

Gatwick Chapter Study
August 2003

Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light

Q: "I think you are a very intelligent, very special person."

A: "The bad stuff is easier to believe."

(--*Pretty Woman*)

I wanted to talk about Hell and about transforming it. I thought, at least I won't need to chant for an experience of Hell because like most people there have already been too many of. But *transforming* Hell is a more interesting topic.

"Although I live in such a forsaken hovel, deep in this mortal flesh I preserve the ultimate secret Law inherited from Shakyamuni Buddha at Eagle Peak. My heart is where all Buddhas enter nirvana; my tongue, where they turn the wheel of doctrine; my throat, where they are born into the world; and my mouth, where they attain enlightenment. Because this mountain is where the wondrous votary of the Lotus Sutra dwells, how can it be any less sacred than the pure land of Eagle Peak?" ("The Person and the Law")

Let's start by talking about Global Warming. That's a kind of hell, isn't it?

We know that it's happening, but you only hear about it when the weather is very hot, yes? It's as though Global Warming itself appears and disappears. In winter, it's as though it never existed, but next summer it's back. You could ask if next year's Global Warming is the same as last year's Global Warming because there's no obvious continuity. If this sounds familiar, you're right – it's the first of the "Three Obvious Truths" (Jp. *Santai*) or "Three Perceptions" – the Truth of Temporary Existence.

The other thing about Global Warming is that it's erratic, a phenomenon, a set of random interlocking atmospheric conditions, which could be natural, which some people dispute exists at all as an artefact. This, of course, is the Second Obvious Truth, the Truth of Co-dependant Origination (Jp. *Engi*).

One of these views is analytical, the other synthetic. One is about what we can perceive with our senses (Ho), the other about how things come to exist at all (Myo). One is about what we perceive as objective reality, the other about subjective aspects of existence, the operation of consciousness, wisdom:

The sutra states, "The Thus Come One perceives the true aspect of the threefold world exactly as it is. There is no ebb and flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction. It is neither substantial nor empty, neither consistent nor diverse." (LS p. 226)

This is ku or Sunyata, an absolutely fundamental concept in all Buddhist schools. Many Mahayana scholars use the word Emptiness, but it does not mean simple nonexistence or vacancy. To be empty is to be empty of something. "We look deeply at the table, the blue sky, our friend, the mountain, the river, our anger, and our happiness and see that these are all empty of a separate self. When we touch these things deeply, we see the ...interpenetrating nature of all that is." (*The Heart of The Buddha's Teaching*, p.146. Thich Nhat Hanh)

"Regarding life and death with abhorrence and trying to separate oneself from them is delusion, corresponding to the notion that Buddhahood is acquired. To clearly perceive life, and death, as life's innate workings, is called awakening and corresponds to inherent or total enlightenment.

"The Buddha, perfectly enlightened in the Three Bodies, takes the entire universe as his true body, takes the entire universe as his spiritual nature, takes the entire universe as his physical existence" (Nichiren Daishonin Goshu Zenshu, p. 563)

Now Nichiren and his disciples who chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo awaken to the ebb and flow of birth and death as the innate workings of life that is eternal.” (Gosho Zenshu p. 754)

These two perceptions of reality both miss something. That something is the innate Buddhahood of ordinary mortals explained in the Juryo chapter of the Lotus Sutra, also called the Fusion of Objective Reality and Subjective Wisdom or the True Aspect of all Phenomena:

“The Lotus Sutra reads, “The true aspect 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.”

Here Nichiren refers to the Ten Factors in the *Hoben* or Expedient Means chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, which states categorically that all life states, i.e. all phenomena and beings in the universe, are imbued throughout with Buddhahood, not only as a separate Buddha Nature but in every moment of life, even when we are afraid, angry or animalistic.

“The “Life Span” chapter states, “It has been immeasurable, boundless [hundreds, thousands, ten thousands, millions of nayutas of kalpas] since I in fact attained Buddhahood.”

In this passage, “I” refers to all beings in the Ten Worlds. Because all beings of the Ten Worlds are inherently Buddhas, they dwell in the pure land. The “Expedient Means” chapter reads, “These phenomena are part of an abiding Law, [and] the characteristics of the world are constantly abiding.” Since it is the way of the world that birth and death are eternally unchanging characteristics of life in the three existences of past, present, and future, there is no need to grieve or to be surprised.”

This is a profound concept articulated by the Indian philosopher-poet Ashvaghosha, recognized as a fundamental aspect of T'ien T'ai Buddhism by Zhiyi in *The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra*, explained in depth in Zhanran's *The Essential Meaning* and *The Diamond Scalpel*. Daisaku Ikeda explains:

“In the Essential Meaning, Zhanran for the first time elucidates the doctrine of the eternal truth and its manifestations under changing circumstances. According to this doctrine, the absolute mind embraces all the phenomena of the universe, and hence it has within it both the aspects of eternal truth and of constant changeability. The two conditions of being eternally unchanging and simultaneously changeable in accordance with the varying circumstances constitute a single entity, and because the mind of the individual contains these two aspects, it can embrace all the varying phenomena of the universe.” (Flower of Chinese Buddhism p. 147)

As an aside, this was a key element in refuting the claims of the esoteric Buddhist schools, particularly Flower Garland, and remained so when Saicho brought T'ien T'ai Buddhism to Japan, where it again had to avoid falling into the errors of the esoteric or Tantric schools. Tantric Buddhism was originally favoured by the Chinese court of Emperor Xuanzong because the practice taught by the Indian esoteric monks Shanwuwei, Jingangzhi and Bukong in the 8th century emphasized incantations and magical rituals which resembled popular Taoist culture. While the Esoteric monks cultivated courtiers, Zhanran refused to accept invitations from three successive emperors to come to the capital, remaining on Mt. Tiantai. The same pattern developed in Japan and it was for this reason that Nichiren was so vehemently opposed to the revisionism of priests Annen and Kukai, who reinterpreted Tendai in the light of the Mahavairochana Sutra as the Tendai True Word school, directly contrary to its founding licence from the Japanese imperial court.

So when Shakyamuni says in the *Juryo* that as the Original Buddha his Buddhahood is infinite, it means that his Buddha nature is the same Buddha nature we ourselves experience because the *Hoben* has already stated that our common Buddhahood is part of an abiding law.

We were both enlightened from the same source.

Nichiren attempts to explain this repeatedly, but it isn't an easy concept.

“Now Nichiren and his disciples who chant Nam Myoho Renge Kyo are the main subjects of the Juryo chapter. In general, bodhisattvas taught by the Buddha, in his provisional aspect, cannot uphold this chapter. For them, the theoretical teaching is primary and the essential teaching secondary, while for us the essential teaching is primary and the theoretical teaching is secondary. Even so, this chapter is not the essential teaching for the Latter Day of the Law.”

This is the key. It's often confusing to be told that the Juryo is the Essential Teaching compared to the *Hoben* or Theoretical teaching, only then to hear that it isn't. Nichiren again explains:

A "good teacher" is a priest who is innocent of any wrongdoing in secular affairs, who never fawns upon others even in the slightest, who has few desires and is satisfied with little, and who is compassionate, a priest who trusts to the scriptures, reads and upholds the Lotus Sutra and also encourages others to embrace it. Such a priest the Buddha has praised by calling him, among all priests, the finest teacher of the Dharma.

"The reason is that this chapter confers the benefit of [reaping the harvest of] emancipation for those who lived in Shakyamuni's lifetime, while only the five characters sow the seed [of Buddhahood] for those who would come in the future, that is, at the present time. This being the case, the Buddha's lifetime was the age for the benefits of [the harvest of] emancipation, while the last age is the time for sowing the seed. In the Latter Day of the Law, sowing the seed is the basis. Nichiren and his disciples, who chant the Daimoku, are the parents of mankind because they save them from the hell of incessant suffering." (Gosho Zenshu p. 753)

Nichiren returns to historical realities, the lifetime of Shakyamuni and the Latter Day of the Law. Now, he says, it is too late to worry about using partial theories or temporary expedients to "turn the Dharma Wheel". Shakyamuni said that now, we need to stop telling people to practice austerities or earn merit badges to qualify for Buddhahood because it won't really help people understand enlightenment. In the *Letter to Akimoto*, he says:

"This is one of the most important points in the Lotus Sutra. The doctrine of the sowing of the seed and its maturing and harvesting is the very heart and core of the Lotus Sutra."

We have to realize our own fully-endowed Buddha nature and directly elicit the Buddha nature in those around us.

We are, says Nichiren, the "parents of mankind" because we can save mankind from the Hell of Incessant Suffering. Is this too much to cope with? I find it awesome but motivating.

The alternative isn't pleasant:

"Even if one were to practice the provisional teachings for immeasurable millions of years, if one should turn away from the Lotus Sutra, it would simply always be hell. I did not make this assertion; it was decided by Shakyamuni Buddha, Many Treasures Buddha, and the emanation Buddhas of the ten directions."

Provisional is in fact partial, in the way that a provisional Buddha or Bodhisattva is a shadow or aspect or avatar of a fully endowed Buddha.¹ No matter how good your intentions may be, if your practice only allows you to manifest partial buddhahood, you cannot fully attain or directly share enlightenment, while if your practice is the Mystic Law then it by definition is fully endowed because it manifests the totality of all of the Buddha's enlightenend properties – the Property of the Law, the Property of Wisdom and the Property of Manifest Action (the Dharma Body, the Reward Body and the Manifest Body).

As a not very enlightened illustration, think of the army recruiting slogan: "Be all that you can be!" Suppose we had a slogan that said: "Be not very much of what you can be!" and we went around looking sloppy and incompetent while trying to be helpful in very limited ways, for example offering people sunscreen when it's raining. Not likely to do a lot of good, really. Hell for us, useless for anyone else.

Back to Hell and Global Warming – Attaining Buddhahood in one's present form

Global Warming is, to recap, not just about something temporary or contingently arising. It has an underlying existence which affects us all, whatever we perceive it as. But also, Global Warming isn't somewhere else. We think of it as something which might affect the tropics, or 3rd-world countries but actually it's everywhere – including here, isn't it? And it isn't just someone else's problem, for example George Bush, it's **my** problem, my Cause, every time I say "let's turn up the air conditioning".

The **Mind** of Global Warming, it's **Ichinen**, is my mind.

Why all this stuff about Global Warming?

Because I realized when I was first preparing this talk that I was doing it wrong. I was struggling. I was finding it a painful austerity. I had stopped enjoying study lectures and found it a burden. I didn't want to take time away from other pressing affairs, from activities, from business and family obligations, to slog through another lecture. Every time I had to do a lecture, obstacles cropped up – last-minute contractual deadlines, VAT and tax reports, members phoning with urgent issues, financial panics etc. I never had enough time to prepare properly. I felt guilty about letting everyone down. What I wanted to happen simply wasn't happening. It was Hell!

¹ See Fundamentals of Buddhism, Kirimura, about this point.

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"The eighty-four thousand earthly desires are eighty-four thousand cauldrons in hell",

said Nichiren.

But what to do about it? Should I try to plan better? Should I stop doing Study lectures?

"Those who embrace the Lotus Sutra, however, can turn all this around. Hell becomes the Land of Tranquil Light; the burning fires of agony become the torch of the wisdom of a Thus Come One of the reward body; the dead person becomes a Thus Come One of the Dharma body; and the fiery inferno, the "room of great pity and compassion" where a Thus Come One of the manifested body abides."

The answer is that even in the most extreme suffering I can manifest Buddha nature by understanding and practicing the reality of Myoho Renge Kyo. It's hot, but the hell of global warming is my hell. I was stressed out while starting to prepare the study lecture, but it's my stress. My suffering is my opportunity to begin to grapple with the need for personal change, for "human revolution" :

Morinaka: "Simply trying to eliminate a void or run away from one's karma or destiny will only postpone the whole process of changing it."

Ikeda: "Our challenge now is to see if we can effect a change in the karma or destiny of human kind."

(WND Writings #15)

This is worrying, isn't it? If I can't show how I can change my karma of stress and obstacles, my provisional and ascetic view of Study as a difficult intellectual labour, then Ikeda Sensei questions whether I can deal with the karma of human kind. "It will simply always be hell".

Attaining Buddhahood in one's Present Form is not a theoretical issue. The basis of much traditional Buddhism is that one may attain parinirvana, enlightenment on death. In this goshō Nichiren is at pains to explain that this is not, or need not be, the case. Global Warming isn't going to wait for me to die – why should enlightenment?

The difference between Pure Land and other 'Provisional' schools on the one hand, and Nichiren's on the other, is that ours is about manifesting the fully endowed Buddha right now.

"Manifesting" is not just about sounding wise or wearing saffron robes or having big earlobes or meditating on That-ness. The Buddha's manifest body is about our actions in this world.

So how can we honour our vow to convey to other people the profound meaning of this Buddhism of the fully-endowed Buddha? Will Study Lectures by very well-informed speakers help? Well, Buddhism has been well-known in England since 1920s, and practiced by some very clever and influential people including Judge Christmas Humphries and Madame Blavatsky. But it still numbers only a few score thousand practitioners nationally, including Tibetans, Theravadans, Zen and other smaller schools. Not much to show for a century of work. SGI has done more for Buddhism in the past 20 years than all the other schools together in the previous 80:

"Understanding Buddhist principles alone will not make you happy. Faith is essential." (NHR Vol. 8 p.113)

We mentioned the Three Enlightened Properties of the Buddha, which are Appearance, Nature and Entity. These are also called the Manifest Body, the Reward Body and the Dharma Body. Manifesting Buddha nature is nothing extraordinary. It simply means behaving like a Buddha in this world. But this is not just the **Result** of Buddhist efforts like daimoku and study, it is equally the **Cause** of enlightenment, which is simply the recognition that we are all fully-enlightened buddhas as we are. Faith is Action, says Pres. Ikeda. The principle is "Substituting Courage for Faith."

When we say "Myoho Renge Kyo", Myo is Mystic, and connotes Awakening. Myoho represents the Hoben, and Renge the Juryo chapters respectively. When we chant, we start with Awakening to the Mystic Law, followed by receiving the Wisdom Body of the Tathagata Shakyamuni, followed by Kyo, sutra or utterance. It looks as though action comes last. But all mantras are circular, aren't they? Repeating the daimoku represents the fact that all three practices are in fact essential and immediate, not linear and conditional. Even in the definition of Study, Nichiren refers to "the three studies of precepts, meditation and wisdom." (Goshō Zenshu p. 755) Precepts are the dharma itself, meditation (the active kanjin 'mind-observing' meditation which is chanting) and wisdom the reward of taking action based on faith. So even Study itself is composed in microcosm of the three practices and the three enlightened properties.

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What do I have to do to attain the body of a Buddha in my present form? Chant, and act. Chant, and take courage. I can't be a closet Buddha. This doesn't mean I have to join the god squad in Hyde Park every weekend. Faith is expressed in every moment of my life, even chewing gum and tailgating some poor sod on the motorway.

"What is important is that every person show through their own life how they can challenge their suffering and become happy."

(I didn't say that, Susan Pritchard did.)

Still talking about Hell and what I can do to turn it into something much better:

We've got the theory, I hope: the exit sign from Hell is the one that says "Chant and Act." But when you're in Hell, this sign may be obscured by the sulfurous smoke and screaming of the suffering millions. Perhaps it says "chant to win the Lotto to solve my pressing financial problems" or "chant for my ex wife to die and stop bugging me" or "chant to solve my binge drinking problem without actually having to stop drinking" or "chant to get that promotion at work without changing my reputation for arriving half an hour late every day." Sometimes the exit sign is obscured by our perception of hell itself and our own suffering.

In fact,

"Hell is just where you are in order to move your life forward."

(I didn't say that, Michelle Lamb did.)

We need to take a 'Chu view' of our suffering: is it good or bad? That is probably unknowable, and may even be uninteresting. The fact that we suffer does not make the alleged cause of our suffering bad. I'm confident that if I can achieve this, so can you. What matters about our suffering is what we do about it. If we do it right, we will be forcibly reminded in the most joyful way about our own fully-endowed Buddhahood. Doing it right means actively putting the Mystic Law into operation by behaving as a Buddha to everyone and everything in our lives, as best we can.

I have to mention my Study experience, which is that when I stopped trying to explain gosho as a purely intellectual exercise and started to view it as simply communicating directly with people, from my heart, from my lived experience of my own Buddha nature, I started to enjoy it again. I don't know if you will, because there's a quiz now.

Intellectualism and Dogma

Joking aside, there is a point about intellectual understanding of gosho which we need to make.

Sometimes people talk about the dangers of intellectualizing the practice, of acquiring a provisional, exclusive attitude to it. We've explained that Study contains the Three Practices, so Wisdom is not an end in itself, certainly not sufficient. Without being fully endowed, we have only a provisional or partial and ineffective ability to explain Buddhism.

But the danger is not from intellect itself, and it's important to take a balanced view of the capacities of every unique individual.

There are two issues here. The first is the provisional view that Voice Hearers and Pratekyabuddhas cannot attain enlightenment – until the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni said they had "scorched the seeds of Buddhism". This was about practicing a self-serving Buddhism, 'enlightenment for me and the devil take the hindmost'. But the fact that the life states are named "Learning and Realisation" does not mean that Learning and Realisation are themselves evil, far from it. We need philosophers and sages every bit as much as we need poets and plasterers. But intellect must not be used to justify superiority.

The second issue is Dogma. While avoiding gratuitous intellectualism we also must beware of falling prey to dogma, which simply asserts superiority by beating people over the head with supposed authorities.

This is no better than self-seeking intellect. Both intellectualism for its own sake and dogma are attempts to assert that my Buddha nature is better than yours. Both will turn votaries of a living practice, the heart of the Lotus Sutra, into museum keepers. Neither attitude truly considers the happiness of other members, other people.

I can distinctly remember being told many years ago that if I yawned during gongyo it was because I had failed to eliminate Christian beliefs. I've been told how to sit, what to look at, what not to put in my Butsudon, not to talk to my Tibetan mates except to argue with them, what to think about when chanting,

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what to chant for, what to eat, which way to burn my incense, and a large number of other things which I have, mercifully, forgotten.

All of these were justified by reference to some piece or other of guidance taken out of its historical, geographical, social and cultural context. It does not mean that they were wrong – it means that I made them an external object of worship. That is the essence of provisionality, and as Nichiren said, “it will always simply be hell.”

“The poison has penetrated deeply’ describes the state of those with strong emotional attachments to the slanderous doctrines of the provisional teachings. As a result, they cannot believe in and accept the great effective medicine of the Lotus Sutra.” (Gosho Zenshu p. 755)

Buddhahood, when manifest, must come from the heart and be based on person-to-person compassion. Simply parroting a dead SGI Vice President’s comments to a meeting in rural Japan in 1976 is not guidance. It’s not even Buddhism.

Sensei endlessly repeats the warning that we must be fundamentally concerned with the happiness of members. I cannot tell what is right for your Buddha nature by referring either to my vast library of Buddhist texts, or to something a High Priest said about posture years ago. I must refer to my own heart, my own Buddha nature, to clearly understand how to support your daily enlightenment.

My problem – my benefit - is to be enlightened first, because I cannot transmit what I have not lived. This is the progressive human revolution described as “from the indigo, and even deeper blue”.

Summary

This is a short gosho but full of profound and important concepts – ichinen sanzen, turning poison into medicine etc.. It almost serves as a summary of all of Nichiren’s core views. But it first and foremost relates to someone’s suffering because of the death some time before of someone close.

Surely your late husband is 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].

Coincidentally, while preparing this study I also had to compose some words to send to my father and sister to read at a ceremony on August 21st, where my mother’s ashes were scattered from a boat near Montreal. Finally noticing that similarity - the desire to relieve my family of their suffering by explaining life and death, hell and heaven in a few sentences - left me feeling very close to Nichiren and made the study prep a genuinely happy time for me.

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