

Between Death and Life:

Truth, Folklore & Experiences

*"Brief is the span of life yet left to me
Old age, disease, hang imminent to crush.
Now ere this body perish and dissolve,
Swift let me be; no time have I for sloth.
And contemplating, as they really are,
The Aggregates of Life that come and go,
I rose and stood emancipate!
For me the Buddhas' words had come to pass."
--- Mittakali, a Brahman Bhikkhuni*

Dedicated to Tony Albers, whose encouragement
and friendship survive his life

Myoho Renge And The Three Truths

This paper was originally given as an informal talk subtitled "Truths, Folklore and Experiences" because it involves material which is simply unknowable in any traditional scientific sense, and on which Buddhism, although happy to speculate, has no clear central doctrine. Shakyamuni refused to discuss it, saying repeatedly that there was no personal atman or subjectivity which survived after life, and in replying to questions such as "to whom does karma happen if nothing survives" that "all is conditioned".

This is intended as an experience, as a joyful, noisy excursion into some of our varied cultural background and rich historical roots, as much for their beauty and intrigue as anything else. While I have attempted to point out differences of doctrine between Nichiren, Tien T'ai, Tibetan, Theravada and other schools of thought, there are doubtless many instances where this is not the case. The current paper is not intended to represent orthodox thought, but to remind us of the culture and common roots from which these schools emerged.

Although folklore is more myth than science it should not be ignored. 'Truths, Folklore and Experiences' are in fact the "Three Proofs" of Buddhism – Theoretical, Documentary and Actual. These are effectively *Face Validity*, *Content Validity* and *Empirical Validity*, the tests required to establish a scientific hypothesis. There is a good deal in folklore which is accurate - we should be wary of "contempt prior to investigation"¹

There also seems to be a need for Buddhist folklore. People in the West who take up Buddhism are used to a Judeo-Christian cultural background – a context which provides the significance for much of our daily life including religious festivals, biblical stories and their re-enactment, mediaeval history, cosmology, heaven and hell, philosophy, anecdotes, pageants, even the use and significance of shapes and colours. Without a similar Eastern cultural background we may find it difficult to understand new concepts and ways of thinking - things which are usually absorbed in the form of stories, parables, anecdotes, jokes, historical accounts etc. These may not be doctrinally important or even correct² but they provide a context and reassurance which is particularly important for children. The folklore of rebirth is one of the most significant areas of Eastern culture.

Our point of departure is well-established Buddhist doctrine, *Myo* and *Ho* in *Nam Myoho Renge Kyo*, starting with the "Three Obvious Truths" or *San Tai*.

1.1 The Three Truths

- All things are either *Myo* or *Ho*, latent or manifest, Ku or Ke

"Three Noble Truths" or Santai:

- Truth of non-permanence (ketai)

All things are in flux, changing

- Truth of non-substantiality (kutai)

Phenomena are neither existing nor non-existing

- Truth of the Middle Way (chutai)

"*There is no arising of consciousness without conditions*" (*Mahatanhasamkhaya Sutra*) - *Dependent Origination (Engi)*

¹ "There is a principle which is a bar against all information, which is proof against all arguments and which cannot fail to keep a man in everlasting ignorance – that principle is contempt prior to investigation". This is widely ascribed to Herbert Spencer but never specifically referenced..

² "The additional events of the six years' striving have an interest chiefly as examples of the inventiveness of the commentators" - E.J. Thomas, *The Life of the Buddha as Legend and History*; p.. 70. Unwin, 1975

All things are either myo or ho, latent or manifest, ku or ke. One of the most central and unchanging features of Mahayana³ Buddhist schools up to our own Nichiren branch of Tien Tai Mahayana are the Three Obvious Truths or *Santai*:

1. The Truth of Non-Permanence, *Ketai*, is that all things are in flux, all things change. Traditionally, going back to the Tripitaka Schools, this was stated as “all composite things decay”. It is the inherent nature of things to arise and decay. Shakyamuni identified birth, old age, illness and death as four sufferings which affect everyone because of the impermanence of life. In the Tripitaka schools this was represented as the “Wheel of Samsara”, a cycle of suffering from which the only release was enlightenment. “The Hinayana teachings are divided into two sects, eighteen sects, or even twenty sects; but in essence they all expound a single principle, namely, the impermanence of all phenomena.” (*Letter to Shomitsu-bo*)
2. The Truth of Non-substantiality, *Kutai*, is that nothing exists absolutely, everything exists as an aspect of everything else. “What creates the condition of life are the internal and external causes of reality. 'Ichi' refers to chutai [entity], dai to kutai [potential] and ji to ketai [form].”⁴ This is due to the action of consciousness, Mind, on the universe: “Again, there are countless different Mahayana sects, but insofar as they subscribe to this view - that the mind alone produces all phenomena and that phenomena have no real existence - then they may be regarded as constituting a single sect. So all these sects stress one or the other of two partial truths of the Mahayana: that phenomena have actual existence or that they are non-substantial (*ku*) in nature.”⁵
3. The Truth of the Middle Way, *Chutai*, is that temporary existence and non-substantiality are two sides of the same coin, two complementary ways (analytic and synthetic) of viewing reality. Hence the “Three Obvious Truths” were also called the “Three Perceptions”. Reality is phenomenal, neither existing nor non-existing, or both existing and non-existing, just as it presents itself to us in this moment. Although this is certainly better understood in Western philosophy and science⁶ today than in the past, it is still difficult to grasp.⁷ Everything exists because it's conditioned by something else⁸. So our existence and consciousness arises moment by moment as the result of preconditions including those of our own making, including even Buddhahood.⁹

From this it follows that most of our sense of rational cause and effect, of the logical and inevitable flow of events or personal identity, is an artefact, part of the conditioned reality which arises contingently and moment by moment.

Reality is a stream of phenomenal events which become manifest momentarily and pass. Something happens, then something else happens. Each thing is conditioned by others, but much of that is less than obvious, is mysterious.

As individuals, then, we share this conditioned existence where even at the most profound level, even at a subatomic level, one thing happens and, happening, gives rise to others - a quantum event, a smile, a war - so there are effects which in turn become causes. This is not

³ This doctrine is specifically attributed to Nagarjuna (*Madhyamika-Karika*, ed. L. de la Vallee Poussin – *Bib. Budd. IV.* – who in the 2nd or 3rd century began as a Tripitaka (Hinayana) monk but became a Mahayana scholar. I have used “Tripitaka” instead of “Hinayana” or “Elder School” because Hinayana is deprecatory and its applicability to schools such as the Sarvastivadins is questionable. Since Mahayana finds its roots in events going back to the expulsion of the Mahasanghika monks of Vishali it seems misleading to characterize Theravada, for example, as an “Elder” school in any meaningful sense. Nichiren uses the term “Tripitaka” to describe “the Kusha, Jijitsu and Ritsu sects which derive from the Tripitaka teaching of Hinayana” (*The Two Kinds of Illness*). However he also uses it to describe Shingon (*Three Tripitaka Masters Pray for Rain*) and “Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva” (*Gosho Zenshu* p.782 quoted in *Ongi Kuden* chap. 28.) so it includes practices based both on the Agon sutras and some provisional Mahayana sutras, the latter because (*Letter to Shomitsu-bo*) “the Daishonin explains that the Kegon and Shingon sects, while nominally Mahayana, in fact should be considered Hinayana because they bind themselves to the Hinayana precepts.”

⁴ *Ongi Kuden* chapter 2 “Expedient Means [Hoben]”

⁵ *Letter to Shomitsu-bo*

⁶ Daisaku Ikeda quotes frequently from Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, for example. We would also point to the evolution of quantum mechanics following Planck and Schroedinger as the arena within which science debates the profound effect of consciousness on reality.

⁷ They are closely related to the three properties of the Buddha's life (Appearance or Action, Nature or Wisdom, and Entity). It is because the Buddha is manifest in compassionate action (Ojin) that the Juryo chapter says “ever since then I have been constantly in this world” - the phrase which turns *ichinen sanzen* from T'ien Tai's abstract concept into a physical reality. The Buddhaland is nowhere but here in the world.

⁸ In Japanese, *Engi*, Dependant (or Inter-dependant) Origination

⁹ For a much more thorough appreciation see Appendix B, Chapter 28 of the *Ongi Kuden* (“Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings”).

a purely linear process – underlying reality is an interdependence, a resonance or fundamental identity which appears to exist at the quantum level throughout the universe. This is represented as “Indra’s Net”:

Suspended above the palace of Indra, the Buddhist god who symbolizes the natural forces that protect and nurture life, is an enormous net. A brilliant jewel is attached to each of the knots of the net. Each jewel contains and reflects the image of all the other jewels in the net, which sparkles in the magnificence of its totality.

When we learn to recognize what Thoreau refers to as "the infinite extent of our relations," we can trace the strands of mutually supportive life, and discover there the glittering jewels of our global neighbors. Buddhism seeks to cultivate wisdom grounded in this kind of empathetic resonance with all forms of life.¹⁰

What are we? We’re a random accumulation of things, a bit like a flame or a river, something that’s constantly in motion, composed of changing constituent parts.

A flame is never the same for long, always changing, consuming different materials, taking different forms. Or consider reality as a river, which is never the same from moment to moment. At the same time it presents us with this illusion of continuity and consistency. This is *Chutai* or *Myoho*, then - the mystic basis for all things which arise and disappear to construct our reality.

The same is true of human life:

“Rather than saying that you have to believe in the Uncreated or in Ultimate Truth or in God, the Buddha pointed to what is created, born or originated. He taught that we should look at these created conditions, because that is what we can see directly and learn from. He taught that the act of being mindful and awake to the created takes us to the Uncreated, because we experience the created arising out of the Uncreated and going back into the Uncreated.

This experience of the Uncreated, at most an ineffable experience, the Buddha called nibbana, which means a calm or coolness... It can sound really dreary, but that’s not what the Buddha meant. He was pointing to the fact that these very unsatisfactory conditions, which are ever-changing, are not self. He was not making a doctrinal statement that there is no self and that we have to believe in no self, but he was pointing to the way whereby one can see the truth.

As you watch the conditions of the body and mind, you realize that they come and go; they change. There is no substance to them that you can extract and say, "This is mine".¹¹

"The monk asked "How then do we attain emancipation?" "From the first," answered the master, "we have never been in bondage, and therefore there is no need to seek release. Just use it. Just act it."¹² "Fundamentally, there is no ebb or flow of birth and death; life, as thus conceived, embodies the oneness of birth and death. Our lives exist eternally and are inextinguishable.... In other words, we can correctly fix our gaze on the present moment, and advance along the path of continual self-improvement."¹³

1.1.1 Parable of the Two Demons

An old Buddhist parable tells the story of a man who, travelling alone, came upon a vacant house and decided to spend the night there. At midnight a demon brought in a corpse and left it on the floor. Shortly, another demon arrived, and quarrelled with the first demon over ownership of the corpse.

They decided to let the human decide the argument. He was dreadfully afraid, because he knew the losing demon would seek revenge and kill him, but he thought that he would be killed anyway and had nothing to lose by telling the truth.

The second demon was infuriated by the decision and tore one of the man’s arms off, but the first demon replaced it with one of the corpse’s arms. The second demon ripped off the other

¹⁰ from "Thoughts on Education for Global Citizenship", a lecture given by SGI President Daisaku Ikeda at Columbia University on June 13, 1996.

¹¹ Ajahn Sumedo, *The Mind and the Way*, p. 22

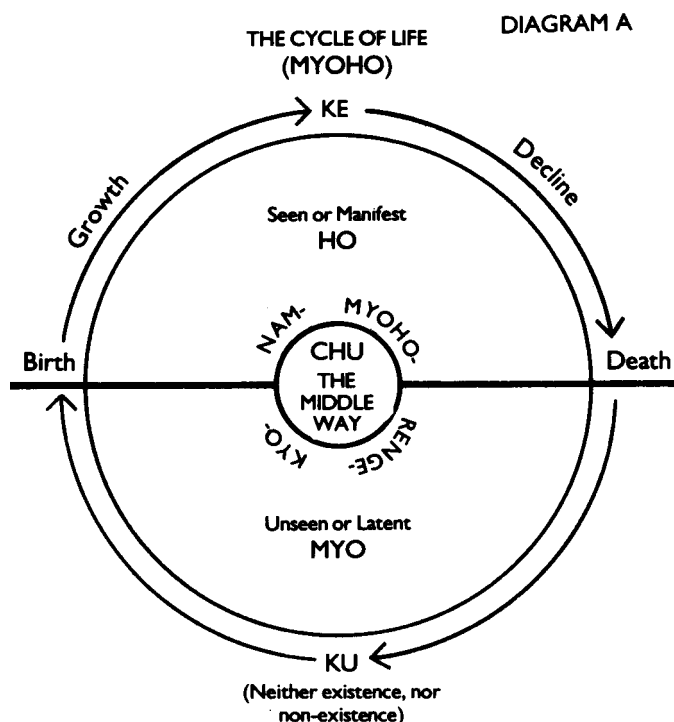
¹² DT Suzuki, *Living by Zen*, p.98

¹³ Daisaku Ikeda, p.180, *Conversations & Lectures on the Lotus Sutra*, vol.2

arm, which was similarly replaced with one from the corpse, and so it went until every part of the man's body had been torn off and replaced. Then the demons, seeing the scattered fresh body parts scattered about, picked them up and ate them and went away laughing.

The poor man who had taken refuge in the house was very upset. All the parts his parents had given him had been replaced by bits of the corpse, so who was he, anyway? Unable to resolve this problem he became crazy and wandered the land until he found a temple and told his story to the monks, who realized that it explained the true meaning of selflessness.¹⁴ (This may be a cautionary tale for people trying to understand Dependant Origination!)

1.2 The Cycle of Life



The diagram above is reproduced from Richard Causton's *The Buddha in Daily Life*. The diagram is titled "The Cycle of Life", or *Myoho*.

On it, things arise from *Ku*; first birth into a state of *Ke* which is *Ho* or Manifest. Things arise, grow, decline, die and eventually re-enter the state of *Ku*, or latency.

Ho is manifest and *myo* is unseen, latent, mystic.

That is the cycle of composite things as they exist in our reality - the fact that they go round and round produces the world as we know it. Emerging from nothing, from latency, we manifest life - first there's nothing there then all of a sudden there is something, or at least there seems to be something.

What is it, then, that we acquire at birth or which allows us to come into existence out of nothing at all? Buddhism identifies Five Components which are required for us to exist.

1.3 Manifest life in Buddhism = "5 Components":

- Form - Physical body
- Perception - Sight, Hearing, Smell...
- Conception - Recognizing what has been perceived
- Volition - Ability to act on what has been recognized

¹⁴ *The Teaching of the Buddha*, p.434; Hanjin Publishing Co. Seoul Korea 1979

- Consciousness - Ability to discriminate/judge

“The essential elements of an individual life”¹⁵

Form or Matter - our physical body - the elements (solidity, fluidity, heat and motion), the five sense organs (nose, ears etc.) and their corresponding objects in the 'external' world (sounds, odours, tastes...) as well as some conceptions.

Sensation - basic senses of sight, hearing, smell etc. - all physical and mental sensations. "Mind" in Buddhism is the faculty which perceives ideas, thoughts and mental objects.

Perception - ability to recognise what we perceive. The conception we have influences our perception of things, for example we smell something unpleasant but when we recognise it as our favourite Danish Blue cheese it suddenly smells wonderful. How we conceive it determines how it smells.

Volition or Mental Formations - the ability to form mental objects and act on what is being recognised. Shakyamuni said: "O bhikkhus, it is volition that I call karma. Having willed, one acts through body, speech and mind."¹⁶ Sensation and perception are not volitional, so do not create karmic effects. However attention, will, determination, concentration, wisdom, energy, desire, rage, hate, ignorance, conceit and the idea of self can produce karmic effects.

Consciousness - the ability to determine and discriminate, being aware of e.g. an object. This kind of consciousness in Buddhism is not rationality as we normally understand it but consciousness of something (such as heat or colour) without recognizing it (the role of Perception). So it is not the kind of abstract problem-solving we associate with intelligence nor is it 'spirit' as opposed to 'matter'. Consciousness cannot exist independently of matter, perception, sensation and volition - which effectively rules out notions of ghosts as disembodied beings.

These are the five essential elements of an individual life, also called the “Aggregates of Attachment” or Skandhas. Clearly none of these can be called "I". When all five components unite, the idea of "I" comes into existence - but even this is a phantom of the fourth aggregate.

As no permanent, unchanging substance passes from one moment to the next, so a fortiore nothing unchanging can pass from one life to the next. But the energy involved in one life continues in another form, another life. "The difference between death and birth is only a thought-moment (*ichinen*). The last thought-moment in this life conditions the first thought-moment in the so-called next life."¹⁷ From the Buddhist perspective, as we will see, the question of rebirth is inherently less interesting than the question of parinirvana.

In the Mahayana tradition, Consciousness was expanded to include @@@@

There is a Sixth Consciousness which integrates the five components and makes judgements about the external world. This is basically the rational ego function we normally consider consciousness, and it integrates the previous six consciousnesses.

The Seventh Consciousness is the *Mano* consciousness, also called Karma consciousness because it uses abstract thought to bridge between the external and inner worlds, between conscious and sub-conscious mind.

The Eighth or *Alaya* consciousness underlies the other seven and contains all our latent causes from previous lifetimes.

- Karma is formed here - Karma is formed exclusively by volitional actions
- Suffering arises here - wants, desires, cravings, expectations – in Sanskrit called “*dukkha*”.
- The concept of self arises here – like everything else, a phantom which looks much more real than it is!

1.4 Karma

Karma is formed exclusively by volitional actions and in Sanskrit simply means “action”. Suffering arises within the five components because the volitional actions which result from material attachments create *causes*, both good and bad. So Buddhists say “suffering arises”, that is, wants, desires and cravings are Earthly Desires which cause us to behave in various

¹⁵ *The Buddha in Daily Life*, p.140

¹⁶ *Anguttara-Nikaya*, ed. Devamitta Thera, p.590. Pali Text Society 1929.

¹⁷ *What the Buddha Taught*, p.34 Walpola Rahula, Gordon Frazer 1972

ways. For example, I like stinky cheese and it smells wonderful (perception), but if I become too attached to it of it I'll wind up with enough cholesterol to cause heart disease. As human beings we have universal forms of suffering – birth, disease, old age and death – which were the causes for Shakyamuni Buddha to seek enlightenment.

Attachments can be positive or negative, creative or destructive. But the essential cause of suffering is the difficult recognition of the three truths, of myoho renge kyo, which is for example, that all composite things both begin and end. When you are brought face to face with that it causes suffering, the painful recognition that nothing exists forever, nothing exists absolutely. But from this realization, traditionally called the “First Noble Truth” comes the possibility of something remarkable, the “Second Noble Truth”:

*“Empty and calm and devoid of ego
Is the nature of all things:
There is no individual being
That in reality exists.”*

Earthly Desires are Enlightenment

- Suffering includes the difficult recognition of the Three Truths, hence, “Earthly Desires are Enlightenment”
- In Tripitaka teachings¹⁸ “*The Sufferings of Samsara are Nirvana*” (“*Samkhitena pancupadanakhandha dukkha*”)

*It is like unto clouds and lightning,
It is like unto gossamer and bubbles floating
It is like unto a fiery revolving wheel,
It is like unto water-splashing.
Because of causes and conditions things are here.*¹⁹

2.1 Suffering

We say ‘difficult recognition of the three truths’ because the point at which we are forced to become aware of them is likely to be a painful one; such as the death of a loved one or loss of a cherished possession. There is nothing, there is not certainty or permanence, everything is phenomenal existence, there is no underlying soul or Atman whatever.

In what is reputed to be the oldest sutra (*Setting in Motion the Wheel of Truth*, the first sermon given at Sarnath after his historical enlightenment), Shakyamuni set out the Noble Truths including the Noble Truth of Suffering (“dukkha”). This is often misrepresented as meaning that life is nothing but pain and suffering. In fact “dukkha” is translated as suffering but also connotes “impermanence”, “emptiness”, “non-substantiality”. In fact, even profound meditation (Dhyana, Samadhi) is included in Dukkha. More importantly, only within dukkha can awareness of the path to extinction of suffering be found. This was originally expressed as “The sufferings of Samsara are nirvana”. We now say, “Earthly desires are enlightenment.”

2.2 How Do I Know Who I Am?

- If everything is Conditional and “Self” is a transient phenomenon, how do we continue to exist at all?
- Buddhism says that without the components, there is neither life nor identity. But if I don’t really exist, who does karma happen to?
- What is the difference between death and tomorrow?
- Who Am I?

The phenomenal concept of self also arises within the five components. Why do we call it a phenomenal concept? Because in Buddhism the notion of self is itself something which is part of the component of consciousness. Descartes said, “*cogito ergo sum*”, ‘I think therefore I am’. But in Buddhism it’s the other way around - I am because I think, the thought is the thinker, or as W.B.Yeats put it, “how can we tell the dancer from the dance?”

Of course we feel that we have a continuing self, an entity which links memory of the past and plans for the future into an individual being. I feel that I have self. But if you think about it there are times in your life when you don’t have that sense of self, for example when you are asleep. Do you stop being yourself when you are asleep?

¹⁸ See footnote 1 re Tripitaka. This citation is from the *Samyutta-Nikaya*, Pali Text Society edition.

¹⁹ *Mahayana-Abhisamaya Sutra* quoted in *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, p.46; D.T. Suzuki, Shoken, London 1973

Clearly it's something transient. Like everything else it appears, disappears and reappears. Is it real or not?

We know from *Myoho Renge Kyo* that the unification of the *Santai* in the Middle Way means that even in manifest life there is something latent. The doctrine of *ichinen sanzen* means that *myo* and *ho* are ceaselessly active, moment by moment, in an eternal interplay. "The life and death of all phenomena are simply the two phases of *myoho rengo kyo*." ²⁰ That entity of the Middle Way underlies our manifest lives so that we are always, infinitely, unique and identifiable. In the *Lotus Sutra*, for example, Shakyamuni repeatedly indicates that a person will attain enlightenment as a specific Buddha, a unique entity. Daisaku Ikeda says "Nichiren Daishonin taught that life and death are the alternating aspects in which our real self manifests itself, and both are part of the cosmic essence." ²¹

2.2.1 *All Things are Conditional*

- Non-being can become Being just as Being can become Non-being
- Life arises when the conditions are right - the seed of circumstance allows life energy to arise with the 5 components, either at birth or from moment to moment
- At death, the life energy reverts to ku.

If everything is conditional, and self is a transient phenomenon, how do we continue to exist at all? Without the components there is neither life nor self-identity. "As life appears, the five components appear, and as life disappears, so do the five components."²²

What happens if some of the components are missing? In fact this happens not only at death but routinely. Consider the similarity between death and sleep. If we only have a phenomenal sense of self which arises with the component of consciousness, then when we are sleeping we have no self, we become "dead to the world". So anchoring self-identity in the components is not very safe.

Worse, the five components are themselves in a state of flux because we know that our manifest body is going to change - parts quickly, parts more slowly - but still our entire body changes, roughly over seven to ten years. Our conscious self-identity then is little more than a passing fancy based on a false impression of physical and mental continuity, as in the parable of the two demons.

What is the difference between death and sleep? Perhaps not very much, except for the persistence of the component of Form. Shakyamuni suggested that if one really wanted a sense of abiding self, then it was better to ground it in the physical body than mental continuity.

During sleep the self has vanished, and your body is never more than a collection of atoms which themselves exhibit quantum instability. Amazing, then, that when you wake up, it's still you! And not only that but when you wake up you feel better. Nobody actually knows what it is about sleep that makes us feel better. The prevalent theory is that there is physiological renewal, the cleansing of fatigue toxins, and a psychological deprogramming to prepare us for the next day. But hang on - doesn't that sound like rebirth?

2.2.2 *Consciousness and Incarnation*

- Consciousness does not exist without form
- Life force after death (ku) is neither being nor non-being, but a state of latent potential
- Reincarnation suggests that life force infuses form. But form always has life force so the term is misleading.
- Life state at death indicates the life state into which one is reborn.

²⁰ Nichiren Daishonin, quoted in *Buddhism in Daily Life* p.139

²¹ *The Buddha in Daily Life*, Richard Causton, p.138

²² *Ibid*, Richard Causton, p.140

2.3 Entity vs. Identity

Who am I? Richard Causton distinguishes “entity” from “identity”. My identity is the concept of self that arises from the ability to form concepts in my 6th and 7th consciousness, part of the three aspects of desire, form and formlessness. But my identity or self-image can change even more rapidly than my physical form. I may sense an underlying unity over time but even memory is an imprecise tool, not only because we may forget or confuse things, but because our understanding of what happened may change as our “karmic sunglasses” change. Mr. Causton compares this to an actor’s role.

Identity then is our “ke”, the manifest aspect of our lives. Underlying it is our “ku” which mystically unites our lives past and future. This is karma, the latent causes of actions in this and previous lifetimes. The totality of these things is Chu, the unification of manifest and latent, the truth of the Middle Way, the mystic entity of our lives:

“Shakyamuni then clarifies the nature of the threefold world that he correctly perceives with his wisdom, saying: ‘There is no ebb or flow of birth and death, and there is no existing in this world and later entering extinction.’ ...What is being explained here is the true aspect of the life of the Buddha who attained enlightenment in the remote past. This Buddha is in fact an entity of life without beginning or end who dwells eternally in the saha world”²³ and is in no way different from we ourselves who inherently possess the ten worlds. We are the *Tathagata* of the Lifespan (Juryo) chapter and our true lifespan is equally infinite.

Against the cosmic background Nichiren reveals in our lives, Karma is our fundamental character, our dominant lifestate and all the nuances of habit. These are the things which persist more or less indefinitely unless something changes them. Mutable karma can be changed or change over time, or with effort. Fixed karma is described as either positive or negative, and negative karma arises from acts which denigrate the value of life or from habit.

If we think about it, much of what we “are” is habitual or determined by significant actions. I like ripe roquefort cheese. That’s a habit, and therefore something engrained in my life. When I’m ready for another life, something of that will persist. The five components will come into existence in response to my life entity under the right conditions. Barring other conditioned factors, I may be someone who likes Roquefort. Or I may detest it.

If that sounds theoretical, Sumedha says rebirth can be experienced directly, without theorizing about it:

“Since there is no self, there is nothing to be reborn as a personal essence or soul carrying through from one lifetime to the next. However desire is being reborn; it is constantly looking for something to absorb into or something to become. If you are unhappy and depressed, you look for something that you can absorb into that will give you some happy feeling, or at least get you away from the unpleasantness of the moment [e.g. the television, food or a game]. That’s rebirth.... Sleep for most people is annihilation. You don’t have to be anything when you’re asleep. Being reborn all the time gets boring so you want to not exist anymore.... These three kinds of desire [kama, bhava, vibhava²⁴] are the causes for rebirth. In fact, it’s desire that’s being reborn.”

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²³ Daisaku Ikeda, *Conversations and Lectures on the Lotus Sutra* volume 2, p. 178: SGI-UK 1996

²⁴ Desires of the body (kama); the desire to be reborn (bhava); the desire for annihilation (vibhava).

²⁵ Sumedha, *Ibid*, p.55

2.4 The Importance of one's Life State at Death:

- Ku conditions rebirth, just as our phenomenal existence during life has an underlying consistency
- "You should realize that it is because of a profound karmic relationship from the past that you can teach others even a sentence or phrase of the Lotus Sutra"²⁶
- "Ku is not static, it is a time when the life-entity draws on the life force of the universe in preparation for rebirth."²⁷
- How long we remain in ku depends on life state at death and daimoku directed to the life-entity

In short, we do not believe that consciousness is in any way independent of physical existence. Without the Aggregates there is no consciousness. When birth happens the cycle closes and our life energy, ku, our fundamental characteristics or entity, come together with the ke of senses and physical body to produce chu, the totality.

For this reason there are no ghosts in Buddhism, there is no sense of a consciousness without form (although there is a sense of latent consciousness with latent form, about which more in a moment!).

At death life energy reverts to Ku. Ku is not a soul or atman, it is latency, potential. Equally it does not represent the complete non-existence of the life entity. Ku is "sunyata" - "neither being nor non-being". So you are at the same time both one with the universe and yet still distinct from it. Nor is it completely impersonal, being characterised by *karuna* (love, compassion) and *bodhi* (intelligence).

"This is the insight that helped the Buddha become serene, peaceful and fearless. This teaching of the Buddha can help us touch deeply into the nature of our being, the ground of our being, so that we can touch the world of no-birth and no-death. This is the insight that liberates us from fear and sorrow.

Nirvana means extinction, above all the extinction of ideas - the ideas of birth and death, existence and non-existence, coming and going, self and other, one and many. All these ideas cause us to suffer. We are afraid of death because ignorance gives us an illusory idea about what death is...

Once these [eight concepts] have been destroyed, we touch nirvana. Nirvana is release from the Eight Concepts, and also from their opposites - impermanence, nonself, interdependent co-arising, emptiness and the Middle Way. ..To touch the water, you have to touch the waves. If you touch birth and death deeply, you touch the world of no birth and no death."²⁸

Life state at death has always been an important fact for Buddhists, inherited from the pre-Buddhist culture of the *Upanishads*.

For Buddhists birth and death are mirror processes - during conception, gestation and birth one's karmic conditions assemble the five components when the circumstances are right and suddenly life is manifest. Life force does not infuse or occupy the physical form, since life force is an evolving factor of the physical form. For this reason the term "reincarnation" is incorrect - it might be better to call it regeneration.

At the other end of life, the disassembly process we call death, the five components fall apart as our life energy fades away. When we finally die we manifest our dominant life state:

"As the law of cause and effect requires, we die the way we lived. At the moment of death, our past causes show most plainly in our appearance. At that time there is no way to conceal the truth about the life that has been lived...the way in which we face the moment of death determines whether or not we have crowned our lives with fulfillment."²⁹

²⁶ "Ship to Cross the Sea of Suffering", Nichiren Daishonin Writings p 33)

²⁷ R. Causton, *The Buddha in Daily Life*, p. 150

²⁸ *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, p. 139. Thich Nhat Hanh, Rider Press, 1999.

²⁹ *The Buddha in Your Mirror*, p.201. Hochswender, Martin and Morino. Middleway Press

Without external intervention, that state predicts the life state into which we are reborn.. For this reason the moment of death is highly significant and closely observed.

Allegories of Transition

- The folklore: based on Nichiren's *Juo Santan Sho*, sensations or images of transitional state
- An attempt to describe the life-entity's mystic journey back to life
- Take with a grain of salt, but don't ignore!
- Very similar to Tibetan concepts

3.1 After Death

We now enter the realm of folklore and metaphysics, referring to Nichiren's writings about the experience of rebirth in various goshō and in particular a document from the Goshō Zenshū titled the "Juo Santan Sho" ("Ten Kings"). The Ten Kings are well known in Japanese tradition

Although it is presented as a voyage usually called "the journey through intermediate existence" (Jap. *chu-u*) we can think of these sensations or images of the transitional state as an attempt to describe the life entity's mystic reintegration.

This is similar to the Tibetan *Bardo Thodol* in the sense of voyage and trial, described in the third or *Sidpa Bardo* which is the Bardo while seeking rebirth. (*Bardo* itself simply means an intermediate state.³⁰)

Early parts of the transitional process will be recognised from descriptions of near-death experiences. Much of these accounts is esoteric or symbolic. The Tibetan doctrine of *dharma-kaya*, pronounced "chu-ku" (close to our *Chu-tai*) is considered erroneous by Theravadists³¹ because there is no mention of it in the Tripitaka sutras (perhaps a somewhat parochial view).

3.2 A Cross-Cultural Digression

Daisaku Ikeda comments that "studies in comparative folklore have shown that a number of Western fairy tales do indeed derive from Buddhist and Indian sources,"³² citing Lafcadio Hearn's comment in *Literary Criticism East and West* that "most of the legends and fables of the Old World could be traced back to Buddhist origins."

3.2.1 *The Middle Way as union of Secular and Spiritual - Similarities between the Grail Quest and Middle Way*

I think there is at least one Western equivalent to the Transitional State - the Grail Quest; since in both cases the ultimate goal is the reintegration of the material or secular with the spiritual or mystic essence of life, of *ke* and *ku*, leading to the rebirth of the phenomenal world.

*We may compare the Grail theme with the passages in the Hermetica dealing with the Krater; and the chapters concerning Parzival's spiritual rebirth with those referring to "coming again into being."*³³

The karmic aspect of the Quest is also quite clear: "Each knight had his own set of trials along the way, as each was brought face to face with the particular challenges

³⁰ There are 6 intermediate states: the bardo of the womb; that of dreaming; that of ecstatic meditation (*dyhana samadhi*); of the moment of death, of experiencing reality, and of seeking rebirth.

³¹ Theravadists also consider Middle Way Chinese and Japanese schools, including Nichiren's, as erroneous because esoteric. However Theravadists tend to be literalists to a fault, including belief in the physical existence of the interim body and individual life states, so only rebirth allowed migration from one life state to another. The Mahayana view is that the Realm of the Environment (*Kokudo Seken*) itself possesses all 10 life states.

³² *Buddhism, the First Millenium*, p. 77. Daisaku Ikeda, tr. Burton Watson: Kodansha International 1982.

³³ *The Quest: From Simple "Fool" to Grail Servant*, I.M. Odeburg

that would make him whole.” This leads to a wealth of material with surprising connections, for example:

Parzival's mother was called "queen of two kingdoms," supposedly North and South Wales, but which may have meant of spiritual and material life. We see such a thought exemplified by the custom in ancient Egypt, where the outer mergence of Upper and Lower Egypt to form one realm also signified mystically the inner balance of the subjective and objective aspects of the world as of the human being.” (Ibid)

The “inner balance of subjective and objective aspects of the world” is remarkably close to “the unification of subjective wisdom with objective reality”. From the point of view of rebirth, the process is inverted - the “Womb of the Universe” or Tathagata-Garbha:

“may be explained ontologically as the state of ‘Suchness’ quickened by Ignorance... about to transform itself to the duality of subject and object. Psychologically, it is the transcendental “soul” of man just coming under the bondage of the law of Karmic causation.”³⁴

And consider the following view of Anfortas, the Fisher King, from the point of view of Buddha nature changing immutable karma.

“Anfortas entered into direct conflict with Klingsor... he unwisely attempted to fight Klingsor on the latter's home ground -- man's lower nature. In the fight, Klingsor captured from Anfortas the Holy Spear, a universal symbol of the spiritual will, and wielded it against him, touching him with it. The resulting wound could be healed only by application of the Spear when in the hands of the rightful holder.”(Ibid)

That is, volitional action under control of lower life states creates karmic damage that can only be expiated by the application of will in harmony with buddhahood.

3.3 Intermediate Existence

- Life entity in a state of ku = Interim Body
- Interim body = latent energy of the 5 components
- Latent component of Form = “Subtle Body” (Kusha Ron)

3.3.1 Subtle Body

- visible only to other interim bodies & mystics
- Its motion cannot be affected by anything, even a Buddha
- exists only to move to its karmic destination
- feeds on odours!
- Actually, interim body is alaya consciousness
- Interim body is both one with the cosmos and still a unique life entity

Immediately following death the entity ‘perceives’ itself entering darkness. Near-death accounts^{35,36} describe the impression of a hole, tunnel, or starless night. Yoichi Kawata³⁷ suggests that “images that arise at this point ...are expressions of the process whereby the psychosomatic energy hitherto manifested in the five components of form, perception, conception, volition and consciousness shifts toward latency, moving from the domain of the sixth consciousness and mano consciousness toward the realm of the alaya consciousness.

There is a Zen story about a man on a galloping horse. From the horse’s speed it appears that the man is on an important mission. A bystander shouts “Where are you going?” and the man replies, “I don’t know! Ask the horse!” The horse, says Thich Nhat Hanh, is our “habit energy pulling us along”, something it continues to do after death.

³⁴ *Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, p.126. D.T. Suzuki, Shoken Books, New York 1963

³⁵ Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life*; New York, Bantam 1976

³⁶ Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death, A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience*, New York, Quill, 1982

³⁷ “Buddhism and Medical Science; Toward Establishing a Correct View of Death and Rebirth” in *Kyogaku Kenkyu Koza* (Tokyo, Institute of Oriental Philosophy) vol 6, 1985

The Interim Body is the latent energy of the five components, essentially another way of saying that all that life energy can't just vanish - it has to go somewhere. In fact it's really the higher consciousnesses, particularly our storehouse or Alaya consciousness, described in terms of the "karmic seeds" or latent causes of the five components. The first of these, the latent component of Form, is called 'The Subtle Body'³⁸

³⁸ According to the 4th Century Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu in the *Kusha Ron*, a treatise which Nichiren quotes in the *Juo Santan Sho*.

What Next?

“Should you depart from this life before I do, you must report to Brahma, Shakra, the Four Heavenly Kings and King Yama. Declare yourself to be a disciple of the Priest Nichiren. Then they cannot possibly treat you discourteously.”³⁹

“But the time came when the Tripitaka Master Shan Wu Wei suddenly Died. Thereupon a number of wardens of hell appeared, bound him with seven iron cords, and led him to the palace of Yama, the lord of hell.”⁴⁰

The Subtle or Interim Body may not come instantly into being. The *Bardo Thodol* talks about being submerged in a trance for about 3 days before the interim body is “born”. According to the 4th century Buddhist scholar Vasubandhu in the *Kusha Ron*, the subtle body has a number of characteristics:

- It is visible only to other interim bodies and mystics (perhaps clairvoyants etc..)
- It can move through mountains or instantly to any place: “Excepting Budh-gaya and the Mother’s womb, even Mt. Meru, the King of Mountains, can be passed through by thee... that too is an indication that thou art wandering in the Sidpa Bardo.”⁴¹
- Its motion cannot be affected by anything, even by a Tathagata, since it exists only to move to a karmic destination. “Not even World-Honoured Ones can restrain it, for it is invested with the force of karma” says the *Kusha Ron*.
- It has the five sense organs, or perhaps the latent energy of the five senses.
- The interim body is inevitably driven to its destination: “The interim body arises for the purpose of moving toward its destination and can only move in that direction, never in any other.”
- The interim body reflexively follows many of its lifetime habits - it eats and drinks, perceives and acts according to its karma.
- Intermediate existences in the worlds of Desire, Form and Formlessness subsist only on odours. People with little good fortune have to live on foul smells. (*Kusha Ron*).
- Estimates vary, but the *Abhidharma* suggests that the duration of the interim body is between a week and 7 weeks. Shakymuni Buddha however is quoted as saying that the interim body lasts until the conditions are right for rebirth, which may be sooner or later.
- The Interim body is both one with the cosmos and still a unique life entity. It is *ku*, which is “neither existence nor non-existence” It is as the subjective self that the interim body “is acted upon by the karma seeds contained in its own alaya consciousness.”

4.1 Days 1 to 7 - the Dark Plain

- “When one dies, he wanders all alone through a vast plain... Though he sees his beloved wife and children in the saha world, there is no road by which to return, and he moves farther and farther away from them.”
- He approaches the Mountains of Death “with crags sharp as swords”.⁴²

We now turn to an exploration of the “interior landscape” of the subjective self as it is driven toward rebirth. Nichiren describes this in the *Juo Santan Sho*, which explains

³⁹ “Encouragement to a Sick Person”, *Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.82)

⁴⁰ *Collected Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p.173

⁴¹ *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Evans-Wentz translation.

⁴² From the *Juo Santan Sho*, and c.f. *Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin* vol. 1, p.124)

the process by which the "Ten Kings" passed judgement on the dead. The purpose of the process I suspect is to help overcome denial. We might compare this with programming the life energy to ready it for another life.

So Nichiren says:

"When one dies, he wanders all alone through a vast plane. He sees his wife and children in the Saha world. There is no road by which to return and he moves farther and farther away from them."

The Sidpa Bardo states:

"The fierce wind of karma, terrific and hard to endure, will drive thee onward, from behind, in dreadful gusts...there will be a grey twilight-like light, both by night and by day"

This dark plain or desert is a common part of myth quests and spiritual experiences. In the Grail Quest, Percival or Parzival comes to a castle in the midst of a desolate wasteland: "ruin and chaos. The ground is spent and sere, the crops no longer grow, nor do the waters flow, and a darkness has descended on the hearts of the people." Carl Jung points to the first phase of the alchemical process, "the black stage, *nigredo*, characterized by confusion, frustration, depression, the "Dark Night of the Soul of St. John of the Cross, in which nevertheless all potentialities and the seeds of future developments are contained."⁴³

D.T. Suzuki⁴⁴ proposed that it was a symbol for *sunyata*, the underlying basis of reality, which we call *ku*. In Christian mythology this is perhaps analogous to the desert in which Christ wandered.

The link between Christianity and Buddhism goes deeper: Ashvaghosa described *sunyata* or *ku* as "neither that which is unity nor that which is plurality; neither that which is at once unity and plurality nor that which is not at once unity and plurality."⁴⁵ Daisaku Ikeda points to the importance of Nagarjuna's "Eightfold Negation" or *Happu-Chudo* in the *Chu-Ron*⁴⁶ which begins:

*"The Dependent Origination
That is not destroyed,
Does not come into being,
Is not cut off,
Is not everlasting
Is not single
Is not plural,
Does not depart,
This is the highest goodness
That transcends the emptiness of words"*

The meaning of "Eight" is "numerous negations, or even infinite negations."⁴⁷ Suzuki compares this with *On the Divine Names*, a 6th century tract by the Syrian monk Dionysius the Areopagite which describes godhead as "neither number, nor order, nor magnitude, nor littleness, nor equality, nor inequality, nor similarity, nor dissimilarity" and compares *ku* with the source of God in the individual understood as divine simplicity.⁴⁸ "Nothing can be born out of mere nothingness. But from the "emptiness" of the Middle Doctrine, which is a kind of infinite potentiality, everything and anything may be born or produced, depending on what causes happen to affect it."⁴⁹

The comparison can be extended to anecdotal accounts of Shakyamuni Buddha's life and the Temptation of Christ, but this leads into questionable scholarship since the

⁴³ Jung's *Psychology and Tibetan Buddhism*, Radmilla Moacanin, p.38.

⁴⁴ *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist*

⁴⁵ *The Awakening of Faith*, p.59, quoted in Suzuki *Op. Cit.*

⁴⁶ *Middle Doctrine*

⁴⁷ *Buddhism, The First Millenium*; Daisaku Ikeda, p.141. tr. Burton-Watson. Kodansha International, 1982.

⁴⁸ "Blessed are the Pure in Heart" in Meister Eckhart, *The Sermons*.

⁴⁹ Ikeda, *Op. Cit.*, p.141

4.3 Days 8 - 14 - King Shoko

- To reach King Shoko, must cross “River of Three Crossings” or the river of hell.
- The river is 40 *yojana* (280 km) wide and can be crossed in 3 places:
- A shallow ford, for minor offenders
- rapids, with waves as high as mountains and poisonous serpents, for those who committed great evil
- bridge of gold, silver and jewels, for those who performed good works

To reach King Shoku, our wanderer needs to cross the “River of Three Crossings” or river of hell, which is 40 *yojana* wide. Of its three crossings, the first is upstream, a shallow ford (but at 280km, still arduous!) That's for minor offenders. Further downstream, there is a much more difficult crossing with waves as high as mountains and poisonous serpents. This is for people with the gravest karmic impediments.

But for those who perform good works, in the middle there is a bridge of gold, silver and jewels. However, on the far side Nichiren says “advance on the Lotus Sutra's path to enlightenment, bearing in mind the time when devils, demons and the guards of hell will strip you of your clothing on the bank of the river of three crossings. The Lotus Sutra is the robe which will keep you from disgrace after this life.”⁵⁰

In the shade of a tree on the far side wait two demons, whose role is to take all the wanderer's clothing and hang it over the branches of a tree. Depending on the weight of one's sins, the branches bend down a little or right to the ground.

4.4 On the road to King Emma

Our traveller reaches the court of King Shoko on the 14th day, King Shutei on the 21st, and King Gokan on the 28th. In each case there is an inquiry but judgement is deferred. At King Shoko's court, there are poles on the left and right:

“each surmounted by a deity in the form of a human head... The Juo Santan Sho reads ‘The god to the left records all evil deeds, not overlooking the slightest offence. The god to the right records all virtuous acts, not overlooking the minutest good. Together they are called the paired deities of the banner poles.’”⁵¹

4.5 Day 35 - King Emma

- After visiting King Shutei and King Gokan, we arrive at King Emma (aka Lord Yama), also “King Hsi-Cheng” - “Stilling Protest”
- Dosho and Domyo - accompany one throughout life “as a shadow follows the body” and note all one's deeds on tablets
- “Will you still compound your offences by telling lies?” The Mirror of Karma (Johari mirror)
- “Of particular importance are prayers offered on the 35th day, when the deceased undergoes great suffering at the Court of King Emma.” (Juo Santan Sho)

On the 35th day our traveler arrives at King Emma (aka “Lord Yama” or Yama-Rajah) also known in Chinese as “King Stilling Protest”. This is reputed to be a time of great suffering for the dead. A depiction of the court of Yama-Raja according to Tibetan tradition is shown on the next page.

As before there are pillars on the gates, a left pillar and a right pillar and on each of these is the head of a tutelary deity:

These gods are sometimes called the ‘heavenly messengers’ and are generally equated with Dosho (“same birth”) and Domyo (“same name”), who are said to accompany a person from the time of his birth and keep track of his good and evil

⁵⁰ Letter to Jakunichi-bo, MW 1, 237

⁵¹ *Between Death and Rebirth*, Yoichi Kawata, p.11

deeds.⁵² When King Emma pronounces judgement, he informs the deceased ‘...they have followed you as a shadow follows the body...there cannot be even a hair’s breadth of error.’⁵³

In the Tibetan tradition, the Kings are all found in Emma’s court. Doshō and Domyō are represented in the illustration by the Little Black God and Little White God, holding sacks of black and white pebbles representing the deceased’s evil and good deeds.

If the deceased objects to this judgement, Lord Emma says “What, even here in the afterworld, will you still compound your offences by telling lies?” In the Hall of Light Brilliance there is a special mirror called the *johari* mirror or Mirror of Karma which replays the deceased’s life moments. The Tibetan illustration shows one of the kings (with a bear’s head, on the right) holding a karma mirror and skull cup of blood.

The justification for this bloodthirsty approach is the lifestate of the deceased, their accumulated karma:

"Human beings can attain any level. We can live, as many people do, at the instinctual level of our bodies, following the animal instincts of eating, sleeping and procreating. We can even go below that level...there are many human beings who live this way. They're not really humans; they're like ghosts living in a twilight world of obsessive hungers and insatiable desires, as addicts and alcoholics. Or they can be devils, with a malevolent energy that tries to destroy and hurt others. Just because you have a human body does not mean that you are fully human. It's not that easy."⁵⁴

At this point the deceased abandons his efforts to deny his own cruelty, greed, and lack of compassion. Nichiren says:

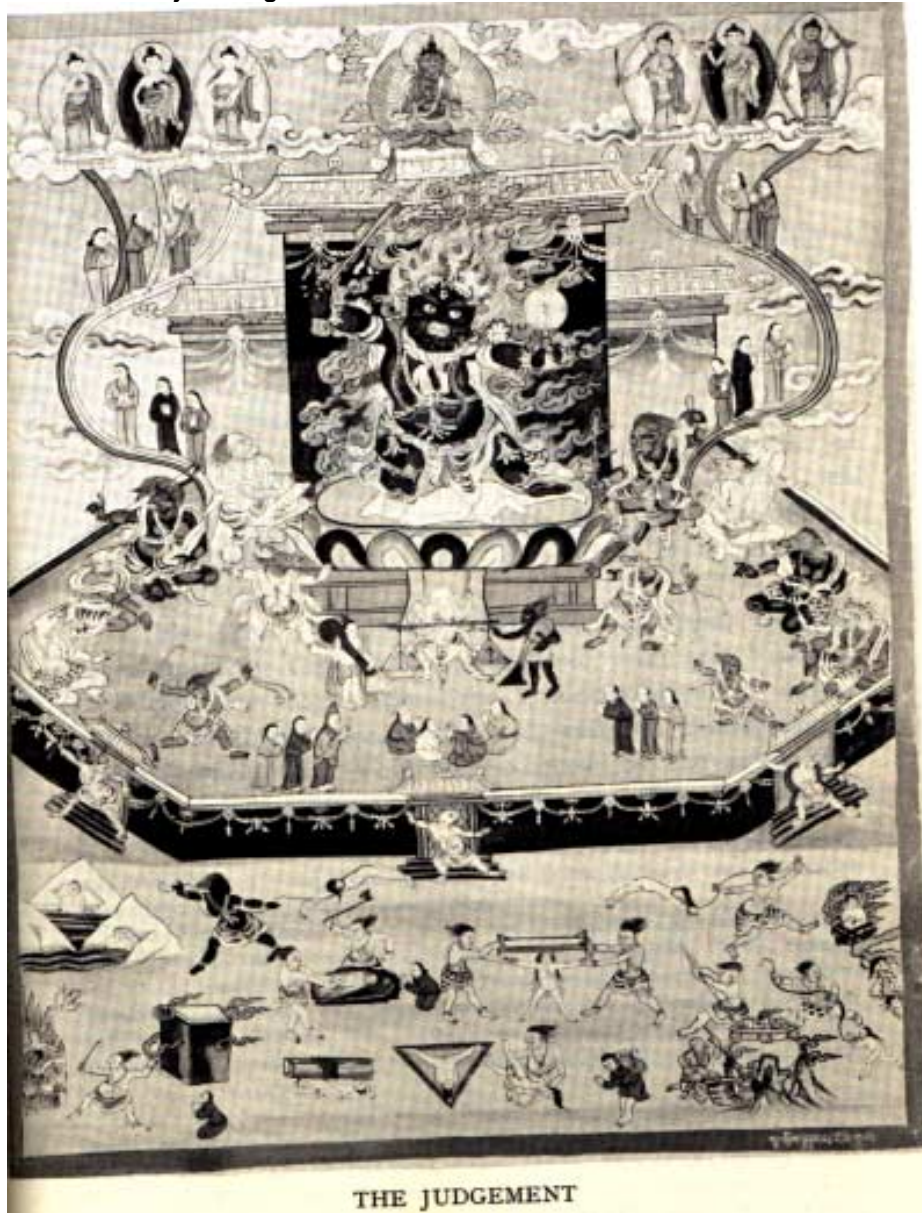
In the end, what determines whether the deceased person shall rise or fall is whether or not prayers are offered for his sake...If one performs the virtue [of offering memorial prayers] at this juncture [Day 35] then when everything is reflected in the mirror, King Emma and all his officials will rejoice.” (*Juo Santan Sho*)

⁵² “The Causal Law of Life”, Nichiren Daishonin Goshō Zenshū p.1114: “The Buddha explained that people are attended by two messengers named Doshō and Domyō from the moment of their birth. Following as closely as one’s own shadow, they never leave the person for an instant. In turns they report each person’s greater and lesser evil acts as well as his major and minor virtues to the heavens without forgetting the slightest detail. Therefore, the heavens must already know about your having sent your husband to me. How indescribably joyous!”

⁵³ *Op. Cit.*, Kawata, p.11

⁵⁴ Sumedo, *Ibid*, p.30

Figure 5-4.1 Yama-Raja's Judgement Hall



4.6 Day 49 - King Taisan

- The last chance to change rebirth karma
- "Fulfilment of the five components of intermediate existence"
- Enables a life wandering through intermediate existence to attain Buddhahood."⁵⁵

"If thou dost not know how to meditate, then merely analyze the real nature of that which is frightening thee. In reality it is not formed into anything, but is a Voidness which is the dharma-kaya."⁵⁶

Offering prayers for the dead is clearly a very important part of Buddhist tradition. Interestingly, in the illustration, among the sinners at the bottom can be seen 4 lamas crushed under the weight of an enormous book of scripture. They are being punished for hurrying and skipping passages when reading sutras. Next to them, the

⁵⁵ Kawata, *Op.Cit.* 1985

⁵⁶ i.e. Nam Myoho Renge Kyo. From the *Sidpa Bardo* in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, Evans-Wentz translation.

person staked out in the triangle symbolizes the Avichi Hell. Tibetans thought that this unending torment was for grave sins such as using sorcery to destroy an enemy.

Nichiren describes this graphically:

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.⁵⁷

In both the Tibetan and T'ien T'ai / Nichiren traditions even a person bound for hell can be rescued by the prayers of the living and both recommend the Lotus Sutra. The *Juo Santan Sho* deviates in this respect from the *Kusha Ron*, which holds that absolutely nothing, even the compassion of the Kings, can amend the consequences of karma. Kawata comments:

"The supreme good fortune inherent in the state of Buddhahood, offered by the living through their prayers, penetrates the deceased person's alaya-consciousness and effects a change in that life at a very fundamental level... if the great good fortune of the state of Buddhahood is sent to [a life suffering the evil paths in the intermediate existence] by the living, its suffering will at once change to pleasure."

If his sentence is deferred, the deceased will eventually arrive at King Taisan on the 49th day. This is almost always the time when the dead have their place of rebirth determined, hence it is called the "Fulfillment of the Five Components of Intermediate Existence." There are six gateways, each symbolizing one of the six paths (C.f. the six gateways in the court of Yama-Raja above.)

The overall length of time one spends in the transitional state is a variable, depending on which authority one relies on (Nichiren follows the *Daibibasha Ron* which says 7 weeks is normal) and the lifestate of the deceased. Those who are supremely virtuous or good spend no time at all in the Bardo realm, being either instantly cast down to hell or instantly attaining Buddhahood. (See *Heritage of the Ultimate Law of Life, On Practicing the Buddha's Teachings*, and *The Fourteen Slanders* for Nichiren's descriptions of the latter.)

⁵⁷ *Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, "Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light".

Conditions for Rebirth

- Conditions require conception, health and suitable karma for the lifestates involved
- The alternative - Parinirvana = fully 'blown out' - free from delusion and ego-attachment.

The conditions for rebirth are health, suitable karma for rebirth, the union of male and female, and the emergence of life from the state of *ku*.

This is not a passive or mechanical process - the life force arises because of karmic conditions which choose the appropriate circumstances. Kawata proposes that the life entity selects the genetic information needed to embody its own unique karma.

In Buddhism, particularly in Nichiren Buddhism⁵⁸, the mechanics of rebirth are less interesting than those of *parinirvana*. From a Buddhist point of view, attaining enlightenment is a much more drastic and interesting concept than rebirth. Nichiren says:

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.

And:

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.⁷ 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,"¹⁸ 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 attain Buddhahood in one's present form, and to awaken to it is to open the Buddha wisdom.⁵⁹

"Continue your practice without wavering up until the final moment of your life, and when that time comes, look carefully! When you climb the mountain of wondrous enlightenment and gaze around you in all directions, then to your amazement you will see that the entire universe is the land of Tranquil Light. The ground will be of lapis lazuli, and the eight paths²³ will be set apart by golden ropes. Four kinds of flowers²⁴ will fall from the heavens, and music will resound in the air."⁶⁰

This should remind us of the earlier description in the *Juo Santan Sho*. Here the fearsome mountain of death has become the "mountain of wonderful enlightenment" and (From Gosho Zenshu)

To Be Completed

⁵⁸ Due to the reality of Ichinen Sanzen, it is reasonable to expect the Votary of the Sutra, we ordinary mortals, to attain enlightenment in this life – and therefore to experience *Parinirvana*. However rather than permanently escaping the Wheel of Samsara, the Mahayana Bodhisattva's urgent desire to bring about the enlightenment of all people leads to his instant return to the Saha World.

⁵⁹ *Hell is the Land of Tranquil Light*

⁶⁰ *Fourteen Slanders*

5.1.1 *What is Anuttara Samyak Sambodhi?*

"A human being who is responsible for what he does is always a beautiful being to have around. Wherever he goes he is welcomed; he beautifies, he enhances." ⁶¹

How can there be happiness when there is no sensation? Ananda said "Oh friend, no sensation itself is happiness"

To Be Completed

⁶¹ Sumedo *Ibid* p.23

Experiences

Intellectual knowledge (*anubodha*) in Buddhism is of little value because it is not part of one's being or character, one's *Chu*. Only wisdom gained from action (*pativedha*) is truly learned.

This is particularly significant for Nichiren Buddhists because it is the statement in the Juryo Chapter that the Buddha never departs the saha world which makes ichinen sanzen a reality rather than a theory:

The sutra says, "I am always here, preaching the Law. I am always here." (LS p. 229, 3LS p. 254)

'Always here' means any place where the votary of the Lotus Sutra lives. 'This place' means the threefold [saha] world. 'Preaching the Law' is to preach the wisdom inherent in the words and voices of all people in the Latter Day of the Law. Chanting the Daimoku is the act of preaching the Law for Nichiren and his disciples. (Gosho Zenshu p. 756)

The sutra states, "[T]hen I and the assembly of monks appear together on Holy Eagle Peak." (LS p. 230, 3LS p. 254)

This passage reveals that the assembly on Eagle Peak is solemnly present and has not yet dispersed. 'Then' means the Latter Day of the Law, when the Buddha responds to the beings' aspiration. 'I' means Shakyamuni. 'And the' indicates bodhisattvas; [other] sage beings are here indicated by 'the assembly of monks.' 'Together' means the Ten Worlds. 'Holy Eagle Peak' means the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light. '[T]hen I and the assembly of monks appear together on Holy Eagle Peak.' This should be kept secret. This passage clearly reveals the actuality of a single thought moment comprising the three thousand realms, which is contained in the essential teachings. The Gohonzon is the manifestation of this passage. Thus 'together' indicates the principle of true reality that is unchanging and 'appear' indicates the wisdom of true being that accords with conditions. 'Together' means the single thought-moment, and 'appear,' the three thousand realms. ⁶²

Daisaku Ikeda comments:

"Then I and the assembly of monks appear" corresponds to the Gohonzon. In the ceremony on Eagle Peak ..the Buddha and his disciples, representing all of the nine worlds, appeared together, so that the ceremony itself indicates the ten worlds. In this sense the ceremony on Eagle Peak reveals the true aspect of the Buddha's lie and environment. The statement "The assembly on Eagle Peak has not yet dispersed" is the profound teaching of the Tien Tai school, but it was not until Nichiren Dishonin appeared that this statement was validated."⁶³

"I am here always, yet because of my mystic powers the deluded people cannot see me even when I am close by." - It is difficult for many people to perceive that the Gohonzon, which they see in front of them [and within them] is, in actuality, the eternal life of the Buddha."⁶⁴

So the Buddha who is eternally present - and is in the Hoben Chapter declared to be present in the Realm of the Five Components and the Realm of Living Beings - is in the Juryo or Essential Teaching announced as present in the Realm of the Environment from the remotest past.

⁶² Nichiren Daishonin, *Ongi Kuden* Chapter 28

⁶³ Daisaku Ikeda, *Lectures on the Sutra* p.121

⁶⁴ Daisaku Ikeda, *Lectures on the Sutra* p.116

Strictly speaking, therefore, the principle of ichinen sanzen as taught in the Theoretical Teaching of the Lotus Sutra is not complete. The revelation of the True Land clarifies the essential oneness of life and its environment, and opens the way for the common person to transform even this defiled world into the Buddha Land by manifesting the state of Buddhahood from within himself... With the determination to make the world a better place, starting with our own immediate environment, our lives become significant, solid, and deeply rooted in the real world."⁶⁵

In short, we have looked at documentary and theoretical aspects of rebirth, but they are meaningless without actual evidence in the real world. The following are some of my own experiences – the conclusions I draw from them are probably subject to my own biases, but for me they are of cumulative interest. In the end, how many anomalies and pointers is enough to lead us to consider a possibility? When does "coincidence" become an overworked term for spiritual certainty?

6.1 Life line

When I was a 14 I found a magazine with instructions on how to read palms. I didn't believe in Palmistry but thought it would be interesting to try it. Looking at my hand, I saw that the life line seemed to be broken and I remember saying to myself, "Oh dear, it looks as though I could die when I'm about 50." Being a teenager this didn't bother me and about 20 years later a "real" Palmist told me that I had a very strong life line. I discovered I'd been looking at the wrong one! However this all came back to mind when I was diagnosed with heart disease at the age of 47, and had to have a multiple cardiac bypass operation. Without it, I would have died. During it, I was as close to death as it's possible to come with any realistic chance of survival. I can't explain how I knew I was going to have a near-fatal problem 30 years before it happened.

6.2 Rick Brant in Tibet

When I was between 9 and 12 years old my favourite reading was a series of mystery books (like the Famous Five) about Rick Brant, Boy Scientist (!) I remember nothing about him except that he had a Private Pilot's License and went on expeditions. The only book I really remember was *Rick Brant in Tibet*. The part of the story I remember was our hero finding a message on a rock on a mountainside: "Om Mane Padme Hm" which was badly translated as "Hail the Jewel in the Lotus". I was always fascinated by Buddhism but I only found out 40 years later that this was in fact the title of the *Lotus Sutra* in Tibetan, and is the daimoku which now plays a central role in my life. I do not know why I specifically remembered that phrase out of all the phrases in more than a dozen Rick Brant books even when it meant nothing to me.

6.3 Horley

At boarding school in Canada in 1968 I remember looking at a World Atlas with a friend. We were laughing at some of the bizarre UK place names – Nether Wallop, for example. Then I found Horley, which for some reason I thought was uproariously funny. It was such a good joke I remembered it for years – but apparently not when I moved to Horley in 1989.

6.4 Dai-gohonzon

This was an experience which altered the course of my life.

By August 1992 I was in bad shape – my marriage had broken down and our relationship was non-existent, I was working but unable to make ends meet and in debt up to my neck; my health was poor and I was threatened with redundancy in the middle of the recession. I was drinking heavily to cope with my numerous woes. I did not even have Gohonzon due to the priesthood schism, but the only thing which worked and kept me sane was my new faith.

⁶⁵ *Lectures on the Sutra*, p.77 (NSIC 1984)

But that too was threatened because I couldn't attend meetings drunk and trying to do gongyo after a few brandies was humiliating. I determined to go for a week without drinking.

At the end of the week I realized, as I tried to do evening gongyo, that I had been drunk every evening that week despite all the willpower I could bring to bear. I had no idea how I had reached a place where nothing I did could help, in fact where everything I did made things worse. "The poison had penetrated deeply, causing them to lose their true minds."

I could do nothing but express my bitter self-pity, remorse and need for help to my empty butsudan. As always, I had to remind myself not to seek the Treasure Tower outside my own mind since I had no gohonzon to look at.

Falling into a reverie, I found myself standing on the shore of a black lake, like a tarn, under a very dark sky. I had no idea of where I was, and there was no colour except dark grey and the impression of a deeper watery blackness in front of me. At some distance ahead there was something which looked like a burning Christmas tree, except that it was corruscating with energy instead of fire. I could not tell how large or far away it was - sometimes it looked huge, sometimes tiny. It gave me a feeling of being immensely powerful.

This lasted for a few seconds before I regained concentration. I felt that I had to take certain steps immediately, and did. I lost the urge to drink and have not cared about it since. (I now choose not to drink because it does nothing for me, and in gratitude to my gohonzon.)

I never seriously thought that the "vision" was specifically about gohonzon. It was not the same as the Nikken gohonzon I was familiar with and the colour was wrong, since I knew gohonzon were inscribed in sumi. However I valued the experience for its incredibly positive effects on my life.

About two years later, I was still wondering about the experience when I overheard John Delnevo talking beside me to some members at a May festival activity. He was describing the dai-gohonzon and mentioned that it was inscribed in gold characters on black lacquered wood. Suddenly I knew what the 'black lake' reminded me of, and the colour of the 'burning tree'. However I put it down to interesting coincidence.

While preparing this talk I stumbled over the apparently widespread characterization of *Ku* as 'dark plain' or desert (i.e. empty place). The descriptions of spatial ambiguity, frustration or despair, and infinite potential were compelling. I have no personal doubt that I experienced the intermediate state of *samadhi*.

An interesting cross-reference is that had I not stopped drinking when I did, I would probably have died before reaching 50. Due to undiagnosed diabetes the alcohol was contributing to accelerated ischemic heart disease. By the time the condition was diagnosed in 1997 I was immediately scheduled for emergency quadruple cardiac bypass surgery. Remarkably, due to a reverse cardiac blood flow phenomenon, there was no detectable damage to the heart muscle. In 1999 I climbed Mt. St. Victoire without incident.

I suspect that *Myoho Renge Kyo* is another word for "coincidence".

6.5 How I met my wife

In yet another case of complex coincidence, in 1986 I moved from Montreal to Horsham. I was married and not practicing. The same year, someone named Myrna B. moved from Horsham to France. Having started to practice formally in 1989, in 1992 I actually began to practice in actuality, by changing myself. I also met a very pleasant Buddhist named Peter D. while doing Taplow keibi. We got along well despite the fact that he spoke incessantly about people he had introduced to Buddhism, which I found very annoying.

In 1993 my wife deserted me for a boyfriend in London. After several months of hard work and practice I remonstrated with the Shoten Zenjin, saying "what is the purpose of all this if I have no Kosen Rufu partner to help me? Why aren't you fulfilling your

vows to Shakyamuni Buddha?" etc. No answer! However in December 1993 the meeting of our local group was moved to my home for the first time. As people arrived I greeted them. Then someone I had never seen before appeared, and I heard myself say, "Wow, what a Christmas present!" I couldn't believe I had said anything so tactless. However we got along well and began dating. It turned out that she had been living in France, had started practicing there in 1992 after caring for a friend who was terminally ill with AIDS. She had decided to visit England to have Christmas with her parents in Horsham, and for no particular reason decided to find a Buddhist meeting in the area. We both felt an instant recognition when we met.

What was particularly curious was that she had been introduced to the practice by an English member who was staying briefly in France, several miles from her own home there. Coincidentally mutual friends had mentioned that he chanted, something Jane herself had started doing, so she drove over to meet him. His name was Peter D.

Appendix A

The Five Comparisons

7.1 Early Days

7.1.1 *First Buddhist Council or Recitation*

Shortly after Shakyamuni's passing, called by Mahakashyapa and Upali to compile individual memories of his talks. Ananda in particular had an excellent memory. However Shariputra and Maudgalyayana had died some 30 years before.

7.1.2 *Theravada and Mahasanghika*

Split at the time of the Second Buddhist Council, about 110 years after Shakyamuni's death. The monks of Vaishali initiated it to challenge some of the strictures arising from the first council. For example, they proposed that monks should be allowed to store away salt. Previously, storing away any foodstuff had been forbidden. The Elders of the order rejected the proposals completely. Yet the insistence on strict adherence at the first council was the result of failure to agree on what compliance Shakyamuni had actually mandated, leading Mahakashyapa to order that all rules should be strictly followed.

In the event, the Vaishali monks responded by holding a great recitation and rejecting the absolute adherence of the elder school (Theravada) monks to the precepts, meditation and wisdom, instead choosing to go forth in to society and spread the teachings to lay people. They were to a large extent forced into this schism by the harsh criticism of the elder monks, who branded the Vaishali monks unlawful and not true followers of the Buddha. In fact, there was very little difference between the sutra versions used by the Mahasanghika monks and the elder school. But the behavioural difference between elitist retreat into monasteries to preserve an abstract codification, and being out in society even at the risk of one's own enlightenment forshadowed the split between Mahayana and Theravada.

7.1.2.1 **Why "Hinayana" is sometimes an inappropriate term**

The term "Hinayana" is usually applied to both the Sarvastivadin and Theravadan schools and their derivatives, whose views are in some respects contradictory. Generally the Mahayana schools are found in Nepal, Tibet, China, Korea and Japan, hence often called "Northern" Buddhism. Hinayana, a derogatory term applied by Mahayana proponents, is typically found in Sri Lanka, Thailand and Burma, hence "Southern" Buddhism. However the division is doctrinally fuzzy - in Sri Lanka, the Anagarika Dharmapala routinely teaches Mahayana concepts such as *anuttara samyak sanbodhi* and the Six Paramitas.

Although Mahayana suffered at the hands of Western critics⁶⁶ who until recently considered Sanskrit sutras new and derivative versions of older Pali works, it would be as incorrect to lump all Southern Buddhist schools into one category as it is to consider all Mahayana schools equally valid.

7.1.3 *Key Discriminating Factors between Mahayana and "Hinayana"*

Before Nagarjuna, those who followed a more liberal or progressive school of Buddhism distinguished three types of practitioners: Bodhisattvas, Pratyeka-buddhas and Sravakas (Voice-Hearers). By definition, the latter two were considered inferior

⁶⁶ D.T. Suzuki cites several examples of Western incomprehension, including Waddell (*Buddhism in Tibet*) who describes Mahayana as a theistic and nihilistic doctrine. (*Outlines of Mahayana Buddhism*, Op. Cit., p. 22)

and later, Hinayana. Bodhisattvas were distinguished by their desire to realize and develop the Middle Way for the sake of all their fellow creatures. To a considerable extent, Mahayana was simply the Buddhism of Bodhisattvas.

Mahayana's earliest origins are unclear, but emerging from the works of Ashvaghosa it came to be a powerful proponent of that view of Buddhism based on the Sanskrit sutras of the Madhyamika school founded by Nagarjuna in the 5th century, largely due to the work of Vasubhandu and his elder brother, Asanga, who renounced the Pali Tripitaka sutras of the Sarvastivadins in favour of the Consciousness Only school.

The Sarvastivadins held the view that the elements of phenomenal existence are actually real. This manifestly disagrees with the idea of contingent existence. As an eminent scholar of the Abhidharma, Vasubhandu became a devastating critic of the "real dharmas" view of the Sarvastivadins.

Vasubhandu continued Nagarjuna's view of the emptiness of all phenomena, "and that the fact of their emptiness must be grasped through the wisdom attained in religious practice."⁶⁷ However he also extended the Components to include two additional types of Consciousness, *Mana-shiki* and *Araya-shiki*, the Mano and Alaya Consciousnesses. This addressed the problem of Idealism in the Pali sutra traditions, i.e. that since consciousness was ultimately individual, there was no basis for a shared reality. "Each individual will perceive the external world in a different way depending on the workings of his particular mind."⁶⁸

To Be Completed

⁶⁷ Ikeda, *Op. Cit.*, p.151

⁶⁸ Ikeda, *Ibid*, p. 152 This is the same problem experienced more recently by the Phenomenological philosophers, e.g. Edmund Husserl and Merleau-Ponty. The solution was also similar, the addition of a concept of 'Intersubjective Constancy'. There may also be echoes of the evolution of Jung's Collective Subconsciousness as an answer to radical Idealism as well as a discovery from analysis. "When the easy concept fails - that we are nothing but our own conscious personality - we are forced to face the proposition that "individual consciousness is based on and surrounded by an indefinitely extended unconscious psyche." (*Boundaries of the Soul: The Practice of Jung's Psychology*; June Singer, p. 373. Prism Press, 1972.) Jung's view was that "each person's consciousness emerges like an island from the great sea in which all find their base." (*Ibid*, p.373) Interestingly, ku can also be sea or water. Mircea Eliade notes that flood myths "have their counterpart, on the human level, in man's 'second death' (the dampness and the 'Humid Field' of the Underworld and so on) or in initiatory death through baptism. But both on the cosmological and the anthropological planes immersion in the waters is equivalent not to a final extinction but to a temporary reincorporation into the indistinct, followed by a new creation, a new life, or a 'new man'." (*The Sacred and the Profane*, Harcourt Brace, 1959)

Appendix B

Ongi Kuden (Record of the Orally Transmitted Teachings)

8.1 Chapter 28: The Encouragement of Bodhisattva Universally Worthy [*Fugen Bosatsu Kambotsu*]

The sutra states, "World-Honored One, I now therefore employ my transcendental powers to guard and protect this sutra. And after the Thus Come One had entered extinction, I will cause it to be widely propagated throughout Jambudvīpa and will see that it never comes to an end." (LS p. 322 3LS p. 341)

It is due to the awesome supernatural powers of Bodhisattva Fugen that people throughout the world will be able to practice the Lotus Sutra. It is because of the protection of Bodhisattva Fugen that kosen-rufu will be achieved. (Gosho Zenshu p. 780)

The sutra states, "Before long this person will proceed to the place of practice, conquer the devil hosts, and attain anuttara-samyak-sambodhi. He will turn the wheel of the Dharma, beat the Dharma drum, and sound the Dharma conch, and rain down the Dharma rain. He is worthy to sit in the lion seat of the Dharma, amid the great assembly of heavenly and human beings." (LS p. 323, 3LS p. 343)

'This person' refers to the votary of the Lotus Sutra. The place where he upholds and practices the teachings is the seat of Buddhahood. There is no need to leave this place and go elsewhere. The 'lion seat of the Dharma' is the place where people of the ten worlds reside. All of the mountains, valleys and fields where Nichiren and his disciples live and chant Daimoku are the Land of Eternally Tranquil Light, they need not leave their present place and go elsewhere. This is what is meant by [the phrase] 'the lion seat of the Dharma.' (Gosho Zenshu p. 781)

The sutra states, "Therefore, Universal Worthy, if you see a person who accepts and upholds this sutra, you should rise and greet him from afar, showing him the same respect you would a Buddha." (LS p. 3LS p. 343)

There is the ultimate inheritance [contained in the sutra]. Shakyamuni expounded an essential theme of the Lotus Sutra, which he preached for eight years, in the phrase of the eight characters and transferred it to the people of Latter Day of the Law. The eight characters mean [see the above]. The [above phrase] means, without fail, you should show the votary of the Lotus Sutra the same respect as you would a Buddha. (Gosho Zenshu p. 781)

The sutra states, "Before long this person will proceed to the place of practice." (LS p. 323, 3LS p. 343)

Question: The Lotus Sutra starts, at the beginning of the [Jo](#) Chapter, with the word 'this,' ["This is what I heard" (LS p. 3)] and ends, in the [Fugen](#) Chapter, with the word 'departed.' ["they bowed in obeisance and departed." (LS p. 324)] What teaching did the sutra's translator, the Tripitaka Master Kumarajiva, intend to express?

Answer: The two essential teachings of this sutra are the true aspect [of all phenomena as set forth in the [Hoben](#) chapter] and [Buddha's original enlightenment in] the remotest past [set forth in the [Juryo](#) chapter]. The initial word 'this' indicates the true aspect, and the concluding word 'departed' represents the remotest past. The reason is that the true aspect corresponds to principle [ri] and the [Buddha's original enlightenment in] the remotest past, to actuality [ji]. 'Principle has the meaning of emptiness [ku], and emptiness has the meaning of 'this.' In this way, 'this' corresponds to principle and to emptiness.

The Hokke Mongu states 'This' means 'not differing' and has precisely the meaning of emptiness. The remotest past corresponds to actuality. The reason is that the [Juryo](#) Chapter of the original teaching has, as its primary meaning, the principle of three thousand realms present in a single instant [ichinen sanzen]. 'Departed' corresponds to the past. 'Withdrew' has the meaning of 'opening.' 'This' has the meaning of 'integrating.' 'Opening' represents the mind that discriminates. 'Integrating' represents the mind that is without discrimination. When 'opening' and 'integration' are applied to the beings and the Buddha, then 'integration' represents the Buddha realm, and 'opening,' the realm of the beings. The word 'this' at the beginning of the [Jo](#) chapter represents the oneness of the Buddha and living beings. The theoretical teaching corresponds with the realm of non-duality, because it sets forth [the principle of] of the eternal and unchanging truth.

'This' of 'This is what I heard' is the principle of the unchanging truth. Of the three truths of emptiness [ku], provisional existence [ke] and the Middle Way [chudo], 'like' indicates emptiness, 'this' indicates the Middle Way, and 'I heard' corresponds to provisional existence. The theoretical teaching stresses [the truth of] Emptiness [ku] and therefore sets forth duality on the basis of non-duality. Thus, to express the aspect of duality, all the beings who hear [this sutra] equally are arranged in separate categories. 'Departed,' the last word of the essential [hommon] teaching, corresponds to wisdom that functions in accord with changing conditions and to the realm of duality. Hence the use of the word 'departed.' 'Departed' of 'they bowed in obeisance and departed' corresponds to the 'this' [nyo] of true wisdom [shinnyo] that accords with conditions. The essential teaching expounds duality on the basis of non-duality. Two and yet not two [nini funi], constantly identified and 'constantly differing, from past to present, spontaneous and unchanging' - one should ponder this commentary. This word 'departed' is also related to the five thousand who rise and depart from the assembly [in the [Hoben](#)-bon]. The reason is that, according to a transmission handed down, that these five thousand persons represent the five levels of defilement. These five levels of defilement bow to the Buddha who is one's own mind and depart. (Gosho Zenshu p. 782)

The two characters 'this' [nyo] and 'departed' [ko] are the two ways of birth and death. Nyo signifies that the Law is condensed into a single life and ko signifies the opening or merging of that life back into the universe. Ko means 'to open' and nyo means 'to combine.' Dengyo states, 'Departed' indicates the thus coming that is without coming and the 'perfect departing that is without departing.' The word 'this' [also] has the meaning of 'all dharmas are the mind' and the word 'departed' has the meaning of 'the mind is all dharmas.' 'All dharmas are the mind' corresponds to the eternal and unchanging true nature of phenomena expounded in the theoretical teaching of the Lotus Sutra. 'The mind is all dharmas' corresponds with the unchanging true nature expounded in the essential teaching of the sutra. Thus, the world of Buddhahood being contained within the one mind has the meaning of 'this,' and [the mind] opening to become the world of Buddhahood has the meaning of 'departed.' This has the same meaning as the oral transmission concerning the three truths and the threefold contemplation. (Gosho Zenshu p. 782)

In another sense, 'this' indicates 'true,' and 'departed' indicates 'aspect.' 'True' indicates the Ninth Consciousness, and aspect the mental functions. Again, 'the dharmas' correspond to 'departed' and the 'true aspect,' to 'this.' The entirety of this sutra from beginning to end is contained in the phrase [in the [Hoben](#) chapter], 'the true entity of all phenomena [Shoho Jisso].' The commentary states, 'What is the essence of this sutra? It is the true entity of all phenomena.' (Gosho Zenshu p. 782-83)

Now proceeding a step further, in terms of Nichiren's practice, 'this' [nyo] indicates the 'practice that accords' [nyo] with teaching [the sutra] [nyosetsu shugyo]. When Shakyamuni pronounced the essential transmission of the five characters, [the events of this transmission] began with the [Ken Hoto](#) chapter of the sutra. His voice penetrating beneath the earth, he ensured that there would be someone [to propagate the sutra] in both near and distant times, declaring his entrustment [of the sutra] both to his original disciples and to those whom he had taught in his provisional capacity. Thus, the [Ken Hoto](#) Chapter serves as a hidden introduction to the essential

teaching. With the two Buddhas, Shakyamuni and Taho, sitting side by side and the emanating Buddhas assembled, Shakyamuni expounded and revealed the excellent good medicine which is the Lotus Sutra. Manifesting ten types of supernatural powers, he summed it up in four phrases and entrusted it to Bodhisattva Jogyo. That which was transferred was the title of the Mystic Law. One should ponder the fact that the essential transfer occurred inside the Treasure Tower and the general transfer occurred outside of the tower. In this way, [the substance of the transfer] was revealed in the [Yujutsu](#) and Juryo chapters and [the transfer] concluded in the [Jinriki](#) and [Zokurui](#) Chapters. (Gosho Zenshu p. 783)

Regarding the five characters of Myoho Renge Kyo in the Latter Day of the Law, the sutra states, therefore, "a person of wisdom, hearing how keen are the benefits to be gained, after I have passed into extinction should accept and uphold this sutra. Such a person assuredly and without doubt will attain the Buddha way." (LS p. 276) It is clear from this passage that in the Latter Day, when the True Law has become obscured and lost, Bodhisattva Jogyo will make his advent and, abbreviating four of the five practices, will attain Buddhahood by the single practice of embracing the five characters of Myoho Renge Kyo. (Gosho Zenshu p. 783)

This passage is perfectly clear and expresses the Buddha's transfer of merit. The mind-ground of one who accepts and holds this sutra is 'this' [nyo] in that it accords [nyo] with the teachings of the sutra. In the 'this' of this mind-ground, because one accepts and holds the five characters of Myoho Renge Kyo and chants the Daimoku, one immediately departs from all ignorance and defilement and manifests the ultimate fruit of wondrous enlightenment. Thus, the word 'departed' is used to conclude the sutra, and is accordingly preceded with the words "accepting and upholding the Buddha's words." (LS p. 324)

Even the demon king of the defilements and evil insight, when illuminated by the light of all phenomena manifesting the true aspect, perceives that he pervades the universe in a single thought moment. Then he in turn salutes the Buddha, who is one's own mind; hence the phrase "they bowed in obeisance and departed." (LS p. 324) One should ponder the interpretation that states 'the three thousand realms interpenetrate and yet each remain as they are.' This sole transmission [of the heritage of the Law] should be kept secret and not told to others. It has been taught that the ultimate meaning of the word 'departed' is the departure of 'not departing and yet departing.' (Gosho Zenshu p. 783)