PART I: “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” Chapter: To Learn About Death is To Learn How to Live
Section 1: An Irrepressible Zest for Life – the Spirit of the “Life Span” Chapter

“Life Span of the Thus Come One” Chapter Overview:

[Abbreviated as the “Life Span” chapter.] The sixteenth chapter of the Lotus Sutra, in which Shakyamuni Buddha reveals that he originally attained enlightenment in the far distant past rather than in his present life in India as his listeners generally thought. The chapter title “The Life Span of the Thus Come One” means the duration of Shakyamuni’s life as a Buddha, that is, how much time has passed since he originally attained Buddhahood. He proceeds to explain that, while all heavenly and human beings and asuras believe that he first attained enlightenment in his present lifetime under the bodhi tree, it has actually been an incalculable length of time since he attained enlightenment. In the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra, Shakyamuni thus refutes the view that he attained enlightenment for the first time in this life in India and reveals his original attainment of enlightenment in the remote past. T’ien-t’ai refers to this in The Words and Phrases of the Lotus Sutra and The Profound Meaning of the Lotus Sutra as “opening the near and revealing the distant,” “casting off the transient and revealing the true,” and “opening the transient and revealing the true.” Here, “the transient” means Shakyamuni’s transient status, and “the true” means his true identity. From his original attainment of Buddhahood, Shakyamuni declares, he has constantly been here in this sahā world preaching the Law, appearing as many different Buddhas and using various means to save living beings. In answer to the question of what Shakyamuni practiced in order to reach the stage of non-regression, Nichiren (1222–1282) identified it as the Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo.

Key terms & concepts in this section:

- Essential teaching (WLS-4, 11)
- Casting off the transient and revealing the true (WLS-4, 12-13)
- Shakyamuni’s “actual attainment in the remote past” (WLS-4, 14)
- Numberless major world system dust particle kalaps (WLS-4, p. 14)
- Provisional Buddha (WLS-4, 16)
- “Originally I practiced the bodhisattva way” (WLS-4, 24-25)

Discussion Questions:

- *The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra* states, “The ultimate purpose of practicing Nichiren Buddhism is to awaken to the eternity of life” (WLS-4, 16). Why is it important to grasp the eternity of life?
- How can we practice “enlightenment in the Latter Day of the Law?” (WLS-4, 17)
- On page 23 President Ikeda says, “Life span is a matter of life force” (WLS-4, 23). What does this mean for us as practitioners of Buddhism?
- According to the text, why does the Buddha “enter extinction” (or Nirvana)? (WLS-4, 25)
**The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra vol. IV, p. 19**

“Passing through the round of births and deaths, one makes one’s way on the land of the Dharma nature, or enlightenment, that is inherent within oneself.” (OTT, 52) WLS-4, p. 19

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**The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra vol. IV, p. 21**

“This body of ours in the end will become nothing more than the soil of the hills and fields. Therefore, it is useless to begrudge your life, for though you may wish to, you cannot cling to it forever. Even people who live a long time rarely live beyond the age of one hundred. And all the events of a lifetime are like the dream one dreams in a brief nap.” (“The Fourteen Slanders,” WND-1, 760)

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**The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra vol. IV, p. 24**

“The doctrine of three thousand realms in a single moment of life is found only in one place, hidden in the depths of the ‘Life Span’ chapter of the essential teaching of the Lotus Sutra.” (“The Opening of the Eyes,” WND-1, 224)

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**The Wisdom of the Lotus Sutra vol. IV, p. 26**

“If, among all the numerous sutras, this “Life Span” chapter should be lacking, it would be as though there were no sun or moon in the sky, no supreme ruler in the nation, no gems in the mountains and rivers, and no spirit in human beings.” (“The Opening of the Eyes, WND-1, 256)