

Ten States *of* Life

*‘While deluded, one is called
a common mortal,
but once enlightened,
he is called a
Buddha.’*

Life changes from moment to moment. You may wake up feeling good, go into the kitchen and find a sink full of washing-up. Instantly you feel irritated; you can't get the kettle under the tap. After a strong cup of coffee, your spirits somewhat restored, a cheque you had been waiting for arrives in the post. You feel even better, but a hold-up on the way to work makes you feel anxious about being late.

At work, how you feel and act changes according to what is demanded of you, how well you are able to respond to those demands, and the moods of everyone else. If you have a bad day, a couple of drinks after work may induce a sense of euphoria, which vanishes when you realise there is no food at home and you are going to have to battle through the supermarket, or get yet another expensive take-away. Once home and able to relax, you may forget all the worries of the day and feel calm again.

Our lives are constantly changing. The changing conditions which we experience are defined in Buddhism by ten states of life (often called the ten worlds). We can all recognise these life-states, although our experience of them may differ according to our individual personalities. Each state describes a common way of experiencing life from moment to moment. We change from one to the other all the time, although we may identify some that we experience more often than others.

Hell: extremity of suffering

This is a state of abject misery. In this condition one feels continuous torment and anguish. One feels trapped and powerless, as if in prison. This feeling of helplessness induces the anger of frustration. It is a different kind of anger from that of, for example, anger for justice. It is helpless rage. In hell, time seems painfully slow. Space, or one's sphere of influence, is severely restricted. For example, when we are depressed we can think of nothing but ourselves, and we feel as if our depression will last for ever.

Hunger: insatiable desire

Hunger is characterised by greed. Desires dominate one's life. Even if a desire is satisfied, one is only temporarily appeased before being dominated by another desire. Of course, like any other of the ten states, desire is essential to life. Desire has been the driving force behind civilisation and has brought about many improvements. However, if desire is unchecked by respect and wisdom, it becomes selfish greed which leads to destruction, as evidenced by pollution.

Animality: a life of instinct

In this state, one follows one's instinctive desires with no thought of the outcome. It is called animality because it is like the law of the jungle, where the strong prey upon the weak and the weak fear the strong. It is natural in the animal world for hunters to kill the weakest of their prey, which in turn helps to preserve the strength of that species. Self-preservation, such as getting enough food and sleep, is a vital function of animality. However, instinct needs to be tempered by the human qualities of reason, conscience, love and mercy. If it is not, we will be unable to create and maintain a peaceful and constructive co-existence in both our personal lives and the world at large.

Conditions of suffering

The life-conditions of hell, hunger and animality are collectively called the three evil paths. They are called evil because they are conditions of suffering in which one is controlled by helpless agony, desire or other instinctive forms of behaviour. The fourth state, anger, does have an element of humanity in that one is self-conscious and consequently aware of the opinion of others. Nevertheless, it too is a state of suffering. Anger is therefore grouped with hell, hunger and animality, which together form the four evil paths.

Anger: the world of conflict

A person in anger is dominated by ego. He thinks he is better, and knows better, than everyone else, and works exclusively for his own benefit. Concerned about the opinion of others, he may make an outward show of being benevolent or righteous, but inwardly he is solely motivated by his own gain.

The anger of this state is different to the self-consuming rage of hell. In anger, one's conceit and desire to win is paramount, so the anger is directed outwards. As opposed to the rage of hell, which is debilitating, this kind of self-righteous anger has tremendous energy which can also be used in creative ways, such as in defending a just cause.

Tranquillity: the human being

In tranquillity, one controls his instinctive desires with reason. This is the humane, calm and reasonable state of mind in which one is at peace with himself and others. It has such qualities as intelligence, sound judgement, superior wisdom, the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood, and a good temperament. Although tranquillity, also called humanity, is the state which is most natural to human beings, it is not easy to maintain in our turbulent society.

Rapture: overwhelming joy

Rapture, sometimes called heaven, is the exhilaration experienced through the satisfaction of a desire. This state is sub-divided into the worlds of desire, form and formlessness. In the first of these, rapture comes from the satisfaction of any desire, such as eating one's favourite food, gaining a material possession, or achieving power or recognition. Rapture in the world of form has to do with physical well-being and energy, such as the pleasure derived from sex or the exhilaration of sport. In the world of formlessness, it is the spiritual fulfilment of intense creativity.

In rapture, time flies past and one has a strong influence on the

outer world. One feels light, filled with energy and tremendously joyful. However, this state is short-lived. Once the desired objective palls, one tends to fall into hunger, hell or animality.

Learning: self-reflection

The last four of the ten states are termed the four noble paths because in order to experience them, one has to make an effort. In the six lower life-states, one wanders weakly from state to state, depending on changing circumstances. To experience the four noble paths, one must make a conscious effort to motivate and direct one's life. In the state of learning one has an open mind, applies oneself to self-development through learning from others, and gains wisdom through self-reflection. A person in this state is actively looking for deeper meaning in life.

Absorption: realisation

Absorption is very similar to learning in that one is seeking to cultivate oneself. However, rather than learning from others, one gains insight and wisdom from introspection and intuition. A classic example of a person in absorption is Archimedes who, it is popularly believed, shouted 'Eureka!' when he realised his famous principle whilst musing in the bath. This life-state is very creative and absorbing, hence its name.

Literature, music and the arts, as well as the great discoveries of science, stem from the states of learning and absorption. Whilst often motivated by concern for the welfare of others, those dominated by these states can tend to be inward-looking. They can become oblivious to others and lose sight of the possible effects of their great discoveries and inventions until it is too late. An outstanding example of this is the development of the nuclear bomb. A more personal example might be an artist who, absorbed in his work, fails to take care of his family.

Learning and absorption are known jointly as the two vehicles.

People who are inclined towards these life-states often attain positions of prominence in society and can therefore have far-reaching influence. However, those who have mastered a great deal of theory may adopt a superior attitude, thinking they know it all. If this happens, they lose the will to develop themselves, become arrogant and selfish, and fall back into one of the six lower states, such as anger or animality.

Bodhisattva: caring for others

One experiences this state when devoted to helping others. The great compassion of the state of bodhisattva is seen in the most caring nurses, doctors and teachers who are dedicated to the welfare of others, even at the expense of their own comfort. Mothers too, who show unconditional love for their children, are in this state. The negative aspect of this life condition is that those devoted to caring for others often wear themselves out in the process, having no way of replenishing their energy. This has become known as 'compassion fatigue'.

Bodhisattva originally meant one who summons up courage in the hope of attaining Buddhahood. In a Buddhist sense, therefore, in the state of bodhisattva one recognises that helping others is the most effective way of perfecting oneself. Empathising with another's suffering, one takes action to help, thereby overcoming selfish and egotistical tendencies. In Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, therefore, the bodhisattva is not selfless. The development of the self - that is, the greater self of reason, conscience, wisdom and courage - is vitally important in order to release the limitless energy of compassion from within. Self-reformation and altruism go hand in hand so that one does not yield to the weaknesses of despair, selfishness or ego.

Bodhisattvas of the Earth

Nichiren Daishonin often referred to his followers as Bodhisattvas

of the Earth. First described in the fifteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, they appeared from the earth to spread the Buddhist Law *throughout the universe*. The earth symbolises that these are ordinary people, from every walk of life, who choose to devote themselves to working for the good of all. Earth also means the foundation of Buddhahood.

Bodhisattvas of the Earth have four virtues: true self, eternity, purity and happiness. These are developed through self-reformation. The virtue of true self is established by strengthening oneself to withstand difficulties, turning them into opportunities for growth. The virtue of eternity is to experience freedom, through believing in the eternity of life, and to work spontaneously towards the greater happiness of society. Purity is to demonstrate true wisdom and reason, unswayed by selfish desires or ego. Happiness means to live with great joy, securely founded on the creative power of life. These qualities are developed by tapping into the 'earth' of Buddhahood. Bodhisattvas of the Earth are truly humane, compassionate and joyful people.

Buddhahood: the state of enlightenment

Many people may think that Buddhahood is a kind of superhuman state which has only been attained by one person: the Buddha. However, 'Buddha' means an enlightened person. It is indeed an unsurpassed state of life and, in Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism, it is accessible to all.

Although the Lotus Sutra taught that all people are equally capable of attaining Buddhahood, it did not teach a means whereby everyone could actually do so. Nichiren Daishonin defined the Law of the universe, or the Law of life, as Nam-myoho-enge-kyo (see p.79), so that we can actually harmonise our lives with the universe. This generates understanding of the continuity of past, present and future: the eternity of life. It gives direct access to the boundless life-force of the cosmos, as well as the great wisdom which arises

from being in oneness with all life. The essential nature of the universe is compassion, so that in Buddhahood one's main concern is to save all life from suffering.

Buddhist teachings traditionally portray the Buddha as an incredible being with mystic powers. Nichiren Daishonin clarifies that these are descriptions of the magnificence of human life or, more broadly speaking, all life, including insentient life. However, from a personal point of view, the important revelation is that each one of us has unlimited potential and power to overcome suffering and live based on indestructible happiness. Nichiren Daishonin says:

You, yourself, are a true Buddha who possesses the three enlightened properties [courage, wisdom and compassion]. You should chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo with this conviction.¹

The people of thirteenth century Japan thought the Buddha was a being with superhuman powers: something they could never aspire to. Nichiren Daishonin therefore often encouraged his followers by reassuring them, as well as us, that Buddhism is about how to fulfil the whole of our potential as human beings, overcome suffering, be happy, and help others.

TEN STATES OF LIFE

BUDDHAHOOD	enlightenment
BODHISATTVA	caring for others
ABSORPTION	realisation
LEARNING	self-reflection
RAPTURE	heaven
TRANQUILLITY	humanity
ANGER	self-righteousness
ANIMALITY	instinctive behaviour
HUNGER	greed
HELL	extreme suffering

The mutual possession of the ten states

In early Buddhist teachings, the above ten states were thought to exist in separate places. This is why they were called the ten worlds. It was considered impossible to move from one world to another within a single lifetime. There are still some Buddhist sects which sustain the belief that a 'pure land' (rapture or heaven) can be attained only after death, and that one must therefore endure suffering and devote oneself to good deeds in order to be reborn there. Endurance and perseverance are undoubtedly admirable human qualities. However, religions which teach that a 'pure land' lies elsewhere leave people open to exploitation, keeping them in their place, working hard and expecting nothing, in the hope of a better life after death.

In contrast, Nichiren Daishonin's Buddhism teaches the mutual possession of the ten states: each state contains all ten within itself. This means that all people, whatever their life-state, have the potential to reveal Buddhahood. Also, very importantly, it means that the Buddha state is not removed from ordinary life because it contains all ten states. In other words, there is no separation between a Buddha and an ordinary person. Buddhahood is accessible to anyone and everyone.

People in the state of Buddhahood then, do not cut themselves off from the realities of daily life in the nine worlds. Because their lives have a secure foundation, they actively delve into society in order to help others. In this way, they are able to reveal the creative qualities of the nine states. Everything becomes a source of growth. The suffering of hell becomes a means to empathise with others. Hunger becomes desire for peace. Animality promotes gratitude for others' support. Anger becomes anger for justice, and so on.

Buddhahood is endowed with infinite compassion and wisdom. The wisdom of Buddhahood penetrates to the diabolic nature that subverts life and tries to destroy it. The compassion of Buddhahood furnishes the energy to overcome this evil force.

In this way, the wisdom and compassion of Buddhahood become manifest in the nine states. And as they act in these states, they themselves are nourished and increased, strengthening the Buddhahood within us.

We must not, for this reason, seek to avoid the difficulties and challenges of the nine states, but rather meet them head on and overcome them, thus turning them into valuable experience. If one attempts to avoid difficulties, one misses the chance to develop and improve oneself. To avoid trouble is no more than to succumb to the illusions of the nine states. The mark of Buddhahood is the ability to meet all challenges and turn them into good. Indeed, the person who bases his life on Buddhahood seeks out new difficulties and new challenges that need to be overcome for the sake of the world, as well as for his own growth and development.²

¹ *The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, Vol. 1, p. 30.

² Daisaku Ikeda, *Life: An Enigma, a Precious Jewel*, pp. 144-5.