

THE TEN WORLDS

Each of the ten worlds

Although our lives are constantly changing and we experience a range of emotions from moment to moment, Buddhism teaches that our experience of the world can always be understood as one of ten basic states of life. These are called the Ten Worlds, and what follows is a brief impression of the negative and positive aspects of each of these worlds:

1. Hell

- Misery and suffering. Fear, grief and destructive rages or depression. A feeling of being imprisoned by one's circumstances.

+ Having experienced hell helps us maintain a desire to better our circumstances. Empathy, understanding the sufferings of others.

2. Hunger

- Being dominated by desires or cravings, both physical and mental.

+ The driving force to improve a situation. People can hunger, even yearn to see others happy and fight for peace in the world.

3. Animality

- Instinctive behaviour, lacking in reason. Fear of those who seem stronger and bullying of those who seem weaker. The 'law of the jungle'.

- Protective instincts, for example, that we need more sleep.
- Preservation of self or others.
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4. Anger

- Feeling superior to others and wanting to show it. Aggressiveness. Feeling in conflict with others. The world of self-centredness and ego.

+ Anger at injustice. The passion to fight authoritarian behaviour.

5. Humanity, or Tranquillity

- Constant inactivity, laziness, passivity.

+ Being at peace, calm and reasonable. An opportunity to restore one's energies.

6. Rapture, or Heaven

- Short term gratification when one's desires have been achieved. Can quickly revert to hell, or hunger.

+ Temporary joy when desires are fulfilled. Exhilaration at being alive.

7. Learning

+ Learning about life and oneself from others and from existing knowledge.

- Can lead to self-centredness and separation from others. In the Lotus Sutra people of Learning and Realization were taught they could only enter the realm of Buddhahood through faith.

8. Realization

+ The wisdom or insight where we gain an understanding of an aspect of life from our own observations and experiences.

- Can lead to self-centredness and a tendency to use one's intellect, rather than one's wisdom, to solve problems.

9. Bodhisattva

The word consists of *bodhi* (enlightenment) and *sattva* (beings) and means someone who seeks enlightenment, for themselves and others.

+ Devotion to the happiness of others as shown by eg nurses or a parent's love for a child.

- May turn to arrogance if you feel superior to those you are helping. Pouring life-force out towards the lives of others, without paying attention to one's own needs means that one's life will move towards the lower life states.

10. Buddha

An ordinary person awakened to the true nature of life, and experiencing absolute happiness and freedom within the realities of daily life. Indestructible joy, unlimited wisdom, courage, compassion, creativity and life force.

The working of the ten worlds

The 9 worlds (from hell to Bodhisattava) can be experienced as positive or negative. The Buddha state originates from the very depths of life, called the amala consciousness, meaning the fundamentally pure life force or consciousness. The function of the Buddha state is to bring out the positive side of the other 9 worlds.

This principle of the Ten Worlds shows that the Buddha state is a naturally occurring condition of life in every living being. The purpose of Buddhist practice is to enable us to cause the Buddha state to appear; to have it working strongly in us. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, then, the Buddha is not some perfect, ideal being, but is rather an ordinary person living in rhythm with the law of the universe, taking wise, courageous and compassionate action for the benefit of others, through the functioning of the 9 worlds in daily life.

The first 6 of these life states are called the six 'lower' worlds because they can be experienced by all human beings without any effort. If people make no effort towards their own self improvement they will experience lives which simply move within these 6 life states. It is like being in a life which only has six

moods; these will be the only patterns in a constantly changing world.

The four 'higher' worlds however require effort on our part. We have to want to improve ourselves, mustering our energies and learning to direct them in a worthwhile way which requires patience, tenacity and concentration.

Learning

This state is not confined to people who study; it is about having an attitude of wanting to learn, whether a practical skill or mastery of our work or the development of an interest. It is about applying ourselves with an open and sincere mind and using the process of reflecting on our efforts so far to take the next step.

Realisation

This is the creative use of what has been achieved through cultivating the state of learning. But it involves the cultivation and polishing of the self. It often involves a self-awakening to some truth or principle, a bit like Archimedes shouting 'Eureka' in his bath!

As soon as someone whose dominant life-state is learning or realisation achieves what they set out to do, they may experience joy, but they also become vulnerable to conceit and egoism. If our lives are strongly influenced by these two worlds we may find that we become arrogant and stubborn. We may become self-satisfied and think we know it all, and have no further need to improve ourselves. We may feel we have escaped the six lower worlds and are better than the people in those worlds. At this point we begin to become gripped again by the lower worlds. The Lotus Sutra and the Buddhism of Nichiren Daishonin make it clear that people whose lives are in the grip of the worlds of learning and realisation can still attain Buddhahood, but through faith, not through the intellect.

Bodhisattva

The world of Bodhisattva is a state in which one makes effort for the happiness of others. One's own happiness comes from actions that enable others to overcome their

sufferings. Those who teach others about Nam-myoho-renge-kyo are, in the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, referred to as the 'Bodhisattvas of the Earth'. That means that this life state is grounded on the 'earth' of the ultimate Law of life. We can simultaneously cause the pure life force of the universe to flow and work more strongly from within our own lives, as well as pouring out our life force towards others. In other words, this type of Bodhisattva action means that our efforts towards others further invigorate our own lives. This means that as we have dialogue in which the other person gradually learns the value of chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, we ourselves maintain and strengthen our own life condition.

Buddhahood

This is a state of freedom, in which one is awakened to the ultimate truth that is the reality of all things. It is a state characterised by wisdom, courage and compassion. The Lotus Sutra reveals that Buddhahood is a potential in the lives of all beings, not just a select few.

The enlightenment of Buddhahood is not a mystical or transcendental state. Rather it is a condition in which we enjoy the highest wisdom, vitality, good fortune, confidence and other positive qualities, and in which we find fulfilment in our daily activities and come to understand the purpose of being alive.

The Mutual Possession of the Ten Worlds

Although it is possible to see these ten life states to be climbed like the rungs on a ladder, this implies the need to move up the ladder a rung at a time! But the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism talk about 'the mutual possession' of the ten worlds. The ten worlds do not exist as separate, isolated realms. Rather, each world embraces and contains within it the potential for all the others. Even if the self-destructive world of

unrelieved suffering known as hell has manifested itself in an individual's life, the potential for the other worlds remains; any one of them can become the dominant state of that individual's life in the very next moment. In this way, our life condition is never static or fixed, but continues to transform itself, instant by instant, throughout our lives. This is what is referred to as the 'mutual possession' of the ten worlds.

In the light of the theory of the ten worlds, we see that even the tormented world of hell carries within it the potential state of enlightenment. No matter how bleak our circumstances may be, at each moment we can choose to reveal the highest state of life.

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