

Oneness of Life and Its Environment

Today we know that the environment has an immense effect on people. Turn on a TV and we may well find a programme trying to unravel whether our path in life is shaped through 'nurture' (one's upbringing) or through 'nature' (genetic inheritance). Nichiren Daishonin explained in his writings that the environment and the lives of the people living in it are absolutely inseparable. When people change, society changes too. When people sparkle with life and vitality, so does the realm of the environment.

For Buddhists this is the oneness of life and its environment. While we are influenced by our environment, the influence also works the other way: we influence and change the environment. The Daishonin's writings liken human beings to the body and the environment to a shadow cast by the body. When the body bends the shadow bends too.

These days we are much more aware how important it is to foster and maintain planet earth. But attempts to limit situations like global warming show us how people are not aware how each individual contributes to the problem. This is despite it being clear that the destruction of the environment leads directly to the suffering, and possible extinction, of human beings.

Buddhism asks, "How can there be environmental change when the destructive causes in peoples' lives continue to exist?" When we change ourselves at a profound level it is not just a powerful way to change 'environmental issues' but it affects the totality of our environment. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo and doing our own human revolution mean we change ourselves in this profound way, which is not just a matter of will power or the mind. This profound transformation based on

chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo changes the condition of our lives; our dominant life state moves towards the higher life states, we overcome our negative and destructive tendencies (which previously we may not even have been able to see). Therefore we are much more willing to change ourselves even if we see no evidence that anyone else around us is making any real change themselves. Even if everyone around us continues as before, we now have a profound awareness that our individual lives have the power to influence all of life because of the depth of our own inner change and the realisation gained about how life works.

As we continue to gain experiences of this, we also go deeper in our understanding. We move from this principle of the oneness of life and its environment to one that goes further. This lies at the very core of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism: the principle that a single moment of life comprises 3,000 realms.

A Single Moment of Life

The 'single moment of life' is our life state as it is, moment by moment. This principle of a single life moment manifesting in 3,000 ways explains just how much a person's life affects everyone and everything at every moment of life. Once we grasp it fully, it really challenges us to keep ourselves in as high a life state as we can.

At the root of our ability to make this kind of effort is the desire to be truly happy through fundamentally respecting ourselves and others. This quality comes from the heart more than the head. With our heart we realise that this kind of happiness is

only possible because in life's depths all of life is connected: the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo permeates everything. A person's individual life expressing this Buddha nature is strongly manifesting the Law.

Why 3,000 realms? This number is built up in stages starting from the ten basic states of life from hell to Buddhahood (so we start with the figure 10). Secondly because of the mutual possession of the ten worlds, each of these basic states of life contains all other life states (this gives us 10 times 10 or 100). Thirdly there are 10 aspects to how life changes (called 'the ten factors' - this gives us 10 times 10 times 10 = 1000). And finally as well as influencing their own life, each person's life influences two other 'realms', the realm of 'living beings' (which we call 'society') and the realm of 'the land' (which we call the environment). Hence we arrive at 1000 times 3 'realms'. The figure 3,000 is not intended to be used as a mathematical formula. Rather it is a way to gain awareness or appreciation of the complex and dynamic ways in which life interacts.

1000 Ways my life influences the World

For each of the 100 life states there are 10 ways they will influence a person's life, other people, and the environment. These 10 ways are the ten factors that we recite in gongyo (starting with '*nyo ze so, nyo ze sho...*' etc).

The first three ways are to do with the body, spirituality or mind, and sense of self. Buddhism teaches that mind and body inter-relate. With the oneness of life and its environment, we

can be conditioned to see only the influence of the environment on us and neglect our inner change influencing the environment. So too we can be conditioned to see that material changes in our body are accompanied by changes in how we think, when we're ill, for example. But actually our mind influences our body too. What is really interesting is that Buddhism brings together three aspects of life: body, mind and self. And this is another tremendous change that can take place as someone practises Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism. It is not just that our life state tends towards the Buddha state, but our sense of ourselves becomes brighter, we 'sparkle' more and at the same time our appearance and the way our mind works are influenced positively too.

The fact that this takes place on a deeper level, through chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, makes this process much more than positive thinking. Through body, mind and self, these are the first 3 of 10 ways one's life state influences everything.

The 4th and 5th ways are the power or inherent energy of our life and the influence this has on circumstances around us.

The 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th ways are encompassed by the meaning of rengo in Nam-myoho-enge-kyo. Rengo means that the cause and the effect are simultaneous. This means that when I make the cause, by chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, for Buddhahood to appear, the effect is immediately created deep in my life. Therefore I manage to overcome my desire to keep causing other life states like hell or hunger as my dominant life state. What this also means is that the 'external' cause and effect no longer drives my attempts to relate to what is happening, rather it is my inner causes that bring about changes around me. These four ways in which my life state influences the world are: internal cause, latent effect, external cause and manifest effect.

The tenth is about how body, mind, self, power, influence and cause and effect all work together consistently. If I make angry causes because of my life state, my body,

mind and self are also consistently in anger state.

3000 realms in a single moment of life

Finally our moment by moment life state influences other living beings and the land. From this standpoint it is meaningless to seek to change society or the environment without there being real change in the depths of our lives, the people living there. The nature of society and the land show us how much change is needed in our individual lives! As Nichiren Daishonin writes, "There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds." (WND p4)

We have had a glimpse here of this principle of a single life moment manifesting in 3,000 ways. Our minds will have become engaged in trying to grasp it intellectually, perhaps struggling with the mathematics! However it is only through practising Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism that we are really able to grasp this principle with our lives and thereby make our contribution to the world based on Buddhahood. What is crucial is that we awaken to the relationship between our life at each moment and everything around us. As the Daishonin says, "Life at each moment encompasses both the body and mind and the self and environment of all sentient beings in the Ten Worlds as well as all insentient beings in the three thousand realms, including plants, sky, earth, and even the minutest particles of dust. Life at each moment permeates the entire realm of phenomena and is revealed in all phenomena. To be awakened to this principle is itself the mutually inclusive relationship of life at each moment and all phenomena." (WND p3)

And President Ikeda explains: "Our minds 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.

Introductory study programme materials

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