

The
Oneness
of Body and Mind

*‘Life at each moment encompasses both
body and spirit’*

‘What is matter? Never mind. What is mind? Never matter!’ For centuries, philosophers, theologians and scientists have argued about the nature of the basic components of life. Is life essentially composed entirely of matter, with mind and consciousness a by-product of the human brain? Or is it essentially spiritual, with the body merely a vessel? Or are mind and matter independent entities, which are in some way connected?

Generally speaking, there are two main schools of thought: those who see life in purely physical terms, and those who believe it is spiritual. This polarisation of viewpoints is demonstrated in the treatment of ill health. There is much evidence indicating the importance of a patient’s positive attitude to recovery. Even so, the emphasis in medical science still lies heavily on physical treatments such as surgery and drugs. Conversely, faith healers often use treatments which are wholly spiritual.

It is widely accepted nowadays that the state of one’s mind influences one’s body, and equally that one’s physical condition affects the state of one’s mind. However, the practical implications of this inseparability remain largely in the realm of theory. On the whole, the separation between mind and body persists in science, medicine, religion and politics.

From the viewpoint of Nichiren Daishonin’s Buddhism, body and mind are equal and interdependent. This principle is known as the oneness of body and mind (*shiki shin funi*). Body, or the material aspect (*shiki*), includes everything which can be outwardly discerned such as colour, form and texture. Mind, or spirit (*shin*), refers to those aspects of life which are inner or invisible such as emotions, will and personality.

Their oneness is indicated by the word *funi* which means ‘two but not two’ and ‘not two but two’. This is not intended to be a riddle, but to clarify that although we can observe body and mind separately, in essence they are one. Neither is caused by the other. Furthermore, one cannot exist without the other. Both arise from the

same fundamental entity: life itself.

A person can know another's mind by listening to his voice.

This is because the physical aspect reveals the spiritual aspect.

The physical and spiritual, which are one in essence, manifest themselves as two distinct aspects.¹

All functions of life are revealed both physically and spiritually. Sleep refreshes the body, yet also has a vital psychological role. Reading a book, which inspires or entertains our minds, also involves the use of our bodies. Work, whether manual or desk-bound, involves both thought and physical exertion.

The unseen, spiritual workings of life are, of course, more difficult to analyse than visible actions. They can only be observed through their physical manifestations. Perhaps this is why the emphasis in the physical sciences has always been on matter. Yet when matter is reduced to its smallest particles, the difference between 'something' and 'nothing' becomes increasingly difficult to discern. Interestingly, recent scientific theories suggest that consciousness is inherent in life; all life, including objects such as stones. This idea comes closest to the Buddhist perception that all life, including insentient life, has both physical and spiritual aspects.

In society as a whole, we can see the shortcomings of placing emphasis on either the material or the spiritual. European societies have, in the past, placed spiritual values highly. Unfortunately, more often than not, this led to hypocrisy. For example, many people in power maintained their own physical comforts while placating those in poverty with the promise of rewards after death. However, certain minimum physical requirements are necessary to people's well-being. One cannot be said to be leading a fulfilled life if starving and cold. These dual standards, and the divorcing of the spiritual from the physical, tended to breed an attitude of resignation. In the second half of the twentieth century, the opportunity to achieve a good standard of living became available to

many more people. Understandably, along with this, there arose a degree of scepticism as to the importance of spirituality and the value of religion in general.

Likewise, societies based on materialism, such as our own in the present day, demonstrate that it is virtually impossible to establish a truly prosperous society if no regard is paid to the spiritual self. It would seem that it is not possible for people to demonstrate integrity and overcome corruption if they have no personal spiritual values. People need values, such as honesty, even in the pursuit of materialism.

A constructive and fulfilling society must be based on the equal importance of both material and spiritual values. Since they are inseparable, there can be no mental well-being without physical well-being and vice-versa.

This is amply illustrated by the modern syndrome of stress. Stress can be caused by noise, hunger, death or financial anxiety, to name but a few environmental and psychological triggers. Equally, the effects of stress are both physical and mental, resulting in irritation, tension, depression, high blood pressure, stomach ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome and so on. Stress can be alleviated in many ways, such as positive thinking, exercise, even swimming with dolphins. It is becoming not just desirable, but vital, that in all fields of endeavour equal importance is given to the body and the mind.

In contrast to many other religions, the practice of Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is not directed solely towards spiritual enlightenment. It influences our lives at a fundamental level. Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo affects us mentally in various ways, giving rise to optimism, determination and joy. At the same time, it affects every cell in our bodies. For this reason, posture and concentration are important when chanting, as well as a steady rhythm. Many people have found that chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo has helped them to overcome illness because it affects both

body and mind.

Furthermore, our aim in practising Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism is to improve all aspects of our lives. As well as developing ourselves spiritually, it is also important to fulfil ourselves at work and establish harmonious relationships. We therefore direct our chanting towards improvements in our material circumstances as well as towards our spiritual well-being.

Buddhism defines two kinds of benefit: conspicuous and inconspicuous. Conspicuous benefit corresponds to the body or material circumstances, while inconspicuous benefit corresponds to improvements in our character, such as increased wisdom and energy. At their root, these two kinds of benefit cannot be separated either. For example, increased wisdom leads us to take care of our health and discover what type of job suits us best; more energy is itself healthy and enables us to be more active in society. Respect and compassion are also activated by our practice, naturally creating tolerance and harmony in our relationships with others. In discussing this subject Daisaku Ikeda says:

From ancient times, philosophers and theologians have formulated various concepts of the relationship between the mind and the body. The doctrines born of these concepts are numerous and different in kind, but all of them fall into one of two general categories: materialistic and spiritualistic. Followers of both ways have done much for the sake of cultural developments, and I believe that their achievements deserve proper evaluation. For example, by expounding morality and love, spiritualists have contributed greatly to keeping human society truly humane. For their part, the materialists have laid the foundations for the formation and development of modern science.

Still I am unable to embrace either approach without reservation. Although the materialists recognise man's spiritual functions, by considering the physical body the original source

of being, they tend to view life itself as material in nature. Furthermore, while agreeing with the spiritualists that reason, intellect, desires and other mental functions are the bases of a truly humane way of life, I cannot subscribe to the philosophy that the physical aspects of human life and the physically related human desires are to be despised. Both the materialists and the spiritualists seem to pursue only one aspect of the issue and fail to grasp the relationship between spirit and body.²

1 *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 4, p. 32.

2 Arnold Toynbee & Daisaku Ikeda, *Choose Life: A Dialogue*, pp. 24-5.

The Oneness *of Self and* Environment

*‘There are not two lands, pure or impure
in themselves. The difference lies solely in
the good or evil of our minds.’*

The destruction of our natural environment is of great concern, as the pollution of the land, sea and air increases at an alarming rate. Few people would deny that this has been caused by humankind's greed and selfishness. Social problems, too, are on the increase: homelessness, unemployment, drug abuse and the breakdown of the family, to name but a few.

According to Buddhism, the environment reflects the people who inhabit it. In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin says that life is like the body and the environment like a shadow. When the body bends, the shadow bends also.

We can see this relationship of body and shadow quite clearly in, for example, someone who is severely depressed. Such a person is likely to neglect his home and personal appearance. Others are mostly repelled by this, which reinforces that person's feeling of isolation, so the depression deepens. On the other hand, someone who is secure and generous creates a warm and attractive environment around them. Others are drawn to this and influenced by it, thereby widening the circle of warmth.

It is much harder to see this relationship in terms of ourselves. If we are, say, unhappy at work, we may think the problem lies with the company. However, according to Buddhism everything, including work, is the reflection of our inner lives. If we change ourselves, our circumstances will inevitably change also. Everything is perceived through the self and alters according to the individual's perception. Whether we enjoy our work or not has much more to do with our individual state of life than the situation itself.

Similarly, how we feel about the weather has much more to do with the state of our minds than whether the sky is blue or grey. Of course, the environment influences us as well, and most people feel better if it is a bright, sunny day. However, if we are feeling good inside, we can appreciate the wind and rain just as much as the sun.

The effect of the environment on people is seen, for example,

in inner cities. Here, problems such as violence and vandalism are recognised as being influenced by urban environments where people live in densely populated areas. The effect human beings have on their environment is demonstrated by problems such as pollution. However, again, most of us regard pollution as being caused by someone else. Furthermore, most people consider it is up to the government or large business concerns to cure the problems, not only of pollution, but of all society's ills. This is not necessarily because we don't care, but because we often feel powerless to change our environment, viewing it as we do, as being created by other people.

The principle of the oneness of self and environment (*esho funi*) means that life (*sho*) and its environment (*e*) are inseparable (*funi*). *Funi* means 'two but not two'. This means that although we perceive things as separate from us, there is a dimension of our lives which is one with the universe. At the most fundamental level of life itself, there is no separation between ourselves and the environment. This fundamental level of life can be called the ultimate reality, defined by Nichiren Daishonin as Nam-myoho-enge-kyo.

The oneness of self and environment is further clarified by the doctrine of the three realms: the realm of the self, the realm of living beings and the realm of the environment. This classifies differences amongst individual living beings, their social and natural environments.

The realm of the self

In the realm of the self, each individual life consists of five components: form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness. Form is the physical aspect: male or female, tall or short, black or white etc. Form also includes the five sense organs - eyes, ears, tongue, nose and skin - through which we perceive the outer world.

THE THREE REALMS

THE REALM OF THE SELF

form, perception,
conception, volition and
consciousness

THE REALM OF LIVING BEINGS

society

THE REALM OF THE LAND

the natural environment

The other four components are mental aspects of individual life. Perception is the function of receiving information through the senses. This varies depending on both the quality of the information received and the awareness of the individual. Conception is the function of analysing the received information and forming a coherent mental picture of it. Volition is the will to take action based on this information. Consciousness, which includes judgement and wisdom, is the integrating function which unifies these thought processes.

The five components are common to everyone, but no two individuals are exactly alike. Our special characteristics and personality are expressed through the five components. These are constantly changing. Our bodies change as we get older and most of our cells are replaced every seven years. Our thoughts are also constantly changing. The realm of the self is therefore a temporary combination of the five components.

In his writings, Nichiren Daishonin explains the far-reaching implications of this realm of the self:

Therefore, when the people's five sense organs are disordered, the four quarters [of the earth] as well as the centre will be startled and shaken, and as signs of the consequent destruction of the land, mountains will collapse, grasses and trees wither and rivers run dry.¹

This is an incredible statement, even today. However, we can see

the reality of environmental destruction caused by humankind before our very eyes.

The realm of living beings

Each individual is born into a social environment: the realm of living beings. This category accounts for cultural and hereditary differences between social groups. A person is a product of his social environment, and equally contributes to and modifies his cultural or family group. The realm of society closely reflects the lives of the people living in it.

The realm of living beings also pertains to other creatures. We tend to think that there is one large environment in which all life dwells. However, when we look more closely we see that each living being, as well as each social group, inhabits a unique environment. For instance, we don't come across whales living in trees. Likewise, as yet, no human being is living at the bottom of the ocean (if he did so he would have to create a special environment). Within a single footstep, in fact, there are a myriad different habitats occupied by insect life and micro-organisms. Each species inhabits the most suitable environment and adapts to it. Equally, each species modifies that environment to suit its own requirements.

The realm of the natural environment

The third realm, that of the land, is where living beings dwell in their social groups. For thousands of years, human beings have seen the environment as separate and even hostile. We have sought to dominate and exploit the land, largely ignorant of our delicate symbiotic relationship with it. As a result, far from constructing the perfect environment we sought to create, we have all but destroyed the habitat on which our life depends.

Many people are exerting tremendous efforts to reverse this trend, and are creating a widespread awareness of the problems.

The United Nations World Council on Environment and Development has called for sustainable development based on harmony between environmental protection and economic development. To achieve this, international cooperation and agreement is required. It also involves different fields of endeavour, such as science, economy, commerce, agriculture and manufacturing.

The situation is extremely serious and the efforts of concerned people who are actively involved in trying to remedy it, whether globally or locally, are of vital importance. If we truly understand the oneness of self and environment, we can see that everything depends on each one of us. As stated in the slogan of the 1992 UN Conference for Environmental Development: 'Think Globally, Act Locally'.

From the Buddhist perspective, the only lasting way to bring about change is for people themselves to change. As the above quotation says, 'There are not two lands, pure or impure in themselves. The difference lies solely in the good or evil of our minds.'² 'Evil' means self-centred and short-term actions based on greed, arrogance, fear and aggression.

Nichiren Daishonin teaches us that we possess Buddhahood, the enlightened life-condition of the human being, and can therefore transform our negative tendencies into creative and valuable ones. The single most positive action we can make for society and the land is to transform our own lives, so that they are no longer dominated by anger, greed and fear. When we manifest wisdom, generosity and integrity, we naturally make more valuable choices. We call this transformation of the self 'human revolution'. Hence, the foreword to the novel entitled *The Human Revolution* says:

A great revolution of character in just a single individual will help achieve a change in the destiny of a nation and further, will cause a change in the destiny of all humankind.³

Most of all, it is lack of respect for ourselves and our environment which causes the problems we are facing today. Often, we cannot foresee the long-term results of our actions. However, if we base our decisions on the utmost respect for all life, our actions will be wiser. The principle of the oneness of self and environment explains that everything is interconnected. Short-term profit, if detrimental to the environment, therefore rebounds on us, both individually and collectively. In the same way, actions which contribute to the well-being of other living beings and the environment will also benefit our own lives.

We are free to choose the path we follow, and the ability to follow the right one is innate within man. The question is how to develop the potential wisdom inherent in our life-force so that it works for life and creativity in the universe. Even if a human being possesses the ability to love and trust, if the motivating force within him is weak, he is not apt to influence other human beings, let alone human life as a whole. On the other hand, if a person has a strong motivating force, but is beset by doubt, suspicion and antagonism towards others, he is apt to destroy himself, and perhaps humankind as a whole. When we have discovered how to employ our life-force for the creation and furtherance of life on both the human and the cosmic levels, and when we have found out how to live in true harmony with the universe, the philosophy of the unity between subjective existence and objective environment will have become the great saving practical philosophy of humankind.⁴

1 *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 4, p. 146.

2 *Major Writings*, Vol. 1, p. 4.

3 Daisaku Ikeda, *The Human Revolution*, (1961) Vol. 1, p. iii.

4 Daisaku Ikeda, *Life, An Enigma, A Precious Jewel*, p. 45.