

# Life Condition and the Ten Worlds

One of the main concepts of Buddhism, and one that is crucial to one's understanding of Buddhist method is the concept of life condition. If you don't understand the concept of life condition, it's going to be very hard to understand what an enlightened life condition is; and that, after all, is what the practice of Buddhism is all about.

Basic to the concept of life condition is a Buddhist term known as the Ten Worlds. The Ten Worlds are not physical places. They are momentary states of life that each person can exhibit at any given time. When we refer to the concept of "life condition," we are referring to the Ten Worlds. The first six are ones in which most people live all of the time. They are commonly known as the "six lower worlds." Let us remind everyone again that they are momentary states of life. However, each of us has a "central tendency" associated with one of them. That is, there is a particular life condition that you will always go back to whenever there is a lack of internal or external stimuli to activate a different one. So then, to describe them, they are:

**Hell (Jap. Jigoku).** This state of life is characterized by a feeling of hopelessness; sadness, depression, lack of confidence, tiredness, and the sense that nothing will change for the better and that there is nothing anyone can do to change it. This state can manifest as uncontrollable rage, not to be confused with anger, but a desperate and deep self-hatred.

**Hunger or Hungry Ghosts (Jap. Gaki).** This is a feeling of insatiable desire. It could be a desire for food, but usually denotes a "need" for some external stimulus the person in this world thinks will result in their happiness. Examples of things a person might hunger for are cars, houses, money, drugs, alcohol, someone, etc. The moment you are in the world of hunger, you are, a slave to your desires.

**Animality or Animals (Jap. Chikusho).** A person in this world behaves like an animal in that they prey on those whom they perceive to be weaker than them and cower before those whom they perceive to be more powerful than them. Work environments are perhaps the most common places where behaviours arising from this world occur. A person in this world may pretend to willingly do everything that their boss tells them and to respect their boss's authority while treating their own subordinates in a high-handed or authoritarian manner. Another description of Animality is contained in the common phrase "the law of the jungle." The struggle for power becomes all consuming and fear

of others with more power than you debilitate you for the moment when you are in this world or life condition.

**Anger or Asuras (Jap. Shura).** The world of anger is perhaps the most deceptively named of the Ten Worlds. It is a condition of egotism and self-righteousness, backstabbing and manipulation. Like Animality, it is a condition that is focused on power. Wars start from the collective life condition of a nation centred in the world of anger. The concept that was once popular in our country propounded, “We are America. We are the best country in the world. We must fight to make the world safe for democracy so that all others can be just like us.” Dogmatism about religion, politics, relationships, etc. comes from this life condition. All others are to believe you because of who you are (your status and previous accomplishments) not because what you are saying is necessarily reasonable or correct.

These four lower worlds, or life conditions, are known as the four evil paths. That is because they tend to lead individuals down to the lowest condition — the world of hell.

Those in the world of hunger, for example, after they have exhausted all efforts to obtain what they desire and cannot do so, quickly plunge into the condition of hell or hopelessness. This is especially true if they believe that their desire is the only means of attaining happiness for themselves. As for the condition of Animality, you also begin to feel helpless and hopeless unless you have found a way to become the “top dog” in the most important aspects of your daily life. Then you become entrenched in the world of anger, thinking yourself superior to all others and forcing your will on everyone around you. At that point, those with more power will meet your unrelenting, yet egotistical attitude. Or you may be faced by those who can clearly point out your errors and cause others, from whom you obtained your power of anger in the first place, to lose respect and quit following you. Rich people who flaunt their wealth, such as newly rich athletes, begin to feel so powerful that they actually become outraged when some authorities point out that they cannot break the laws about use of drugs or other things no matter who they think they are.

**Humanity or Human Beings** (also called **Tranquility, Jap. Nin**). This is another world that is somewhat difficult to describe. This state is often mistaken for enlightenment (research Chan or Zen), even by Buddhists. This is a life condition of stasis, where the perception is that nothing changes. It is a condition where you can use rational judgment. You can carry on conversations and have dialogues without becoming distraught about concerns for your own life or the lives of others. This condition is actually the goal of many people. This is what they strive for. They believe that if they could just become tranquil, then they wouldn’t need anything else in their lives. One of the problems with this world is that while in it, you really can’t accomplish much of anything at all. Desire causes people to take action, sometimes for

good and sometimes for bad. When people are in the world of humanity, they are absent from desire. This can be a good thing, and usually feels good to the person experiencing it. However, desire goes beyond selfishness sometimes and extends to helping others. For instance, one might feel a desire to stop animal abuse. In the world of tranquility however, such a desire would be absent. So it becomes difficult to get much accomplished while in this state, either for oneself or for others.

So much effort is put forth to avoid emotionalism or passion that, despite what you would think at first view, this world is actually exhausting in that it is impossible to remain in without just shutting out the realities of your life and the lives of others.

**Rapture or Heavenly Beings (Jap. Ten).** The condition of rapture, as the name implies, is one of elation or ecstasy. It can be the result of a positive outcome within the world of hunger. Obtaining what you wanted brings about a feeling of elation that consumes you for the moment. A main characteristic of this condition is that it is short lived.

Most people tend to cycle through these six lower worlds over and over again without any hope of breaking free from them. For instance, a person may hunger for a certain job; say to be a rock star. They devote their lives to the goal (Namu) for several years. When they reach their goal, assuming that they have the fortune to do so, they at first live in the world of rapture. They may then lose their stardom or become tired of it and the lack of privacy. They will then fall into the world of hell or back into hunger for some other circumstance they think will bring them happiness. Another example would be of yearning for a new car. After working hard to get the car and living in the world of hunger, the person will switch to the world of rapture once they achieve their goal. After a while, the good feelings about having a new car fade. The person may then enter tranquility or even hunger again.

That is the constant cycle of the six lower worlds. Their environment easily manipulates the person, and their happiness relies heavily upon their external success.

The preceding examples are cases of people with pretty good fortune or who have made reasonably good causes in their present or previous lives. A person who has made bad causes may have a very difficult time ever escaping from hell or hunger. Such a person will make further bad causes by committing crimes or perhaps even suicide. We see such examples every day.

That leads to the next concept of the Ten Worlds. As we had mentioned earlier, most people stay around a single world most of the time. The world that a person hovers around is known as their central life tendency. The central life tendency of most humans is tranquility (a.k.a. humanity).

The important thing to understand about the concept of the Ten Worlds and life condition is that it is relatively easy to obtain external goals, but to change one's central life tendency is quite difficult. Even after obtaining a new car, a person will shortly fall from the world of rapture into their old feeling or life tendency. So, to be able to maintain a high life condition, or central life tendency, is the most fortunate thing a person could have. To raise one's life condition, or central life tendency, is also the most difficult thing a person can do.

Most people think that the fifth and sixth worlds (tranquility and rapture) are the happiest states of life that anyone can achieve. They strive to maintain one of these two worlds as much as they possibly can. The fortunate ones are capable of staying in one of those two worlds most of the time. Some people, on the other hand, realize that there must be more to life and strive for an even higher state of life, or life condition. That leads us to the next worlds.

**Learning or Voice Hearers (Jap. Shomon).** As the name of this world implies, the world of learning is exhibited when you are gaining knowledge about the world around you or your life itself. To begin to learn, that is to be in the world of learning, you must exert effort. It is said that a seeking mind is the key to wisdom, and you've probably heard teachers say that without effort on the part of their students, learning will not take place. Put another way, your external environment cannot make you learn. It can provide great circumstances to learn, but it cannot make you learn or be in the world of learning.

**Realization or Cause-Awakened Ones (Jap. Engaku).** The world of realization takes learning one step further. It requires even more effort. Perhaps the easiest way to describe what takes place within the world of realization is to look to the arts. Just because you know the notes that a guitar can make doesn't make you a great musician. Similarly, your learning and knowledge about painting does not make you a great artist. By internalizing the knowledge and adding something of yourself and your creativity to it, you can take your learning a step further and actually go beyond the level of your teachers.

While these two worlds, learning and realization are much "higher" and allow you much more control than the six lower worlds; they still have their shortcomings. First of all, to remain for long in these worlds you must be somewhat self-absorbed. It is a limited sort of enlightenment that excludes most others. It most frequently leads to the world of anger where the person can't understand why others can't just do things as well as they do them. They grow impatient with the entire world around them. They think themselves somehow superior because of their knowledge and the efforts that they had to put out to get themselves where they are now. They have little time or patience for others who won't or can't do what they did. People in these worlds don't care to waste their time convincing others to follow their example. They believe

that teaching others won't help them further their knowledge or the realization of their art and self-expression anyway, so why bother.

**Bodhisattva (Jap. Bodhisattva).** The world of Bodhisattva is a naturally occurring condition of life, although most people don't think it is. Most people think that the term Bodhisattva applies only to Buddhists, but that is not true. It is the life condition where you actually care about another person's life more than you do your own. Say, for instance, that there is someone in the world who is trapped in a burning building. To make a decision to risk your own life to save another's is the condition of Bodhisattva. At the moment you decided to do so, you are in the world of Bodhisattva. You may not stay there very long, but it is an extremely powerful good cause to make for your life. Because it is so hard to love, to care, even beyond your own self-protection and preservation, it is a life condition that also yields a great cause and effect within your life. If you were to constantly find yourself in situations that gave you the opportunity to offer your life for the sake of others, and if you constantly gave no thought to yourself or your own self preservation, but freely gave of yourself, you would be accomplishing an extremely difficult feat and would be making an extremely good cause. But actually, in real life, even those people such as emergency workers who have chosen to put their lives in situations where they themselves may die trying to save others, exhibit the life condition of tranquility, anger, or Animality about the career choice they have made. They do not consistently act out of Bodhisattva compassion where it is the love and concern they feel for the person, which instigates their every action. Actually, the only way to consistently experience the world of Bodhisattva is by raising your life condition to the next and highest world — the world of Buddhahood. The world of Bodhisattva actually enhances and strengthens the world of Buddhahood. In other words, they act reciprocally to enhance each other. To quote Shakyamuni Buddha about this "...Originally I practiced the Bodhisattva way, and the life span that I acquired then has yet to come to an end but will last twice the number of years that have already passed." (Lotus Sutra) Both the story of heroic Bodhisattva deeds, and the deeds themselves, lives on and on. The world of Bodhisattva strengthens, or you might say lengthens, the condition of Buddhahood.

**Buddhahood or Buddha (Jap. Butsu).** This world, or life condition, is the most difficult to explain. It is the condition of life that exhibits infinite wisdom, strong life force and vitality, and tremendous good fortune. Buddha wisdom here does not refer to knowledge. Everyone has inherent wisdom. When you are in the right place at the right time and do the right thing for your life and when your life just kind of "knows" what to do, we say that you are in the world of Buddhahood. When you chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, you are instantaneously in the world of Buddhahood. Your conscious mind may not know it at the time, but you are actually there. You exhibit what is known as absolute happiness. Your life condition is not dependent on your environment

at that moment. For the moment, you have secured for yourself a condition of pure joy, comfort and freedom, even in the most unlikely of circumstances. Even in circumstances that others would think that you couldn't help but be suffering, the enlightened life condition of Buddhahood won't let you suffer. It's really strange to experience, but quite real and quite wondrous. To quote the teachings of Shakyamuni again, "...This, my land, remains safe and tranquil....

The halls and pavilions in its gardens and groves are adorned with various kinds of gems. Jewelled trees abound in flowers and fruit where living beings enjoy themselves at ease.... My pure land is not destroyed, yet the multitude sees it as consumed in fire, with anxiety, fear and other sufferings filling it everywhere." (Lotus Sutra) Here, Shakyamuni is referring to the condition of Buddhahood rather than a specific place. He is commenting on the wondrous nature of the condition of enlightenment, as it exists in the real world.

The goal in Buddhism is to make enlightenment one's central life tendency. We mentioned before that a person's ability to make a certain world their central life tendency is the result of causes that they have made in the past. Some people spend their entire lives striving to break free from a central life tendency of hell. For one to raise their central life tendency at all takes tremendous effort, struggle, wisdom and good fortune. Therefore, for a person to raise their central life tendency to that of enlightenment is an incredible struggle. It is not something that a person can accomplish by simply trying to do it, or even by reading about how to do it. A person needs help in breaking free from the negative causes they have made in the past that keep them trapped in the world, or life condition, in which they presently live. They need something powerful enough to counteract all of the past bad causes that they have made. There is only one cause that is powerful enough to overturn any past negative cause and permanently raise a person's central life tendency. That cause is to chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo and teach it to others.

Within each of the Ten Worlds is the potential for each of the other nine. This is referred to as the mutual possession of the Ten Worlds. What this means in practical terms is that the potential for Buddhahood exists within each of the other worlds. You don't have to scratch and claw your way up through each and every one of the worlds to reach the highest or tenth world of Buddhahood. As you become aware of your life's tendency to cycle among the lower six worlds, you can develop a seeking mind to escape from them. Your efforts even to read this book about Buddhism are the cause for you to break free from the six lower worlds' grasp. When you take the initiative to have a seeking mind, you ask questions and are in the world of learning. As you internalize this information about Buddhism, you may be in the world of realization, or you may even seek out the means to end suffering for the sake of another and be in the world of Bodhisattva. If you chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo as you study this text, you will find yourself in the enlightened world (or Buddhahood) of learning, realization, or Bodhisattva, by virtue of the mutual possession of the

Ten Worlds and the power of chanting Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo. Even if your karma has it that your central life tendency is that of hell, as you chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, you will easily and quickly escape the sufferings of hell and find yourself with a renewed hope for your own and others' future. If you fail to chant Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo, though, you can never understand or experience the world of Buddhahood in your own life. Chanting Namu-Myoho-Renge-Kyo is not about Buddha wisdom, it is Buddha wisdom. As Shakyamuni Buddha said, "The true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddha's." (Lotus Sutra) Therefore, the only way to do more than intellectualize the concept of the world of Buddhahood is to start chanting Namu- Myoho-Renge-Kyo now and reveal the condition of Buddhahood within.

The accomplishment of enlightenment, or in other words, making the world of Buddhahood your life's central tendency requires Buddhist practice. As we have stated before, the moment you chant Namu- Myoho-Renge-Kyo, your life is in the world of Buddhahood. The moment you stop, your life returns to one of the other nine worlds, which is a process dependent upon your karma. Here an analogy may help you to understand the process of enlightenment. Suppose your life is a piece of steel and chanting Namu- Myoho-Renge-Kyo is like a magnet. The instant the steel (your life) touches the magnet (your chanting) it takes on magnetic properties. While actually physically in contact with the magnet, the steel itself is magnetized. When you release the steel from the magnet, the steel's magnetic properties go away. But repeatedly rubbing the steel against the magnet causes the steel to retain the magnetic properties even after it is removed from contact with the magnet. The practice of chanting Namu- Myoho-Renge-Kyo and studying and teaching Buddhism to others results in becoming one with Namu- Myoho-Renge-Kyo or, in other words, becoming enlightened.

When you chant for the first time, the condition of Buddhahood may still be weak, just as the magnetic properties within the piece of steel are weak after just touching the magnet. Therefore, you may not be able to recognize the effect of Buddhahood. However, the more time you spend chanting, the more consistently you chant every day, and the more determined you chant, the more you will see the various aspects of enlightenment emerging from your life.

You'll begin to see yourself becoming happier, noticing the things in your environment more, noticing others around you, taking more pleasure in everything you do, enjoying your life more, inspiring others with wondrous new realizations, attracting people to you, changing the way you do things and the way you view the world, smiling more, laughing more, approaching new challenges with fresh determination, being more vital and full of energy, being more productive, feeling more confident, and increasing your inherent wisdom from within, and on and on. There are thousands more benefits that come from chanting, but we can't list them all here. As you chant, these traits will become

stronger and more noticeable the more you chant. This is what we call a strengthening of life condition.