

## The 9 Consciousnesses

Another important concept with which the daimoku practice is shown to be the essential and complete teachings of the Buddha, as the One Vehicle and as the First of the “three secret laws” or “three precious truths” or “three great treasures” of the Law (Dharma), the “object” (Dharma Voice) and the “sanctuary” (Dharma Body); and the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra is contained in the Goshō of “Hell and Buddhahood.”

The Threefold Lotus Kwoon teaching is based on the Buddhas teachings as well as T'ien-T'ai and Nichiren's exposition of the Nine Buddhist Consciousnesses. In order to introduce this teaching I will first provide the goshō as reference.

Here is the goshō:

Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light

I have received your various gifts. Nothing would please me more than to know that you have communicated with the late Lord Ueno, but I know that that is impossible. Perhaps only in a dream or a vision can you see him. Your late husband must certainly be in the pure land of Eagle Peak, listening and watching over this saha world day and night. You, his wife, and your children have only mortal senses, so you cannot see or hear him, but be assured that you will eventually be reunited [on Eagle Peak].

Counting all your previous lives, you must have shared the bonds of matrimony with more men than there are grains of sand in the ocean. However, the man to whom you were wed in this life is your true husband. He is the only one who brought you to practice the teachings of the Lotus Sutra. You should revere him as a Buddha. While he was in this world, he was a living Buddha, and now, he is a Buddha in death. His Buddhahood transcends both life and death. This is the meaning of the doctrine that is of utmost importance: attaining Buddhahood in one's present form. The fourth volume of the Lotus Sutra states: 'If one can uphold this [sutra], he will be upholding the Buddha's body.'

Neither the pure land nor hell exists outside our selves; both lie within our own hearts. Awakened to this truth, one is called a Buddha; deluded about it, one is called a common mortal. The Lotus Sutra reveals this truth, and one who embraces the Lotus Sutra will realize that hell is itself the Land of Tranquil Light.

Even though one may practice the provisional teachings for immeasurable millions of years, one will only fall into hell if one turns against the Lotus

Sutra. These are not my own words; they were proclaimed by Shakyamuni Buddha and confirmed by Taho Buddha and by all the Buddhas of the ten directions, who are Shakyamuni's emanations. To practice the provisional teachings is to be like a man scorched by fire that enters deeper and deeper into the flames, or like a drowning man sinking to the bottom of the deep waters. Not to embrace the Lotus Sutra is like jumping into fire or water. Those who rely on such evil teachers as Honen, Kobo and other slanderers of the Lotus Sutra and believe in the Amida or Dainichi Sutra are falling farther and farther into the fire or sinking deeper and deeper toward the bottom of the water. How can they possibly escape from agony! They will doubtless fall into the fiery pits-into the hell of repeated rebirth for torture, the hell of the black cords, and the hell of incessant suffering and sink to the depths of the ice to the hell of the blood red lotus and the hell of the great blood-red lotus. The second volume of the Lotus Sutra reads, "When his life comes to an end he will enter the Avichi hell, [be confined there for a whole kalpa, and when the kalpa ends, be born there again]. He will keep repeating this cycle for a countless number of kalpas."

Your late husband has escaped such agonies, for he was a supporter of Nichiren, the votary of the Lotus Sutra. A passage from the sutra reads: "If someone . . . should enter a great fire, the fire could not burn him.... If one were washed away by a great flood and called upon his Name, one would immediately find oneself in a shallow place." Another passage reads, "It cannot be burned by fire or washed away by water." How reassuring! How encouraging!

You may think of hell, the iron rods of the guards of hell or the accusing cries of the demon wardens as existing way off in some faraway place, but they are not like that. This teaching is of prime importance, and yet I will impart it to you just as Bodhisattva Monju revealed to the dragon king's daughter the secret teaching of the attainment of Buddhahood in one's present body. Now that you are about to receive that teaching, strive even more earnestly in your faith. One who practices still more earnestly whenever one hears the teachings of the Lotus Sutra is a true seeker of the way. T'ien-t'ai states, "From the indigo, an even deeper blue." This passage means that something dyed repeatedly with indigo becomes even bluer than the indigo plant itself. For us the Lotus Sutra is the indigo plant, and the growing intensity of our practice is "an even deeper blue."

The word jigoku or "hell" can be interpreted to mean digging a hole in the ground. A hole is always dug for one who dies; this is what is called "hell." The flames that reduce one's body to ashes are the fires of the hell of incessant suffering. One's wife, children and relatives hurrying one's body to the grave are the guards and wardens of hell. The plaintive cries of one's family are the voices of the guards and wardens of hell. One's two-and-a-half-foot-long walking stick is the iron rod of torture in hell. The horses and oxen that carry

one's body are the horse-headed and ox-headed demons, and the grave itself is the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. The eighty-four thousand earthly desires are eighty-four thousand cauldrons in hell. One's body as it leaves home is departing on a journey to the mountain of death; while the river beside which one's filial children stand in grief is the river of three crossings. It is useless to look for hell anywhere else.

Those who embrace the Lotus Sutra, however, can change all this. For them, hell changes into the Land of Tranquil Light, the burning fires of agony change into the torch of wisdom of the Buddha in his reward body; the dead person becomes a Buddha in his body of the Law; and the fiery inferno becomes the "room of great pity and compassion" where the Buddha in his manifested body abides. Moreover, the walking stick is transformed into the walking stick of the true entity or the Mystic Law, the river of three crossings becomes the ocean of "the sufferings of birth and death are nirvana," and the mountain of death becomes the towering peak of "earthly desires are enlightenment." Please think of your husband in these terms. To realize all this is to attain Buddhahood in one's present form, and to awaken to it is to open the Buddha wisdom. Devadatta changed the Avichi hell into the blissful land of tranquil light, and the dragon king's daughter also was able to attain Buddhahood without changing her form. Their achievements were none other than the results of understanding the above truth. This is because the Lotus Sutra saves both those who oppose and those who follow it. Such great benefits are contained in the single character myo.

Bodhisattva Nagarjuna states, "[The Lotus Sutra is] like a great physician who changes poison into medicine." The Great Teacher Miao-lo states, 'How can one find the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light anywhere outside Buddhagaya! This saha world does not exist outside the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light.' He also says, 'the true entity is invariably revealed in all phenomena, and all phenomena invariably possess the ten factors. The ten factors invariably function within the Ten Worlds, and the Ten Worlds invariably entail both life and its environment.' The Lotus Sutra reads, 'the true entity of all phenomena can only be understood and shared between Buddhas. This reality consists of the appearance, nature . . . and their consistency from beginning to end.' A passage from the Juryo chapter states, 'It has been immeasurable, boundless [hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas] since I in fact attained Buddhahood.' Here, 'I' means all beings in the Ten Worlds. All beings of the Ten Worlds are essentially Buddhas; so they dwell in the pure land. A passage from the Hoben chapter reads, 'All those phenomena are aspects of an abiding Law, and all the characteristics of the world are eternal.' It is the way of the world that birth and death are the eternally unchanging characteristics of life throughout the three existences of the past, present and future. This is nothing to grieve over or be surprised at. The single ideogram 'characteristics' represents the eight characteristics or phases of the Buddha's existence. Even these eight phases are subject to the law of birth and death.

The votaries of the Lotus Sutra are enlightened to all this, thereby attaining Buddhahood in their present forms. Since your deceased husband was a votary of this sutra, he doubtless attained Buddhahood as he was. You need not grieve so much over his passing. But to grieve is natural, since you are an ordinary person. Even sages are sometimes sad. Although Shakyamuni Buddha's greatest disciples had been awakened to the truth of life, they could not help lamenting his passing. Perhaps they behaved as ordinary people do.

By all means perform as much good as you possibly can for the sake of your deceased husband. The words of a wise man of old, 'Base your heart on the ninth consciousness and carry out your practice on the six consciousnesses,' are indeed well said. This letter contains teachings I have so far kept secret. Keep them deep within your heart.

Respectfully,

Nichiren

The eleventh day of the seventh month

Reply to the wife of the late Lord Ueno

Footnotes:

Takatsu, kokuja and mugen: Metaphorical descriptions of the life conditions experienced by those in the state of Hell. Descriptions of hell vary according to the different sutras and related treatises. These three are included among the so-called eight hot hells. Takatsu is the first of these eight hells, where people are said to fight each other viciously with iron claws, or are tortured by guards armed with iron staves and razor-sharp sabres. Kokuja is the second of the eight hells, in which people are either sawn in half or slashed by red-hot axes according to whether they are longer or wider than a red-hot iron measuring rope. Suffering in kokuja is said to be ten times worse than in tokatsu. Those who have committed the five cardinal sins are said to undergo indescribable torture in the last and severest hell, mugen (the hell of incessant suffering).

Hells of guren and daiguren: Literally, "blood-red lotus" and "great blood-red lotus," two of the eight cold hells. In "Letter to Niike," Nichiren Daishonin writes: "The hell of the blood-red lotus is so called because the intense cold of this hell makes one double over until his back splits open and the bloody flesh emerges like a crimson lotus flower. And there are hells even more horrible. "

Lotus Sutra, chap. 25.

Ibid., chap. 23.

Aborasetsu: (Ski Avoraksas) Jailers in hell, who have the head of an ox and the hands of human beings. They are said to cut down evildoers with razor-sharp swords.

Maka Shikan, vol. 1.

Property-of-wisdom aspect, property-of-Law aspect and property-of action aspect: The three enlightened properties with which Buddha is endowed. See Three properties of life in the Glossary.

Daichido Ron.

Hokke Mongu Ki, Vol. 26.

Kongabei Ron.

Eight phases of a Buddha's existence: See p. 122, footnote 135.

Ninth Consciousness: The fundamental purifying force that is the essence of our lives-the law of Namu-myoho-renge-kyo itself.

Six consciousnesses: The first six of nine consciousnesses, a classification of the spiritual functions of perception. The first five consciousnesses are the perceptions of the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch. The sixth consciousness enables one to integrate the perceptions of the five senses and form judgments about them. See also Nine consciousnesses in the Glossary.

Source unknown.

Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin; Vol 2.

Now I would like to extend this teaching with the help of a visual aid. There are nine consciousnesses as shown in the diagram. From a Buddhist Dictionary of terms, the following definition is given of the nine consciousnesses:

- Nine kinds of discernment. "Consciousness" is the translation of the Sanskrit vijñana, which means discernment. The nine consciousnesses are as follows:

- (1) Sight-consciousness (Skt chakshur-vijnana),
- (2) Hearing-consciousness (shrota-vijnana),
- (3) Smell-consciousness (ghrana-vijnana),
- (4) Taste-consciousness (jihvavijnana),

- (5) Touch-consciousness (kaya-vijnana),
- (6) Mind-consciousness (mano-vijnana),
- (7) Mano-consciousness (mano-vijnana),
- (8) Alaya-consciousness (alaya-vijñana), and
- (9) Amala-consciousness (amala-vijñana).

Note that the Sanskrit is the same for both the sixth and seventh consciousnesses. The first five consciousnesses correspond to the five senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. The sixth consciousness integrates the perceptions of the five senses into coherent images and makes judgments about the external world. In contrast with the first six consciousnesses, which deal with the external world, the seventh, or mano-consciousness, corresponds to the inner spiritual world. Awareness of and attachment to the self are said to originate from the mano-consciousness, as does the ability to distinguish between good and evil. The eighth, or alaya consciousness, exists in what modern psychology calls the unconscious; all experiences of present and previous lifetimes-collectively called karma-are stored there. The alaya-consciousness receives the results of one's good and evil deeds and stores them as karmic potentials or "seeds," which then produce the rewards of either happiness or suffering accordingly. Hence it was rendered as "storehouse consciousness" in Chinese. The alaya-consciousness thus forms the framework of individual existence. The Dharma Characteristics (Chin Fa-hsiang; Jpn Hosso) school regards the eighth consciousness as the source of all spiritual and physical phenomena. The Summary of the Mahayana (She-lun; Shoron) school, the T'ien-t'ai school, and the Flower Garland (Hua-yen; Kegon) school postulate a ninth consciousness, called amala-consciousness, which lies below the alaya-consciousness and remains free from all karmic impurity. This ninth consciousness is defined as the basis of all life's functions. Hence it was rendered as "fundamental pure consciousness" in Chinese. This is the storehouse of our inherent Buddha nature and our door to the ultimate truth.

In the following diagram the consciousnesses are rendered as circles or as a section through the spheres of consciousness with the most "worldly" on the outermost sphere moving toward the centre or innermost sphere of "pure" awareness or enlightened consciousness of Namu Myoho Renge Kyo. By invoking the daimoku while focusing on the ultimate mandala of the Gohonzon in our Samsaric "reality", we invoke a cause in the three aspects of: the Buddha (the Law-Dharma-Myohorengekyo), the Wisdom (Dharma Body), and the Action (Dharma Voice) that work their way through the consciousnesses of Sight, purifying vision; Hearing, purifying listening; Smell, purifying odours; Touch, purifying the flesh; Mind, purifying thoughts; Mano, purifying causal tendencies, and self-perception of innate Buddha nature; Alaya consciousness,

purifying causal heredity; and then ultimately, with direct association the Amala consciousness, as the mirrored aspect of the Gohonzon reflected into the essential purity of the subtle consciousness creating a continuity without time or space and the true aspect of the eternal continuity of life, Buddhahood. See the diagram for a graphic illustration.

Because the Daimoku reaches to the “core” of the Amala Consciousness immediately, the intermediate eight consciousnesses are purified without impedance whatsoever. This is why the Daimoku and the Gohonzon together, in the “active” meditation of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Buddhism, are the most expedient means of the Buddha practice to achieve enlightenment in this lifetime. In fact, the state achieved during the invocation of the Daimoku while focused on the Gohonzon done with determination as in the statement earlier, “single-mindedly desiring to see the Buddha”, immediately produces the mind of the Buddha. The objective of practice is to attain and maintain this Buddha-mind as long as possible and to maintain it beyond the meditation and to keep it while in one’s daily activities. So while one performs the practice of recitation of the Gongyo (two chapters of the Lotus Sutra, the Hoben and the Juryo), one instantly enters the Buddha mind and concomitantly affects all eight consciousnesses to purify them. Over time with regular practice, as the eight consciousness are cleansed, the innate core of Buddha nature is more and more able to be maintained throughout all the consciousnesses and therefore achieving the maintained state of awakening in one’s current life.

The diagram on the next page attempts to visualize the levels of consciousnesses and the actions of chanting the Daimoku in relation to Karmic cleansing.

**NAMUMYOHORENGEKYO**

**CAUSAL**

**EPISTEMOLOGY**

**THOUGHT**

**TOUCH**

**TASTE**

**SMELL**

**HEARING**

**SIGHT**

Active  
meditation with  
Daimoku and  
Gohonzon

