

June Discussion Topic – **The Nine Consciousnesses**

The Buddhist concept of “Nine Consciousnesses” is a way of describing the conscious and subconscious aspects of our life. It helps us to clearly understand the workings of our inner life, and also offers us the means to overcome our illusions and gain the wisdom to see things as they really are.

The first five consciousnesses are our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. We use them to collect information about the world around us. With our sixth consciousness, our awareness, we integrate the information thus gained and distinguish and understand it. The seventh consciousness, also called mano-consciousness, represents the unconscious, limited, egocentric self which is oriented towards our inner world. Here, everything that we have learned in the course of our life is stored and serves to form our perception of who we are. It is also where we develop our morals and value judgements.

The eighth consciousness is the alaya-consciousness, or karma-consciousness. This is our karmic storehouse which contains our entire karma, positive, neutral and negative, accumulated over our past existences, and our present life. We create karma through our thoughts, words and deeds. The latent effects of these causes are stored within our eighth consciousness, forming the basis from which we experience the world around us. They determine our physical looks, our circumstances, reactions, benefits and problems, job, relationships and health, in fact, all aspects of our life.

The ninth consciousness is a fundamentally pure consciousness that cannot be defiled by anything. It is our Buddhature, which pervades the entire universe and is connected at the deepest level with all life. It is from this consciousness that we are able to transform our negative karma, or destiny. Nichiren Daishonin says, “You should base your mind on the ninth consciousness and carry out your practice in the six consciousnesses.” (WND-I, 458)

The eighth and ninth consciousnesses both function at the level where everything in the universe is connected. The perception, formed in our seventh consciousness, of a “self” that is separate from others, and from our environment, is incorrect. The smaller self of our seventh consciousness resists the idea that life is boundless. A life that comes into contact with the ninth consciousness breaks through the shell of the smaller self and enters the greater self.

When we chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, boundless life-force, wisdom, compassion and courage well up from our ninth consciousness, our Buddhature. Our eighth consciousness is being purified causing our karma to become less heavy. We also become aware of those aspects in our life that make us unhappy, or hold us back from fully revealing our true potential. Through our practice we can purify all those aspects and transform them into value.

1. Do you have an experience of using your practice to purify your karma and transform it into value?
2. How would you explain the nine consciousnesses to others in your own words?