

DISCUSSIONS ON YOUTH EVERYTHING WE ARE RESULTS FROM WHAT WE DO

‘All our actions — what we think, what we say, and what we actually do — are engraved in our life,’ SGI President Ikeda explains. ‘When our actions are good, we will receive positive effects that make us happy. When our actions are bad, we will receive negative effects that make us unhappy.’

Part three of a discussion on life and death among SGI President Ikeda and Soka Gakkai high school division leaders Teruhiko Yumitani (young men’s leader) and Yoshiko Ueda (young women’s leader).

Yoshiko Ueda: We have more questions about life and death. One member writes: “My grandmother, whom I loved very much, has died. Will I ever be able to meet her again, after I am dead?”

SGI President Ikeda: Ni-chiren Daishonin says that you can. And this is the gentle comfort he gave to a mother who had lost her child: “There is a way to meet him [your deceased son] readily. With Shakyamuni Buddha as your guide, you can go to meet him in the pure land of Eagle Peak.... [The Lotus Sutra teaches that] it could never happen that a woman who chants Nam-myoho-renge-kyo would fail to be reunited with her beloved child” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 1092).

By saying that mother and child will “meet in the pure land of Eagle Peak,” the Daishonin is telling the bereaved mother that her deceased child has attained Buddhahood. And he assures her that since she, too, is destined to attain Buddhahood, she will be able to join her son in the same world of Buddhahood.

The word *meet*, we could say, is used here in the sense that when our lives after death are fused with the universal life, we can sense our unity or oneness with the lives of our deceased loved ones. Or, in the sense that we can meet again with our deceased loved ones in the future in some other Buddha land in the universe.

It is quite possible, in this vast universe of ours, that there are many ideal Buddha lands where kosen-rufu has already been achieved. Recently, astronomers announced that there may be approximately 125 billion galaxies in the universe. [This estimate of the number of galaxies in the universe is based on observations made by NASA’s Hubble Space Telescope and was announced at a meeting of the American Astronomical Society.]

Teruhiko Yumitani: What an enormous number! Not 125 billion *planets*, but 125 billion *galaxies*. That’s mind-blowing.

Ikeda: But from the Buddhist perspective of the universe, even that is still far from large. An even vaster view of the universe is taught in the “Life Span” chapter of the Lotus Sutra, which we recite as part of morning and evening gongyo. The scale of the universe described in that chapter is so immense that we can really only take it as an attempt to express infinity.

Yumitani: Does that mean that the scientific view of the universe is beginning to approach the Buddhist view?

Ikeda: Yes, I think you can say that. At any rate, the earth is certainly not the only planet on which life exists — there are an infinite number of such planets in the universe.

Sometimes we may be reborn with our deceased loved ones in the Buddha lands among those planets. Sometimes we may be reborn together on earth or other planets on which kosen-rufu has not yet been accomplished, and there work together to help those who are suffering. The Lotus Sutra teaches that each of us can freely decide all these things.

Life is eternal. Though we say we have “lost” someone when they die, actually we could just as well say that they have just gone somewhere far away for a while, as when a friend goes overseas, and we can’t see him or her for a while.

Ueda: So it would also be possible for our member’s deceased grandmother to be reborn here on earth, and for the two of them to meet again?

Ikeda: Of course. But they might not recognize each other! After all, the grandmother would be younger than her granddaughter!

Our suffering helps us understand others more.

Ikeda: When Mr. Toda was a young man, he lost one of his children. He once said: “When I was 23, I lost my daughter Yasuyo. I held my dead child in my arms all through the night. At the time, I had not yet taken faith in the Gohonzon, and I was so grief-stricken that I slept with her in my embrace.

“And so we parted, and now I am 58 years old. When she died she was three, so if she were alive now I imagine she would be a fine woman in the prime of her life. Have I or have I not met my deceased daughter again in this life? This is a matter of one’s own perception through faith. I believe that I have met her. Whether one is united with a deceased relative in this life or the next is all a matter of one’s perception through faith.”

Mr. Toda shared this experience to encourage a member who had lost a young child. He was replying in response to the member’s question, “Is it possible to reestablish a parent-child relationship with my deceased child again in this lifetime?”

After losing his daughter, Mr. Toda also lost his wife. He suffered enormous grief and heartache, but he said it was that very suffering which allowed him now to encourage and comfort others and, as the leader of many people, become the sort of person who understood others’ feelings.

Everything that happens to us has a meaning. Even if you’re sad and filled with pain and feel like you can’t go on, as long as you keep going and keep pressing forward bravely, living your life without being defeated, you will come to see the meaning of that suffering and pain. This is the power of faith. It is also the essence of life.

Ueda: Yes, I understand.

Yumitani: Mr. Toda said it’s “a matter of perception.” By “perception,” does he mean the personal feeling or awareness we have in the depths of our life?

Ikeda: Yes. Life, when you get right down to it, is ultimately a question of your own inner feeling or awareness. It is not just a matter of theories or words. You can talk about how

joyful and happy you are, but if what you actually feel inside is depression and despair, all your talk of happiness is meaningless.

Likewise, while you may believe on an intellectual level that life is eternal, that too is empty and meaningless if you fail to challenge yourself and make efforts in your Buddhist practice so that your life will shine with everlasting brilliance. In fact, you can't be said to have a real understanding of the eternity of life, either.

We cannot blame anyone else for our problems.

Yumitani: You have explained to us that everything has a meaning, but what about people who die young in accidents or from illness? Is there a meaning to such deaths as well?

Ikeda: We must give them meaning. The law of life and death is universal, applying across the cosmos. But it always manifests itself uniquely, differently for each and every individual. Life is tremendously complex, with many causes and conditions at work therein.

For instance, our lives are governed to a large extent by our karma—formed by our actions in past lifetimes. We are subject to the effects of immutable or fixed karma, which determines the basic path our life will take, such as how long we will live. We are also subject to the effects of mutable or unfixed karma, the results of which we may or may not reap in this lifetime. If we compare these two types of karma to sickness, immutable karma is like a serious or even fatal disease, while mutable karma is a slight illness, like a cold.

Yumitani: Both are the results of our past actions, though, right?

Ikeda: Yes, so we can't blame anyone else for our problems. Everything we are is the result of our own actions. Some people fret about why they were born into a certain family, or why they weren't born more beautiful or more handsome, but everything is determined by their own past actions.

The word *karma* is Sanskrit for action. All of our actions—what we think, what we say, and what we actually do—are engraved in our life. When our actions are good, we will receive positive effects that make us happy. When our actions are bad, we will receive negative effects that make us unhappy. It all eventually comes back to us.

It is even quite likely sometimes that people who commit acts of terrible cruelty and inhumanity may not be reborn as human beings in their next lifetime.

To be continued in an upcoming issue