

Myokei Caine-Barrett
Teachings for Uncertain Times
February 6, 2016



Nam-myoho renge kyo. Nam-myoho renge kyo. Nam-myoho renge kyo.

Hello. I'm Myokei Caine-Barrett, current bishop of the Nichiren Shu order of North America and also resident minister of Myoken-ji Temple in Houston, Texas. Today I want to talk to you about Teachings for Uncertain Times—and we certainly are in uncertain times, where separation seems to be the norm, and where we are somehow unable to relate to each other in a way that is compassionate and loving.

What I'd like to introduce is the concept of *Ichinen Sanzen*. It is a very complex and difficult topic. I'm just going to introduce the bare bones. It begins with the ten realms: hell, hungry spirit, animality, *asura* (or anger), humanity, heavenly beings, *sravaka* (disciple), *pratyekabuddha* (independently enlightened one), bodhisattva, and buddha. Those are the ten realms. And in our tradition we talk about the mutual possession of the ten realms. That means simply that in the realm of hell is also the realm of buddhahood as well as the realm of humanity.

This mutual possession leads to a hundred realms. And, we can think about a realm as something each of us fundamentally has but may not know about. Mine used to be anger, which came about as a direct result of spankings that I got as a child. It was something that I carried with me for a long time without realizing. The more I got into practicing, I began to understand the nature and the source of that anger. Because of that, I was able to heal from that anger.

That's just a simple point about understanding where we are. When we take the mutual possession of the ten realms that lead to a hundred realms, then we also have to deal with the ten "suchnesses"—those you might find in the *Lotus Sutra* in Chapter 2 referred to as the *nyoze* or suchnesses. Basically it states that we have appearance, we have nature, we have entities, we have power, we do activities, we have primary causes, environmental causes, effects, rewards, retributions, and equality, despite all of those differences.

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So, we take the ten realms and multiply those by the ten suchnesses, which gets us to a thousand, which we then multiply by the three constituents of the world. The three constituents are: the world of sentient beings; the world of the five elemental aggregates (which form body, mind and environment); and the world of non-sentient beings, which is the land where living beings live. Now, I'm not going to go much deeper into that. I encourage you to look that up. But there's a point to understanding and knowing about it.

When we talk about suchness, for example, we're talking about our appearance, our nature, and the entities that we are. All of us have that, the world has that; every thing that exists has all of those suchnesses. If we understand our fundamental realm from hell to buddhahood and understand that that realm is also reflected in our appearance, nature, entity, and how we show up in the world, then we see how our entity has a footprint on this earth. All of those things together lead us to better relate and understand each other.

If I can view you as an individual that is somewhere in any of those ten realms with all of those ten suchnesses, and understand that perhaps your fundamental being might be governed by humanity, then I can look at you and see that humanity reflected in your face. It's reflected in the human nature. It's reflected in your actions. I can begin to understand you better and then I can also begin to understand myself, because we are mirrors of each other.

We are demonstrations of the world as we exist. And all of the things that we can do with each other in terms of coming together and understanding each other can help us to create a better world. One of the things I've learned is to be able to look at someone like Charlie Chaplin, for example, who really never had to say anything. He could use his appearance. He could use his nature and the way he looked, the entity that was Charlie Chaplin, his whole being, as a kind of power. He was able to interact with the people and the world to change the way they existed for just a few moments, or even longer.

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Something very critical could happen as he carried people through his bodily movements and his facial expressions. This is a level of power that each of us has the ability to access if we simply understand our own fundamental nature. And these times require that of us, because if we imagine a world where there is no separation, then we can imagine a way to heal the separation that currently exists.

One story I like to think about is of a teacher in Wisconsin, who had been a prisoner of war in Japan. He suffered there for three years and, as a result, came back from the war with a profound hatred of Japanese people. But he was also an artist and he became an art teacher. His work was really well respected and touched a lot of people. One day he walked into his classroom and found a student who was Japanese. Instantly, all of the hatred, anger, and rage that he had felt welled up within him upon seeing this student. He taught the class and went back to his office to question himself: *Why was I not able to really deal with what was going on with myself in seeing this person? Why do I still have this hatred?* Because it had been years since he'd been a prisoner of war.

What he did was something that many of us would never think about doing: he invited the student into his office to find out who he was. And in the course of their getting to know each other he learned that the young man had been raised in one of the internment camps. So, there was a human to human meeting there, [a meeting] of suffering to suffering. And over the years they became really good friends who encouraged each other in their art. But the thing that is most important is that each of them had to show up to exist, to present the persons that they were in order to help the other person heal.

If we can imagine that every time we encounter another person as critical for that person's awakening, for that person's wellbeing, then there's a way for us to walk in the world and help each other. But first we have to help ourselves. First we have to understand on a personal level, the fundamental condition that we all have in order to really know if our fundamental core is

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anger or if our fundamental core is hell. That within that realm of hell or anger there is still the potential for buddhahood, there is still the potential for bodhisattva or humanity.

The important thing is that our practice, whatever that is, allows us to show up and strengthen the buddhahood that exists within whatever realm we find ourselves. The more we practice, the more we strengthen our buddhahood and the potential to be a bodhisattva to help others, to really lead others to awakening. And this is a very important part of practice. I think that's necessary for these uncertain times.

It's very easy to get caught up in anger and hell and talk about the way we suffer because of the way the world is today. But the world is also our demonstration of what exists within us. And if we are really able to look at it and examine what the world looks like and how it impacts us, if we understand, as the Buddha taught us so well, that these are temporary circumstances that we find ourselves in, it becomes much easier for us to deal with them.

For many folks, the concept of Ichinen Sanzen doesn't make much sense. It's great theoretically, but the application allows us to open our hearts to see past the separation that occurs through racism and sexism, and against different groups of people such as police and protesters, to instead see the humanity within each other. Once we do that it becomes very difficult for us, I think, to harm each other.

There's another expression that comes from a Sufi poet, Hafiz: *How did the rose ever open its heart and give the world all its beauty?* That's what I'm asking all of us to do, to give the world all of our beauty by opening our hearts. And as Buddhists we follow a teaching that calls for compassion, mercy, and for all types of lovingkindness.

And, specifically from my perspective, we ought to hug each other more. Only through greeting each other this way and embracing whoever we find can we allow them to blossom just as they

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will allow us to blossom, and in blossoming together we create a beautiful world. That is my hope for these uncertain times. Thank you.