

## Discussion Topic January – The Ten Worlds

The aim of our Buddhist practice is to elevate our life state so that we can withstand and transform the most difficult and adverse circumstances. There is always a correlation between our external circumstances and our inner tendencies. The same circumstances can represent a dreadful ordeal to one person, while another finds them an exciting challenge. Basing himself on the Lotus Sutra, the Buddhist scholar T'ien-t'ai developed a system defining ten states of life, often described as "Ten Worlds". Nichiren Daishonin further refined the system. What are these Ten Worlds?

**Hell**, a life state of despair in which we are completely overpowered by suffering and feel hopelessly trapped by our circumstances. But it does help us develop our desire to improve our circumstances, and also to empathize with the suffering of others.

**Hunger**, a life state of constant desire for pleasure, power, wealth, fame, and so on, that can never be satisfied – not even when our wishes are fulfilled. But it can act as a driving force for us to improve our situation. We can also desire a better world, and to see others become happy.

**Animality**, a life state governed by instinct, in which we fear those who are stronger and dominate those who are weaker than us. It also encompasses an instinctive desire for both self-preservation and the protection of others.

**Anger**, a life state dominated by egocentric selfishness, competition, arrogance and the wish to be superior to others. But anger can also galvanize us into standing up for justice.

**Humanity**, a life state of calm in which we are capable of sound judgement and of controlling our instinctive desires with reason. It is also a vulnerable state, as it is easy to fall back into a lower life state as soon as we encounter difficulties.

**Rapture**, a life state of joy experienced when a wish is fulfilled or a problem overcome. It tends to disappear as a result of even the slightest change in our circumstances.

In general, we move between the six life states described above, also known as the "Lower Worlds". They are always activated by external influences and the ways in which we react to them. This means that we remain extremely vulnerable to changes in our circumstances.

The following higher life states, or "Noble Paths", are activated solely by our own endeavours.

**Learning**, a life state in which we learn about life and about ourselves from others and from pre-existing knowledge. It can lead to self-centeredness and alienation from others.

**Realization**, a life state in which we come to understand a certain aspect of life through our own perception and insight. It can lead to self-centeredness and the tendency to rely on our intelligence rather than our wisdom.

**Bodhisattva**, a life state in which we seek enlightenment both for ourselves and for others. It is a state of compassion, of overcoming selfishness and striving for the well-being of others. It can also turn into arrogance, when we think we are superior to those we are helping. Or we might sacrifice ourselves, disregarding our own needs, which in turn makes us fall back into the lower life states.

**Buddhahood**, a life state in which an ordinary person is enlightened to the true nature of life and experiences absolute happiness and freedom in the reality of daily life. We feel complete and in harmony with the fundamental power of the universe: indestructible joy, unlimited wisdom, courage, compassion, creativity and life force. A person in the state of Buddhahood can experience everything, including the inevitable trials of sickness, old age and death, as an opportunity to experience joy and fulfilment.

Because each of these ten life states includes the other nine, the life state we are in at any given moment influences the other nine. When we are in the state of Buddhahood, we bring forth the positive and fundamentally enlightened aspects of the four lower life states. Therefore, the life state of Hell is transformed into the desire to help others attain Buddhahood. Hunger changes into the desire for knowledge, justice and peace. Animality turns into instinctive wisdom, and Anger changes into the passion to build a society of peace and justice.

How desperate our circumstances might appear, we can choose at any time to manifest the highest life state – Buddhahood. Thus, our life state is never static or unchanging, but continues to change from moment to moment, throughout our entire life.

- What is your basic life state, and how has the practice helped you to transform it?
- Do you have an experience with the life state of Buddhahood?