

Nichiren Shu Buddhist Temple of UK Newsletter

Values of Enlightenment

To a greater or lesser extent, we all have some troubles in our life. Even if your own troubles are very serious, others may not appreciate how serious yours are. In such a situation you may come to the conclusion and say, "In the final analysis, no one really understands me!" We are sometimes disappointed by other people's reactions to our problems. Especially when they do not seem to care as much about you as you care about them. However, sometimes it can be helpful to hear the point of view of someone who is not directly involved with the issue. Those who are on neutral ground have a different perspective, and may be better equipped to judge and understand a particular situation than you do. The differing points of view between you and them are a result of different grounds of view and individual values.

Buddhism teaches us about the cause of troubles and suffering. The causes of them are both our ignorance and delusion. Therefore, there are many teachings and practices included in order to resolve these, such as the Eight Fold Path: to observe rightly, to consider rightly, to understand rightly and so on. This is a practice for approaching Enlightenment too.

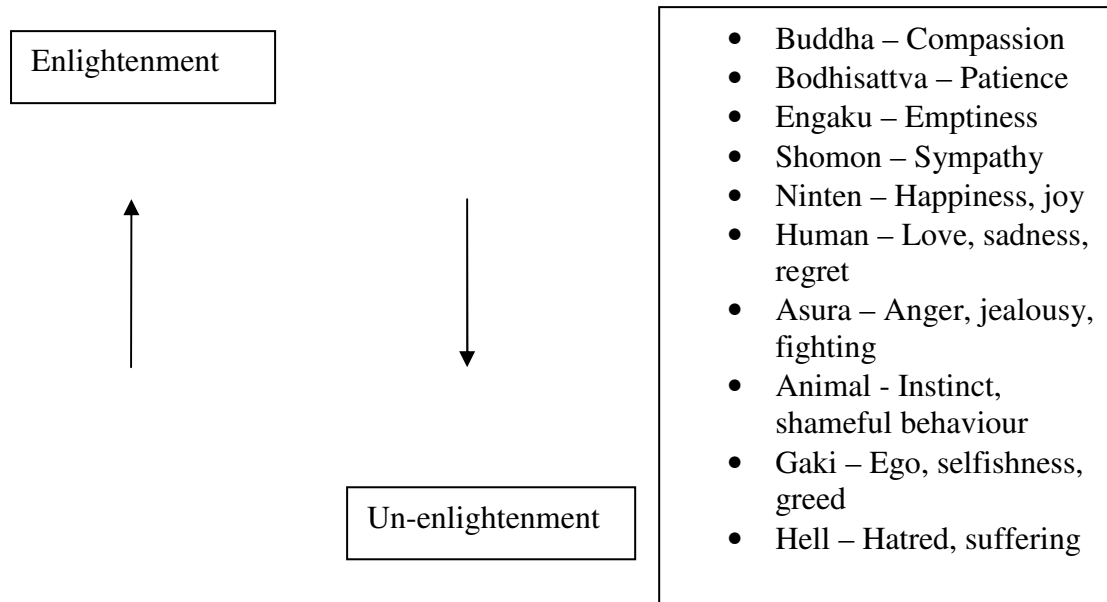
The teachings of Enlightenment will guide you to mature your ideas or point of view, and as a result will improve your values of life. Improving your values of life means that as you mature you grow to value spirituality over materialism. You tend to prefer mental pleasure to material pleasure. Just like growing children who eventually become adults, when they are young they derive their joy from toys, but their joy changes from toys as things, to invisible things such as art, music, or mental or spiritual pleasure. I would like to invite you to consider the value of Enlightenment.

Generally it is said that the nature of the Buddha's Enlightenment is too noble for us to express with words, because words have a limited ability to describe the spiritual world. There is an expression in the Lotus Sutra: "Only Buddhas who attained the highest truth realise the world." However, although we have not yet attained enough Enlightenment, we can perceive the state of Enlightenment. Thus, there are many expressions, descriptions, epithets, and parables in the Lotus Sutra to help us perceive, sense, and feel the Buddha's Enlightenment and in order to support our Enlightenment finally.

One of these expressions is the teaching of "Ten Realms." This teaching teaches us about the human mind, which is changing every moment constantly, along with great complexity. This teaching also identifies the stages of Enlightenment associated with each condition of the human mind. The Ten Realms are: Hell, Gaki, Animal, Asura, Human Being, Ninten (God and Goddess), Shomon, Engaku, Bodisattva and Buddha. In order to explain these more clearly they are associated with various emotions as follows: Hell expresses hell's mind, such as hatred and suffering. The mind of Gaki expresses greed, ego and selfishness. The mind of Animal expresses instinctive desire, shameful behaviour. The mind of Asura expresses anger, jealousy and fighting. Human Being expresses love, sadness and regret. The mind of Ninten (God and Goddess) expresses joy and happiness. The mind of Shomon expresses sympathy. The

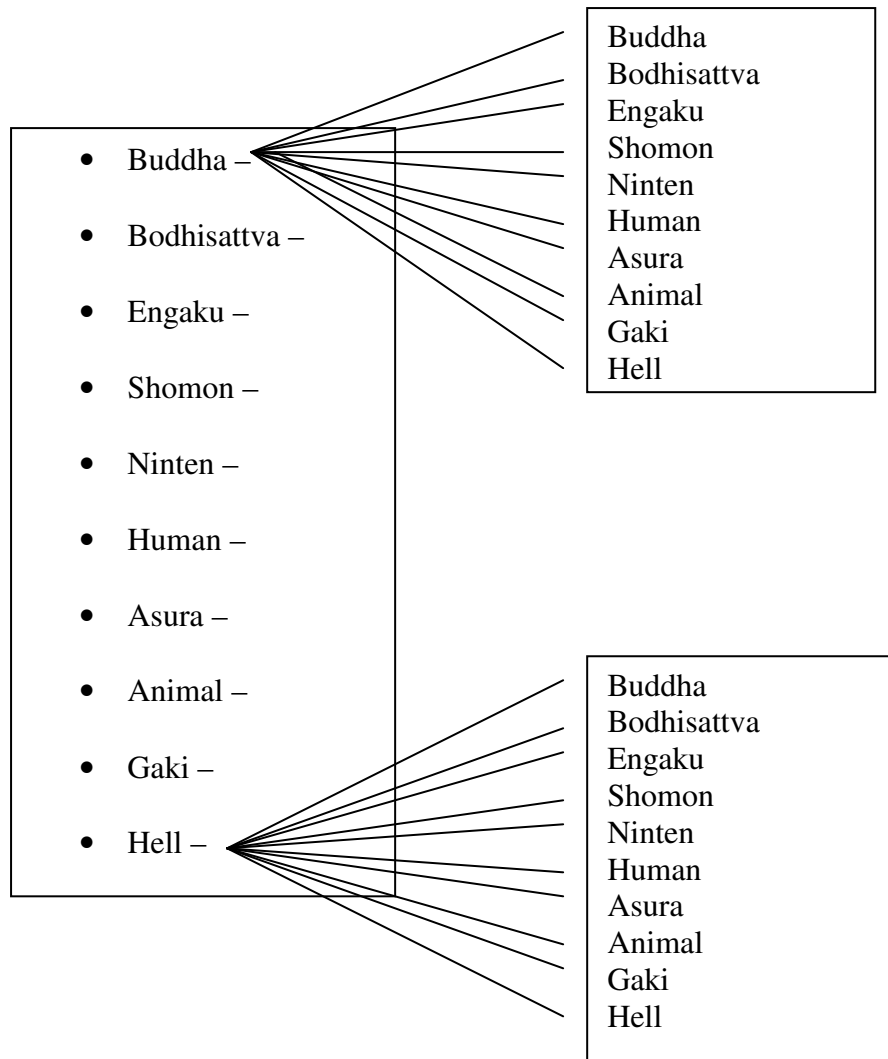
mind of Engaku expresses emptiness. The mind of Bodhisattva expresses patience and the mind of Buddha expresses compassion.

Picture 1 - “Ten Realms”



Moving up to the top, your mind is approaching the Enlightened Realms, conversely moving down to the bottom your mind is dropping to Unenlightened Realms. For instance, when you hate someone, your mind is situated in the realm of hell; when you are angry, your mind is situated in Asura; when you show compassion for someone, your mind is situated in the Buddha realm. In this manner, our mind always moves up and down between the ten realms in every moment. Please check your Enlightenment level on the picture above. To identify which realm you are at, there is a level or realm that you maintain most often, even if your mind changes constantly. That realm is your level of Enlightenment at present. For example, as we are human beings, basically we are situated in the level of the human realm. However, if you are often angry, complain, are stingy or selfish, then your average will be between Human and Gaki, or you may be between Asura and Animal realm. If you are no longer attached to things and show compassion to others then your average will be between Buddha and Engaku; you will be situated in the Bodhisattva realm, which means your level of Enlightenment is that of a Bodhisattva. This is a very interesting teaching of the Lotus Sutra which is called “Ten Realms”.

Picture 2 – “Mutual Possession of the Ten Realms”



Moreover, there are another Ten Realms within each of the Ten Realms. Please see picture 2. The Hell mind at the bottom of the Ten Realms includes the Buddha mind or God mind. The Human Being mind includes the Buddha mind or hell mind too. The Animal mind includes the Buddha mind and also the Human mind. Do you believe that our mind has the Buddha mind or God mind, or Animal mind; and that an animal has a Human mind or a Buddha mind? Sometimes a human being acts like an animal exhibiting shameful behaviour, and an animal reacts like a human being. Sometimes we can meet the Animal or Hell part of human beings when we read about brutal crimes in a newspaper or see them on TV. Even so, the Lotus Sutra says human beings who have a Hell mind have the potential to approach and eventually achieve Enlightenment like the Buddha. This is called “Buddha nature” However, although we are all born with it, if we do not awaken it, it is as if we do not have it at all. Awakening this nature by yourself and developing this nature is what practice and faith of the Lotus Sutra to approach Enlightenment is about.

This teaching is called “Jikai Gogu: Mutual Possession of the Ten Realms” This brings us various ideas. For example, take “love”. Love is a very important factor in relationships. According to this teaching, love cannot exist alone. Love consists of other emotions which combined form “love”, such as joy, sadness, hope, ego, respect, anger, conquest, doubt and hatred. Therefore, love has the potential to manifest suddenly as hatred or anger. Sometimes love manifests as jealousy by ego mixing with anger and doubt. With joy, ego and anger, love can become abusive. We should keep this in mind when we associate with people so we will be able to understand people’s behaviour. If we don’t, we will not be able to tolerate the unexpected changes in other people.

I encountered a bitter experience without knowing of this teaching at our Head Temple. I was visiting the Head Temple of Minobu-san Kuon-ji for the first time. Before going there I’d imagined what it would be like. It is a sacred place where Nichiren Shonin lived for the last nine years of his life, and he expounded the Lotus Sutra to many people there during that time. In fact, I had a wonderful time, just as I had expected, until the day of my departure. On the final day, I was deeply moved after attending a morning service in the main hall, and I wished to purchase a souvenir as a reminder of my visit. I went to the stall selling Buddhist items, where a single clerk was busy serving many pilgrims. I chose an item and joined the queue to pay. At last it was my turn. I put my item on the counter, and the clerk, pointing at the tag, shouted, “Can’t you read? This is a sample!” People were taken back by his loud voice. At that moment, my heart sank and my emotional level plummeted. When I returned to my home temple, I reported the incident to my master, saying, “The Head Temple is a very sacred place for us. I believe that people who work or live there must be good people to suit the sacredness of the place” My master responded with an unexpected answer: “You are wrong.” Unbelievable! I could hardly believe my ears. I had been the victim of mistreatment. My master explained, “You don’t understand the teaching of the Mutual Possession of the Ten Realms. This teaching teaches us that the human mind changes constantly and can be experiencing hell or Buddha mind or another realm, regardless of our actual physical circumstances whether it is a sacred place or not. Suppose he was in a hell mind (which does not change the nature of the physical place where he was). If you knew this, you would have realised this teaching and listened to his words with a Buddha mind. Unfortunately, the miserable truth is that you did not notice that you fell into the hell mind yourself.”

Approaching enlightenment means improving your point of view, rejuvenating your ideas and cultivating your values of life through the Buddha’s teachings. Constant troubles in life are caused by greedy values that are dominated by our ignorance or delusion. However, a life that has no troubles at all can also be a bad thing. When we think of your life of happiness based on the Mutual Possession of the Ten Realms, happiness includes suffering, selfishness and even hardships. Also, even unhappiness includes happiness, hope and joy. Therefore, what true happiness is, is a balanced or harmonised happiness in accord with another basic teaching of Buddhism- the teaching of the “Middle Way.”

In summary, for a balanced happiness we should not abuse happiness even under extreme happiness, because sooner or later we will feel empty. Under extremely bad situations, we should not lose focus on the purpose of life or let the mind run away

wildly. Even though we face challenges and troubles, we should remember there must be a time to make ourselves feel happy. This is called true happiness.

Some please say that Buddhism is not a religion but a lifestyle, or way of life. In fact, Buddhism shows us through wisdom how to eliminate the suffering in our lives. The scriptures containing the Buddha's teachings are collectively known as "Sutras" or "O-Kyo." The Lotus Sutra is the conclusion of all the Sutras; the final teaching. We have been fortunate to meet the Lotus Sutra. I have now introduced the teaching of the Mutual Possession of the Ten Realms from the Lotus Sutra.

Gassho