

Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra 33b

This is part two of the thirty-third 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 October 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.

This time, focusing on the concept of mutual possession, they discuss the true meaning of the teaching that the nine worlds contain the world of Buddhahood and that the world of Buddhahood contains the nine worlds.

33 The “Life Span” Chapter—Part Eight Enacting the Drama of Kosen-rufu on the “Earth” of Buddhahood: The Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds <Part II>

Transforming One’s State of Life—A Mother’s Drama

TAKANORI ENDO: The other day I heard the experience of a Ms. Chan Boksoon of Hiroshima, and was extremely moved. Ms. Chan is a Korean national living in Japan who was a victim of the atom bomb. Having overcome anti-Korean discrimination from the Japanese and the painful aftermath of the bombing, she is now active as a volunteer spokesperson for peace.

Ms. Chan, whose parents had immigrated to Japan, was born in Osaka. Her family had run an extensive agricultural operation in Korea. However, militarist Japan invaded the country, and the family lost its land as a result of Japan’s colonialist policies.

They had no choice but to come to Japan. In making their decision, they had placed their trust in advertisements promising that a wonderful life awaited them there. But after being sent to one dangerous construction site after another, they finally arrived in a small village deep in the mountains. They were put in a tiny room in the corner of a cocoonery that was partitioned off by only a straw mat, and were made to work as assistants to a tenant farmer.

Moreover, they were assigned to work a swamp-like field. There was no way they could get a satisfactory harvest from this poor piece of land. They reportedly lived in a constant state of hunger, surviving on a meager allowance and what plants and fruit they could collect.

HARUOSUDA: That’s terrible. At the time, a great many Koreans were similarly duped into coming to Japan.

ENDO: They later moved to a site near Hiroshima. A year later, on August 6, 1945, the rumor spread that the city had been totally destroyed by a new kind of bomb. And so Ms. Chan and her mother, concerned about the safety of relatives and friends, entered the city of Hiroshima immediately after the blast. As a result, Ms. Chan became a victim of secondary radiation from the bomb. She was 12.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

When they finally located Ms. Chan's aunt and her son, they found them so badly burned that there was nothing they could do for them.

Her aunt cried: "There are too few doctors and too little medicine ... not enough to go around for Koreans. All we can do is wait for death to come!" At this, her mother wailed: "Our country was taken and we were brought all the way to Japan to be mercilessly worked like cows and horses. They don't even make death easy for us; instead they force us to die in excruciating flames. What offense did we commit? Will they continue to discriminate against us even after we are dead?" Even now Ms. Chan vividly recalls how her mother sobbed and lamented, pounding the ground with her fists.

Later, when she was 16, Ms. Chan married. She married so young because her family had limited means and there were too many mouths to feed. From around the time she gave birth to her first child, she was afflicted by severe anemia and various internal disorders—probably as a result of her exposure to the atomic bomb—and had to undergo many operations. She was told by her doctor that she had no chance of recovery, and when she was transferred to a hospital in Hiroshima, she was reportedly in a coma.

Her husband stopped coming to see her, and she and her two small children had to share her hospital meals. Since she had no money, she was forced to leave the hospital and wound up living in a tiny hut without running water or utilities. They had to go to a neighborhood park to use the toilet. It was a pitiful existence.

The local women of the Soka Gakkai were the ones who extended a helping hand to Ms. Chan and her family. They would warmly encourage her, saying things like, "Let's become happy together!" and would sometimes bring over dishes of hot noodles for her and her children. What a profound impression this must have made on Ms. Chan, who had lost all trust in people!

In 1964, at age 32, she began practicing Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. Through earnestly exerting herself in faith, she succeeded in recovering vibrant health. Upon witnessing this, her husband also took faith.

Ms. Chan had a concern that had been on her mind for a long time. She wondered why she had to suffer so much in her life—she had endured not only discrimination as a Korean in Japan, but had also suffered the effects of the atomic bombing. When she learned about the Buddhist concept of deliberately creating the appropriate karma, meaning that one undergoes suffering in order to help other people in similar circumstances, she found herself at last able to make sense of her predicament.

"I see," she exclaimed. "So I have a mission that only I can fulfill. And my situation is my responsibility." Through reading President Toda's "Declaration for the Abolition of Nuclear Weapons" and studying your guidance, President Ikeda, Ms. Chan developed a strong determination: "There must be some unique way that I, as a Korean A-bomb victim living in Japan, can contribute to peace. I will put more effort into fulfilling my mission! I will study harder!"

At the age of 52, she enrolled in night middle-school classes. She later attended night high school, where she maintained a grade point average at the very top of her class. At 57 she was admitted to the night school of the University of

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

Hiroshima.

KATSUJI SAITO: To undertake one's education at that age is no small feat. It must have been very arduous.

ENDO: She comments that she cannot recall having once gone to sleep in her bed while she was attending classes, nor being aware of when she fell asleep and when she awoke. Through such tenacious effort, in the spring of 1995, at the age of 62, she succeeded in getting her diploma.

At present, while teaching part-time in the night high school that she herself attended, she is participating in lecture meetings and symposiums near and far as a spokesperson for peace. She has tirelessly given her support to schools for adult literacy, and has carried out volunteer activities to promote education programs in many countries of Asia, including Nepal and the Philippines.

When she joined the Soka Gakkai, Ms. Chan was told by the person who first introduced her to the Daishonin's Buddhism, "You will become unimaginably happy." She says that she recalls thinking at that time, "Rather than unimaginable happiness, I would be satisfied with happiness that I can readily imagine. It would be enough if my husband would just quit drinking and get a job." She has in fact constructed a state of life that is truly far beyond anything she could have then imagined.

Ms. Chan says emphatically, "Making the spirit of the 'Monument of Prayer for World Peace' that President Ikeda established in Hiroshima my own, I am determined to exert every ounce of strength I have to fulfill my mission for the peace and happiness of people throughout the world."

Freely Enacting the Ten Worlds

DAISAKU IKEDA: That's a wonderful experience. A wonderful life. A wonderful example of victory through faith.

In the "Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings" (Onji Kuden), the Daishonin says of Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound (who appears in the twenty-fourth chapter of the Lotus Sutra): "He manifests thirty-four different bodily forms, illustrating the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and preaching the Law so as to bring benefit to others" (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 801).

To lead people to enlightenment, this bodhisattva appears in various guises (thirty-four bodily forms) and widely propagates the Lotus Sutra in accord with people's capacity and their worries. This, the Daishonin says, is "illustrating the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds."

Ms. Chan's life had sometimes revealed the suffering of the world of Hell and, at others, the sadness of the world of Hunger. But through faith in the Mystic Law, she realized that these were the effects of karma that she herself had willingly created in order to show actual proof of faith. She developed the confidence that, for the sake of kosen-rufu, a Bodhisattva of the Earth readily undergoes even the most abominable suffering. While revealing various states of life, in the end the

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

bodhisattva demonstrates victory, and so teaches others about the greatness of the Mystic Law. Those who do so are great actors in the drama of the Ten Worlds. Such a life could well be described as “revealing thirty-four bodily forms” and “illustrating the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.”

SUDA: “Illustrating the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds” refers to the idea that people, though originally Buddhas or bodhisattvas, manifest the various states of life of the Ten Worlds.

SAITO: In “The True Object of Worship,” Nichiren Daishonin, commenting on the passage in the “Life Span” chapter that reads, “Sometimes I speak of myself, sometimes of others; sometimes I present myself, sometimes others; sometimes I show my own actions, sometimes those of others” (LS16, 226), says that it expresses the truth that “the world of Buddhahood contains the Ten Worlds” (MW-1, 51). Here, he interprets “myself” as pointing to the Buddha’s life, or the world of Buddhahood, and “others” as meaning the various states of life that the beings of the Ten Worlds manifest.

IKEDA: The Daishonin elucidates that, since the remotest past, the Buddha, while appearing in various states among the nine worlds, had been continually taking action as the Buddha. This was possible because the nine worlds continued to exist in the Buddha’s life even after the attainment of supreme enlightenment. This is the meaning of the phrase, “All beings of the Ten Worlds are essentially Buddhas.”

Also, in contrast to the “theoretical” mutual possession of the Ten Worlds found in the “Expedient Means” chapter, the “Life Span” chapter explains the “actual” mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. The Buddha revealed the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds through his own actual conduct. This is the meaning of “Sometimes I speak of myself, sometimes of others....”

Just as Bodhisattva Wonderful Sound leads people to enlightenment through freely manifesting thirty-four bodies, we advance kosen-rufu while carrying out various roles and activities, whether it be, for example, through education, business or taking care of the home. And, whether revealing the pain-filled world of Hell, the joyous world of Heaven, or the world of Anger, through it all we continue progressing.

Based on our activities as SGI members to promote peace, education and culture and to reach people through words and actions grounded in Buddhism, we continue moving forward while revealing all aspects of life. This surely corresponds to the “thirty-four bodies” and represents the practice of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

Changing Life on a Fundamental Level

SUDA: There is one last point that I would like to confirm.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

The purpose of the doctrine of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds lies in helping people manifest the Ten Worlds inherent in the world of Humanity, in particular, the world of Buddhahood. And human life is the entity of the one hundred worlds, just as the universe is. This much I can understand. But I'm still not completely clear on the significance of the hundred worlds contained within the world of Humanity.

SAITO: The Daishonin discusses the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds focusing on the Ten Worlds existing in the world of Humanity. I think what you're asking is what, exactly, does it mean to say that each person is an entity of the hundred worlds, or if there is even any sense in discussing it at all.

IKEDA: One way we can approach this problem is from the perspective of basic life tendency. While all people belong to the world of Humanity, there are some who, in terms of their basic life tendency, act mostly from the world of Hell, for example, and others who act mostly from the world of Bodhisattva.

SAITO: Someone whose life clings to the world of Hell will become downcast and discouraged at the slightest setback. That is the kind of trend I think we're talking about.

IKEDA: We could term this the habitual tendency of the person's life. This tendency has been built up by the cumulative causes that a person has made up until the present.

SAITO: That would include one's personality.

ENDO: It's the basic course of the person's life, the base or home to which they always retreat.

IKEDA: Just as a spring returns to its original shape after it has been extended, we return to our own basic tendency. Even if the world of Hell is someone's base, that doesn't mean that the person remains in that state all the time. Rather, their state of life will shift from one world to another, sometimes entering the world of Humanity and sometimes the world of Anger.

Even a person who strives to be superior to others (a characteristic of the world of Anger) will sometimes manifest the worlds of Bodhisattva or Heaven, for example.

SUDA: Bodhisattva or Heaven is contained in the world of Anger.

IKEDA: But even if someone who has the world of Anger as his or her fundamental tendency momentarily produces the world of Bodhisattva, they will quickly revert to the world of Anger.

It is doing our human revolution, transforming our state of life at the deepest

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

level, that enables us to change this basic tendency, to change our fundamental state of mind.

Our basic tendency in a sense determines our life. To illustrate, a person who tends to act from the world of Hunger is as though on board a ship called Hunger. While proceeding along the course of Hunger, they will sometimes experience joy and sometimes suffering. Though there are many changes and fluctuations, the boat unerringly continues to advance along that track. Consequently, that person's viewpoint is always colored in the hues of the world of Hunger; after they die, his or her life melds with the world of Hunger existing in the universe.

Making the world of Buddhahood our basic life tendency is called attaining Buddhahood. Of course, even if Buddhahood becomes our basic tendency, we still have the nine worlds; and, consequently, we still have worries and suffering. But the foundation of our life becomes one of hope, and we acquire a rhythm of peace of mind and joy.

President Toda once explained this as follows:

Even if we should become sick, we should have the attitude: "I'm all right. I know that if I chant to the Gohonzon, I will get well." Doesn't Buddhahood mean living with total peace of mind? Now, because the world of Buddhahood contains the nine worlds, we might still sometimes become angry or perplexed; enjoying total peace of mind doesn't mean that we cease to experience anger, for example. A worry is still a worry. Yet, underneath everything, we feel profound peace of mind. Someone in this state is a Buddha.

He also said:

Isn't a Buddha someone for whom to be alive is itself an overwhelming joy? Isn't this what it means to attain the Daishonin's state of life? Even when facing the prospect of being beheaded, the Daishonin was calm and composed. In a similar situation, any one of us would be ready to give up. And when he was exiled to Sado, the Daishonin continued instructing his disciples on various matters and produced such writings as "The Opening of the Eyes" and "The True Object of Worship." Without peace of mind, he could never have written such great treatises.¹

SUDA: Referring to what you said earlier, I can see how President Toda enjoyed a state of life as vast as the Pacific Ocean even while facing great adversity. It seems that this is just the kind of peace of mind that he was talking about.

Struggles in the Nine Worlds Strengthen the World of Buddhahood

ENDO: The practice of doing gongyo and chanting daimoku is the means for establishing the world of Buddhahood as our basic life tendency.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

IKEDA: Gongyo is a solemn ceremony in which we fuse our lives with the life-state of the Buddha. By steadfastly and continually carrying out the practice of gongyo and daimoku, the world of Buddhahood in our life becomes solidified, just as firmly packing together a pile of earth will produce a strong foundation. On this foundation, this stage, at each moment we freely enact the drama of the nine worlds.

Kosen-rufu is a struggle to make the world of Buddhahood the basic tendency of society. Fundamentally this comes down to forging ties of friendship with increasing numbers of people.

At any rate, when we base ourselves on Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, absolutely no effort is wasted. When we make the world of Buddhahood our basic life tendency, we can advance toward a future of hope while making the most of all our activities in the nine worlds, both past and present. In fact, our efforts in the nine worlds become the nourishment that fortifies the world of Buddhahood.

In light of the principle that earthly desires are themselves enlightenment, sufferings (i.e., earthly desires, or the nine worlds) all become the "firewood" or fuel for attaining enlightenment (the world of Buddhahood). This is similar to how our bodies digest food and turn it into energy.

SUDA: Without wood there would be no flame, and without food our bodies would have no energy. Similarly, without the nine worlds, the world of Buddhahood would be diminished.

IKEDA: That's right. A Buddha who has no connection to the actual sufferings of the nine worlds is not a genuine Buddha—a Buddha of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. That is the essential message of the "Life Span" chapter.

In a sense, the world of Buddhahood is expressed in the inclination to take on even the hardships of Hell. This is the world of Hell contained in the world of Buddhahood. It is suffering for the sake of others, suffering willingly taken on as an expression of responsibility and compassion. Working to spread the Daishonin's teaching and encouraging friends has the effect of strengthening the world of Buddhahood in our lives. Faith means gladly taking on hard work. Manipulating others to do things is not faith; that's organizationalism and authoritarianism.

SAITO: To enthusiastically and joyfully go into the midst of suffering—that's analogous to the spirit of bodhisattvas to take on karmic suffering out of compassion for others.

IKEDA: You cannot grow as a human being without great effort. Those who avoid the struggle can neither manifest true faith nor carry out their human revolution.

President Toda once said:

A sea bream of the Inland Sea is born in an inland body of water, grows up in the rough waves of the outlying Sea of Genkai, and then once again returns to

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

the Inland Sea. Since it has withstood the fierce currents of the Sea of Genkai, its flesh is firm and its bones strong, and it has a wonderful taste. Similarly, battling the rough waves of the world enables young people to grow into outstanding individuals.²

According to a certain chef, the muscles that a fish has used most, such as those near the tail or the fins, taste best.

SUDA: Those areas aren't usually eaten.

ENDO: It seems that people leave the best parts behind!

IKEDA: In terms of people, those who have really struggled possess the "flavor" of profound character and humanity.

There are those who give up when things get tough and consequently fall into despair. This is comparable to how you will undermine your health if you eat too much at a time when your power to digest and assimilate food is weak. Therefore, having a strong life force is important. When our life is strong, we can turn all of our toils into a source of spiritual nourishment.

On the other hand, no matter how much one may believe in the Mystic Law and carry out the practice of gongyo and daimoku, it is impossible to strengthen and solidify the world of Buddhahood in one's life if one avoids the hard work necessary for advancing kosen-rufu.

Live True to Yourself

SAITO: In terms of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds, attaining Buddhahood does not mean eradicating the nine worlds. Rather, it means making the best use of all of them. This gives us a sense of the broad-mindedness of this teaching.

IKEDA: To live based on the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds means to live thoroughly true to oneself based on faith.

Buddhist teachings that do not explain the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds treat the nine worlds with scorn, postulating that one can only enter the world of Buddhahood by eradicating the nine worlds. Their approach is essentially to try to carve away those parts of human existence that they regard as bad. They impose restrictions and condemn shortcomings. This ultimately leads to the idea of "annihilating one's consciousness and reducing one's body to ashes," in other words, ridding oneself of earthly desires and attachments.

While self-reflection is of course important, if not done in a positive, growth-inspiring way, a person's life may become closed off and rigid, causing them to lose all sense of purpose.

A Japanese saying goes that trying to straighten the horns of a cow could kill the cow. Instead of nit-picking over another's weaknesses, it is far more valuable

to encourage them, giving them hope and enabling them to find goals. Through doing so, we can help someone who is impatient, for example, become someone who can't wait to take positive action.

This applies to one's personal growth as well as that of others. We can be completely ourselves; there is no need to try to make ourselves appear to be what we are not.

Since we are human, there will be times when we want to cry, times when we want to laugh, times when we want to be angry, as well as times when we are confused. Though we are ordinary people who are subject to such frailties, when we make kosen-rufu our prime focus, the world of Buddhahood becomes our basic life tendency.

Once this happens, then when anger is appropriate we get angry. When suffering is needed we suffer. When laughter is due we laugh. We enjoy what there is to enjoy. The Daishonin says, "Suffer what there is to suffer, enjoy what there is to enjoy" (MW-1, 161). By leading such a vigorous and vibrant life, we are able to advance each day by leaps and bounds toward absolute happiness, and help others do the same.

SUDA: That must be what it means to live based on the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

Make Kosen-rufu the Prime Focus

IKEDA: It's vital that we possess a strong sense of responsibility for kosen-rufu. If we have the lackadaisical attitude that "Someone will take care of things" or "Somehow things will work out," then we do injury to the world of Buddhahood within our own life. For instance, when the schedule for the month is decided, if we merely write down the dates in our appointment book, we may not be roused to action.

Our mind and energy should be concentrated on the tasks we must accomplish. Our prayer is then directed, and, through the principle of three thousand realms in a single moment of life, the entire universe will move toward our victory and success. We need to make kosen-rufu our prime focus. We need to fix our attention on our friends and fellow members. We need to pray wholeheartedly for kosen-rufu, for the prosperity of the SGI, and for the happiness of all; and we have to take action. This is what it means to be a true champion of kosen-rufu.

The Lotus Sutra says, the "evil demons will take possession of others" (LS13, 194). We, however, must become people of whom "the Buddha takes possession."

Kosen-rufu is what constantly occupies the thoughts³ of the Buddha. When we are determined to accomplish this goal by working with our fellow members, Buddhahood will flow from our lives and we will begin to actualize the principles of true mutual possession of the Ten Worlds and three thousand realms in a single moment of life.

The life of the Buddha wells forth in the nine worlds of an ordinary person.

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds

This is the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

The Daishonin says, "If you exert a hundred million aeons of effort in a single moment of life, the three enlightened properties of the Buddha will appear within you at each moment" (GZ, 790). We need to exert "a hundred million aeons of effort." When we work to the utmost for kosen-rufu, Buddhahood shines like the sun in our lives. This passage expresses the essence of the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

To be continued

1. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 446–47.
2. Daisaku Ikeda, *Zuihitsu Ningen Kakumei* (Essay on the Human Revolution), (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1978), p. 145.
3. This is a paraphrase of the line near the end of the "Life Span" chapter, "*mai ji sa ze nen,*" which translates as, "At all times I think to myself..." (LS16, 232).

Title: Dialogue on the Lotus Sutra (33B)

Subject: Living Buddhism 12/98 v.2 n.12 p.36 LB9812p36

Author:

Keywords: Concepts Dialogue Lotus Mutual Possession Sutra Terms Worlds