

Toward a Century of Health: The Wisdom for Leading a Long Life of Good Fortune and Benefit—Part 4 [of 4]

Joy in Life and Death—The Boundless Life State Attained by Dedicating Ourselves to Our Eternal Mission

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Hello everyone, welcome to July's study podcast!

In July, we are celebrating the 70th anniversary of the YMD and YWD. On July 1, 1950, a youth meeting was held with only about 20 people attending. Sensei wrote in his diary that day: “The youth have set sail toward the future’s storms and raging waves. I, too, will advance with my whole life.” Sensei recognized that the Soka mentors and disciples must overcome all obstacles through their shared commitment of mentor and disciple to realize the great vow for kosen-rufu. This was Sensei’s vow and prayer.

Let us continue Sensei’s determination to realize the great vow for kosen-rufu.

This month we are studying the “Joy in Life and Death—The Boundless Life State Attained by Dedicating Ourselves to Our Eternal Mission,” the final part of the subseries “Toward a Century of Health: The Wisdom for Leading a Long Life of Good Fortune and Benefit”. This part examines the Buddhist view of life and death based on several passages from the Daishonin’s writings. As Second Soka Gakkai President Josei Toda said, “The ultimate problem that Buddhism must resolve is the problem of death.”

The first passage is from “Hell Is the Land of Tranquil Light.”

Since your deceased husband was a votary of this [Lotus] sutra, he doubtless attained Buddhahood just as he was. You need not grieve so much over his passing. On the other hand, to grieve is only natural for ordinary people. Could the lamenting of all the great enlightened disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha at his passing have been meant to show the

behaviour of ordinary people?

You should by all means perform as much good as you possibly can [by offering prayers] for the sake of your deceased husband. (WND-1, 458)

This passage is from a letter of encouragement that Nichiren Daishonin sent to the widowed lay nun Ueno, mother of Nanjo Tokimitsu, who had lost her husband, Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro. The Daishonin reassures Ueno that since her late husband was a practitioner of the Lotus Sutra, “he doubtless attained Buddhahood just as he was.”

Nichiren explains that those who dedicate their lives to the Mystic Law can attain Buddhahood just as they are in this lifetime. Hyoe Shichiro remained a sincere practitioner of the Lotus Sutra until the end of his life, so he was a Buddha in life and a Buddha in death. Therefore, from the standpoint of the eternity of life, Ueno does not need to worry about him.

But it is only natural to grieve and be deeply shaken when faced with the death of a loved one. The Daishonin reminds us to continue chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo “as much as we possibly can” to transform our grief into prayers for the eternal happiness of the deceased. The Daishonin says, “The ray of light from the daimoku reaches all the way to the hell of incessant suffering and makes it possible for them [the deceased] to attain Buddhahood.”

In the case of our own lives, our determination to work for kosen-rufu in this lifetime and the next means that, at the end of our lives, we can look back without regret. We can face death without fear, confident that we will continue to experience Buddhahood in future existences. President Ikeda says that we can “savour joy in both life and death.” Our practice has the power to encompass everything. As President Ikeda says:

Through faith in Nichiren Buddhism, we can transform the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death into four virtues of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.

President Ikeda uses the following passage from *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings* to explain the eternity of life and the originally inherent nature of birth and death.

Point Four, regarding the passage [from “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” (16th) chapter of the Lotus Sutra] “The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction.

The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings says: The “Thus Come One” is the living beings of the threefold world. When we look at these living beings through the eyes of the “Life Span” chapter, we can see and understand the true aspect of these beings who in their original states possess the Ten Worlds.

The aspect or characteristics of the threefold world are birth, aging, sickness, and death. But if we look at birth and death in terms of their true nature, then there is no birth or death. And if there is no birth or death, then there is no ebb or flow. [Yet it is not that birth and death do not exist.] To look on birth and death with repulsion and try to escape from them is termed delusion, or a viewpoint of acquired enlightenment. Seeing and understanding the originally inherent nature of birth and death is termed awakening, or original enlightenment.

Now when Nichiren and his followers chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, they realize the originally inherent nature of birth and death, and the originally inherent nature of ebb and flow.

We may also say that nonexistence and existence, birth and death, ebbing and flowing, existing in this world and entering extinction, are all, every one of them, actions of the eternally abiding inherent nature. (Cf. *The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings*, pp. 127–28)

In this passage, the Thus Come One, or Buddha, refers to Shakyamuni and all living beings in the “threefold world”, or the real world. This includes us. We all possess all of the Ten Worlds, including Buddhahood. We are all entities of the Mystic Law embodying the principle of “three thousand realms in a single moment of life.”

When the Daishonin says in the passage that there is “no birth or death,” he means that from the standpoint of eternity, there is no beginning or end. From a Buddhist perspective,

both birth and death are simply phenomena or phases inherent in eternal life. In the phase of death, life becomes dormant and exists as a potential, and in the phase of birth, it becomes active and manifests itself in the physical world. President Ikeda uses the metaphor of waves in an ocean:

Each individual life can be likened to a wave in the ocean. When a wave rises from the ocean, that is life, and when it merges back into the ocean, that is death. This process continues eternally, without beginning or end...

The “originally inherent nature of birth and death” means that birth and death are innate aspects of our eternal lives. From the standpoint of the eternity of life throughout past, present and future, there is no reason to abhor or fear death.

What does the “originally inherent nature of birth and death” mean for us? It means that we should continue to make efforts for kosen-rufu right up to the end of our lives, so that we can “firmly establish the state of Buddhahood within us in this lifetime” and experience great benefit in lifetimes to come.

The role of a mentor in Buddhism is to share that great desire for kosen-rufu and the fighting spirit to achieve it. We can attain the same life state as the Buddha by living with the shared commitment of mentor and disciple. And as we come to understand more and more the true nature of our eternal lives, we can grasp the importance of the present moment and the person in front of us. President Ikeda says that we can “appreciate the preciousness of each moment of our existence. We can make every moment a treasure for opening the way to eternity.”

Not only that but, according to Josei Toda, “once people understand the true eternal nature of life, we’ll be able to elevate the life state of humankind. The spread of the Buddhist view of life and death will enrich our world.”

With the current adversity that humanity is facing today in its battle against the coronavirus pandemic, it is essential for us to elevate the life state of humankind and help to free people from the four sufferings of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Let us work together to create a wonderful Century of Life!

Thanks very much for listening to the podcast.