

March Discussion Topic – Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life

At any given moment, we possess the power to change our lives and our future, and to influence our environment. Even though we might accept in theory that we have boundless potential, in reality we still feel that our possibilities are limited. This is because of the restricted vision we have of ourselves and the world. Our standards and values, our sense of purpose, the things we focus our energy on, and our way of defining happiness, all influence the way we perceive and experience our surroundings. We can certainly live very comfortably within the confines of this limited vision of ourselves and the world, but when we are challenged by a problem or an obstacle, we suffer, because we feel overwhelmed, helpless or afraid.

The principle of “Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life” (in Japanese *ichinen sanzen*) means that in a single moment (*ichinen*), three thousand (*sanzen*) possibilities are present within our life - including the greatest of all: Buddhahood. This is true for everybody. All human beings possess the capacity to bring forth the highest life state, whatever their ethnicity, gender, age or education. No one is superior to anyone else in terms of being able to manifest their highest life state, Buddhahood. All possible future events are contained in the present moment. This means that the future is not predetermined.

At any moment, life expresses itself in one of the Ten Worlds, or ten life states. These Ten Worlds are: Hell, Hunger, Animality, Anger, Humanity, Rapture, Learning, Realization, Bodhisattva and Buddha, or Enlightenment. The Ten Worlds do not exist separately as isolated life states; in every life state, the other nine are latently present. Which brings the number of potential life states up to a hundred.

Each of these hundred life states possesses the Ten Factors. The Ten Factors are: 1. Appearance (*nyo ze so*); 2. Nature (*nyo ze sho*); 3. Entity (*nyo ze tai*); 4. Power (*nyo ze riki*); 5. Influence (*nyo ze sa*); 6. Internal cause (*nyo ze in*); 7. External cause (*nyo ze en*); 8. Latent effect (*nyo ze ka*); 9. Manifest effect (*nyo ze ho*); 10. Their consistency from beginning to end (*nyo ze honmatsu kukyoto*). The Ten Factors are active in each of the Three Realms, bringing the total up to three thousand realms.

The Three Realms are: 1. the Realm of the Self: form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness; 2. the Realm of Living Beings: society; 3. the Realm of the Land: the natural environment. The sum of three thousand is thus the result of multiplying 10 (Ten Worlds) x 10 (Ten Worlds) x 10 (Ten factors) x 3 (Three Realms of Existence).

The principle of “Three Thousand Realms in a Single Moment of Life” implies that we can bring about a positive change precisely because of the underlying connectedness of all living beings. In Buddhist writings, we find the beautiful metaphor of “Indra's Net” to show the interconnectedness of all that lives: the celestial palace of the god Indra is adorned with a magnificent jeweled net. At each intersection of the net sits a sparkling jewel that reflects all the other jewels in the net. Whenever a jewel is moved by a passing breeze, all the other jewels glitter. We, too, are jewels in the infinite web of connectedness. When a single jewel moves, everything moves, like ripples spreading through water. Truly, everything starts with one single person.

- How can we use our practice to influence our life state and bring about a positive change in our future?
- When we change, our environment changes. Have you experienced that?