

**Questions & Answers on Faith:
What Is the Real Meaning of the Oneness of Self and Environment?
By TED MORINO, SGI-USA Study Department Chief**

Q: What does the principle of the oneness of the self and its environment mean to my practice and daily life?

A: The practical message of this principle is that how we experience our environment depends completely on our life-condition.

The oneness of self and environment is related to another principle, one of the most profound in the Daishonin's Buddhism, that of a life-moment possessing 3,000 realms (Jpn *ichinen sanzen*). This principle says that the condition of our lives at each moment can affect the entire universe. Our prayer can thus permeate the entire universe and have a positive impact. Faith in Buddhism in essence means to trust in this.

The oneness of self and environment clarifies this by sharing the Buddhist view of our lives and environments being interrelated. The word in Japanese is *esho funi*. *Esho* is a contraction of *eho* — the insentient environment, or objective world — and *shoho* — the self, or subjective world. *E* of *eho* means “to depend” and *sho* of *shoho* means “subject,” signifying that the environment is necessary for the self to exist. *Ho* in both words means “manifest effect,” suggesting that an individual's karma appears in both his or her subjective and objective realities. *Funi* drives home the point that self and environment, while two independent phenomena, are one in their fundamental essence — they are both part of life.

Thus not only does our life-condition or, more specifically, determination affect how we experience our environment, but we can affect society positively with our lives, beginning with our prayer. Ultimately, we shape ourselves and our environment.

But sometimes the oneness of self and environment is misunderstood. It can be tempting to blame ourselves for what's wrong in our environment, saying everything is a reflection of our bad karma, rather than taking action to change our situation. We may even use our misunderstanding of the concept as an excuse not to speak up when we see injustice in our environment. But the import of *esho funi* is that, since we shape our environment, we have to take action to change it.

This can be illustrated in terms of the temple issue: Some people have said that Nikken's attitude and behavior is a reflection of the SGI members' karma. “We should not point out his bad points, but simply self-reflect since we are to blame.” While it is the destiny of the SGI to encounter one of Nikken's ilk at this particular time in its history, this does not mean we can just self-reflect and think Nikken will then go away. We have to take action — we have to speak up against what he has done.

In the ideal condition of life called Buddhahood, self and environment are joined. We are naturally protected and supported by our environment because of our prayer, life-condition, determination, action and fortune.

Nichiren Daishonin writes in “On Attaining Buddhahood”: “Life at each moment encompasses both body and spirit and both self and environment... Life at each moment permeates the universe and is revealed in all phenomena” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 3). This beautiful principle is not intended to make us feel guilty for all that is wrong in the world, but to make us feel empowered to change it. Who shapes our lives? Who shapes the world? We do.

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