

June Discussion Topic – Changing our deepest karma

“Nichiren Buddhism teaches the principle of the Nine Consciousnesses, which explains that we can reveal a boundless life state when we awaken to it. The ninth consciousness - the Buddha nature - is the unchanging reality that encompasses all functions of life. It is an infinite realm that exists in the depths of our lives. This magnificent, indestructible palace, nurtures, revitalizes and harmonizes all things, and becomes visible in our daily lives.”¹

The first five consciousnesses correspond to our senses: sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch. Through these, we take in information from the world around us. In the sixth consciousness, our conscious mind, we distinguish and understand everything we experience through our senses. It shapes how we see and understand our surroundings. However, what we perceive is often influenced by the deeper levels of consciousness within ourselves. The seventh consciousness is the unconscious, limited, egocentric self, the part driven by instinctive urges like the will to survive. It holds everything that we have learned in life and it forms the beliefs we have about who we are. From here, we also form our value judgments.

The eighth consciousness is the karma-consciousness. Here, all our karma, positive, neutral and negative, accumulated over our past and our present lives, is stored. We create karma with everything we think, say and do – these are causes. The dormant results of these causes are stored in the eighth consciousness. We experience the world around us based on this consciousness. It shapes our appearance, circumstances, actions, fortune and struggles, work, relationships, and health - in short, every aspect of our lives. This eighth consciousness lies beneath our conscious thoughts. As a result, it influences what we think, say and do and it remains in our lives, throughout all our lifetimes. Karma can be compared to a strong current of a river that pulls us along, even when the solution to our problems seems clear.

For example, if we have trouble trusting others because of past experiences, we might unconsciously try to protect ourselves from being hurt again. As a result, we may see others as untrustworthy more quickly, or feel less safe sharing our feelings. Our thoughts, words and actions in response to this leave traces in our lives. These traces can shape how we view the world and create a painful vicious cycle of suffering.

This is where the ninth consciousness comes in. The ninth consciousness lies even deeper and is a pure, fundamental consciousness that cannot be affected by anything - it refers to a consciousness that is untouched by karmic influences. This is our Buddha nature, the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, which at the deepest level is connected to all living beings and permeates the entire universe. Through this consciousness we gain the power to transform our negative karma. A life that comes in contact with the ninth consciousness breaks through the shell of the lesser self that is afraid of losing control over itself and its environment, and enters the greater self.

Chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo can be likened to drilling through the habit and delusions found in the other consciousnesses and reach the pure wisdom of the ninth consciousness, which can wash away all impurities. When we live from the ninth consciousness, we can see all karmic obstacles as opportunities to reveal our Buddha nature. By chanting, we not only take the helm of our lives but also bring forth the wisdom, courage and compassion to create a world based on the Buddhist values of respect, equality and the interconnectedness of life.

¹ From Ikeda Sensei's speech of June 26, 1983, at the 1st General Meeting of SGI Netherlands; translated from the *Seikyo Times* of August 1983.

- Have you ever experienced changing certain tendencies (karma) through your Buddhist practice?
- How can we live from our ninth consciousness? Have you experienced that?