

# FINDING THE TRUE SELF

lecture by BARBARA CAHILL

at

SGI-UK Scotland HQ

16<sup>th</sup> AGM

held in EDINBURGH – 13 June 1998

I look after Wales and the West of England, and we have always looked after the region, ever since 1975. And it's exactly the same... all the regional work that we do... and that you do – is all exactly the same. It felt so familiar coming into this hall and seeing you all, even though I've never been here as a member before. So it's really great to see you and to see all the efforts that you are making, and I really, really wish you well.

I don't know whether you have been reading the notes, but if you have had the chance to have a look, you might think this is going into quite deep water here. But I just want to reassure you, I am not the one who has all the answers, but I am trying to go into this area of thinking about things because I think Sensei has pointed us in this direction many times. So I don't think you'll get anything totally conclusive from this lecture, but I hope that you will be able during the lecture to open your minds up to this way of thinking a little bit. So we'll just read the first quote:

"In order for human beings to live lives worthy of their humanity, they must return to a cognisance of their nature as part of the universal life force, and must regard this as the basis of all their actions. Once they have adopted this attitude, they will also be able to create the sense of value that is urgently needed today. This sense of value will give paramount place to life itself and it will devote major concern to solving the questions involved with life, for these are the ones that determine the answers to all other questions."

Daisaku Ikeda: "Choose Life", p.139

So Sensei says in that quote: "...human beings... must return to a cognisance of their nature as part of the universal life force..." And he says this is important if they are "... to create the sense of value that is urgently needed today". In other words, through coming to the conclusion that we each are part of something greater, we can understand that we ourselves can create a sense of value. We can imbue our lives and those of others with a sense of value. That is for the most part sorely lacking today. This is what I want to talk about today. I feel that developing this awareness of the greatness of our lives is what the practice is about.

However, everything, it would seem, is against us understanding the greatness of our lives. It seems that from earliest childhood we were warned not to think so much of ourselves. This developed in us a deep conflict, because quote naturally the ego was all the time fighting for survival, directing all thoughts and concerns to ourselves. And then we were told by our parents and others that this shouldn't be happening. Naturally, this produced in us a self-dislike and even self-loathing, and we have held onto that into adulthood and often dare not even acknowledge it. When I think of myself, I'm aware of my needs and my failings. But Buddhism says that our lives are much more than that – we are told that we have a greater self or a true self, which is what we should be aiming for. This can seem ambiguous. So this is what I want to talk about today.

I don't want us to deride ourselves, however, by saying that the ego is all wrong and should be disposed of in the search for the greater self. If we were to do this, we would once more simply be applying western cultural values, shaking a finger at our ego and trying to banish it, in a sense. In order to find the greater

self we need to do the opposite of chastising ourselves. We need to accept ourselves, embrace ourselves, no matter how bad we think we are. This isn't necessarily easy to do because it so much goes against our upbringing, but let's try to do it.

Another point I want to make today is about prayer. I'll go into this in more detail later, but even before coming to the detail, I know that each one of us has felt the power of chanting for ourselves. What I have to add is just out of interest and something we can call upon later when we are doubting. But more of that later.

For now let's begin by making great prayers about our own lives – about accepting and embracing ourselves. This could become our first prayer that we could come back to every day when we are chanting daimoku: "I pray to accept and love myself." "I pray to embrace my whole life, not just the parts I think are good." The reason we should pray in this way is that, by accepting yourself totally, you can be moved on in this seemingly flawed self, and one that's bound up in recrimination and self-hatred, into something where you can accept a true self, and a true self could exist. So in order to find the true self, we need to accept the self that's looking for the true self. So this is our first basic prayer: "I pray to accept and love myself, my whole life."

Let's look on the practice of Buddhism as a means to change, not to change others or to change the situation, but to change ourselves. It's absolutely wonderful when you get hold of this idea of self-change and make it your own. Every single thing that happens, then becomes the key to some change or transformation in yourself. You'll then have learned how to make the whole of life become the soil in which your own wonderful life can flourish.

However, thinking about your own life as being a wonderful, rich thing, seems to be unbearably selfish. We tend to have the conflicting idea that the less often we think about ourselves, and the more we disparage ourselves, that means the more often we will think of others and the better we will think of others! But the exact opposite happens! The more we disparage ourselves, the more we disparage others!

I want to return to this point because it really is quite central to this talk: I want to ask you – when you pray, who or what do you pray to? I know we will all answer, "The Gohonzon". But do we tend to think of the Gohonzon like God? In other words, maybe we think that it's the Gohonzon which will answer all our prayers, give us what we want, if only we are good enough, we do enough daimoku, we never miss Gongyo! I know we may not consciously think this, but having been brought up in a culture in which we were told that the power is outside us, that God has the power, that we should never be so egotistical as to think that we ourselves have power – in such a culture it is very hard to think that it is my own life that makes things happen. This is a big change in thinking that we need to make – even examine how are we thinking about the Gohonzon. I maintain, though, that it is in this very area of what we pray to that we need to make some changes. It is, of course, very important that we stop seeing the Gohonzon as the God of our childhood. The Gohonzon is our Buddhahood. The Gohonzon is our own life manifesting Buddhahood. So we pray to our own life that we may become aware of our Buddhahood and maintain this awareness.

Now let's begin to take this further. This is something that President Ikeda has been writing and speaking about for some time. When I chant to reveal my own Buddhahood, in fact I could be said to be revealing not just something that belongs to me, but the Buddhahood of the entire universe. There is no difference between the Buddhahood of an individual life and the Buddhahood of the sea or the sky or a little animal or another individual. This all reaching, all encompassing, all powerful, all compassionate state exists everywhere, all the time. When we make the effort to reveal it, we transform our lives.

What is our life? What is life itself? Buddhism has always talked about life in terms of relationships, and it has tried to fathom life by describing the relationship which exists. This means the concept of "funī", which is short for "nini funī" – "two but not two" – "seeming to be two, but in fact one". So the self and the environment – that's "funī" – seeing to be two, but in fact one. The body and the mind is "funī" also. Thus, in these concepts, we are being encouraged to see life as a whole and not as separate little existences.

But this seeing life as an unbroken whole is so very different from the perception of life that we all have. Unless you happen to be one of the ones who has already read and chanted and challenged this notion, I would be that you see your own life as being quite separate from the life that goes on outside of you. It is very easy to see life outside yourself as something you have very little influence over. So science has encouraged us to think of this outside life objectively, as if it could be understood by observing it objectively. This view of life was developed in the sixteen hundreds and it has been with us in a very powerful form ever since.

However, by objectifying life and saying that I am and you are just observers of life, a vital aspect of life was removed in the process. This vital aspect is one's subjective reality. It is this subjectivity that most people at the end of the twentieth century are looking for and trying to re-establish. It is a key element in life, and its importance is explained in the Buddhist concept of "esho funī", which means that the subject or one's subjective self is related to the objective world by the idea of "funī" – "Two but not two". In other words, the objective world seems to be separate from me, this subjective self, but we are "funī", not two.

As a matter of fact, this Buddhist concept, which Nichiren Daishonin taught seven hundred years ago is now being substantiated by the findings of science. Although scientists initially tried to find the truth about life by reducing everything down to the very smallest sub-atomic particles, what they actually found, when they got to this microscopic level, was that there were not things there, but relationships. Here's quite a long quote from Fritz Capra, which explains it really well:

"(The) quantum theory freed (scientists) to accept the fact that the solid material objects of classical physics dissolve at a subatomic level into wave-like patterns of probabilities. These patterns, moreover, do not represent probabilities of things but rather probabilities of interconnections. The subatomic particles have no meaning as isolated entities, but can be understood only as interconnections or correlations between various processes of observation and measurement. In other words, subatomic particles are not 'things' but interconnections between things, and these in turn, are interconnections between other things, and so on. In quantum theory we never end up with any 'things', we always deal with interconnections.

... quantum physics shows that we cannot decompose the world into independently existing elementary units. As we shift our attention from macroscopic objects to atoms and subatomic particles, nature does not show us any isolated building blocks, but rather appears as a complex web of relationships between the various parts of a unified whole."

F. Capra, "The Web of Life" p.30

The importance of this is two-fold. Firstly, it validates the Buddhist view. It validates the Buddhist teaching which has always taught about these relationships existing. And secondly, and more importantly, it can lead us to a new way of seeing ourselves and seeing our faith. The old scientific theories taught that the objective world was out there and that each person was just an observer to it. The new scientific theories teach that all of life is a complex web of relationships. We ourselves may not be too aware of these relationships, firstly because they exist on an unseen level, and secondly because everyone quite naturally was taught, and the whole of our culture has believed for hundreds of years, that the aspect of life which exists out there is completely

separate from what exists in here. Now we discover that, instead of life being made up of individual, isolated things that can be accurately analysed by scientists, it is, in fact, all interconnected.

But what difference can this make to us? Think of the difference between being an observer and being a participant. The new scientific theories teach us that we are participating in life instead of just observing it. So if you think of something like going to a dance – if you stand around just observing the dance like a wallflower, you are an observer. But think how different it is if you actually get up and start dancing yourself. Then you can interact and you can influence.

However you happen to approach that dance, either as an observer or as an actual participant, very much determines your view of the dance, doesn't it? How we see life is very much determined by whether we see it as a participant or as an observer. So do you see that, for all these hundreds of years, a human being's innate power and influence has been greatly lessened because of one's believing that the correct response to life was just as an objective observer and nothing more. We need to try to understand that we do have influence on our environment, and we need to begin to direct the influence we have so that it becomes beneficial for everyone.

So Buddhism teaches something completely different from this scientific objective view that I've just explained. When we take up the practice of Buddhism, we begin to see that our lives can have and should have much more influence than we previously thought. We are also taught that the way we see and respond to life outside us has directly to do with the way we see and respond to our own lives subjectively – this is taught in "esho funi". In other words, there is not some objective life out there that is separate. Whatever life there is, you are part of it and I am part of it, and if we want to change it in some way we might as well start by changing ourselves, because that is the only thing that we can be sure that we can change. We know that we can change ourselves because that's what Buddhism tells us – that's the whole proof of this Buddhism, isn't it? We do have the ability because of the practice to change ourselves. Then, because of the "funii" that we have with the environment, we can change the environment. The environment will reflect the change that takes place in it.

"To be dragged around by other people or the environment is not the way of life that the Lotus Sutra teaches. True happiness is not feeling happiness one moment and misery the next. Overcoming the tendency to blame our sufferings on others or on the environment enables us to greatly expand our state of life... In every case, whether we feel happy or unhappy, ultimately depends on us ourselves. Without changing our own state of life, we can find no true happiness. But when we do change our inner state, our entire world is transformed. The ultimate means for effecting such a change is chanting daimoku."

Daisaku Ikeda: "Lecture on 'Happiness in this World'", UKE April, 1997  
Our inner state must change, then our entire world is transformed. Let's let go of the idea that there is some objective, unyielding world out there that we can't effect. This idea is so ingrained in us by the scientific, cultural teachings that we've all had for so long, and Buddhism says, "Let's let go of it!". The very opposite is true – I can affect the world outside me – and it has been proved by science that on a sub-atomic level we interact with life constantly – we constantly affect the objective world on a sub-atomic level. And what we see or perceive to be the objective world has been and is being influenced by each of us. In a physical sense there is a constant exchange between us and the so-called "outside" world.

"From the level of the electron to that of stars and galaxies, modern physics points to a unity of matter and its surrounding environment. This interaction is so intimate that matter and its surrounding environment cannot any longer be considered separate entities."

L. Dossey: "Space, Time and Medicine", p.80

Isn't that brilliant? That is "esho fun", as taught by Buddhism for a thousand years – and now science is validating that. This interaction is called "biodance" and it refers to the way chemical elements flow back and forth between the human being and one's environment. Of course, we can't see this happening. If we could, I suppose we'd see millions and trillions of colourful chemicals dancing around every single person, every object. And all the person or object would be, would be just a greater condensation of those chemicals. But though we can't see it, we can be assured now that science has discovered that this is the case.

Now that's on a physical level. On the level of the non-physical, on what we might call the mind, what happens there? Well, some of us have already felt some connection with other minds, but scientists have found out that this phenomenon is happening all the time – not just when we're aware of it – that there's always an interchange between people's minds. The way this is explained is that they are calling the mind "non-local". In other words, we think that our minds are stuck inside our heads, don't we – and I think that my mind is completely different from your mind? But what the scientists are now coming to is the idea that mind is something that's shared by everybody, and they're calling this concept "non-local" mind". They say that the mind can't be confined to the physical brain in the physical body. Also, "non-local" means that the mind does not belong to a specific person.

"... if the mind is non-local, it must in some sense be independent of the strictly local brain and body... If the mind is non-local in space and time, our interaction with each other seems a foregone conclusion. Non-local minds are merging minds, since they are not "things" that can be walled off and confined to moments in time or point-positions in space."

L. Dossey: "Recovering the Soul", p.37

We are so used to thinking of the mind and the brain as occupying the same space inside our heads, that it's hard to imagine that anything else is likely. The book quoted above makes a long, well established, well researched case for the existence of non-local mind. It's full of quotes from famous physicists – I can't convey most of this in forty-five minutes, but you'll see examples in the quotes I've given you from "Recovering the Soul" and "Space, Time and Medicine", (both of these are in print now). I'd just like to ask two things of you: one is that you try to suspend judgement and come with me in what I'm trying to talk about here; and also that you do this because Sensei has made numerous references to this subject recently and he clearly feels that it accords to some extent with Buddhist thinking. So I think that a lot of our understanding of what faith is and what Buddhahood is can be explained by reading this kind of material. Here is another quote:

"In the West we have stopped short in describing the span of consciousness at the level of the 'healthy, functioning ego', ignoring any higher dimensions that may exist. A remarkable exception is the work of Wilber, who, in his landmark book 'Spectrum of Consciousness' has fashioned a model resembling those of the East. He Says: 'Lying above the level of the healthy ego are several other strata – various subtle and causal realms and finally the state of ultimate unity'. I will frequently refer to the latter state of ultimate oneness as the highest self, the soul, and the One Mind, which contain attributes of the Divine."

L. Dossey: "Recovering the Soul", p.4

So this I find very close to the Buddhist concept of the nine consciousnesses, because where he talks about "various 'subtle' and 'causal' realms and finally the state of 'ultimate unity'", I think you could say this is very close to the past part of the nine consciousness in Buddhism. "Various subtle realms" compares to the seventh consciousness, which is spiritual thought, self-awareness and intuition.

And then the eighth consciousness of the karma storehouse, as we call it, is close to the "causal realm". And finally, the ninth consciousness, or fundamental pure consciousness of Buddhahood seems to be what Wilbur and Dossey mean by the "ultimate unity". Dossey makes a case for the existence of one mind, calling it the "ultimate unity", containing "attributes of the Divine". When he speaks of "one mind" he seems to mean a consciousness that goes beyond individual training and education. It also goes beyond individual memories and experiences. It's difficult while we use this word "mind" to describe this. Maybe it would help to call it "one consciousness". This we could think of as the one area of life that we all share in. It would not be affected by each person's own individual destiny, but rather it would be available to everyone as the great fundamental life of the universe.

I feel, after reading a lot of recent work by Sensei (I first encountered this book by Dr Dossey in Sensei's 'Conversations' number 25), that it is very interesting to encounter these many statements by scientists which actually seem to substantiate the concept of Buddhahood – that Buddhahood isn't left any long as some kind of... spiritual something or other... something very vague and hard to talk about. Here the scientists actually taking notice of what we have always known as the fundamental life force, the fundamental pure life of the universe. There are many ways of coming at, understanding, this phenomenon of what we variously call "the great fundamental life of the universe" or "the ninth consciousness" or "Buddhahood" or "one mind". But let me give a very little background to the reason why some scientists are now interested in this area.

When physicists first tried to find the smallest building block of life, as we used to call it, they encountered an unexpected phenomenon. The tiniest sub-atomic particles could not be pinned down and in fact seemed to be changing their properties according to what the observer, the scientist, was asking of them. This was what brought them to the conclusion, as we referred to in the quotation earlier, that there aren't "things" there – there are just relationships.

The next quote is from Chandra Wickramasinghe, who teaches in Wales and is a great friend of Sensei's:

"The interaction between human consciousness and inanimate matter in quantum mechanics leads me to speculate that our consciousness might somehow be derived from a cosmic consciousness that may be regarded as all-pervasive."

C. Wickramasinghe and D. Ikeda: "Space and Eternal Life", p.117

So scientists or people who are grounded in the sciences are coming to this from all different angles and coming to the same kind of realisation. We have the Buddhist teaching of the Lotus Sutra and Nichiren Daishonin, and now we have the scientists – all telling us the same thing – a human life is far greater than just an ego and a collection of physical attributes. This is what Sensei says:

"What we need today is a transformation in how society views the human being. When people's view of the human being changes, everything will change. You must not yoke yourself to nationality or ethnicity. You must not think of yourself as powerless, or as no more than a collection of matter. You must not regard your self as a slave to your genes. Fundamentally, you have limitless and immense potential. Fundamentally, the human being is one with the universe! Such is the immense power of one person! This is the message of the Lotus Sutra."

D. Ikeda: "Conversations on the Lotus Sutra" Number 25, p. 17,18

Now, isn't that great! It's really hard for us to believe this because we're so stuck in this way which is dominated by the old science. This is what I'm trying to get us to begin to see – that these quotes that Sensei makes are actually really possible – and true!

On the sub-atomic level people have now come to the idea of a cosmic consciousness. From the viewpoint of Buddhism this has been taught for over a thousand years. Dr. Dossey, working as a clinical physician, has found that what he conceived as of one mind, influences phenomena within one" body and outside it. If the mind is just tucked inside your brain, how can it influence your body? I think we are aware of the influence of thought, so we already know, we're already getting to that idea that the mind is not just stuck inside the brain. But he felt that it was very important to give scientific research findings about this. He talked about a woman who was able, through doing meditation, to change to responses of her immune system. Dr. Dossey, after describing her fully documented case, says about this:

"This experiment and many others like it bring the power of science into the task of showing that the mind can extend its influence far beyond the brain. It shows that the mind can penetrate to the cellular level of the body and modify 'mindless' bodily processes. No longer in the category of mere folk wisdom or superstition, the mind-body connection is now a matter that has been demonstrated by careful scientific enquiry."

L. Dossey: "Recovering the Soul", p.24

It's great, isn't it? In another experiment, people who were being injected in their right arms with a skin test for TB, were showing very strong reaction in the right arm. In their left arm they were receiving a harmless saline solution. They then had the injections switched without their being told about it, and they went on having the reaction in the right arm. He comments about this:

"Their expectations seemed to be capable of over-riding the purely automatic physical responses of the body. Their bodies had clearly begun to behave according to the dictates of their thoughts".

L. Dossey: "Recovering the Soul", p.25

We have been told about this – if you're ill you chant about it, sending your daimoku to that area. I think that's the same kind of thing – sending thoughts to the area that's ill. I'm going to talk about this under "The power of prayer" later.

The case which Dr. Dossey is making is that for far too long we have been led to think of our bodies like machines and our minds like computers. But clearly this was not what he often observed. And, of course, his observations also accorded with the findings of modern physics described before. Why is this important to us? Both President Ikeda and Dr. Dossey believe that the fragmentation of life, the separating of various aspects of life – like, for instance, separating the body and the mind – this thinking of life as separate rather than integrated, as it so clearly is, is the cause of our heartaches and sufferings and our illnesses and our dissatisfaction. When we see life as being out there and separate from us, we very often can't accept it and we're afraid of it. This kind of thinking increases our feeling of isolation and aloneness, and things become very threatening to us. That has to do with how we see life – not how life is, but how we are seeing it. The great effort then is to consciously try to believe in the connecting power of one mind, or, as we would call it, Buddhahood. When I chant to reveal my Buddhahood, I don't have to stay with the idea that it is mine. Rather I can see it as tapping into something that we all tap into and that we all contribute to all the time.

I really urge you when you are chanting, to really try this out. Instead of thinking... where is my Buddhahood, where is it, I've got to find it – rather try... I'm contributing to the Buddhahood of the universe and I'm being fed by that Buddhahood of the universe. Something like that.

Now, getting back to the idea of prayer that I mentioned earlier – we find that this is the way that we contact or bring out or re-create this wonderful event of Buddhahood in ourselves and in the world. In Dr. Dossey's book "Recovering the Soul", he gives quite a few examples of the effects of prayers. These were compiled by a unique organisation called "Spindrift" – the word meaning the sea hitting the land and bouncing back into the sky – so by calling themselves "Spindrift" they were trying to talk about the connection between the physical and the non-physical, and trying to sort it out in terms of scientific experiment, to assess the effectiveness of various ways of praying. Their central tenet is that all human beings have divine attributes and can reach a oneness of the divine throughout all life. This "oneness" is what we would call Buddhahood.

So first these researchers asked: "Is it real?" "Does prayer work?" "Is spiritual healing possible?" (I don't mean "spiritual" as in "spiritualism"). So they put seeds into a prepared compost and they divided this compost into two sections A and B. a group of people living miles from the seeds, and never seeing them, agreed to pray – they were praying for Side A. So, of course, Side A did much better than Side B in germination. So then they thought, if we distress the seeds in some way, would they still do as well? So they put a little salt water into the seed tray. The distressed seeds which had been prayed for did even better than the non-distressed ones. These results were maintained over tons and tons of experiments. this is what Dr Dossey says about it:

"This simple test... indicated that the effect of thought on living organisms outside the human body was significant, quantifiable and reproducible and that the effects of human consciousness are not confined to the brain and the body."

L. Dossey: "Recovering the Soul", p.55-56

So then they asked – does it matter how much you pray? So they divided the seed into some which were not prayed for at all, some which were prayed for ten minutes at a time, and a third set which were prayed for twenty minutes. They found, of course, that the ones prayed for for twenty minutes did much, much better than the ones prayers for for ten minutes.

They then asked about whether it mattered if the people doing the praying knew or not what is happening with the seeds, and they found that it is much more effective if the person doing the praying does know what is happening and is kept informed, kept connected with the process. They also found that the more experienced the person was at doing the praying, the more powerful the outcome was.

Now here is one other last result which I think is very interesting. They asked: If the person praying has some specific result that they want, is that more effective than if one is just doing the action of praying? I thought it very interesting that the results showed that the people praying for a specific result did less well. You wouldn't think so, would you? But I think this very interesting, because I see this as indicating that the ones not praying for a specific result (since they were Christians they were leaving it up to the will of God, with the attitude when praying of "Thy will be done") were more effective than if the prayed with the attitude of "I want this, this and this". This attitude of "Thy will be done" I see as rather like, for us, leaving it up to the inherent harmony of the universe, the inherent harmony of Buddhahood. To have our prayers be most effective, it would seem that, yes, we have to know we are praying for the seeds to germinate, but we don't have to try to impose our will on the situation.

...trying to impose our will on the situation. That's something to think about. Of course, we're going to always have in our lives things that we want – we have to have that, otherwise we wouldn't even be chanting in the first place. But we don't always have to be thinking: I've got to get this job... got to get this job... as we maybe tend to do! And then we think: Oh, I haven't been chanting right because I forgot about the job for a while! So yes, we have to know that we, for

instance, want the job. But then, that's enough. Then we trust the Gohonzon. We trust the power of the Law, as opposed to limiting it with our own will power.

Another very important point was that what the Spindrift people found was that anyone praying with love and care in their hearts was much more likely to be effective in their prayers.

So all of the experiments that were carried out completely scientifically over many years, indicate that the thoughts we have and especially the prayers we make do affect the object that we're praying for, even though there may be a great spatial separation between us and that other person or situation that we're praying for. It seems to conclusively clarify that we can affect life, however basic or however complex.

Finally, this is Dr. Dossey's conclusion:

"The main reason to establish the nonlocal nature of the mind is, then, spiritual. Local theories of the mind are not only incomplete, they are destructive. They create the illusion of death and aloneness, [which are] altogether local concepts. They foster existential oppression and hopelessness by giving us an utterly false idea of our own basic nature, advising us that we are contracted, limited and mortal creatures, locked inside our bodies and drifting inexorably toward the end of time."

L. Dossey: "Recovering the Soul", p.7

So when I said I wanted to talk about prayer, this is what I meant. Our prayer need not be for specific and therefore limited results, but we pray instead for the welling up of our Buddhahood and for our sense of it existing within the whole of life: Buddhahood within the life of one's enemy, within the situation at work that we cannot bear, within anything that makes us suffer. Suppose there is someone or some situation that makes us suffer – it would seem that the more we emphasise our difference from that someone or situation, the more we emphasise the separation, the more we are made to suffer through this. It is not the other person or the situation that brings us our suffering, so much as we who cause it ourselves by assuming a difference and separation that does not exist. We've gone against the true nature of life by doing this, and this is what makes us suffer. So this is why it is really important to try in our chanting to chant for this oneness of Buddhahood, one mind, whatever you want to call it, however you want to get into it... to keep trying to be aware of that. It really helps us to deal with the day to day problems and sufferings that we have.

An American lady gave me an example of the ego and how it works. She said that the ego is like the little finger, and this little finger is quite delicate and doesn't have a lot of power, but when it realises that it is part of a hand and part of a body, it's then got a lot of force to it. So this is the same kind of relationship that we have with our true self. The true self is this whole thing of Buddhahood that I've been talking about up to now – that is our True Self – it's the awareness of the oneness of life instead of being the isolated little finger with no power. We come to have this incredible amount of power and resource and energy when we become more and more aware of the True Self that we really are.

So I'm not trying to deny the importance of having and praying about personal concerns. All I'm saying is that we shouldn't stop there. We shouldn't get so heavily embroiled in these concerns. Becoming aware of the whole, the fundamental pure consciousness has to take a more central role in our practice. How do we gain this awareness? Of course we gain it by chanting daimoku in front of the Gohonzon – as much daimoku as we can possibly do. But we also gain it by understanding the role of adversity in our lives. Any many experiences that people have had of eternity – this is close to this awareness of the wholeness of life – people who've been in near death situations and they've left their bodies and they've given these experiences of looking down and seeing themselves and

the whole situation at the hospital. That is an adverse circumstance, because at that time they have actually died, but then somehow they are re-awakened and they come back into their bodies and they go on living. So in that adverse situation of dying they have gained the understanding of eternity.

Or another experience could be the understanding that President Toda achieved when he was in jail, which became the driving force for the whole movement that we belong to now – attained during this very distressing time in jail in war-time. The understanding didn't just come to him, just like that, just because he was in a bad situation – he had to work to attain that understanding of life. And we know from "The Human Revolution" that he was chanting to understand the Lotus Sutra. So he was really trying for something, wasn't he, and determined to do a certain amount of daimoku a day until he could understand this passage of the Lotus Sutra. So because of making that effort, he came to see what Buddhahood is. Coming to see that is what made him find his mission to lead all of us.

I know that we all want to avoid adversity. No one seeks it out. I suppose we would be crazy to go looking for it. But I'm talking about something very different. I'm saying that in the midst of our adversity may be our key to understanding Buddhahood and loving life. This is what Sensei says about President Toda's experience:

"We can think of President Toda's enlightenment in prison as the moment in which he connected with his 'eternal self', as the leader of the movement to propagate the Mystic Law... What he awakened to in that moment was the unmistakable truth of life, the fundamental transcendent reality... Through thoroughly pursuing the question 'What is the Buddha?' he came to realise that the Buddha is none other than the self, the great life of the universe; that these two – the self and the universe – are in fact one."

D. Ikeda: "Conversations on the Lotus Sutra" 25 p.14

I really don't think we can over-emphasise the importance of that discovering made by President Toda, because until that time the teaching of Buddhism had not made Buddhahood clear. So that discovery of his, and his willingness to teach it, however difficult, is what allows us now to understand Buddhahood. We can reach the same wholeness or oneness with the universe through adversity if we will challenge the adverse circumstance with as much strong practice as we can.

We also reach the situation of wholeness through compassion. This is because the essential nature of the universe is compassion. All of this is in conversation number 25, which was in the January UKE. When we make efforts to approach a difficult situation with compassion, we may experience Buddhahood. Regardless of the individual desires that we may have, and do have, all the time, our Buddhist practice is designed to give us the change to be a Bodhisattva of the Earth. I know that each one of us struggles to be a Bodhisattva of the Earth and to act with compassion. But I want us to understand that within that very struggle we find that deep connection that we all share with every form of life. We find our Buddhahood.

I began this lecture by saying how important it is that we change the way we see ourselves – from dismissing and deriding ourselves to really cherishing the wonder of our lives. We may achieve this, we may grasp and understand this wonder when we realise that we are not the separate self that we have always been aware of. Instead we are part of, indeed we are, the harmony that is the universe itself – that's what we are – we are that harmony. Because that is what Buddhahood is. And we are taught that each one of us has this Buddhahood, and our lives are individual expressions of this truth of the harmony of the universe. We just have to become aware of it, and keep on renewing that awareness every day in our chanting.

We are terribly aware of our individual memories. These memories may be distressing and even too hard to bear. But what I have been saying in this lecture is that these memories that make our ego what it is, are not all there is to our lives. We also each have the deeper memory of our life being whole and connected and in complete harmony with all of life. It is this deeper memory that we need to seek out and believe in now. Remember what the Spindrift Society discovered – that our prayers are far more effective if we have love in our hearts. So while we chant for ourselves and for our own Buddhahood to emerge, let's do it with love for ourselves, rather than constant criticism.

I mentioned earlier that we can't expect to treat others any differently than we treat ourselves. We need to develop the awareness, therefore, that our lives are superlative, and that we have great missions to help others to understand the same about themselves.

I'm going to end with the last two quotes from Sensei:

"Our minds and the universe are inseparably connected throughout all eternity. The purpose of Buddhism is to enable us to achieve this understanding."

"When we open wide our minds and fix our gaze on the universe, we fix our gaze on our own life."

D. Ikeda, UKE, May 1998