

A Religion of Human Revolution—Part 7

Life and Death—The Journey of Mentor and Disciple to Attain a State of Eternity, Happiness, True Self, and Purity

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Hello everyone! My name is Sachie Motohashi and I am honoured to present the seventh installment of the study series “A Religion of Human Revolution.” In this installment, President Ikeda focuses on Life and Death and the importance of the relationship of the oneness of mentor and disciple.

Although a discussion on life and death can be daunting, President Ikeda makes the topic relevant and straightforward in this lecture. There are 2 main key points in this lecture. The first is that Buddhism teaches that life is eternal and that birth and death are originally inherent in life itself. This is illustrated in the 1st and 2nd gosho passages. The second key point is that this view of life and death that Soka mentors and disciples have come to grasp deeply is because of their selfless efforts for kosen-rufu. This is illustrated in the 3rd gosho passage.

Throughout the lecture, President Ikeda continually uses examples from his own relationship with Josei Toda and also Josei Toda’s relationship with Tsunesaburo Makiguchi to bring to life the often elusive idea of mentor and disciple.

Sensei’s first encounter with Josei Toda took place in the summer of 1947. Sensei shares the very first thing he ever asked Josei Toda: “What is the correct way to live?” Josei Toda answers: “Many difficult problems arise over the long course of life. We must find the answer to the question of life and death. This is the key. Unless we find the correct answer to that, we cannot lead a truly correct life.”

Through understanding death, we can understand life. The interconnectedness of life and death is conveyed in the gosho passage from “The Large Carriage Drawn by a White Ox”.

This carriage [the great white ox cart] I have been describing has the two doctrines, the theoretical teaching and the essential teaching [of the Lotus Sutra], as its wheels, and it is hitched to the ox of Myoho-rence-kyo [the Mystic Law]. It is a carriage that goes round and round in the cycle of birth and death, birth and death, in the burning house that is the threefold world. But with the linchpin of a believing mind [to keep the wheels in place] and the

oil of determination applied to them, it can carry one to the pure land of Eagle Peak.

Or again, we might say that the mind king acts as the ox [of the great white ox cart], while birth and death are like the wheels. The Great Teacher Dengyo states, “The two phases of life and death are the wonderful workings of one mind. The two ways of existence and nonexistence are the true functions of an inherently enlightened mind.” (WND-2, 723; “The Large Carriage Drawn by a White Ox”)

Written in 1277, the gosho likens the two phases of life and death to a carriage that goes through the cycle of birth and death over and over again by the wheels of the theoretical teaching and essential teaching. For more information, please refer to the endnotes for the lecture.

Similarly to when we have a good night’s sleep, we wake the next morning, refreshed and ready to take on another day. After a day full of fulfillment and hard work, we can rest well in the evening and the pattern continues. This continues day after day and similarly lifetime after lifetime. Going to sleep is nothing to be avoided, and similarly, this cycle of birth and death is something we cannot avoid either.

As well, President Ikeda teaches us that by maintaining unwavering belief in the Mystic Law until the last moment of our lives, we can travel the path of life and earth illuminated by Myoho-enge-kyo. He says:

For me, the driving force for doing so was striving with the same spirit as my mentor. This is because following the path of mentor and disciple dedicated to kosen-rufu fills one’s heart with courage to vanquish all devilish functions, and inspires us to practice with the resolve that “now is the last moment of one’s life” Through making bold, all-out efforts for kosen-rufu with and for my mentor, and triumphing in each struggle, I was able to build an unshakable foundation of faith. It allowed me to deepen my conviction in the “wonderful workings of one mind” transcending the bounds of life and death.

In the gosho “The Fourteen Slanders” the Daishonin assures us that if we are strong in faith, we will be greeted by the mountain of perfect enlightenment with gems, flowers raining from the heavens and wondrous music. This is an illustration of the life state of indestructible happiness at the moment of death.

Continue your practice without backsliding until the final moment of your life, and when that time comes, behold! When you climb [swiftly ascent] the mountain of perfect enlightenment and gaze around you in all directions, then to your amazement you will see that the entire realm of phenomena is the Land of Tranquil Light. The ground will be of lapis lazuli, and the eight paths will be set by golden ropes. Four kinds of flowers will fall from the heavens, and music will resound in the air. All Buddhas and bodhisattvas will be present in

complete joy, caressed by the breezes of eternity, happiness, true self, and purity. The time is fast approaching when we too will count ourselves among their number [and enjoy ourselves in complete freedom and ease]. But if we are weak in faith, we will never reach that wonderful place. (WND-1, 761; “The Fourteen Slanders”)

“The Fourteen Slanders” is written to lay priest Matsuno Rokuro Saemon whose daughter is Nanjo Tokimitsu’s mother. Matsuno Rokuro was old, and he appears to have been concerned about his death. In this gosho, the Daishonin emphasizes the unity among believers and instructs Matsuno how to practice his teaching as a lay believer. He encourages him that if we practice correctly and establish the world of Buddhahood while we are alive, death is no longer fearful emphasizing that the essential truth of life is characterized by eternity, happiness, true self, and purity.

The third gosho referenced in Sensei’s lecture is “The Essential for Attaining Buddhahood”. This gosho is personally one of my favourites as I am always encouraged by the simple phrase near the end of the letter that goes: “but still I’m not discouraged”.

The [Lotus Sutra] states, “Those persons who had heard the Law dwelled here and there in various Buddha lands, constantly reborn in company with their teachers,” and “If one stays close to the teachers of the Law, one will speedily gain the bodhisattva way. By following and learning from these teachers one will see Buddhas as numerous as Ganges sands.” A commentary says, “Originally one followed this Buddha and for the first time conceived the desire to seek the way. And by following this Buddha again, one will reach the stage where there is no retrogression.” Another commentary says, “In the beginning one followed this Buddha or bodhisattva and formed a bond with him, and so it will be through this Buddha or bodhisattva that one will attain one’s goal.” Above all, be sure to follow your original teacher so that you are able to attain Buddhahood. (WND-1, 747–48; “The Essentials for Attaining Buddhahood,” addressed to Soya Kyoshin)

This letter, written in 1276, is written to Soya Kyoshin who practised alongside other leading disciples Toki Jonin and Ota Jomyo. The Daishonin quotes passages from the Lotus Sutra and from writings from T’ien-tai and Miao-lo that reference the karmic bond that individuals have with their teachers.

President Ikeda says:

The mentor-disciple relationship is formed through a vibrant and dynamic heart-to-heart bond. It is a life-to-life connection, united by the same spirit and dedicated to the same goal.

He also emphasizes that the mentor-disciple relationship hinges on the disciple and comes to life through the disciple’s own recognition or awareness.

Personally, one of the ways I connected with President Ikeda as a mentor from a young age was through my efforts to get to know what he had gone through as a youth. It was through this discovery, which consisted of lots of reading, that I got to know the hopes and struggles that the young Daisaku Ikeda had experienced. One of the books that truly helped me was the Youthful Diary. In it, Sensei talks about his deep personal struggles with health, self-confidence and concerns about the future – things that I struggled and still continue to struggle with to this day. I felt like I was reading his innermost thoughts and could relate on a deep level. He no longer felt like a president of a worldwide organization but someone who had the same challenges and questions about life as I did. Because of this connection that I had made and still continue to make, when I read his encouragement or guidance or message, I feel more connected and united and truly regard him as my mentor.

This profound relationship of the oneness of mentor and disciple is not just in theory but we can also see it through the lives and struggles of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi, Josei Toda and Daisaku Ikeda. Around the world, we are striving for the same goal of building an age of peace amidst the chaos we seem to be exposed to every day. Let's continue to strive alongside our mentor for the happiness of our friends, family, neighbours and all those around us!