine of Myoho-Renge-Kyo.

At the Tatsunokuchi Persecution, the Daishonin revealed his life as the True Buddha, through discarding his provisional identity and revealing his true identity (hosshaku kempon). He then inscribed the mandala Gohonzon of the ten worlds. On the surface of the Gohonzon, the characters for Nam-Myoho-Renge-Kyo are surrounded by the inscriptions of the life conditions and the personae of the ten worlds, from hell, hunger, and animality, through bodhisattva and Buddhahood. Nichiren Daishonin expounds that, regardless of the life condition or persona, their essential life of the Buddha is manifested, as they are illuminated by the mystical brilliance of Myoho-Renge-Kyo in the center of the Gohonzon.

I am certain that some of you in attendance today are encountering various hardships in your daily lives. There may be others who long to experience greater
happiness. By chanting to this Gohonzon, you will be able to proceed to a true resolution for your current hardships. You will experience a truly mystical and wondrous sense of happiness.

I would like to conclude my sermon by sincerely praying that all of you in attendance today will use this occasion as an opportunity to further deepen your correct faith in the Gohonzon as we advance with devotion in our shakubuku efforts toward our goals for 2015.