

**DIALOGUE ON THE LOTUS SUTRA**  
**35 THE “LIFE SPAN” CHAPTER—LIFE AFTER DEATH—FUSION WITH THE**  
**UNIVERSAL LIFE: THE MEANING OF ETERNAL LIFE**

**THE WISDOM OF THE LOTUS SUTRA—**  
**A DISCUSSION ON RELIGION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

*This is the thirty-fifth installment of an ongoing discussion on the Lotus Sutra between SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai Study Department Chief Katsuji Saito and Vice Chiefs Takanori Endo and Haruo Suda. It appeared in the December 1997 issue of the Daibyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai study journal.*

*Participants this time discuss various issues pertaining to the Buddhist view of eternal life. What precisely continues on eternally? What is the state after death like? They also discuss universal life in terms of the concept of non-substantiality and the doctrine of the nine consciousnesses.*

**35 The “Life Span” Chapter—Life after Death—Fusion with the Universal Life: The Meaning of Eternal Life**

**KATSUJI SAITO:** The more I think about the eternity of life, the more questions I find myself confronted with. Take for example, the concept of “life after death.” We know that once dead, the physical body starts to decompose, so my question is, what is it that remains? What is eternal? What continues on after death?

**TAKANORI ENDO:** Indeed. In our last discussion, the point was made that there is no evidence to support the view that once we die nothing remains of our existence. That is, we refuted the doctrine of annihilation. But neither is there evidence of an unchanging soul, distinct from our physical body, which continues on eternally.

**HARUO SUDA:** In other words, as the refutation of the doctrine of eternity points out, there is no spirit-like substance that flits about hither and yon after death.

**SAITO:** Nonetheless, it seems many people think that Buddhism ascribes to this idea of an eternal soul in its view of life after death. And it often comes as quite a surprise to them to hear that Buddhism in fact rejects this view.

**SUDA:** If not a soul, then just what continues on after death? This is a difficult question.

**DAISAKU IKEDA:** The second Soka Gakkai president, Josei Toda, would often say that upon death our lives fuse with the universe. It’s not a matter of there being a soul; rather, our life, as an entity of the oneness of body and mind, returns to the universe. The universe itself is one great living entity. It is a vast ocean of life. It nurtures all things, gives all things life and enables them to function. When things die, they return again to its embrace and receive new vitality.

There is a boundless and overflowing ocean of life which is always in motion. As it moves and changes, it enacts the rhythm of life and death. Our individual lives are like waves produced from the great ocean that is the universe; the emergence of a wave is “life,” and its abatement is “death.” This rhythm repeats eternally.

This is not only true of the lives of people. Nichiren Daishonin says, “No phenomena—heaven or earth, Yin or Yang,<sup>1</sup> the sun or the moon, the five planets,<sup>2</sup> or any life-condition from Hell to Buddhahood—are free from birth and death” (*The Major Writings of Nichiren*

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*Daishonin*, vol. 1, pp. 21–22). “Heaven or earth, Yin or Yang, the sun or the moon, the five planets” refers to the realm of celestial bodies. Stars also experience birth and death. They have a life span. The Milky Way was born and it, too, will die; its life is limited. The laws of birth and death dictate this. The same holds true in the realm of the microscopic. Each of the Ten Worlds from Hell to Buddhahood, in all phenomena, experiences birth and death. For example, the state of Hell may manifest in life at one time, and in death at another.

The Daishonin writes to his follower Nanjo Tokimitsu about his late father, “While he was in this world, he was a living Buddha, and now, he is a Buddha in death. His Buddhahood transcends both life and death” (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 207), indicating that the effect of Buddhahood he had attained in his life would continue even after death.

All things in the universe weave an eternal rhythm of life and death. What, then, is the state after death in which one fuses with the universe like? Let’s try to investigate this further. Why don’t we first consider the moment of death, which is the transition from life to death?

## The Disintegration of the Five Components

**SUDA:** Perhaps we could start by looking at the “*Rinju yojin sho*” (Cautions on the Moment of Death).<sup>3</sup> As the title suggests, this document, which is a record of sermons delivered by Nichikan (1665–1726), the twenty-sixth high priest of Taiseki-ji, contains a number of things to bear in mind at the time of one’s death.

**ENDO:** These include, for example, “People who are intoxicated should not come near the ailing person,” and “The person should not be surrounded by large numbers of boisterous people.”<sup>4</sup> What this basically means is that one must take care not to interrupt the dying person’s tranquillity.

**IKEDA:** Our *ichinen*, or frame of mind, at the moment of death is a major determinant of which of the Ten Worlds in the universe our life will enter. Therefore, Nichikan warns that every precaution should be taken to ensure that the dying person can single-mindedly focus on the Mystic Law.

**SAITO:** To enable the person to concentrate on the Mystic Law, he advises against such things as placing items of sentimental value nearby to which the sick person might feel a strong attachment, or engaging in discussion which may arouse feelings of anxiety or causing them to become excited.<sup>5</sup>

**SUDA:** He also says, “Even after the person has stopped breathing, you should continue chanting daimoku near the deceased.” That’s because, he explains, “even after death the fundamental mind remains.”<sup>6</sup> Even though in Nichikan’s day the cessation of breathing was held to constitute the moment of death, he asserts that for a while thereafter the “fundamental mind” remains. He says that one should allow that mind to hear the sound of daimoku.

**ENDO:** This suggests that the transition from life to death does not take place in a single instant, but occurs gradually.

**IKEDA:** Yes. Death is seen as a process that continues over a certain period of time.

**SAITO:** In terms of the physical body, that process involves a transformation from “sentience” to “insentience.” In the course of this process, the possibility exists that, due to some circumstance, the person may return to life. But it seems that once a certain stage is passed, that is no longer possible. The near-death experiences that we discussed last time of course involve people who were at the stage when it was still possible to return.

**SUDA:** After passing the point at which return to life is no longer possible, the person finally proceeds toward complete death. This may be the point that has since ancient times been described in Buddhism as the “river of three crossings.”<sup>7</sup>

**IKEDA:** Just what takes place when a living entity makes the transition from life to death? Buddhism after all views the physical and spiritual functions of a living entity as a temporary union.

**ENDO:** That’s what’s referred to as the “temporary union of the five components.”

**IKEDA:** Of the five components, form indicates the physical dimension of life. And perception, conception, volition and consciousness indicate life’s spiritual functions.

*[Perception is the spiritual function that enables one to take in stimuli from the external world via the “six sense organs”—the five sense organs plus mind, which integrates the impressions of the five senses. Conception is the function of creating mental ideas about what has been perceived. Volition is the spiritual function to take some action based on conception. And consciousness is the fundamental spiritual activity that integrates the functions of perception, conception and volition.]*

Life has the power to harmoniously fuse these physical and spiritual functions. It harmonizes them, unifies them, and enables proactive engagement with respect to the external world.

**ENDO:** Certainly, viewed strictly in terms of the physical aspect, our bodies are an amalgam of materials existing in the universe.

**IKEDA:** According to one source, the cells of the human body number 60 trillion. As they age, old cells are constantly being replaced by new ones. In other words, life and death is taking place constantly on the cellular level. Here we see once again the laws of birth and death at work.

At the same time, a single living entity strictly integrates and governs these cells allowing itself to carry out activity. When death approaches, the integrative power of life is lost and the five components, which have hitherto been held in a state of temporary union, disintegrate. Life’s physical and spiritual functions subsequently recede into latency, and the union of the five elements<sup>8</sup> is also lost.

**SUDA:** Nichikan’s “Cautions on the Moment of Death” reads, “When the wind of the ‘devil of extinction’ enters the body, the bone and flesh separate.”<sup>9</sup> This seems to suggest that the dying person senses a wind passing through the body as the five elements all go their separate ways. The annals of near-death experiences in fact include such accounts. The distress that one experiences at that time is termed the suffering of death. Nichikan says of the suffering of death, “If a person has accumulated good karma, he will not suffer a great deal.”

**IKEDA:** Even if the only benefit of faith in the Mystic Law was to be free of suffering at the time of death, it would still be wonderful.

## **Changes in Appearance at the Time of Death Corroborated by Medical Field**

**SAITO:** In the SGI, there are countless reports of people who have passed away with a look of peace and ease at the final moment. You frequently hear about people who, though they may have died of illness, did not experience any pain; or who, although they died due to some untoward accident, breathed their last with a peaceful look as though simply doz-

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ing off.

**SUDA:** I once heard someone who worked for a funeral house remark: “No matter how you might try to improve the appearance of a corpse with cosmetics, you cannot fundamentally alter the person’s visage at death. No amount of money or status can acquire a good appearance at death. Having seen a great many people in life and in death, it seems to me that, ultimately, how a person looks at death reflects how he or she has lived.”

At funerals for SGI members, there is definitely something different about the general atmosphere, too. Observers noting the heartfelt mourning of other members often are left with the sense that the deceased must have truly treasured others.

**ENDO:** In particular, the funerals for individuals who have worked hard to help others are attended by endless streams of mourners. You often hear about how family members or people in the community who are not SGI members gain a new understanding of the great achievements of the deceased by the large numbers of people who come to pay their last respects, even though the deceased may not have had any special standing in society.

**IKEDA:** Such people propagate the Daishonin’s teaching even in death. This is truly wonderful. They are genuine champions of the people. A passage in the “Encouragements of the Bodhisattva Universal Worthy” chapter of the Lotus Sutra indicates just this when it says: “When the lives of these persons come to an end, they will be received into the hands of a thousand Buddhas, who will free them from all fear and keep them from falling into the evil paths of existence” (LS28, 322).

A thousand Buddhas applaud those champions of the people who have fought hard for kosen-rufu. Here, a “thousand Buddhas” could be said to point to the many people who chant daimoku for the sake of the deceased.

Of course, the important thing is not the number of people who see a person off, but that the deceased be embraced by sincere daimoku. There is no greater way to embark on the journey for Eagle Peak than to be sent off from this life by the sincere daimoku of one’s fellow members.

**SUDA:** I heard the experience of Harue Yamaguchi of Hachioji, Tokyo, who died in 1996. The funeral of Mrs. Yamaguchi, who had fought for many years for kosen-rufu in her community, was attended by an extraordinary number of people.

She was 65 when she died, but the look on her face was so peaceful that it became the talk of the community. During the five days her body lay at home while funeral ceremonies were under way, she reportedly grew more lovely by the day. The wrinkles on her forehead vanished and she looked as though she had actually grown younger. On viewing her, one person even remarked in surprise, “She is smiling like a child. That’s truly how she looks.”

Mrs. Yamaguchi, who joined the Soka Gakkai in 1955, had undergone surgery to remove a tumor from her lung eight years prior to her death. But even after that, she continued energetically carrying out activities in the Hachioji area.

**IKEDA:** I have heard a great deal about her. She was deeply trusted by many people not only in Hachioji, but throughout the western Tokyo region.

**SUDA:** Whenever she had a moment’s time, she would be talking with local members or calling up someone to offer encouragement. She was so lively and high-spirited, people sometimes would ask her, “How do you manage to always be so bright and cheerful?” To which she would reply: “It’s because I chant daimoku to help people overcome their sufferings. It seems to me that the more I encourage others, the more abundant my own life force becomes.”

Because she was always brightly encouraging other members, everyone was surprised at

her sudden death. While alive, she had often said, “Life is eternal. I would like to die quickly, the way the petals of a flower scatter after it has bloomed. I don’t want to become a burden for others.”

When she died, she quickly lost consciousness and didn’t experience any suffering at all. And, as has already been noted, she had a truly peaceful countenance—with the same look on her face she had when encouraging someone.

**SAITO:** Her appearance in death was indeed a source of great encouragement for everyone.

**ENDO:** Nichiren Daishonin indicates that one’s appearance at the moment of death reveals one’s condition of life. He says, for example, that the expression of a virtuous person at the time of death will be “pure and bright” and that person’s body will be “as light as a goose feather and as soft and pliable as cotton” (MW-5, 288).

I once asked a specialist in terminal care to explain the circumstances in which a person’s facial color improves upon death. In short, I was told that when a person dies with a sense of satisfaction and peace of mind, generally the blood vessels will be in a dilated and non-constricted state. The formation of blood clots and hardening of the muscles take comparatively longer to occur. As a result, the person’s face brightens while the body remains supple.

On the other hand, when someone dies with feelings of chagrin and regret, in a state of suffering, the body becomes like a clenched fist and consequently the blood vessels are in a constricted state. Then the clotting of the blood and hardening of the muscles begin sooner, so that the person’s appearance darkens as the body stiffens.

While on a different level from attaining Buddhahood, it seems that, in general, the state of a person’s mind upon encountering death is reflected in his or her appearance.

**IKEDA:** This suggests that, to some extent, medicine can explain why there are differences in people’s appearances at death.

Of course, since the benefit of the Mystic Law purifies our lives, those who really exert themselves in faith have absolutely no need to fear death. Even if someone should die in an accident, as long as the person has maintained strong faith in life, he or she will attain Buddhahood without fail.

## The Energy of Karma Continues after Death

**SAITO:** We still haven’t answered the question of what it is that continues after death.

Specifically, Buddhism explains the concept of selflessness, denying the existence of a soul after death. It teaches that there is no “self” that lives as an eternally unchanging entity. At the same time, it teaches that life continues after death, and in a qualified sense recognizes the concept of transmigration. We need to consider whether these two views are contradictory.

**IKEDA:** This is a very old question that has been posed since the dawn of Buddhism. While it would be very interesting to explore the historical development of thought on the matter, I think that because of the complexity, we should perhaps pass over this discussion for now. I would just like to note that the concept of nonsubstantiality and the investigations of the Consciousness-Only school<sup>10</sup> involve a close awareness of this issue.

What continues after death? Shakyamuni’s conclusion is that karma continues. Our circumstances in our present life are the effect of our past actions (karma), and our actions in the present determine the circumstances of our lives in the future. In other words, the

influence of our actions is carried on from one existence to the next transcending life and death.

**SAITO:** Karma, as indicated by the concept of the three categories of action—namely thoughts, words and deeds—means both physical and spiritual activity. What we have done, what we have said, what we have thought—the consequences of all these actions continue into the future unabated. When you think about it, this is an extremely strict perspective on causality.

**IKEDA:** That's right. Essentially, it is the energy of karma that continues beyond birth and death.

**ENDO:** The mention of energy calls to mind the principle of the conservation of energy, a law of physics which holds that energy can be neither created nor destroyed. While thermal energy may change into kinetic energy, and potential energy may turn into electrical energy, energy cannot suddenly be produced from nothing. Nor can existing energy simply disappear. It only changes form.

**SUDA:** Even matter is nothing more than a stable form of energy. From that standpoint, some claim that energy is the ultimate reality.

**IKEDA:** René Huyghe discusses this in his important work *Formes et forces* (Forms and Forces).<sup>11</sup>

[Huyghe (1906–97) was a French art historian. His dialogue with the SGI president was published in 1991 under the title *Dawn After Dark*, by Weatherhill, Inc.]

According to Huyghe, there is a dynamic of form and energy operating on all levels of existence, from the atomic to the universal. And the high-level spiritual activity of artistic creation is no exception.

He proposes that, through some function, force produces a stable form. Should the energy contained in the form remain active, it will eventually take another form or will return to a state of pure force. In terms of the Buddhist concept of “the three truths,” force represents the truth of nonsubstantiality, and form the truth of temporary existence. [see box p. 40]

**SAITO:** So with respect to life and death, we can say that life is when the energy of karma temporarily assumes a fixed form, and death is when the form breaks down and becomes one with the life current of the universe as a flow of pure energy.

**IKEDA:** Generally speaking, that comparison is probably an apt one. Of course, form changes continually from moment to moment.

**ENDO:** Along the lines of the principle of conservation of energy, we might be able to speak loosely of a principle of conservation of karma.

**IKEDA:** I find it deeply intriguing that Huyghe identifies wave motion as an important factor in energy's transformation into form. He postulates that form is determined by the various wave, vibratory and rhythmic attributes of force. This is based on well-known experiments in cymatics.

**SAITO:** Cymatic experiments involve imparting a fixed vibration to liquids, or to dust or metal shavings spread over a disc-shaped surface. When a certain frequency is reached, the particles describe a particular pattern on the surface. The patterns include those of helices, snails, dendriforms or tree-like patterns, hexagons and scales.

**IKEDA:** They also often manifest the shapes of such organic substances as sprigs of coral, broad beans, shells, fish skeletons, turtle shells, and the hexagonal loculi of a beehive. Based on

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these experiments, Huyghe speculates that all matter is made up of energy and a particular vibration or rhythm. His insight is that each living entity may have a particular “vibratory reality.”<sup>12</sup>

Of course, the energy of karma is different from physical energy. It is latent life energy that influences both physical and spiritual aspects of our being. So we should always remember that this is merely an analogy for helping us understand the true nature of life and death.

### **The *Alaya*-Consciousness: A Vehicle for the Continuation of Karma**

**SUDA:** This karmic energy is said to continue on, transcending life and death. Since there is both positive karma and negative karma, the circumstances of each living entity’s present existence is determined by its karmic energy of both good and evil from previous existences.

**IKEDA:** That’s right. The present form of our life is determined by an equilibrium of positive and negative energies.

**ENDO:** As an effect of this karmic energy a person might, for example, be born with superior intelligence or good looks. Because this is an effect that appears in the subject, it is termed a “life effect.” By contrast, to be born, for example, in a home that is the scene of constant fighting is an “environmental effect.”

President Toda once said:

All of our actions in past existences are contained in their entirety in our life. This is why Buddhism is so important. While we might want to say, “What I did in the past is irrelevant. I was born with a clean slate,” we cannot get away from our past so easily.

“Why was I born poor?” “Why was I born stupid?” “Why is my business failing even though I am working as hard as I can?” The answer to all of these questions is to be found in our past lives. Although the cause is in our past lives, the Daishonin’s Buddhism teaches how we can break through such obstacles.

Looking at our lives from a physiological standpoint, in the course of several years every cell in our body, from the center of our eyeballs to the marrow of our bones, is replaced. This is recognized by medical science. On that basis, you could perhaps argue that you are not liable for a debt incurred five years earlier. But while we might like to be absolved of our debts, the debt collector will come without fail. Similarly, we have no choice but to take responsibility for our actions of the past.

While we can readily understand this from a logical standpoint, when we are faced with it as an actual problem we find ourselves at a loss. In this connection, Nichiren Daishonin says that those who worship the Dai-Gohonzon, though they may be people of little virtue or people who committed great offenses in the past, will be completely absolved, and will receive the same effects as they would if they had made many good causes in the past (GZ, 754). That’s why faith is so important.<sup>13</sup>

**SAITO:** The karmic energy that sustains our lives does not all become manifest at once in the present. But sooner or later that energy will produce some kind of effect, though it may not be until a future lifetime. In terms of the theme of our discussion this time, the question is how this karmic energy continues on after death.

**IKEDA:** I think the doctrine of the nine consciousnesses speaks most aptly to this sub-

ject.

**SAITO:** Indeed. The Consciousness-Only doctrine clarifies the interior dimension of human life to such an extent that it has had an important influence on modern psychology. In the first place, it resolves the seeming contradiction between the view of the self as empty and the concept of transmigration.

**SUDA:** Of the nine consciousnesses, the first five are based on the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. These are functions of perception and awareness. The sixth consciousness integrates these five consciousnesses into coherent images; it is the function of intelligence to make inferences and judgments about things. It is primarily with these six consciousnesses that we perform our daily activities.

**ENDO:** Going further, we come to the seventh or *mano*-consciousness and the eighth or *alaya*-consciousness, which corresponds to the realm of the so-called subconscious.

**IKEDA:** The eighth consciousness ensures the continuity of karma from one lifetime to the next.

**SAITO:** The functions of all the consciousnesses up through the seventh consciousness cease upon death. But the *alaya*-consciousness continues to function over the three existences of past, present and future. The original meaning of the Sanskrit term *alaya* is storehouse or repository. Since it is where karma is stored, it is also known as the storehouse consciousness.

**IKEDA:** Incidentally, it is said that the word Himalaya is a combination of *hima* or “snow” and *alaya* or “storehouse.”

**ENDO:** The storehouse of snow.

**IKEDA:** All of our karma accumulates in the *alaya*-consciousness as though in a storehouse. Both good karma and bad karma are stored there like seeds in a granary.

The term *storehouse* conjures the image of an actual structure into which things of substance can be placed. But in fact it may be more accurate to say that the life-current of karmic energy itself constitutes the eighth consciousness.

**SAITO:** A Buddhist text likens the eighth consciousness to a rushing stream.

**IKEDA:** Moreover, the eighth consciousness transcends the boundaries of the individual and interacts with the karmic energy of others. On the inner dimension of life, this latent karmic energy merges with the latent energy of one’s family, one’s ethnic group, and humankind, and also with that of animals and plants.

**SUDA:** That’s a magnificent image. That’s why the human revolution of one person also changes the destiny of the person’s family and society. A positive change in the karmic energy in the depths of one person’s life becomes a cogwheel for change in the karma in the lives of others.

**IKEDA:** There are methods for changing the karmic energy in one’s life from negative to positive through steadily accumulating good causes. But in reality that is not practical; sooner or later we are liable to do something that erases the good causes we have made, just as in piling up stones we can only get so high before we upset what we have worked to create. That is particularly so in an age when society to its very depths is swirling with negative energy.

By contrast, the Lotus Sutra teaches how, by activating the ninth consciousness, which lies at the utmost depths of our being and is fundamentally free of impurity, we can at once change both the negative and positive karmic energy in our life into supremely positive energy. The ninth consciousness is the universal life that underlies the eighth consciousness and every other facet of our being.

The eternal Buddha of the “Life Span” (sixteenth) chapter could be called an expression in human form of this fundamentally pure consciousness that is without beginning or end. When we activate this fundamentally pure consciousness, the energy of all life’s good and evil karma is directed toward value creation; and the mind or consciousness of our ethnic group and of humankind is infused with the life current of compassion and wisdom.

**SAITO:** The Daishonin calls this fundamentally pure consciousness the “unchanging reality which reigns over all life’s functions” (MW-1, 213). It is the Gohonzon, which exists “only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 213).

**ENDO:** The Daishonin also says, “The five characters of Myoho-renge-kyo represent the ninth consciousness” (GZ, 794). This is saying that Myoho-renge-kyo itself is the universal life.

### The Ten Worlds Are “Life Wavelengths”

**IKEDA:** So, life after death means that the life current of karma, in a state of nonsubstantiality, merges with the universal life.

Since it is nonsubstantial, it is neither existence nor nonexistence. Nor can it be said to exist in any particular place in the universe. Rather, it becomes one with the life of the universe in its entirety.

**SUDA:** President Toda put it this way: “The lives of your grandfather and your grandmother exist in the universe. But that doesn’t mean that they are out there somewhere holding hands. They’re there, it’s just that there’s no way of pinpointing a single location for them.”<sup>14</sup>

**IKEDA:** Since they are in no particular place in the universe, you cannot say simply that they exist. On the other hand, they will be born again in response to the appropriate causes; so you cannot say that they do not exist either. Life after death transcends the concepts of both existence and nonexistence.

This might seem to defy common sense, but we in fact find similar concepts in areas of physics such as quantum mechanics. The fact that light has properties both of a wave and of a particle seems to fly in the face of our ordinary way of thinking.

**SUDA:** It does seem contradictory to say that something is both a wave and a particle. That light has the properties of both—sometimes displaying those of a wave and sometimes those of a particle—confounds ordinary logic.

**SAITO:** President Toda used the analogy of radio waves to explain life in the state of nonsubstantiality. In this day and age, it may make more sense to use the example of televisions.

**IKEDA:** Yes. Broadcast waves of various wavelengths from stations in many different countries crisscross the world. When you take a television receiver and tune it to the wavelength of the broadcast you want to receive, you are able to hear sound and see images. Through the *relation* or *external cause* of the receiver, the silent and invisible waves become audible sounds and visible images. It could be said that this represents the transformation of the wavelengths from death to life.

**SUDA:** The broadcaster breaks down sounds and images into various streams of data and transmits them as radio waves. Through the television receiver they are reconstituted and the original sounds and images reappear. Although the sound and image are broken down into unintelligible signals, the original composite is later reconstituted and reap-

pears. This seems analogous to the temporary union of the five components.

**IKEDA:** We are born with a body and mind (a life effect) and in an environment (an environmental effect) that matches our own karmic energy. Of course, life and environment are in fact inseparable. For they both are manifestations (effects) of our own karmic energy.

President Toda often used the example of the Japanese board game *Go* to explain the transition from death to life. In an important title match between two masters, a single game can take as long as two days to complete. If on the first day there is no winner, the play is suspended. This corresponds to the moment of death. But on the following day, the match is resumed with the stones laid out exactly as they had been at the end of play the day before. This corresponds to the next life. There is continuity. We aren't born with a blank slate; rather, we continue where we left off. That's why the expression "to be born anew"<sup>15</sup> is something of a misnomer.

President Toda emphasized this point, saying: "We don't say that a stick of incense or a cigarette is reborn when we relight it. They simply resume burning from the point where they had stopped before. When we die and are reborn, our life, just as it is, continues."<sup>16</sup> "This very body continues on," he added, thumping his chest for emphasis. In other words, he was saying that the continuity of our life, consisting of an entity of body and mind, is not impeded by our going through death and rebirth.

At any given moment our life is in one of the Ten Worlds. President Toda compared the differences between the Ten Worlds to the differences between various wavelengths, calling them differences in life wavelength.

The Ten Worlds also exist in the great life of the universe. If a person's state of life at the last moment is that of the world of Hell, then the person's life fuses with the world of Hell in the universal life; if they are in Rapture, their life fuses with the world of Rapture (Heaven).

**ENDO:** In other words, it merges with the world in the universal life whose wavelength matches that of our own life.

**SAITO:** Life wavelength—that reminds me of Huyghe's comment, introduced earlier, that all matter ultimately is composed of energy and a particular rhythm.

**SUDA:** As to the manner in which our lives fuse with the universe, even though we speak of the Ten Worlds inherent in the universal life, they do not, as we have discussed previously, exist as actual places somewhere in the universe. It's not the case, for example, that the eight cold hells lie beyond Pluto, or that the world of Rapture is next to Venus. Rather, they permeate the entirety of the universal life.

**IKEDA:** Whether we are speaking of the world of Hell, the world of Rapture or the world of Buddhahood, each pervades the entire universe. This is a point we covered in discussing the principle of the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds.

When our being becomes one with the world corresponding to our state of life at the moment of death, we become one with the entire universe. For precisely this reason, as long as the appropriate external cause exists, there is no restriction on when and where in the universe we can reappear. And we are reborn with the body and mind and in the environment that is most suited to us.

**ENDO:** President Toda said of this life that pervades the entire universe: "At some stage, life comes to concentrate in one part of the universe. It is then that it is born as a living being." Isn't he saying that when the proper external cause is present, our life, which pervades the universe, instantaneously becomes concentrated in one particular place and

manifests as a distinct living entity?

**IKEDA:** That is one explanation.

At the same time, we should bear in mind that “pervading the entire universe” does not indicate that life is expansive, nor does existing in a life form as tiny as the head of a pin mean that life is small and narrow.

**SAITO:** In his writing, “On the Ultimate Teaching Affirmed by All Buddhas of Past, Present and Future” (Jpn Sanze shobutsu sokanmon kyoso hairyu), the Daishonin says: “Although it [the true entity of life] can fit inside a mustard seed, the seed does not expand, nor does life contract. Although it fills the vastness of space, space is not too wide, nor is life too small” (GZ, 563).

**IKEDA:** In other words, it’s not a matter of something widely spread out over infinite space suddenly concentrating together in a discrete location. After death and before rebirth, life is in a state of latency; it is not dispersed. Since the entire universe is one living entity, a life that is one with the universe is never distant and can manifest anywhere in an instant. We must be clear on this point.

**ENDO:** It’s a rather difficult concept.

### Can the Deceased Feel Suffering or Joy?

**When living beings witness the end of a kalpa  
and all is consumed in a great fire,  
this, my land, remains safe and tranquil,  
constantly filled with heavenly and human beings.  
The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves  
are adorned with various kinds of gems.  
Jeweled trees abound in flowers and fruit  
where living beings enjoy themselves at ease.  
The gods strike heavenly drums,  
constantly making many kinds of music.  
Mandarava blossoms rain down,  
scattering over the Buddha and the great assembly.  
(LS16, 230–31)<sup>17</sup>**

**SUDA:** I have a question. It is said that the life of someone who has died is in a state of latency and has neither physical nor spiritual properties. If that is the case, then is it possible that the deceased feel suffering or joy?

**IKEDA:** Indeed, they do.

President Toda once remarked that it would be interesting if a device were invented that could make it possible to see life after death. He elaborated: “If it were possible to see the life of a deceased father or sibling that had become one with the universe, you would find some there shrieking in agony and some filled with joy. But the deceased entity, which abides in a state of suffering or joy depending on its karma, is not visible, having neither form nor color. Unless you understand this view of nonsubstantiality, you cannot grasp the essence of the Buddhist doctrine of life.”<sup>18</sup>

**SAITO:** For that matter, the great inventor Thomas Edison (1847–1931) had a keen interest in life after death. Drawing inferences based on the scientific principle that energy continues to exist eternally, he speculated that an “indestructible and undying personali-

ty” continued to exist after death. In 1920, he reportedly announced that “he was working on a sensitive apparatus with which to detect and record the myriad infinitesimal, immortal monads ‘prowling through the ether of space.’”<sup>19</sup>

**IKEDA:** That’s very interesting. If the king of invention had succeeded in building such a device, that would have been the greatest invention in human history.

**SAITO:** He wrote: “The reason why you are you and I am Edison is because we have different swarms or groups or whatever you wish to call them, of entities.”<sup>20</sup>

From the standpoint of Buddhism, this view could perhaps be expressed as follows: The individuality of each living entity is due to differences in the composition of the five components, reflecting its karmic energy.

Incidentally, Edison’s last words were, “It is very beautiful over there.”<sup>21</sup> Edison, who had been in a coma state, suddenly opened his eyes and uttered these words to his wife.

**IKEDA:** These words are full of suggestion.

At any rate, if such a device as Edison described were built, then we would probably find that the deceased experience good and bad life feelings according to their respective karma.

**SUDA:** What would be doing the experiencing?

**IKEDA:** That would be the life current itself of the individual, which had been colored by the person’s good or bad karma. Apart from this life current, which changes from moment to moment, there is no self.

Moreover, this current is constantly interacting with other life currents in a relation of dependent origination. The life current is therefore selfless, in the sense that the self has no fixed substance. But at the same time, the individual self definitely has its own life current.

**SAITO:** In light of the concept of nonsubstantiality or selflessness, which tries to clarify the true aspect of our life, perhaps we could say that this life current is the self.

**IKEDA:** While activity is the main characteristic of one’s life current while alive, one’s life current after death is fundamentally passive. From that standpoint, we cannot independently change our state of life after we have died. For instance, while we are alive, even if our underlying tendency is that of the world of Hell, through contact with other people and the influence of the environment, we may experience a variety of different worlds—Heaven, Humanity and so on. But in the state of death we lose touch with external stimuli, reverting to the underlying state of our own life.

Upon death, a life that has the world of Hell as its underlying tendency becomes one with the world of Hell existing in the universe and is filled with unmitigated pain and suffering. A life that has the world of Hunger as its underlying tendency will be tormented by a sense of hunger even more overwhelming than any experienced while alive.

The self of a life that has the world of Heaven or Humanity as its fundamental tendency will, after passing through the suffering of death, regain its peace and tranquillity and be gently embraced, experiencing a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction.

Lives that have Buddhahood as their fundamental tendency will upon death instantaneously become one with the world of Buddhahood in the universe and be infused with a sense of great and brilliant joy. Perceiving that the entire universe is the Buddha land, they will enjoy the state of life described by the passages: “This, my land, remains safe and tranquil, constantly filled with heavenly and human beings” and “living beings enjoy themselves at ease. The gods strike heavenly drums” (LS16, 230). And, in accord with their sworn prayer, their lives will function as one with the eternal Buddha in both life and death. Let’s talk further about life and death in regards to the world of Buddhahood next time when we sum up the “Life Span” chapter.

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## Can You Change Your State of Life after Death?

The countless entities in the three thousand realms which are undergoing the process of birth, duration, change and extinction are all in themselves embodiments of [the Thus Come One's] transcendental powers.

But in the view of Nichiren and his followers, the realization and understanding of the concept of attainment of Buddhahood in one's present form is what is meant by the words "the Thus Come One's secret and his transcendental powers." For outside of the attainment of Buddhahood, there is no "secret" and no "transcendental powers." (GZ, 753)

**ENDO:** Since life after death is devoid of activity, is there nothing that can change the state of a person who dies and fuses with the world of Hell?

**IKEDA:** That's why we need to struggle to do our human revolution in this life. If you spend your life in vain, then, even though you may regret it for all eternity, it will be too late to do anything about it.

But the power of the Mystic Law is enormous. The daimoku that we chant reaches the lives of the deceased latent in the universal life. President Toda said: "The power of daimoku is immense. It can cause a life laboring under painful karma to experience a peaceful and dream-like state as though frolicking in a garden of flowers."<sup>22</sup> The sound of our voices chanting daimoku resonates throughout the entire universe.

**ENDO:** Daimoku chanted by those who are alive reaches the lives of those who have died. If that is true, do the lives of those who have died then come to function on behalf of those who are living?

**SAITO:** Life after death is in a state of latency; it has lost all activity. Accordingly, it would seem to follow that the lives of those who have died could not function in any active capacity.

**SUDA:** That's indeed so. There are religions that solicit money from their adherents by telling them, for example, that the spirit of their ancestor wants this or that. That is reprehensible.

**ENDO:** Yes. But there are many people who have reported actually hearing the voice of a deceased person or seeing a ghost. It would seem that we cannot discount all such accounts as illusions or hoaxes.

**IKEDA:** President Toda once told someone who thought they had heard the voice of a dead person: "Living people have the Ten Worlds in their life. So it may happen that someone will sense the 'life wavelength' of someone who has died and whose life has become one with the universe. I think that you sensed this as audible words."

In other words, if your own life force is weak, you can be affected by life wavelengths from beyond similar to the way a radio or television picks up a broadcast. And people only sense these voices individually. President Toda pointed out to the person that if he developed his life force through strong faith, then the life wavelength of his own world of Buddhahood would instead be broadcast out, and bring the deceased person peace and repose.

He further declared: "Up to now you were deceived into thinking that your deceased wife or your deceased ancestors were spirits. You must not be fooled by such deceptions. If this were in fact the case, then the whole world would be full of ghosts and it would be so

crowded you could not move.”<sup>23</sup>

At any rate, the universe eternally enacts the rhythm of life and death. The infinite currents of the ocean of life surge high one moment and quiet down the next, never stopping for an instant, repeating the drama of life and death. The “Life Span” chapter explains that the driving force behind this is the “transcendental power” of the Thus Come One.

In the “Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings” (Jpn Ongi kuden), the Daishonin says, “The countless entities in the three thousand realms which are undergoing the process of birth, duration, change and extinction are all in themselves embodiments of [the Thus Come One’s] transcendental powers” (GZ, 753).

In essence, the “Life Span” chapter exhorts us to develop these transcendental powers, this great, fundamental vitality, in ourselves. The important thing—whether we are speaking about transcendental powers or the universal life—is that we can only attain this through wholeheartedly taking action for kosen-rufu. It’s a matter of practicing with the spirit of “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha, not hesitating even if it costs them their lives” (LS16, 230).

President Toda battled difficulties head-on and was imprisoned. And it was there that he attained enlightenment. Based on a sense of mission transcending life and death, he vowed to give his life for the sake of kosen-rufu, and as a result awakened to the true aspect of life and death.

The faith to continue tirelessly struggling for kosen-rufu over the three existences of past, present and future is itself the great ship for embarking on an eternal voyage across the ocean of life and death.

*To be continued*

1. Yin and Yang: Two complementary principles of ancient Chinese philosophy that make up all aspects and phenomena of life. Yin is seen as earth, female, dark and absorbing; Yang is heaven, male, light and penetrating. Their interaction was thought to affect the destiny of all things.
2. Five planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The more distant planets were undetected in thirteenth-century Japan.
3. *Fuji Shugaku Yoshu* (Essential Writings of the Fuji School), ed. Hori Nichiko (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1977), vol. 3.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, p. 265.
7. River of Three Crossings: A river which the dead are said to cross after their demise. It has three points of crossing, shallow, deeper and deepest, and the place where a person crosses depends on the individual’s karma.
8. Five elements: The five constituents of all things in the universe, according to ancient Indian belief; earth, water, fire, wind and space. The first four correspond respectively to the physical states of solid, liquid, heat and gas. Space, here, is interrupted as integrating the other four elements.
9. *Fuji Shugaku Yoshu*, *ibid.*, p. 265.
10. Consciousness-Only school: (Skt. *Vijnanavada*) Also called the Yogachara school, one

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of the two major Mahayana schools in India, along with the Madhyamika school. Maitreya, around 270–350, is regarded as the founder. Maitreya's doctrine, the Consciousness-Only doctrine, was expounded in his one-hundred-fascicle "Yugashiji Ron" ("Treatise on the Stages of Yoga Practice") and was further developed by his disciples Asanga and Vasubandhu in the fifth century. This school upholds the concept that all phenomena arise from the *viññana* or consciousness and that the basis of all functions of consciousness is the *alaya-viññana* or *alaya*-consciousness.

11. René Huyghe, *Formes et forces: de l'atome à Rembrandt* (Forms and Forces: From the Atom to Rembrandt) (Paris: Flammarion, 1971).
12. *Ibid.*, p. 356.
13. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Collected Writings of Josei Toda) (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1985), vol. 5, p. 412.
14. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1982), vol. 2, p. 190.
15. Born anew: This is the literal translation of the Japanese term commonly used to mean rebirth.
16. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, vol. 5, p. 411.
17. 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.
18. *Toda Josei Zenshu* (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1984), vol. 4, pp. 253–54.
19. Neil Baldwin, *Edison: Inventing the Century* (NY: Hyperion, 1995), p. 377.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 407.
22. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, vol. 4, pp. 261–62.
23. *Toda Josei Zenshu*, vol. 2, pp. 169–70.

### **The Three Truths:**

THE truth of nonsubstantiality (Jpn *kutai*), the truth of temporary existence (*ketai*) and the truth of the Middle Way (*chutai*). Three integral aspects of the truth formulated by T'ien-t'ai of China. They indicate three phases of one truth. The truth of nonsubstantiality means that phenomena have no absolute or fixed existence of their own; their true nature is *ku*, the potential state that cannot be defined as either existence or nonexistence. The truth of temporary existence means that while all things are *ku* or nonsubstantial in nature, they nevertheless possess a provisional or temporary reality which is in constant flux. The truth of the Middle Way is that all phenomena are characterized by both nonsubstantiality and temporary existence yet are in essence neither. The true nature of all phenomena transcends words or conception.

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## Ten Factors

RELATION or external cause is one of the Ten Factors, an analysis of the unchanging aspects common to all life and phenomena. Part of the theory of life that “a single life-moment possesses three thousand realms,” the Ten Factors are mentioned in the “Expedient Means” chapter of the Lotus Sutra which states: “The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature, entity, power, influence, inherent cause, relation, latent effect, manifest effect and their consistency from beginning to end” (LS2, 24).

The Ten Worlds or states of life include Hell, Hunger, Anger, Animality, Humanity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddhahood. As different as these worlds are from each other, they all have the Ten Factors in common. The Ten Factors are: (1) Appearance, or that aspect of things which can be discerned from the outside. It includes such attributes as color, form, shape and behavior, and points to the material and physical side of existence. (2) Nature, which indicates inherent disposition or quality that cannot be perceived directly from the outside. In terms of human life, it corresponds to spiritual aspects as mind and consciousness. (3) Entity, or the essence of life which permeates and integrates external appearance and internal nature. These first three factors explain the reality of life itself.

THE next six factors analyze the functions and workings of life. They are: (4) Power, life’s inherent strength or energy to achieve something. (5) Influence, or the movement or action when latent power is activated. (6) Internal cause, the cause latent in life which produces an effect of the same nature as itself, i.e. good or evil. Internal cause is formed through influence or actions. Each internal cause simultaneously contains a latent effect. (7) Relation, or external cause. The external stimulus which helps an internal cause produce its effect. (8) Latent effect, or the effect produced in the depths of life when an internal cause is activated by relation. Both internal cause and latent effect are dormant within life and exist simultaneously without the time gap that often occurs between an action and its manifest effect. (9) Manifest effect, or the concrete, perceivable result that emerges with the passing of time as a consequence of internal cause and latent effect. (10) Consistency from beginning to end, or the integrating factor which unifies the other nine from appearance to manifest effect in every moment of life. Consistency from beginning to end also explains that the first three factors are collectively defined as entity (beginning) and the following six factors as function (end). Both beginning and end, or the entity and all phenomena and functions, are inseparable.

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