

LIFE, DEATH, ENLIGHTENMENT & ICHINEN SANZEN

With Reverend Raido Hirota

Translated and edited by Udumbara Foundation volunteers

QUESTION: What happens at the moment of death?

Reverend Hirota (RH): When we look at life and death they appear different. But from Nichiren Daishonin's point of view life and death are the same condition, there isn't any difference between the two.

There are many people in this religion and in other religions who believe in reincarnation. After person "A" dies some people believe person "A" will be reborn again as person "A." In the gosho, Daishonin recounts 17 different rebirths or past life stories of Shakyamuni Buddha. In one of his past lives Shakyamuni was Bodhisattva Jofukyo, and in another he was Sessen Doji. Daishonin restated in his gosho what Shakyamuni had stated in the sutras. Because it is written in both the gosho and the sutras people have read about Shakyamuni's past lives. That's why believers are confused. There is a misunderstanding. The telling of these stories was an expedient means of achieving an end quickly. If it were used negatively (for the wrong purpose) it would be considered a lie. But when it is used to facilitate understanding it's good. The purpose for telling these stories was to teach cause and effect clearly.

The truth is, I will die and never be reborn as me again. I won't be born to the same parents, in the same family, have the same friends, be born in the same place, during the same time period. Because the environment exists in time and space, we can never be reborn in the same environment. The human body can be compared to a bottle of water. The form is there and the content is there. If the body dies it would be like the bottle falling over or being destroyed and the water spilling out. The water is never going to return to the way it was before. Water is water. It runs down the mountains to the ocean, evaporates and becomes gas, condenses and becomes rain or snow on the

mountains, then flows back down to the ocean. It's a cycle. The property of water--H₂O--never changes. But it is never again the same water, the same river, the same ocean. The essence of water is Namu-myoho-renge-kyo. When water changes form, its essence stays the same. The same is true for human beings. Humans change form, but their essence never changes. It will always be Namu-myoho-renge-kyo.

If you look at human eyes before and after death, you notice the difference; that a change has taken place -- a change from life to death. With the human body there is a difference between life and death, but the essence of life never changes, not even in death. It's constant. It's always the same. In death there is life, and in life there is death. It is a spirit that never dies. Even in death it is alive. And of course, in life it's a life.

Believer 1: What happens to the essence after death?

RH: The essence itself doesn't change. It just takes on a different form.

Believer 1: When it takes a different form, what determines what that form will be? Is it the past causes? It is karma? You don't necessarily come back as a human?

Believer 2: Where is this essence? Where does it go?

RH: It's there. This leads to the discussion of *ichinen sanzen*. This discussion is becoming way too philosophical. No matter how many times or how many ways I answer the question, it will lead to another question, then another, and another. You can never get to the answer. It is the concept of *ichinen sanzen* (a single mind (single life) contains three thousand realms, or everything) that you have to grasp. We are all connected - no matter what our shape or form. We are all one. Life is all one.

Believer 2: I don't understand this, and I don't understand how you can turn the light on about it and make it clear.

Believer 1: The goshō constantly talks about you practicing to be enlightened in this life and for your enlightenment in the next life, and good fortune in your next life. There's a sense of continuity there. If you practice now you assure your enlightenment in the future. It's not that you start over again. It's not that it's up to chance. It's a continuation.

Believer 2: I think that's true. But when you ask what form are you going to come back as? We know Rev. Hirota is never going to come back as himself.