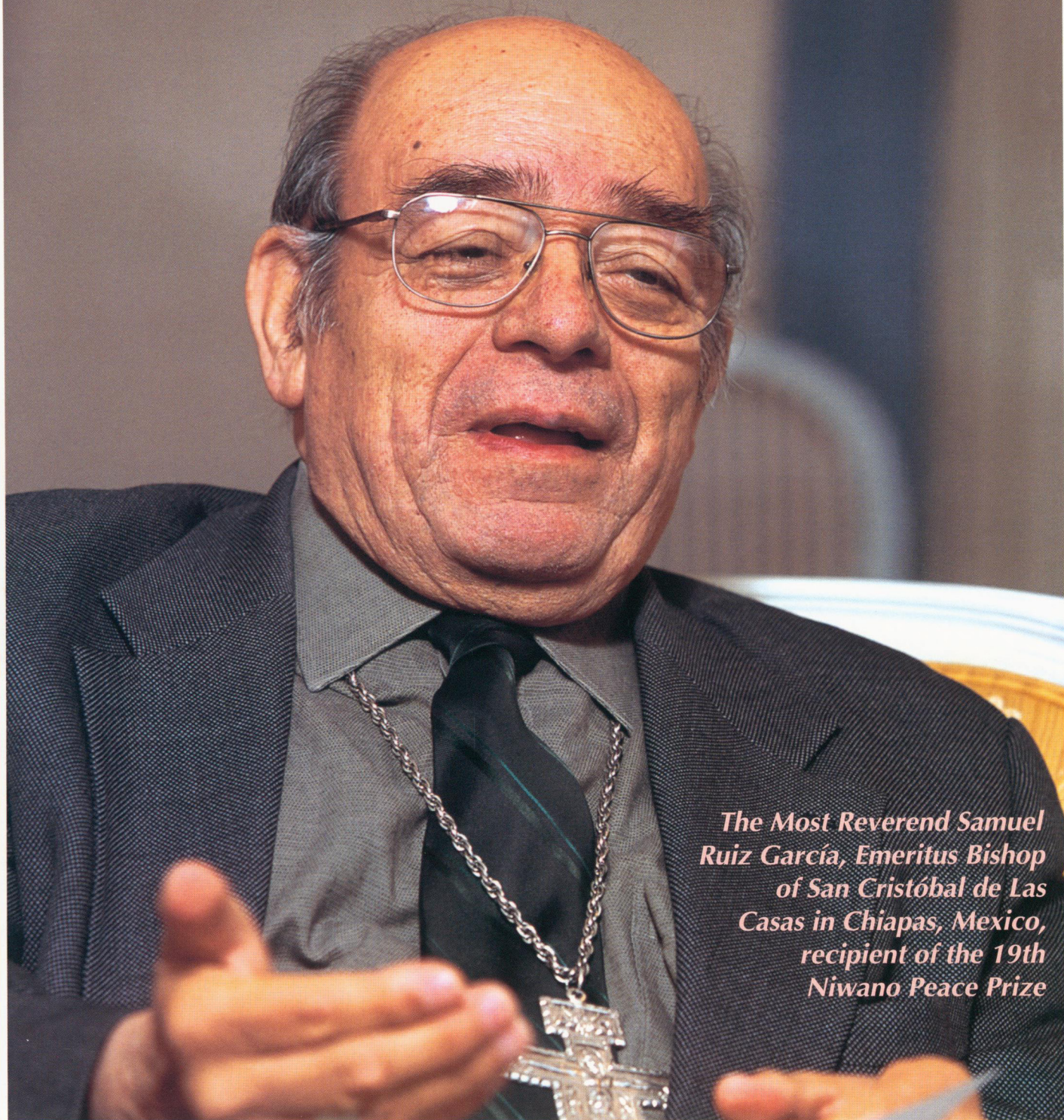


FOR LIVING BUDDHISM AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

DHARMA WORLD

JULY/AUG. 2002 Vol. 29



*The Most Reverend Samuel
Ruiz García, Emeritus Bishop
of San Cristóbal de Las
Casas in Chiapas, Mexico,
recipient of the 19th
Niwano Peace Prize*

Buddhist Wisdom for Daily Life

The author of these readable, enlightening guides was the late NIKKYO NIWANO, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, whose other publications in English include *Shakyamuni Buddha: A Narrative Biography*; *A Guide to the Threefold Lotus Sutra*; *A Buddhist Approach to Peace*; *Lifetime Beginner: An Autobiography*; and *Invisible Eyelashes: Seeing What Is Closest to Us*.

THE MEANINGFUL LIFE

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THE RICHER LIFE

Happiness is elusive: it is not something fixed but, like everything within and around us, is affected by continuous change. To live a richer life, in harmony with ourselves and our environment, we need a deeper perception of the flow of life. When we discover how change can be directed, we can decide the direction in which we will grow.

With practical, down-to-earth advice and countless examples, this book shows that it is possible for us to shape our own lives. The secret of the richer life is paradoxically simple: instead of being constantly at the mercy of outside forces, we can put things in motion around us. The author shows how, using a variety of techniques, we can glimpse the richness inherent in each moment of life and create a fuller, richer life.

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181 pp. 10.9 cm. x 17.4 cm.
ISBN 4-333-01026-8. LCC 82-147941.

\$6.95 (softcover)

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Cover photo: The Most Reverend Samuel Ruiz García, a Roman Catholic bishop in Chiapas, Mexico, is the recipient of the 19th Niwano Peace Prize. Bishop Ruiz has devoted himself untiringly especially to raising the social standing of the indigenous communities in his native country of Mexico and elsewhere in Central and South America. The presentation ceremony took place in Tokyo on May 9.

DHARMA WORLD presents Buddhism as a practical living religion and promotes inter-religious dialogue for world peace. It espouses views that emphasize the dignity of life, seeks to rediscover our inner nature and bring our lives more in accord with it, and investigates causes of human suffering. It tries to show how religious principles help solve problems in daily life and how the least application of such principles has wholesome effects on the world around us. It seeks to demonstrate truths that are fundamental to all religions, truths on which all people can act.

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Inner Purity

In September last year, bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) was found in Japanese cattle. Although so far only four animals have been discovered with the disease, because of the possibility that humans might be infected and come down with the fatal variant Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, Japanese people have become extremely nervous. Sales of beef at supermarkets have dropped to 40 percent of former average levels, and some meat processing companies have gone bankrupt. The number of people eating beef at restaurants has declined markedly.

This recently made me reflect upon various things. The Islamic religion strictly prohibits the consumption of pork. And Hindus do not eat beef. If these two religions did not prohibit the consumption of pork and beef, the number of pigs and cows being raised would not be enough to go around, and an immense rise in meat prices could result.

It seems to me that our knowledge of the outbreak of BSE, and our associated fears about Creutzfeldt-Jakob disease, should lead us to rethink our present diet, dependent as it is upon meat. Christianity and Buddhism are regarded as lacking strict precepts with respect to dietary prohibitions.

If we look at early Buddhism, Shakyamuni himself never prohibited the eating of meat. When Buddhist priests perform the ascetic practice of mendicancy (in which the priest carries a bowl from house to house in order to beg for food), this also functioned as a way to allow the people who give offerings to perform a good deed and accumulate merit. If there were some kind of regulation on what the priest could or could not eat, this would prevent unconditional acceptance of whatever food was offered as charity.

Because everything that is given must be accepted with thanks, naturally no prohibitions were placed on eating meat. Priests were prohibited from eating meat in later ages. At present in Japan, it is normal for priests to eat meat, although many Zen training temples preserve a strict vegetarian regime even to this day.

To be a little more precise, during the early days of Buddhism, eating meat was allowed given the following three conditions:

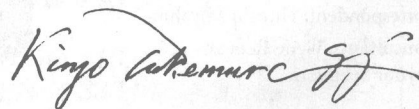
- 1) Cases in which you (the priest) have not witnessed the fowl, beast, or fish being killed for your consumption;
- 2) Cases in which you have not heard that the fowl, beast, or fish was killed for your consumption; and

- 3) Cases in which you are sure that the fowl, beast, or fish was not killed for your consumption.

The priest could eat meat that met these three conditions. However, rules created about 2,500 years ago are not going to be appropriate unchanged in modern times. Society has changed completely since those times.

A milch cow about to be examined as a suspected case of BSE in Chiba Prefecture in September 2001.

For Shakyamuni, the most important thing was the purity of one's inner self. The important thing is whether a person's heart is pure or not, and we do not become pure by not eating meat. However, with the advent of BSE, perhaps it is time for us to take another look at the relationship between the world of humans and the world of animals, and ask ourselves if our methods of raising domestic animals, for example, feeding herbivorous cows bone meal made from cow bones, do not go against nature. □



Kinzo Takemura

Photo: Kyodo

DHARMA WORLD is published in cooperation with the lay Buddhist association Rissho Kosei-kai. Rissho Kosei-kai welcomes access from readers of DHARMA WORLD to its English-language website, which provides up-to-date information about current events and activities of the organization in the home page section. Anyone interested can browse it by accessing the URL:

<http://www.rk-world.org/>

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Our Goals Have No Time Limit

by Nikkyo Niwano

This essay is part of a continuing series of translations from a volume of inspirational writings by the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai. DHARMA WORLD will continue to publish these essays because of their lasting value as guidance for the practice of one's faith in daily life.

Well over half a century has passed since Rissho Kosei-kai was founded. Nevertheless, however much time passes or the structure of our organization changes, the essence of bodhisattva practice never alters. Unlike commercial enterprises, we are not concerned with the aim of sales in a certain fiscal term, but rather with our ultimate goal of establishing the Land of Tranquil Light, a world at peace. We cannot set any length of time for how long this is likely to take, such as within three or even ten years. Shakyamuni likewise never set any time restrictions on how long it would take to attain enlightenment. Rather, he constantly encouraged his followers to strive with determination.

Constant effort (Skt: *vīrya*) is itself the goal and the purpose for which we walk the Buddha Way. However, since this alone might tend to give rise to sloth (Skt: *kausīdya*), it is necessary to schedule the regular functions of the year, as well as fix the aims for our temporary activities, by skillful means, such as described in the parable of the magic city in chapter 7 of the Lotus Sutra. Since it is also difficult to practice demanding religious training for a long time, which only tends to cause pain, all the more important is it to give happiness rather than simply to take away suffering, that is, to undertake pleasant training that fills the heart with joy.

There may be those who say that people cannot strive without a goal, but it is because we cannot say "This is the end" that we are able to continue to seek the path, no matter how far it may take us. It is quite natural, just as every flood eventually ebbs, that if we are satisfied with what we have attained and thankfully announce we have reached the end, we cannot grow any more. When the Mieido, a hall dedicated to a portrait of the founder of the

Jodo sect of Japanese Buddhism, Honen, was completed within the grounds of the temple complex of Chion-in, the sect's head temple in Kyoto, two ridge-tiles were deliberately left off the roof. It is said that members of the Jodo sect think their religious practice remains far from perfect, that they must continue to strive, seeking perfection to the end.

The people of old knew very well that decline sets in as soon as anyone, whether an individual or an organization, has decided that everything has been already achieved. We should engrave this deeply on our hearts.

Past, Present, and Future

When we read the Lotus Sutra attentively, we become aware that Shakyamuni acknowledged the three worlds of past, present, and future and that he taught his followers with this in mind. Today exists because of yesterday; tomorrow exists because of today. Past, present, and future might be able to exist like a long stretch of yesterday, today, and tomorrow. Why, therefore, did the Buddha say that everything is emptiness and that there is no permanent self? He did so because he wanted to teach people not to attach themselves to things, nor be beguiled by them, and to remove themselves from all self-centeredness.

The Milindapanha describes how King Milinda questioned the eminent Buddhist priest Nagasena about *samsara*, the cycle of birth and death, or transmigration. Nagasena replied suggestively, "When we light one candle from the flame of another, the flame might be considered either as being that of the original candle or something newly come into being." Those who recite the Lotus Sutra have no doubt about this, but nevertheless it is not a matter to be proved scientifically. Just as we can teach the Buddhist notion of nothingness from the standpoint of existence, once setting up a hurdle like transmigration, we can put ourselves into the religious training of the effort to clear it.

Ichiro Kobayashi (1876–1944), who taught at various universities in Tokyo and published thirteen volumes of

Nikkyo Niwano, the late founder of the Buddhist association Rissho Kosei-kai, was an honorary president of the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) and was honorary chairman of Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) at the time of his death in October 1999.

Founder Nikkyo Niwano enjoys a talk with local Rissho Kosei-kai members at San Francisco Airport. He was returning from New York in June 1978, where he addressed the first Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly Devoted to Disarmament on behalf of the World Conference on Religion and Peace.

lectures about the Lotus Sutra, was well known for the depth of his faith in that sutra. Just before he died, he was visited by another well-known scholar of the Lotus Sutra, Shobun Kubota (1896–1986), a professor emeritus of Rissho University in Tokyo. There, on what was to be his deathbed, Kobayashi said to Kubota, “I want to start my study of the sutra all over again.”

Kobayashi was not just a scholar immersed in his books, but also a firm believer in the eternally great life-force of the Original Buddha, a man who understood human life and death as they are described in the Lotus Sutra. What wonderful words he spoke on his deathbed!

Heaven and Hell Are in Us

Nichiren (1222–82) said that both heaven and hell exist in our own minds. As we seek to build a world at peace, it is important that we should vow that the very place where we live, the land under our feet, will become a paradise. There is a folk song that goes like this:

In neither east nor west is there any paradise.
Look back upon the road you have traveled,
Which is your very self.

In other words, we should not seek paradise in any geo-

graphical direction, but rather consider well the path upon which we have been walking from the past. This should tell us whether we are following the way of paradise or of hell. The path to happiness is within each of us.

Perhaps there are some people who think it is extravagant to expend a great amount of money on something they can buy now which they somehow feel certain will gain in value in the future. This is not true extravagance, however. True extravagance is when you do not take either profit or loss into consideration. To be absorbed in something with no thought about its value—that is true extravagance.

Members of Rissho Kosei-kai devote themselves to the good of others without thought of profit or loss, and there is no greater “extravagance” than this. It is those who lead their daily lives with rich and full hearts who are able to have lives of the greatest extravagance. To pursue bodhi-sattva practice in this hard world, without thought of profit or loss, is something far beyond the capacity of ordinary people. It is no accident that the Story of King Resplendent, chapter 27 of the Lotus Sutra, tells us that perhaps from a promise made in an earlier life, “We, richly blessed through a former lot, have met the Buddha-law in this life.” □

WCRP Declares Statement against the Conflict between Israel and Palestine

On April 8, the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) issued a statement in the name of its Executive Committee under the title "Religions for Peace in the Middle East" (*see below*). In the statement, the WCRP expressed its concern against the recent conflict between Israel and Palestine, and called upon the world organizations to tackle with a peaceful solution in the Holy Land. The WCRP also introduced a religious summit meeting held at Alexandria, Egypt, in January, chaired by Dr. George Carey,

the retiring archbishop of Canterbury and a WCRP president; the organization appealed to the world, saying that a just and sustainable peace requires not only political contributions but also the mobilization of the civilizational legacies of the three Abrahamic religions in the Holy Land—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The statement bears the joint signature of 13 members of the Executive Committee including the WCRP moderator H.R.H. Prince El-Hassan bin Talal of the Hashemite Kingdom of

Jordan and the vice-moderator, the Very Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky, director of Ecumenical Affairs of the Orthodox Church in America. Risho Kosei-kai President Nichiko Niwano also signed the statement as a president of the WCRP.

The statement was to be sent to the world nations' delegations to the United Nations in New York, Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan of the UN, United States President George W. Bush, representatives of the European Union, and the regional chapters of the WCRP. □

Religions for Peace in the Middle East

A Statement of the Executive Committee, World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP)

The anguish of innocent suffering and the cries for peace with justice in the Holy Land have seized the hearts of people around the world. As representatives of the world's religions, we are united in rejecting terror, the intentional killing of innocent people, whether perpetrated by individuals or by states. We are also united in our conviction that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples have the right to live in peace and security as neighbors. This can be realized through the creation of a Palestinian state and the recognition of the right of the state of Israel to exist, both states with secure, internationally recognized borders.

Therefore, we call first upon Israeli and Palestinian leaders to work together to immediately end the recent military occupation of the Palestinian territories and reject and condemn all terrorism, and enter into a formal ceasefire and begin political negotiations aimed at the establishment of a just and durable peace.

Second, we note with gratitude the creative work of the member states of the Arab League in their recent proffering of a peace plan, which sets forth conditions for the establishment of a Palestinian state and normal relations with Israel. We encourage and support all relevant parties to work toward achieving the goals of this plan.

Third, we call upon the United Nations to take the immediate steps necessary to create peace through the mandates and instruments available to it.

Fourth, we call upon all states around the world to exercise their good offices in building and supporting conditions

for peace and to desist from actions that could further exacerbate the conflict.

Fifth, we call specifically upon the United States to exercise peacemaking offices, with the vigor commensurate with its capacity, to ensure justice for both parties. We offer our encouragement for the success of the mission of US Secretary of State Colin Powell.

Political leaders must exercise primary roles in stopping all forms of violence and establishing a peace process for the peoples in the Holy Land. They need and deserve every support. But their roles, if essential, are not sufficient. Paralleling political contributions, undergirding, guiding, and supporting them, must also be the engagement of the profound civilizational legacies of the region. These legacies are the three Abrahamic religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Far from necessarily being sources of division, these traditions must be grasped as major assets for peacemaking. Mobilizing these assets is both an urgent and long-term necessity.

In this regard, we commend the courageous leadership of our Jewish, Christian, and Muslim colleagues in the Holy Land, who first met in Alexandria, Egypt, in January of this year. They committed themselves to religious cooperation for peace with justice and to common living. We pledge ourselves in solidarity with their mission of peace, and call upon religious believers and men and women of good will around the world to support every step toward a just and sustainable peace. □

WCRP Makes Second Donation to the UN for Afghan Refugees

On April 22, four representatives of the WCRP, including Secretary General Dr. William F. Vendley, visited the UN headquarters in New York and gave a donation of \$500,000 directly to UN Secretary-General Kofi A. Annan. This is the second half of the donation; the rest had already been presented to UN First Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette by Risho Kosei-kai president Rev. Nichiko Niwano, an international president of the WCRP, at the WCRP international symposium entitled "Rejecting Terror, Promoting Peace with Justice: Religions Respond" held in New York on October 23–24, 2001. The total donation of \$1 million is to be utilized for relief for the victims of the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, as well as for the Afghan refugees and displaced persons created by the local fighting and the military actions by US and UK forces.

In the succeeding conversation, Mr. Annan told Dr. Vendley that it is significant that interreligious cooperation enabled this donation to the victims, since perversion of religious thought is considered by many to be the cause of the present international situation. Mr. Annan expressed his gratitude especially toward Risho Kosei-kai members who had played a leading role in raising the donation. He also praised last year's symposium, which enabled the WCRP and the UN to strengthen their partnership and emphasized the importance of the WCRP's mission for interreligious cooperation and the role of the religionist in the efforts for world peace.

On April 24, Rev. Niwano received a message of gratitude from Mr. Annan, in which the UN Secretary-General said, "Risho Kosei-kai and the other faith communities which contributed to this gift have demonstrated once again the positive role they can play when they unite in the name of our common humanity." □

WCRP leaders demonstrate their commitment to problems involving children in the symposium co-hosted with UNICEF.

WCRP and UNICEF Co-sponsor Symposium on Children

The United Nations convened a Special Session of the General Assembly on Children at the UN Headquarters in New York from May 8 through 10. On May 7, prior to the opening of the session, UNICEF and the WCRP co-sponsored a symposium titled "Commitment of the World's Religions to Children" at the Carriage House Center on Global Issues in New York. The symposium served as an opportunity for world religious leaders to demonstrate their shared commitment to various problems involving children. Some 100 people, including leaders of the world's major religions, senior UN officials, and representatives of UN agencies and NGOs took part. Rev. Norio Sakai, honorary executive board member of Risho Kosei-kai, participated as a panelist. In her opening remarks, Ms. Carol Bellamy, UNICEF executive director, expressed her high hope that religionists will take the initiative in transforming schemes for children into practice.

The WCRP is planning a project to curb the increase of AIDS orphans in Africa and to save affected children with the help of local religious institutions, including churches and mosques, that have close and extended ties

with their communities. The Most Rev. Gunnar Stålsett, Church of Norway bishop of Oslo and a president of the WCRP, reported on the commitment of the WCRP to help AIDS orphans, announcing that the organization was to hold a meeting in Kenya in June, dedicated to the issue. Rev. Sakai, referring to a Lotus Sutra passage about the Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara's appearing in the world in various forms, including a child, to save all sentient beings, said that children enable us to be aware of the problems the world faces by experiencing suffering themselves. Saving children, continued Rev. Sakai, equals saving the whole world. A multireligious declaration that emphasized the moral duty to make the world fit for children was presented to Dr. Han Seung-soo, president of the General Assembly. □

Children's Conference Held in New York

As one of the side events of the UN Special Session on Children, a Children's Conference was held under the theme "For Our Future" at the Church Center in New York on May 10. The conference was promoted by the Arigatou Foundation, presided over by Rev. Takeyasu Miyamoto, leader of Myochikai Buddhist organization headquartered in Tokyo. It also was a

Youth discussing "action plans" for a better future.

follow-up to the Conference of Children for the Coming Generation (CCG), organized by the Arigatou Foundation in cooperation with UNICEF and Focolare Movement, which was held at the Myochikai Chiba Holy Land in Chiba Prefecture, Japan, in July 2000. The purpose of this year's conference was for the children to discuss what they should do to better understand themselves and others, transcending their differences of nationality, ethnicity, and religion, and to realize world peace.

Forty-four children, aged from 12 to 18, from among 5 different religions from 17 nations, took part in the conference. Twelve junior and senior high-school student members from 10 local

branches of Rissho Kosei-kai in Japan also actively exchanged ideas and deepened their friendships with the other participants.

On the previous day, at the preparatory meeting for the conference held at the Rissho Kosei-kai New York Buddhist Center, the participants confirmed the purpose of the CCG and the contents of the CCG message adopted on that occasion and sent to all world leaders. They then drew up an "action plan" that included such guidelines as "Love others first," "Initiate actions ourselves," and "Do not be selfish" through discussions, during which they were divided into seven groups.

On the following day, at a panel discussion held at the Church Center,

each separate group of children presented its own plan. Each plan was full of affection, generosity, and the spirit of sharing, and showed the relations of the children themselves with their friends, family, education, environment, and society. UN staff members and members of NGOs from several countries who attended the discussion session were moved by the presentations and were left with such impressions as "They should be given the chance to disseminate their thoughts to others" and "We adults should strive to save the children who need our support all over the world." At this session, the children also delivered the CCG message and nearly 320,000 signatures in support of the message to the representative of UNICEF. □

Rissho Kosei-kai Joins GNRC Conference

With the participation of more than 100 representatives of religious organizations and NGOs from 36 countries, the Conference of the Global Network of Religions for Children (GNRC) was held from May 12 to 14, at the Maryknoll Society Center, Maryknoll City, New York, under the auspices of the Arigatou Foundation. The conference investigated the causes of many problems facing children after the UN Special Session on Children. Rev. Norio Sakai, honorary executive board member of Rissho Kosei-kai, presided over the plenary meeting to discuss ways to make a contribution to a solution of the problems, while Rev. Keiji Kunitomi, director of the Youth Division, led the subcommittee meeting dealing with the issues of child abuse and violence, accompanied by six youths from the organization's students' groups all over Japan. The participants from countries in South Asia, Central Asia, Africa, the Middle East, Latin America, and Europe confirmed the importance of promoting the eradication of poverty and making contributions in the area of education, including the strengthening of such spiritual values as faith, ethics, and justice. □

A subcommittee meeting of the GNRC at the Maryknoll Society Center.

Rissho Kosei-kai's Special Advisor Naganuma Dies

On April 7, Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma, special advisor to Rissho Kosei-kai and the organization's former chairman, died of heart failure at Kosei General Hospital in Tokyo at the age of 78. He had supported the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, and the co-founder, Rev. Myoko Naganuma, since the earliest days of Rissho Kosei-kai. He served as the organization's chairman for 42 years, from 1952 until his retirement in 1993. "Right Effort" and "Aspire for the Way" were his favorite mottoes. He always enjoyed meeting people to share the Dharma and visited branches throughout Japan and overseas to give guidance to members, who revered Rev. Naganuma for his warm and upright personality. During the ceremony upon his retirement in 1993, Founder Niwano praised him as "his best partner," as someone he trusted completely to manage Rissho Kosei-kai. Rev. Naganuma played an important role in promoting cooperation among religions and worked for peace through the activities of such interreligious organizations as the Shinshuren (Federation of New Religious Organizations of Japan) and the WCRP. He also served

Rev. Motoyuki Naganuma (1923–2002)

as chairman of the Niwano Peace Foundation. Since his retirement as chairman of Rissho Kosei-kai, he had continued to support the organization in many ways as its special advisor. □

Shinshuren Supports JEN's Refugee Project

As a part of a humanitarian assistance program for Afghans affected by prolonged war and severe drought, Shinshuren has donated 2 million Japanese yen to JEN, a Japanese multi-organizational NGO, to serve as a fund for promoting its relief activities for refugees and displaced persons in Af-

ghanistan. The sum entrusted to JEN will be used to rebuild the lives of the Afghan refugees. In the war-ravaged country, JEN has been promoting support activities, such as distribution of relief supplies to help Afghans survive the severe winter in their country, and facilitating education for school children. Shinshuren also plans a long-term assistance program for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. □

Blankets Sent to Earthquake Victims in Afghanistan

Under the initiative of JEN, on March 28, some 2,948 blankets were transported to the northeastern Afghanistan area struck by a series of earthquakes on March 25 and 26, which registered between 5.0 and 6.0 on the Richter scale, and were then distributed to the victims. It was reported that the epicenter of the quake was in the Nahrin district in Baghlan province, where 90 percent of the houses and buildings were felled, 60 percent of which being completely razed to the ground. The number of victims is believed to range from 800 to 2,000. The report also said that it had been extremely difficult to operate relief activities in the area because of a long-lasting chilly rain, which prevented the rescue party from landing helicopters carrying relief items on the muddy ground, and because of the danger caused by the numerous land mines that were laid during the civil war.

Members of the Kabul office of JEN decided to send the victims the blankets that were being saved for such an emergency in the organization's storehouse in Baghlan. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance to Afghanistan (UNOCHA) and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) undertook the operation.

Currently, the Kabul office members are engaged in garnering further support. They also plan to continue support activities around the area in cooperation with UNOCHA. □

The late Rev. Naganuma, who headed the Japanese delegation to the 27th World Congress of the International Association for Religious Freedom held in Hamburg, Germany, in 1990, praying at a memorial for Jews who perished in the Holocaust.

The Vatican Reaffirms Its Interreligious Commitment

The Catholic Church is relentlessly committed to the interreligious path undertaken in 1965 after the Second Vatican Council with the issuing of the document *Nostra Aetate*, on the relation of the church with non-Christian religions. Today, more than ever, this commitment is felt as paramount to the coexistence of different faiths in the hottest areas of the planet and as the foundation upon which peace might be established.

This undertaking of Vatican II and its developments were reviewed on April 18 and 19 in the course of an international conference set in Rome's Pontifical Atheneum Regina Apostolorum on the "Dialogue of Pope John Paul II with the 21st Century." Rabbi David Novak, professor of Jewish Studies at the University of Toronto, Canada, spoke on the future of Jewish-Christian relations.

"The Jewish-Catholic dialogue that has been underway for the past 37 years," he said, "has not only comprised formal dialogues and symposia, but also the development of long-term friendships between some of the most important Catholic and Jewish theologians." Rabbi Novak is one of the four outstanding scholars who issued, in September 2000, *Dabru Emet* (Speak the Truth: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity), a Jewish response to the Catholic-Jewish relationship that began with *Nostra Aetate*. The statement was signed by over 200 rabbis and other Jewish scholars and was translated into at least eight languages. "What *Dabru Emet* has done is to encourage, and even force, Jews who are engaged in any kind of relations with the non-Jewish world to speak theologically. *Nostra Aetate* and *Dabru Emet* offer a way to get our dialogue back on a solid theological track," he affirmed.

The conference was held shortly after the Vatican Press Office published the English translation of *The Jewish*

People and Their Sacred Scriptures in the Christian Bible, first issued by the Pontifical Biblical Commission to promote better awareness "of the fraternal ties that closely unite Christians with the Jewish People." Father Albert Vanhoye, secretary of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, pointed out that "the document makes Christians aware that we really have a lot in common with Jews, and not just in secondary matters but in fundamental questions." Father Vanhoye emphasized that the document ends by saying: "Dialogue is possible because Jews and Christians possess a rich cultural patrimony that unites them, and it must be promoted to increasingly eliminate prejudices and misunderstandings on the part of one another, to favor better knowledge of the common patrimony, and to reinforce reciprocal ties."

During an audience with the Bishops of Nigeria, Pope John Paul II reaffirmed the church's commitment to dialogue with non-Christian-based faiths and referred to "the necessary dialogue with the followers of African traditional religion and with Islam." Indeed, the pope referred to the obligation of every government "to ensure that the equality of all citizens before the law is never violated for religious reasons—thus the cultural heritage of the numerous ethnic groups present in Nigeria must be seen as a source of enrichment for the nation, and not a cause of conflict and division."

On April 28, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Turkey's Department for Religions signed a Declaration of Intentions, in which both parties reaffirm their commitment to strengthen the dialogue between Turkey, a primarily Muslim country, and the Holy See. Bishop Michael Fitzgerald, secretary of the same Pontifical Council, told the Vatican Radio that the purpose of the agreement is "to promote good understanding between Islam and Christianity, and to eliminate prejudices." It is the first time for the Council to establish agreements with governmental institutions in order to promote interreligious dialogue. "There is no central authority in the Muslim world, . . . and in a certain

sense we are also obliged to engage in dialogue with different countries, such as Iran, Turkey, Libya, and Egypt," Bishop Fitzgerald explained. The agreement supports "liberty of religion, of belief, and of conscience."

The church's ongoing relationship with the Buddhist faith was vitalized by Francis Cardinal Arinze, president of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In his message for Vesakh, celebrating the birth of Shakyamuni Buddha, His Eminence said that Buddhists and Catholics must work together to "encourage hope and to build a culture based on this hope in order to contribute to a more peaceful world in the future." The Buddhist teaching and tradition, the cardinal said, upholds respect for all beings. "On this common respect for human beings Christians and Buddhists should build a culture of life," the cardinal affirmed, adding that this "would be a way to counteract and overcome the culture of death."

While in Rome, the representatives of nine different religious faiths convened at the Colonna Palace to confront their different perspectives of the concept of "paradise" seen from its spiritual dimension. The encounter was an "occasion for the promotion of interreligious dialogue," said one of the organizers. The pluralism of faith and cultures requires the understanding also of the "other's paradise," the audience was told. In particular, cultural promotion set in an interreligious background may serve to encourage the resolution of conflicts. "Paradise is the participation in divine life, in the purpose of creation," said Traiano Valdman, from the Christian Orthodox Church of Rumania. Master Fausto Taiten Guareschi, from the Soto Zen Monastery Shobozan Fudenji, in northern Italy, and former president of Italy's Buddhist Union, introduced the audience to the concept of nirvana, and stated that the place of the Buddha is among humankind, with those who suffer. Other participants included Giacometta Limentatni, from Italy's Jewish Community, and Yogananda Giri, from Italy's Hinduist Union. □

Eva Ruth Palmieri

The Poor Are Creators of History

*The 19th Niwano Peace Prize Acceptance Address
by Bishop Samuel Ruiz García*

The Niwano Peace Prize, an annual award that honors individuals and groups that have contributed significantly to peace in the spirit of religion, was presented this year to the Most Reverend Samuel Ruiz García, Emeritus Bishop of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico. Bishop Ruiz has been engaged in elevating the social standing of indigenous communities in Mexico and elsewhere in Central and South America for more than forty years. The official presentation ceremony was held in Tokyo on May 9, in which 200 people took part and congratulated the recipient. Following is the text of the acceptance address by Bishop Ruiz.

I am still bewildered by the news that I was nominated for, and later selected to receive, the 19th Niwano Peace Prize. My surprise is even greater, now that the international horizon has changed and we are once again living on a planet at war. Time passes quickly and distances us from the historical opportunity to make global decisions that could change the economic and political structures that generate violence and death in our society, instead of legitimizing a bellicose response that adds the death of more innocent people to the already long list of victims of this unjust system.

Furthermore, given the context I have just described, I ask myself, How can one be grateful for a prize such as this one? How can one feel pleased when the prize is awarded in recognition of the suffering of so many people and of the violation of their human rights?

Any prize awarded for the defense of human rights gives recognition to the existence of human-rights abuses and the lack of respect for the rights themselves. Unfortunately, receiving this prize signifies that we are still waiting for the time in which human dignity is fully respected in Mexico and particularly, in Chiapas.

Prizes of this nature help us to come closer to situations of death, sorrow, war, and violence through a positive channel. In other words, they reveal the reality of pain that originates from injustice and in an ingenious fashion, call greater attention to it.

I accept this recognition on behalf of all those to whom it truly belongs, and who cannot receive it in person because they have been silenced, because they are in jail, or because they are running for their lives.

But they are not the only human beings who are suffering from violence and violations to their rights. Throughout the Americas, there are many more who are excluded, who do not have access to a hot meal or the basic minimum they need to live in dignity.

In the midst of so much suffering and violence, we perceive the good news that comes to us from the poor.

The Good News from the Poor

In fact, our hope for the future comes from the poor, from indigenous peoples and from peasants. They are the ones who give meaning to time and reaffirm our hope to see changes in the economic system that exploits them, the political system that excludes them, and the social system that denigrates them.

The poor bring into evidence the selfishness and conflicts of human history, but they are also the force behind the most significant changes in our history.

They are the historical mediators of our salvation. They are the reference point for real human relations, and their dignity and well-being constitute the foundation for formulating an economic system with legitimacy. They are the reason we can describe the course of history, and without them we would not understand the sense of our existence.

The prize that I am receiving today enables me to once again denounce the suffering of the poor, of indigenous peoples, of *mestizo* peasants in the rural areas of Chiapas and throughout Mexico. At the same time, this prize gives us the possibility to share with you the message of the unjust needs that the poor have and experience every day.

I am reminded of Pascuala, a young indigenous woman who visited my home from time to time to sell bread for her survival. A young and small woman, she would walk with her head bowed down, focusing on the floor most of the time. I greeted her and asked her where she was headed. She answered, almost in a whisper, that she was going to school to learn how to read and write. I congratulated her for her efforts and encouraged her. The next day I ran into her again as she was returning from her first class. "How was your class, Pascuala?" I asked. She came closer with her head held high, looked me straight in the eye as she showed me her notebook and said, "Look what I did. I'm starting to learn to read and write," and she pointed out her first scribbled words. She had undergone an enormous transformation. She no longer felt inferior, and a huge smile lit up her face.

This new situation in Pascuala's life (that for others is a "normal" situation that comes naturally) transformed her life because she discovered herself as a human being. Now Pascuala walks erect, looking straight ahead and no longer staring at the ground.

The Right to Be Different for Being Equal

It is paradoxical that while the economic and political system considers the poor as good-for-nothings, as expendable beings, history has shown us that without the poor, there would be no changes in our own history. The poor are protagonists of change.

We are perplexed when we realize that the system that created the poor, that exploits them and makes them who they are, is the same system that rejects them and denies their very existence: ignoring, eliminating, or excluding them.

The poor become a nuisance for the system and indigenous peoples are ignored as long as they are not a vital part of the chain of production. This system, and the ideology it subscribes to, does not remotely comprehend the right to be different that should be afforded for being equal.

Thus, the warrantors of "order," these public servants, are really converted into warrantors of uniformity: of that which is non-alternative, of that which is non-other.

The right to be different for being equal, expressed in so many ways in our recent times, is fighting to be recognized as one of the rights of the poor. Today this is expressed in many different manners and most clearly by indigenous peoples.

The first Catholic bishop in the state of Chiapas, Bishop Bartolome de Las Casas, fought vehemently against those who argued that indigenous people were incapable of self-governance, denying them their liberty, their history, and their recent past. Thus, those same people considered colonial conquest and its "order," as well as the colonial presence and its "laws," as indispensable. Because "the Indians do not know what they want," "they cannot distinguish between good and evil," affirmed the courts.

Bishop Ruiz conducts the rite of confirmation for indigenous people in Chamula county, Chiapas, in 1995.

The kindness of the colonizers' charge resulted in one of the crudest systems of exploitation that the colonizers defended as necessary for the native people's own protection.

To recognize another being as different, to recognize native people and their rights, is a task that has yet to be undertaken. We were witnesses to this fact just recently in Mexico, where a law that would have created respect for the accords known as the San Andres agreements, the results of a dialogue signed by government officials and the indigenous people failed to pass.

The lack of recognition of the voice of indigenous peoples, the lack of respect for their rights, and the lack of acceptance of their different forms of existence reveal racial discrimination that we deny despite its existence. Nevertheless, they want to continue being and living as they are.

We are horrified by the fact that Power does not recognize indigenous peoples as peoples and as individuals because Power lives by the logic of the victor.

But this is the logic of Power: it is exclusive. It does not join the conqueror and the conquered in the celebration of victory; it seeks the destruction of the loser at all costs; it denies the losers their voice, any possibility of dialogue, and even their very existence. That is to say, it seeks humiliation and death instead of recognizing the discovery of difference for mutual enrichment.

Therefore, I believe that today native peoples and the poor offer both Mexico and the Americas the historical opportunity to change, to grow, and to meet one another—a historical opportunity to come together and dialogue, to rectify the path of ignorance and the cycles of poverty.

As the San Andres agreements state: "The treatment of peoples and cultures that form a part of Mexican society must be founded in respect for their differences, based on the assumption of their fundamental equality. Consequently, the State must enact policies with standards for its own action and encourage a pluralist society that actively confronts all forms of discrimination and amends social and economic inequalities."

The Rights of the Disadvantaged

It would be nonsensical to deny that the current economic option that we are using has not had beneficial results for the greater part of the Mexican population. Those who have made this choice most certainly are not a part of this majority and clearly recognize that the economy is extremely fragile, but that the current option is necessary in order to become a part of the global system of production and the global market.

The experts speak to us of capital in flight, called "sparrow" capital in Spanish, the money that migrates when faced with insecurity and the impossibility of reproducing itself in abundance. They warn us that, for the time being, the suffering of the poor will not be extinguished, that they will have to resist some more, that we must wait.

The poor are asked to revere and observe the letter of

During his stay in Japan in May to receive the Niwano Peace Prize, Bishop Ruiz visited the Peace Memorial Park in Hiroshima and offered flowers to the memorial cenotaph dedicated to the victims of the atomic bombing in 1945.

the current laws, while the holders of huge capital do not revere the minimum of their ethic duty. The frivolity with which they use our country's natural resources, migrating to the powerful countries, is a serious offense to the more than half of Mexico's population that lives in situations of extreme misery.

Once again, the poor help us to see that this abuse leads to madness and the unhinging of relations between peoples and individuals. They teach us that excessive consumption dehumanizes us and that massive destruction of forests and jungles brings an end to life.

So the poor not only confront us with the dignity of others and the recognition of their being as different, they also urge us to rebuild our world and ourselves as people.

History with All Men and Women—The Right to Our Future

The poor are not only factors that serve to stir our conscience when faced with indignity; they are also active protagonists and creators of history.

The good news from the poor is their emergence in the midst of history, seeking to recreate it and define its future course. This is the news that draws us in and pulls us together. The poor refuse to continue to live subject to other people's decisions and strive to become protagonists that define their own paths for living as humanity.

The poor give in-depth meaning and significance to time and to life for all of humanity.

As I thank you for this prize that I receive today, I not only find within it the suffering that the poor carry as a burden but also discover the recognition that you wish to give to indigenous peoples and to the poor.

Thank you very much. □

Religious Freedom and Human Flourishing

by Andrew C. Clark & Zarrín T. Caldwell

Two leaders from the IARF examine its statement of purpose—"To work for freedom of religion because it enables our search for enlightenment to flourish"—and discuss what "to flourish" really means.

If one is brought up in a democratic, industrialized society, especially in the West or in Japan, it is sometimes all too easy to take religious freedom for granted. It is hard for us to imagine, for example, what it would feel like to be put into jail for professing a genuine faith or belief system that meets the minimum requirement of not posing harm to others. We are not necessarily denied opportunities to go to school, to receive pensions, to keep our jobs, or to have our marriages registered if we believe differently from other people about the meaning of our place in the universe. We can go to a private home for a religious class and not necessarily have to worry whether the authorities will raid that home and confiscate the literature. We can share our beliefs with other willing listeners and not be afraid that this activity will be made illegal.

We can build a place of worship and pray in it peace-

fully with no anticipation that this spot, which is holy to us, will be demolished or destroyed.

Alas, there are still many places in the world where freedoms like these are not an accepted fact. Too many people still worship in secret, as doing so openly could potentially put oneself, one's family, or one's community in danger. For some individuals, admitting to believing in a certain way risks a death warrant, regardless of whether those beliefs are a private matter or a public manifestation. Just to believe in a way that is different from the accepted norm is enough to single you out for some form of persecution, little or big. It is hard for some of us to imagine a life like that. How strongly do we need to believe to withstand that kind of abuse and discrimination? Would we measure up to the test? Would our faith be strong enough?

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Zarrín T. Caldwell is Issues and Research Coordinator at the Oxford Secretariat of the IARF. In this position, she monitors religious freedom issues throughout the world and assists the General Secretary with special projects. She formerly worked for several years at the Washington office of the United Nations Association in the United States.

Answering such questions can only be hypothetical for some of us. If we have been blessed to experience religious freedom in practice, we do not think about the kind of sacrifices that others have made in order to obtain these basic rights. In the first half of the twentieth century, Jews died in concentration camps, conscientious objectors were imprisoned, believers were driven underground by atheist states, and territories were allocated on solely religious grounds, leading to pogroms. In the midst of such sacrifices, concepts like the freedom of religion and belief became enshrined in the international documents emerging from the new United Nations. The ongoing efforts of many committed individuals and various non-governmental organizations concerned with human rights have helped to put this issue squarely on the international agenda. Thus, freedom of religion is guaranteed by article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948). The text of this article reads, "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship, and observance."

It then took the UN's member states nearly twenty years (from the early 1960s) to agree to the more precise terms of the 1981 Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief. (November 25, 2001 marked the twentieth anniversary of that landmark document coming into force.)

Despite advances in international legal instruments, however, the UN Special Rapporteur for religious freedom, Professor Abdelfattah Amor, noted in his 2001 report to the UN's Human Rights Commission that "the worldwide trend as regards religion and belief is toward increased intolerance and discrimination against minorities and a failure to take account of their specific requirements and needs." Have these rights been eroding? If they have and, as some would argue, the trend toward such intolerance and discrimination is on the increase, why is this something that should concern all of us? What stake do we each have in a policy of religious freedom?

Why Religious Freedom Matters

Religious freedom should matter to all of us because religion and belief are motivating forces that guide human existence and make it meaningful. However important it is to ensure that legislation exists to allow people to meet in community with others of like mind, there is something

more fundamental at stake. In essence, religious freedom, in conjunction with interfaith dialogue, is a precondition for human flourishing. The statement of purpose for the International Association for Religious Freedom reflects these ideas by noting that the organization's goals are "to work for freedom of religion and belief because it is a precious human right that potentially enables the best within our religious lives, or our search for truth or enlightenment, to flourish." But what does "flourishing" mean? This word may, of course, have different meanings for different people. To our association, however, it means the opportunity to explore the reality that we are much more than our physical bodies and much more than the economic equations that our consumer society would attach to us. Rather, we are also of a spiritual nature and, as spiritual beings, we are tasked with developing the virtues, qualities of character, and values taught by the world's great religious and philosophical traditions. It is these sources of inspiration, and their related moral and ethical codes that are vital to the advancement of civilization.

Despite legitimate criticisms of the various injustices that have been committed in the name of religion, there is also a strong case to be made on the positive role that religions can play.

Historically, religion has provided fundamental insights about the purpose of human existence and has played an essential role in civilizing human character and in

promoting social order. A statement by the Baha'i International Community, presented to an international forum in November 2001, sums it up well. "In the midst of an age convulsed by moral crisis and social disintegration, the need for understanding about who we are as human beings is vital to the achievement of lasting peace and well-being. Historically, such insight about human existence and behavior has been provided by religion. Its indispensable function in addressing the universal inclination toward transcendence, and its essential role in civilizing human character throughout the ages, have been central to defining human identity as well as promoting social order. Through its cultivation of humanity's spiritual nature, religion has ennobled the lives of peoples everywhere and has engendered cohesion and unity of purpose within and across societies. Religion, in a very real sense, provides the warp and the woof of the social fabric—the shared beliefs and moral vision that unite people into communities and that give tangible direction and meaning to individual and collective life. The right to exercise freedom of conscience in matters of religion and belief is therefore crucial not only to satisfying the spiritual

international association for

religious freedom
belief with integrity



promptings of the aspiring soul but also to the enterprise of building harmonious and equitable patterns of living.”

Religious Freedom in Principle

In striving to work for freedom of religion and belief because it is a precious human right, the International Association for Religious Freedom focuses on a number of principles in its work.

a. Freedom from oppressive interference or discrimination by the state, government, or society’s institutions on the grounds of religion or belief.

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief mentioned above notes that “No one shall be subject to discrimination by any State, institution, group of persons, or person on the grounds of religion or other beliefs.” Regrettably, persecution and discrimination by the State (and/or other social institutions) still takes place in many forms. Recent examples are the destruction of religious property, such as the Taliban’s destruction of Buddhist statues in the Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan in the spring of 2001. There can also be discrimination against particular belief communities, such as some three years of legal action by the Russian courts against the Salvation Army or the widespread arrests of the followers of Falun Gong in China. On a more general level, legislation can also be introduced that is so restrictive that it potentially infringes on a person’s religious freedoms or beliefs. For example, minority faiths may have to fulfill tough conditions to be registered or (as in Saudi Arabia) they may be arrested for carrying out their activities. Based on these and many other examples, it is vital to continue to call the attention of the international community to these abuses and, in some small way, to try to help those most affected.

b. Mutual understanding, respect, and the promotion of harmony, or at least “tolerance,” among communities or individuals of different religions or beliefs.

Ultimately, it remains our conviction that we need to listen carefully to the form(s) that the faith and beliefs of others take while accepting our own human limitations to know the truth absolutely. It should be our joy and privilege to meet those from other faith traditions and say to ourselves, “What can we learn from them?” In this context, the association works closely with an interfaith network of some fourteen organizations committed to more effective communication and cooperation in a religiously diverse world.

Of course, the association holds that the right not to believe is just as vital as the right to believe. However, not all practices are acceptable simply because it is claimed

that they arise from religious beliefs. We advocate that understanding, respect, and harmony be the norm for inter-religious relationships, but in a self-critical context, or the seeking of “belief with integrity” (as in point c below).

c. An essential accountability by religious communities to ensure that their own practices uphold the fundamental dignity and human rights of their members and others.

There have been various cases in the press in recent years in which some religious and belief communities have engaged in practices considered to be irresponsible or even dangerous to the societies in which they operate. Examples might include a religious group encouraging suicide, terrorism, prostitution, ill treatment of minors, or the promise of divine redemption in return for large financial contributions. In such situations, governments also potentially have the right to intervene in a person’s religious beliefs in order to maintain public safety. Unfortunately, recent incidences of such abuses by religious groups have led to a backlash by governments in which freedom of religion and belief have been curtailed beyond reason. The goal, of course, is to find the appropriate balance between the right to freedom of religion and the importance of practicing it responsibly. It is because of the need for this balance that the organization is working on the development of a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities (*see below*).

Religious Freedom in Practice

It is sometimes easy to feel helpless in the face of something as ominous as religious persecution. For example, in many countries that have repressive regimes, it is hard to know what can be done to make a difference. Despite these obstacles, the International Association for Religious Freedom has developed a Strategic Plan for the period 2001–2007 that is designed to focus on certain priority activities to advance religious freedom. These are reviewed below.

1. *Supporting affected communities:* The aim of the association is to try to find practical ways to help communities that are facing a denial of religious freedom. Thus, the association works closely with its regional coordinators and member organizations to identify communities that have been victimized and to develop practical programs of support. In Japan, the Japanese Liaison Committee (for member groups of the association) organized a visit to learn more about the religious beliefs of the Ainu, the indigenous peoples of Hokkaido. The General Secretary made a similar visit this past winter to Mindanao in the Philippines to investigate how indigenous communities there are affected in their religious freedom and what practical support can be offered.

The most recent challenge is how to respond to communities in India following the tragic interreligious vio-

lence there in early 2002, in which hundreds of homes, mostly Muslim, and Islamic places of worship were destroyed. The organization is considering support for a Hindu-based organization that is rebuilding the destroyed homes and vandalized mosques. In all cases, it is vital to have an interfaith element in supporting affected communities so that members of the same faith tradition that perpetuated the outrage can demonstrate publicly their renunciation of such acts, and the need both to make restitution and to restore harmonious relations.

2. *Non-formal diplomacy*: As one of some 120 organizations in General Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, the association is able to make regular interventions on behalf of religious minorities at the United Nations. Representatives

In January 2002, IARF youth members from seven countries collaborate to lay the foundations for a Hindu temple in Gujarat, India, whose former building was damaged by the severe earthquake in the previous year.

in both New York and Geneva communicate with decision-makers on the basis of non-formal diplomacy and have close liaisons with other non-governmental organizations working in support of religious freedom. In this latter respect, the organization is proud of its role in helping to re-establish the Committee on Freedom of Religion or Belief of the Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations (CONGO) in Geneva. Upcoming activities of our work in Geneva include a special round-table on Muslim-Christian dialogue, planned for summer 2002.

3. *Young adult programs*: Through work at the association's Oxford office, the aim over the next several years is to create a global network of young adults who are trained and committed to addressing religious freedom issues and to promoting interfaith harmony and understanding. An international group of youth from seven countries was organized to repair both a mosque and a temple in the

earthquake zone of Gujarat, India, in late 2001. One of the participants said of the experience, "It seems to me that shared physical labor of the most simple and enduring kind is part of the humble spirit that helps break down barriers of culture and religion." The Rissho Koseikai lay Buddhist organization sent two young Japanese women members and was instrumental in helping to finance this project. On upcoming work, a special conference for young adults will precede the association's World Congress in the summer of 2002 (see below).

4. *Codes of conduct*: Although we can rightly demand religious freedom, we correspondingly must supply the highest ethical standards of responsible conduct. As noted in the discussion above about the need for an "essential accountability by religious communities," there are practices that cross the line of responsible behavior. With these practices in mind, the association has received funding to proceed with the development of a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities.

A selected group of experts met in the spring of 2002 to begin this work, and an initial draft document will be extensively reviewed by association members and other interested parties in the coming year. The framework for this draft code is to include how a faith or belief community treats its own members, how changes in membership are dealt with, how such communities present themselves in public, and special areas of concern such as finance, accountability, and health-related practices.

5. *Preventive Strategies*: It is vital to the association's work to identify vulnerable areas before acts of religious intolerance recur or occur and to develop programs focused on prevention, including an emphasis on the role of education. An International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance, and Non-Discrimination was held in Spain in late 2001. This event, which was co-sponsored by the UN, has focused increased attention on the importance of a preventive approach.

The association's contribution to this event was the production of a booklet of essays titled *Religious Education in Schools: Ideas and Experiences from Around the World*. Essays were collected from some eight different regions, presenting both the challenges and the opportunities of teaching children about both spiritual values and religious diversity. Follow-up work on these themes is being carried out by our representative in Geneva.

In addition to the association's program priorities for the years ahead, much of our work in the summer of 2002 will center on the International Association for Religious Freedom's World Congress to be held in Budapest, Hungary, from July 28 to August 2. On the theme of "Religious Freedom: Europe's Story for Today's World," a series of seminars arranged by the European members of the association will convey the voices of those who have

Delegates to the 75th anniversary meeting of the American Unitarian Association held in Boston in May 1900, during which the IARF, originally the International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers, was founded.

struggled for religious freedom in Europe. There will also be special lecture and workshop series on subjects such as “teaching tolerance” and “codes of conduct.” More importantly, participants at the World Congress will have opportunities to think about the Strategic Plan (above) and programs that they can potentially design for their own communities.

Overall, some five to seven hundred people are expected for this event, held every three years in a different part of the world. With almost one hundred affiliated member groups in more than twenty-five countries who share a commitment to religious harmony and freedom of worship, the convocation allows the association’s membership (and any others concerned with religious freedom) to come together to share in dialogue, cultural exchange, and worship. More information on our World Congress, as well as quarterly *Global Issues* updates on religious freedom, can be located at our web site: www.iarf-religiousfreedom.net

Looking Ahead

The International Association for Religious Freedom, founded in 1900, was one of the first international inter-religious organizations in the world. While primarily founded by Unitarians and “liberal Christian thinkers” a century ago, the organization has since grown to include

major religious groups of many traditions, including Buddhist, Shinto, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, Jewish, and Zoroastrian participants. Thus, we can look to the future on the basis of a strong heritage. More fundamentally, our members are of the conviction that a diversity of religions and beliefs exists which has a positive and constructive contribution to make to human society. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we feel that the principles of interfaith dialogue have become better accepted in our world. There are also now several international interfaith organizations with different areas of focus. For example, the World Conference on Religion and Peace focuses on peace and conflict resolution, and the International Association for Religious Freedom, on religious freedom. Our association has been considering carefully what contribution we can best make to the encouraging of religious freedom and, by extension, to the flourishing of the human person. We hope that an array of practical programs, like our work with young people, building relationships with indigenous peoples, and the development of a Voluntary Code of Conduct for Religious and Belief Communities, can make some small contribution to these aims.

The challenge is to implement such programs well so that they can make a worthwhile contribution to our human family as it seeks a deeper fulfillment and understanding of life’s meaning and purpose. □

Religion: A Force for Harmony or Hatred?

by Harold Kasimow

A noted American scholar of religion suggests that a new understanding of the world's sacred texts is essential to lead to accurate knowledge about religions and to dialogue between them.

Those of us who study religious traditions are well aware of the evils committed in the name of religion and its contribution to war, persecution, and intolerance. Looking at the role of religion in human history, we find that religion has not always been a force for freedom, justice, and peace. But where can we turn to find a path to peace and harmony, if not to religion?

Albert Einstein is reported to have said during World War II: "When the Nazis came to power, I looked to the German universities to speak out, but they were silent. I turned to the press, but there was no word from them. I turned to the great labor unions, but found them speechless as well. Only in the church, which I had completely dismissed, were valiant voices raised to speak out on behalf of the freedom of men."

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all stress that human beings are created in the image of God—that every human being is precious in God's eyes. The three Abrahamic traditions emphasize that we should love God and neighbor. They also stress that human beings have a duty to confront evil in the world and that we must protest against injustice visited upon God's creatures. They further stress faith in God, which unites us. The fact that there are doctrines that divide us does not change the fact that we are all created in God's image.

Christian theologian Hans Küng has said, "No world peace without peace among religions. No peace among religions without dialogue between the religions. And no dialogue between the religions without accurate knowledge of one another." This is the great challenge of our time if we are to preserve our planet.

Most important in this understanding is having knowledge of one's own religious tradition. And that means a constant search for a new understanding of our sacred texts. For example, the Jews should constantly reexamine the concept of the chosen people and other passages in Jewish texts that could lead to arrogance.

There are different ways to understand the concept of the chosen. The traditional interpretation is to see it as a

mystery, to say that we do not fully understand why God would single out a people. This traditional belief insists that the concept refers to extra responsibility, not to any extra privilege. However, it is hard to deny that there have been Jews who have taken this doctrine to mean that they are, in fact, a spiritual elite.

Another view of the concept of the chosen is that God chose Jews to follow the path of the Torah, Hindus to follow the Vedas, Buddhists to follow the Dharma, Muslims to follow the Qur'an, and Christians to follow Jesus of Nazareth. This way of interpreting the concept of the chosen seems to be in the spirit of the important Jewish theologian Abraham Joshua Heschel, who stated: "In this eon, diversity of religions is the will of God."

Consider Christianity and a verse from the Gospel of John: "No one comes to the Father except by me." A literal interpretation is to say that outside the church there is no salvation. However, other Christians have interpreted

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Joining in a pledge to work for world peace, world religious leaders read in unison the newly-adopted declaration during the closing ceremony of the third assembly of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1979.

this to mean that members of other religious traditions are also saved because Christ is present in all traditions, and that the mercy and power of Christ saves everyone, even if some people are not aware of it. Other Christian scholars today claim that in speaking of Jesus as “the only,” his followers are speaking as devoted believers, not as philosophers. They are describing what Christ means to them, but are not denying that other paths may equally lead to God.

Muslims should constantly reexamine the concept of jihad. Jihad, which means literally “to struggle,” pertains to the struggle to fulfill the demands of God every minute of our lives. It is the struggle against the evil in our own hearts. That this is the primary meaning of jihad is supported by a well-known tradition of the Prophet Muhammad, who declared after a military campaign, “We have returned from the lesser jihad to the greater jihad.” The prophet of Islam later explained that the greater jihad is the struggle that goes on within one’s soul. The lesser jihad refers to defensive war. But jihad has also been interpreted to mean taking up arms against non-Muslims until they submit and agree to live under Muslim rule.

There are many passages in all traditions that need to be interpreted in a way that would lead to peace, rather than war, and which is consistent with the mercy and justice of God that these three Abrahamic traditions teach. The prophets and saints of these traditions all dream of a world of peace, one in which every person is treated as having infinite value. As Heschel said, “diversity of religions is the will of God.”

It seems that there are passages in the Qur’an that support this position. Sura 5:48 of the Qur’an states: “If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but [He has not done so] that he may test you in what He has given you; so compete with one another in good works. To God you shall return and He will tell you [the truth] about that which you have been disputing.”

We know that religious traditions produce not only saints, but also fanatics who can lead us to war, cruelty, and arrogance. The great sin is to use God for our own selfish interests. That is also a good reason why understanding each other is so critical. We can change our behavior toward each other. Change, according to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, is always a possibility. □

Buddhism and Work

by Damien Keown

Work is such an integral part of lives that even Shakyamuni exhorted his disciples to “strive diligently.” Here a British author/educator shows how today’s idea of “decent work” is in harmony with that teaching.

Work is a central part of the daily lives of ordinary people throughout the world, yet it is a subject that has received little attention from Buddhist commentators. Apart from some rather general remarks about what constitutes “right livelihood,” Buddhist scriptures have little to say on this important topic. Recently, the International Labor Office (ILO) of the United Nations initiated a dialogue with the world religions to determine what role spiritual values play in making work meaningful. These discussions have broadened out into an interfaith dialogue under the rubric of “decent work.”

In developing a Buddhist contribution to this discussion, we can do no better than begin with the Buddha’s final words. According to the Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, the Buddha’s last words were “*appamadena sampadetha*,” meaning “strive diligently” or “work conscientiously.” These words are perhaps surprising, given the stereotype of Buddhism as a quietistic or otherworldly faith, but in

fact Buddhism sees work—defined as any productive manual or intellectual activity—as a central dimension of human life and the primary means of personal cultivation and human progress.

What did the Buddha mean by his call to “strive diligently”? Was he simply exhorting his ordained followers to pursue their duties with greater vigor? This seems unlikely, for when he died the Buddha was attended not just by clerics but also laymen from the local village. These people, the Mallas, came along with their “children, wives, servants, and friends.” The Buddha’s call to conscientious work should therefore be understood as applying to society as a whole rather than simply to a monastic elite.

At the same time, when offering his final advice, the Buddha would surely have had in mind first and foremost the religious dimension of work. He was neither a politician nor an economist but an itinerant philosopher and religious teacher. He exercised no secular profession, yet his life was one of industry and activity designed to elevate unceasingly the moral and spiritual level of the society within which he lived.

The society in which his influence was felt was primarily that of Buddhist believers, known in the early sources as “the community (*sangha*) of the four directions” comprising the four social groups of monks, nuns, laymen, and laywomen. The society that extended beyond this Buddhist community was that of the caste system, a rigid system of social stratification that antedated the Buddha by almost a thousand years. In the caste system, occupation is determined by the caste to which one belongs. This means that work, rather than expressing the dignity of the human subject, is imposed upon him by an accident of birth in an arbitrary and inflexible manner, often obliging individuals to labor in conditions approximating slavery.

The caste system, and similar repressive hierarchical social structures, are dehumanizing in that they subordinate the individual to the work he or she does, rather than vice versa. The Buddha was a lifelong critic of the caste system,

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and his call for diligent work must be understood as prioritizing what has been called the “subjective dimension” of work, or that in which a conscious and free subject chooses work that serves to realize his humanity, as opposed to the “objective” one, which is simply measured in terms of the material goods produced. We might say that in the caste system man is “for work,” since the individual is subordinate to his profession. In terms of Buddhist teachings, however, work is “for man” and is undertaken for his spiritual renewal and development.

In repressive social structures like the caste system, work serves as a barrier that fragments and divides the human community, limits opportunity, and isolates individuals from one another. By contrast, in Buddhism work is seen as that which unites people as friends and colleagues in endeavors that promote the common good. The Buddha recognized that individuals are bound to one another through a network of reciprocal relationships. In the Singalovada Sutta he illustrates this with the metaphor of the six directions (north, south, east, west, zenith, and nadir), which are said to represent friends and companions (the north), teachers (the south), parents (the east), wife and children (the west), religious teachers (the zenith), and servants, workers, and helpers (the nadir). The individual stands at the center and has duties to all of these groups.

The rejection of the caste system is not incompatible with recognition of the need for specialization among the human workforce. The broad division of society envisaged in Buddhism between the lay and monastic estates is a general example of such a division of labor. Within the early lay community of the Buddha’s followers, many professions are mentioned: those of doctor, merchant, accountant, financier, artisan, soldier, administrator, and so forth. Within the Theravada monastic community, a division evolved between those specializing in the study and transmission of the scriptures and teachings (*ganthadhura*) and those who devoted their time to meditation and spiritual exercises (*vipassanadhura*). Unlike the caste system, however, these specializations were chosen on the basis of temperament, ability, and suitability for the profession in question and as a way of developing the different talents and abilities of individuals.

In contemporary society a whole range of new specialisms are required, for example, in science, computing, and engineering. In its perspective on decent work, however, Buddhism reminds us, along with the other religions, that work is not only a nine-to-five secular activity with a purely cash value—it must also be seen in the context of what might be called a theology of labor. In terms

In Buddhism, nature is seen not so much as the raw material on man’s workbench that can be hewed and shaped according to his needs, so much as the matrix from which he himself springs and through which he is organically linked to other forms of life.

of this, work is a means toward a larger end that progressively becomes incarnate in the world through the efforts of individual men and women.

From a Buddhist perspective, this long-term end involves the forging of a global human community through actions performed from love (*karuna*) on the basis of understanding (*prajna*). Although there is no dogma on the nature of work in early Buddhist scripture, we find a few centuries later in Mahayana Buddhism the beginnings of a possible metaphysics of work in which buddhas, and more often bodhisattvas, are depicted as working incessantly, lifetime after lifetime, toward the goal of cosmic enlightenment for all beings. Their starting point is a vow

(*pranidhana*) to the effect that they will not cease or falter in their work until all beings have attained nirvana. This is the ultimate goal of work, the transcendent common good toward which every mundane act of human labor is directed.

To this extent Buddhism shares with the theistic religions the concept of work as having an ultimate spiritual end. It differs from certain of them, however, in not grounding the imperative to work in mankind’s office as steward of the natural order and in dominion over the lower orders of creation. In Buddhism, nature is seen not so much as the raw material on man’s workbench that can be hewed and shaped according to his needs, so much as the matrix from which he himself springs and through which he is organically linked to other forms of life. In some East Asian schools, these linkages embrace inanimate nature as well as the world of living beings who inhabit, according to traditional Buddhist cosmology, the animal, human, and divine realms.

What are the main goals for Buddhists today in the workplace as they cope with changing employment patterns and the challenge of globalization? The most acute problems are found in the Third World, and not least among them is child labor. Child labor short-circuits the process of humanization that is begun in the earlier stage of education by denying young people the training necessary for them to realize their true vocational potential. The Buddha set the minimum age for full ordination into the monastic life at nineteen. This suggests that in his view committing oneself to any profession requires a degree of judgment and maturity that children do not possess.

The elimination of discrimination is also a basic requirement of justice. Discrimination on the basis of race, color, or gender represents a failure to respect the dignity of the individual person and is a breach of basic human rights. As noted above, the Buddha rejected the institutionalized discrimination of the caste system, and dis-

crimination in the workplace would be unacceptable to Buddhists for the same reasons. Forced or compulsory labor of any kind is dehumanizing and turns the workplace into a labor camp.

In conclusion, we can say that the modern concept of "decent work" is in harmony with the Buddha's notion of "diligent work." Work has personal, social, and transcen-

dent dimensions and should always be seen as potentially an act of universal collaboration and solidarity. Buddhist attitudes toward work are based on the twin foundations of a recognition of the dignity of the human person, together with the understanding of work as a way of progressively bringing into being those material and spiritual values that incarnate the common good. □

The Bodhisattva Samantabhadra (Universal Virtue) and Ten Female Rakshasas. Thirteenth century, Fujita Museum of Art, Osaka. Important Cultural Property.

The Enchanting World of the Lotus Sutra

(2)

by Gene Reeves

This article represents the second installment in a new series of essays devoted to stories in the Lotus Sutra. Written by an American researcher on Buddhism and the Lotus Sutra, it offers fresh insights into how we can incorporate the teachings found in the sutra's dramatic stories in our daily lives.

The chief way in which the Lotus Sutra enchants is by telling stories—parables and similes, accounts of previous lives, stories of mythical events, and so forth.

It goes without saying that the Lotus Sutra is rich in such stories. Rightfully famous for its parables, it is, perhaps above all, a book of stories. Though there are various ways of counting, it contains two dozen or so different stories. In the sutra, a great many traditional Buddhist doctrines are at least mentioned, such as the four noble truths, the eightfold path, the three marks of the Dharma, interdependent origination, the twelve-link chain of causation, the six perfections, and so forth. Even one of the sutra's most emphasized teachings, that of the one vehicle of many skillful means, is initially presented as an explanation of why there is such a variety of teachings within Buddhism. There are plenty of teachings or doctrines in

it, but if we want to approach a fuller understanding of what the Lotus Sutra teaches, we had better pay attention to its stories, and not merely to propositions within them or to sentences that explain them, but also to the overall thrust and function of the stories within this very unusual sutra.

It is not incidental that the original Lotus Sutra probably began with the chapter on skillful means, now chapter 2, and then, in the next chapter, now chapter 3, told a story, the parable of the burning house, to illustrate and explain skillful means. And this “parable” chapter is immediately followed by the “attitude” (*adhimukti*) chapter, which is built around another story—the parable of the rich father and the poor son.

As we have it now, the first twenty-two chapters of the sutra, except for chapter 12, constitute a single story, a story about a time when the Buddha was at the place called Sacred Eagle Peak and preached the Lotus Sutra. In other words, about 85 percent of the Lotus Sutra falls within a single story.

Thus while there are many stories in the Lotus Sutra, many of them are actually episodes within a larger story that begins with chapter 1 as a kind of introduction and continues through chapter 22, which provides a natural end for the sutra, as well as to the story that begins in the first chapter. Chapter 12 is inserted in order to emphasize the universality of the buddha-nature, and chapters 23 through 28 are added, for the most part, as illustrations of bodhisattva practice. Thus, chapters 12 and 23–28 are regarded by some scholars as a third group of chapters in terms of order of composition. In these chapters there are almost no references to many of the main ingredients of the story found in chapters 1–22: the stupa in the sky, the buddhas and bodhisattvas who have come from all over the universe, or the bodhisattvas who have emerged from the ground. Some of these appended chapters no doubt circulated as independent sutras, as does chapter 25, which is known as the “Kannon Sutra” to this day.

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Within the longer story that ends with chapter 22, there are many other stories and parables, which in this series we will look at separately, while trying not to lose sight of the context, the larger story, in which they occur.

These stories are the primary skillful means through which the Lotus Sutra invites us into its world, which is at once our own world, albeit seen and experienced differently. But it goes without saying that not everyone will welcome such an invitation or read the stories in this way. Some will reject them as supernaturalistic miracle stories. Others will see them as nothing more than the intra-Buddhist polemics of more than twenty centuries ago. Some will judge them to be nothing more than quaint filler for a text which, as a kind of "miracle cure," only seeks to promote itself. An invitation into an imaginative

see or feel or think. Our experience is always vastly richer than we can express. Yet words are what we have; they are part of the rich world that is given to us. Though always inadequate, and not the only way, they are probably the most important way in which human beings communicate. Like nothing else, they make it possible for us to travel across vast distances of both space and time. And, as we have seen, they can invoke a certain kind of concreteness.

It is not very clear to me just how it is that stories function to affirm the concrete. Is it merely that they are less abstract in some way than doctrines? "Everything is impermanent" is, after all, about as abstract (and as metaphysical) as one can get. Stories do have a kind of concreteness about them, more, as it were, flesh and blood in them. But

I do not think that is the complete account of how they can function to elicit the concrete.

Perhaps it is that to tell a story is to trust words, despite the fact that they are unreliable both in the sense that they are inadequate to the tasks of expressing or describing and in the sense that a speaker or writer can never know what kinds of associations or connotations will be suggested to the reader or hearer.

But, so far at least, words are, for many purposes, the best communication tool we have. Sometimes there is communication: questions get answered, feelings shared, descriptions used, images aroused, moral and practical purposes served.

Of course, storytelling is not the only or even primary function of words. So this does not tell us very much about the power of stories to express the concrete. I think that what is special about

stories in this regard is that they use concrete images. The images of a burning house that each of us has when reading that parable may all be different from each other, but each is concrete in that it is an image of a particular house, and not at all like the abstract notion of "house."

Concrete images are, of course, in our minds. There is no need for me to have seen any burning house, much less any particular burning house, for a house to burn in my mind, as a kind of reality created in part by the words on the page. The image, in a sense, testifies to the efficacy of words—it provides evidence that words can make things live, at least in our imaginations.

If words can evoke images of concrete imaginary realities,

An illustration from the Lotus Sutra Narrative Picture Scroll. Thirteenth century, Hatakeyama Memorial Museum of Fine Art, Tokyo. Important Cultural Property.

world can always be turned down or rejected. A religious text will not function as a religious text for everyone. There is no compelling science or logic to lead one into the world of the Lotus Sutra. Some good reasons to stay away can be given, but there is an enchanting dimension, perhaps even a kind of seduction, in such stories.

Affirmation of Language

There is no shortage in Buddhism of words expressing distrust of words. There is some of that in the Lotus Sutra as well, but not a lot.

Words are never quite up to the tasks we give to them. We can never put into language just what it is that we

can they not evoke images of concrete, nonimaginary realities as well? Can they not, in other words, help us to be in touch with the concrete world that always envelops us? If so, might it not be the case that stories, by being concrete themselves, function to draw our attention to the concrete, to the world of everyday plants and people, houses and vehicles?

It is, of course, quite possible to study the Lotus Sutra by focusing on its teachings, perhaps using its parables and stories to illustrate those teachings. But by focusing on the stories, we will discover some things that we could not see by focusing on teachings.

In many ways the Lotus Sutra is a difficult book that stretches beyond, and sometimes even makes fun of, the tradition in which it lives. It surprises. But it does so primarily in its stories, which force us to think, for example, about what it means to tell the truth, or what it means to be a bodhisattva or a buddha. And its stories call for, elicit, a creative response from the hearer or reader.

Invitation to Creativity

What is the purpose of all this enchantment and magic? Entertainment? In one sense, yes! It is to bring joy to the world. Stories are for enjoyment. But not only for enjoyment. Not in all, but in a great many of the stories in the Lotus Sutra, especially in those that are used to demonstrate the meaning of skillful means, it is important to recognize that what is being demanded of the reader is not obedience to any formula or code or book, not even to the Lotus Sutra, but imaginative and creative approaches to concrete problems. A father gets his children out of a burning house; another helps his long-lost adult son gain self-respect and confidence through skillful use of psychology; still another father pretends to be dead as a way of shocking his children into taking a good medicine he had prepared for them; and a rich man tries to relieve his friend's poverty.

Creativity requires imagination, the ability to see possibilities where others see only what is. It is, in a sense, an ability to see beyond the facts, to see beyond the way things are, to envision something new. Of course, it is not only imagination that is required to overcome problems. Wisdom, or intelligence, and compassion are also needed. But it is very interesting that the problems encountered by the Buddha figures in the parables of the Lotus Sutra are never solved by the book. They do not pull out a sutra to find a solution to the problem confronting them. In every case, something new, something creative, is attempted; something from the creative imagination.

Of course, creativity is not always successful. In the first parable of the Lotus Sutra, the parable of the burning house, before the father comes up with an effective way to get his children out of the burning house, he tries some things that do not work. He shouts at his children, telling them to "get out." He considers forcing them out

by wrapping them in robes or putting them on a tablet and carrying them out. And when one approach does not work, he tries another. Or consider, perhaps as a better example, the parable of the hidden treasure, the gem in the hem, in chapter 8. Here a rich friend tries to help out his poor friend by sewing an extremely valuable gem into his robe. And this does not work. The poor man does not realize that he has this great treasure until he is told so in a subsequent encounter with his rich friend. The possibility of failure is always a part of any creative effort, requiring additional creativity.

We do not find mistakes in all the stories by any means, but in many there is still an element of surprise, creativity, and inventiveness. The guide along the difficult way conjures up an illusion, a castle in which the weary travelers can rest. The dragon princess does her little thing with the jewel. Even the Buddha Excellent in Great Penetrating Wisdom of chapter 7, after achieving supreme awakening only with the help of many gods and promising to preach, surprises everyone by waiting twenty thousand eons before preaching the Lotus Sutra, which he then proceeds to do without resting for eight thousand eons, then (exhausted?) retreats into deep meditation for eighty-four thousand eons, forcing sixteen bodhisattva novices to teach and explain the sutra for eighty-four thousand eons. Clearly there is a lot of imagination at work in the creation of these stories.

Creativity involves being free from karma, from past actions. In the Indian context in which Buddhism arose and the Lotus Sutra was compiled, this was especially important. A religiously based, rigid caste system apparently forced many to despair. Many became resigned to a Hindu fatalism that taught that everything is as it should be and that if you follow the rules you may be able to be born in better circumstances in your next life. Buddhism offered a way out of this system of thought and social structures, a new world in which one could exercise the imagination, in part at least to gain control of one's life.

But fatalism is by no means unique to India. In the West it could take the form of debilitating doctrines of divine omnipotence and providence. Liberation from such fatalism is important. But creativity is needed not only for breaking the bonds of such karma. People can be victims of other kinds of karma, of dull habits, or of lack of self-confidence and shyness, or of terrible mental states. People can also be victims of abusive parents or siblings. And people can be held in bondage by unjust political or social systems.

Through the very act of creating a community of monks, which became the Buddhist Sangha, the Buddha recognized, and enabled others to recognize, that social structures do not have to be as they are. This was recognized as well, I think, by some Japanese followers of the Lotus Sutra in the nineteenth century, long before anyone in Japan was influenced by modern Western sociological

A Lotus Sutra Pagoda Mandala owned by Ryuhon-ji in Kyoto. Gold ink on indigo paper. Mid-thirteenth century. The mandala consists of a Lotus Sutra text arranged in a pagoda shape with surrounding illustrations, depicting motifs in the sutra. Copying the text of the Lotus Sutra in a pagoda shape was an effort to accomplish at a single stroke two of the meritorious deeds encouraged in the Lotus Sutra: building a stupa and paying homage to the sutra.

ideas. Poor people would have something like a parade in which there was too much drinking perhaps, and cross-dressing, and other forms of unusual, custom-breaking, behavior. Even the homes of rich people were invaded and people took whatever they wanted, asking, "Why not?"

Creativity is a path to liberation, and as Kenji Miyazawa saw clearly, imagination is a path to liberation. That is why the Lotus Sutra invites us into a world of enchantment—to enable us to enter the path of liberation, a liberation which is always both for ourselves and for others. Notice, please, that this first chapter of the Lotus Sutra is not an order, it is an invitation to enter a new world and thereby take up a new life.

But this invitation also carries a warning—enter this world and your life may be changed. It may be changed in ways you never expected. The Lotus Sutra comes with a warning label. Instead of saying "Dangerous to your health," it says, "Dangerous to your comfort." The worst sin in the Lotus Sutra is complacency and the arrogance of thinking one has arrived and has no more to do. The sutra challenges such comfort and comfortable ideas. Danger can be exciting. It can also be frightening. We do not know if we can make it. We do not know whether we even have the power to enter the path, the Buddha Way.

Empowerment

This is why, while the Lotus Sutra begins with enchantment, it does not end there. It goes further to announce that each and every one of us has within us a great and marvelous power, later called the "buddha-nature." The term "buddha-nature" does not appear in the Lotus Sutra, probably because it had not yet been invented, but the idea that would later be called "buddha-nature" runs through these stories not as a mere thread, but as a central pillar, albeit a very flexible one.

Stories can be understood, of course, as illustrating teachings, which in a sense they do. But to see them only in that way, as something designed to improve our understanding of others, is, I believe, to miss their meaning. These little gems of stories have within them the power to persuade readers that they have the potential and power not only to make more of their own lives but also to make a contribution to the good of others.

And since according to the stories, the Buddha—now no longer existing in this *saha* world in the way he once was—needs others to do his work in this world, what readers do with their own potential to be buddhas makes a cosmic difference, that is, determines to what degree the work of the universal Buddha Shakyamuni gets done in this world. Using that power can cause the whole universe to shake in six different ways! It can even cause a magnificent stupa to come flying to where we are.

The fireworks in the Lotus Sutra are not mere entertainment. They are, I believe, to stress the reality and im-

portance of this world, which is the world of Shakyamuni Buddha, the world in which he preached the Lotus Sutra, bringing joy to countless millions.

Stories of such cosmic events—drums rolling in the heavens; flowers raining down from the skies; beams of light, or even long tongues, streaming from a buddha; dark places becoming illuminated; things and bodhisattvas flying through space—all such things are an invitation to exercise the imagination. There is no hint of anything like an abhidharmic or scientific cosmology.

Perhaps the most important of the stories in this connection is the one about the great horde of bodhisattvas who spring up from below in chapter 15. The chapter begins with all of the millions and millions of bodhisattvas who have come from other worlds asking the Buddha to allow them to stay and help him out by preaching the sutra in this world. But the Buddha promptly declines on the ground that there are many bodhisattvas already in this world who can protect, read, recite, and teach the Lotus Sutra. Whereupon the ground quakes and a fantastically enormous number of such bodhisattvas and their attendants emerge from below the earth, where they had been living. Maitreya and the others almost go into shock from unbelief when told by the Buddha that these bodhisattvas are his own disciples, whom he has been training for countless millions of eons. Why, it is as impossible to believe as a twenty-five-year-old man claiming to have a hundred-year-old son! But the point has been made—it is not by bodhisattvas from other worlds that we are to be saved, but by those who belong to this world.

These kinds of stories are like invitations to unfreeze our imagination, or creativity, so that we too might be empowered through these stories to make use of the power that is within us to be the Buddha, which means nothing more nor less than being representatives of Shakyamuni Buddha in this world by practicing, like him, the bodhisattva way.

The purpose of the enchantment is in part to have us know not only intellectually that we have the buddha-nature, but also to have us know it physically, in our very muscles and bones. Then we can become the hands and feet of, the very body of, the Buddha. We are empowered by the Lotus Sutra to take charge of our lives, so that the world will be a better place because of our choices and our actions. In this way, the Lotus Sutra, chanted and studied and embraced, can give us fantastic power, helping us to realize that we too have this fantastic ability to be creative, to use our imaginations and our energy to make ourselves and those around us, that is the entire world, a bit better than it would be otherwise.

Right now in this year, right now in Tokyo or New York or Colombo or wherever you are, let the flowers rain, let the drums sound, let the world shake, and let the Dharma-wheel roll on! □

The Spirit of the Buddha

by Wahei Tatematsu

A popular Japanese writer takes a look at the world around him and is reminded by nature of Shakyamuni's last admonition to his disciples to "always endeavor to practice diligently." This essay is based on a text of a speech delivered in the Fukushima Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai on December 2, 2001.

While the mountains around Lake Chuzenji in Nikko were still green, the water seemed to be colored with autumn leaves—the male sockeye salmon had turned bright red for the mating season, becoming in effect autumn foliage in the lake. In order to leave behind descendants, they do their best to assert, “I am the handsomest!” The females are mainly on the choosing side, saying things like, “You’re sexy!” or “Go away!”—just as with humans.

Three or four years ago, I was able to observe the spawning of the silver salmon in the depths of a river mouth on the Shiretoko Peninsula. When fish belonging to the Salmonidae family spawn, they return to the river of their birth. Although while the male and female fish completely exhaust themselves, they expend their lives in order to

bring new lives into the world. And this confrontation with life-consuming danger, in order to leave behind descendants for the future, takes place in the autumn. That is to say, autumn is the season in which life comes to an end; it is also the season in which life begins. The bright coloring of the fish in the mating season is, as it were, a type of sex appeal—a burst of brilliance from a fish on its last journey. It reminds me of the phrase, “making up for death.”

In reading the *Tale of the Heike*, one finds the story of Kumagai Jiro Naozane (d. 1208) and Taira no Atsumori (1169–84). Naozane, a Genji (Minamoto clan) warrior, who had just about secured a victory [at the battle of Ichinotani], wanted to distinguish himself somehow in the battle and spurred his horse along the beach. Just then, he saw a young Heike (Taira clan) warrior in beautiful silk-laced armor. Naozane then raced ahead and grabbed the enemy, pulling him off his horse. Preparing to take the enemy’s head, he drew his sword and placed it on his throat, when he saw that the young warrior was extremely good-looking. He was the sixteen-year-old Atsumori. Looking at his youth, Naozane hesitated to kill him. At his delay, Atsumori cried, “Cut off my head quickly!” After doing so, Naozane saw that Atsumori’s face was lightly made up, and he realized that the youth had resolved not to return from the battle alive. Even in going forth into his final battle, he made himself more attractive with make-up in order to fight and die eventually. This gives the same feeling as the cherry blossoms, in that they briefly burst into beautiful bloom and then soon fall. The story in the *Tale of the Heike* relates that Naozane, through becoming aware of the spirit of such a person, came to understand impermanence.

Every time I think of this story, I am reminded of the autumn foliage, of the silver salmon of Shiretoko, and of the sockeye salmon of Nikko. At the very end, just before death, they all sacrifice themselves beneath the banner of beauty. To my way of thinking, that is the essence of autumn. Fish make their bodies bright red and become

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more beautiful than they have ever been before. And the autumn leaves, as they face the coming winter, are at the height of their splendor. The aesthetic of putting on their finest display in the brief instant just before death certainly seems to be a very conscious sensitivity.

Your "Present Location" Is Constantly Changing

It happened while I was strolling in one of London's large parks. It was so large that I had no idea where I was. Then I looked at a big sign with a map of the grounds, which showed my location with a red dot and the label "You are here." This means: "This is where you find yourself at the moment." I felt relieved, and started to stroll again, and once more, there was a sign with a map, and, sure enough, it was marked, "You are here." Of course, I was not in the same spot as the first time. But that goes without saying, because I had moved on. And when I saw the sign, I was suddenly struck with a thought.

At the beginning of Basho's *Narrow Road to the Deep North*, can be found the words:

"Days and months are travelers of eternity. So are the years that pass by." (Nobuyuki Yuasa, trans., *The Narrow Road to the Deep North and Other Travel Sketches*.) In that passage, the days and months, and even time itself, are seen as travelers. I, too, and all of you as well, are always moving. Indeed, we leave the Other world and come here to be born, and we leave this world behind to travel to the Other world. I believe that this illustrates the sense of impermanence. Through the constant working of causes and conditions, the same time never occurs twice. As soon as an instant is born, within that very instant it vanishes. What is called "travel" is not just movement through space; everything also travels through time. Our "present location" is constantly changing—we just do not have a map.

When I was about twenty-two or twenty-three, I traveled to India. I carried a copy of *Budda no Kotoba, Sutta Nipata* (The Words of the Buddha: Sutta Nipata), by Hajime Nakamura. It is a book in which the words of the Buddha are written in an easy-to-understand style. But even though that was so, still I could not understand them.

From the time I was just over twenty, I have continued to read this book, even now that I am a "golden ager" in my fifties. After reading it for about ten years, I sometimes came to think, "Ah, *that's* what it means!" When I became forty, I began to understand it better, thinking, "This is all 'Make the self your light; make the Law your light.'" In other words, with difficult books or the sutras, it is not easy to understand the various teachings they contain, but they themselves serve as large maps of life.

I believe that it is the same when reading the Lotus Sutra. Regardless of one's age, one should listen to others, read books, and study. Shakyamuni Buddha passed away at the age of eighty, and he had continued to study

throughout his life. We must never stop. That is, we must constantly move our "You are here" point and should be consciously aware how much we have moved.

Everything Is Beautiful

My book, *Budda Sono Hito e* (A Journey to the Buddha), was published by Kosei Publishing Company. I think of it as a precedent-setting volume. If I say that I met Shakyamuni it might seem rude, but it was a book that for me was a kind of affirmation of faith in a way. At about that time, I read *Budda Saigo no Tabi* (The Buddha's Last Journey), a translation of the Pali Mahaparinibbana-suttanta by Professor Nakamura, whom I greatly respected. It is a tale about the last journey of Shakyamuni, who had turned eighty, from Vulture Peak toward his birthplace, Kapilavastu. On the way, he died in Kushinagara, and never reached his destination. It is a kind of documentary.

And just how did the Buddha spend his last moments before he died? He said such things as, "Ananda, . . . is pleasant; . . . is delicious; the . . . tree is beautiful. . . ." He

affirmed everything, everything in the world. But we, when our sciatica acts up or we feel a bit out of sorts, take offense at everything. Shakyamuni, who was at an advanced age, was sound in spirit but weak physically. Yet such was his journey toward death. He did not say a single word against anything in the world. "Everything is beautiful—absolutely beautiful." If we could reach that state of mind, the entire world would truly be beautiful and pleasant.

I adore the perspective that Shakyamuni had in his later years, which allowed him to see everything as beautiful. That is very instructive in showing us how to live. To people who have that kind of perspective, everything in this world is seen as beautiful.

And still the journey continued. Shakyamuni came to the village of Pava. As this tale is well known, many of you may already know it. The son of a smith, a man named Chunda, prepared a meal for Shakyamuni, trying his very best to accommodate his whole entourage. However, the meal contained poisonous mushrooms. Shakyamuni had

Chunda bury all the food in a hole, except for his own portion, which he then ate. Even though he knew that the offered meal was poison, he ate it, and that was the cause of his death.

Doesn't what Chunda did weigh upon your mind? He offered Shakyamuni a meal prepared with poisonous mushrooms, which is terrible. Normally, someone who did that would feel too guilty to remain and would run away. Instead, Chunda became one of Shakyamuni's disciples and stayed by him. This is one of the great things about Chunda.

But Shakyamuni was even greater, because he saved Chunda, saying: "Ananda, Chunda has done a very good thing. That is because by this, I eliminate all the fires of the worldly passions, leaving none remaining, and attain perfect enlightenment." And this, despite his feeding Shakyamuni poison mushrooms! It would not have been the same had it been one of us. We probably would have said something like, "What do you mean, feeding me poison mushrooms, you idiot?" Whereas Shakyamuni simply said "Thank you." Well, what about you? Would you have saved Chunda? It is written that later, Chunda actually did undergo and complete full monastic training.

Is it possible to contrive such a tale? Every time I recall this story, my emotions well up, and I get a lump in my throat—that is truly the spirit and the compassion of the Buddha.

Being Modest

However, there is one place within this scripture in which Shakyamuni says something negative. There was a young monk-in-training named Upavana who, when Shakyamuni was close to death, did all he could to fan him with fresh, cool air. Shakyamuni said to him:

"Young man, Upavana! You must not stand before me."

This is the only instance in the scripture of the Buddha saying anything negative. But perhaps the reason for this is because all the gods and spirits from the ten directions had come together to bid farewell to Shakyamuni, and with Upavana, who possessed great supernatural powers, sitting in front of him, those who had come to see him off would be unable to see him. Therefore, he removed the obstruction by telling the man to move.

The episode is very symbolic of my present situation. Shakyamuni is behind me, and I am standing here between you and the Buddha. Although I am not endowed with such supernatural powers as Upavana, in terms of my position, I am standing between you, and, for all I know, may well be obscuring the form of the Buddha from your sight. So, no matter how much energy I expend for the purpose of talking to you, I am, after all, still in the way, like Upavana, even if I am able to blow the slightest cool breeze your way with the best of intentions.

Perhaps when you all go home, you will discuss today's

Kushinagara, in the northwestern part of the Indian state of Uttar Pradesh, where a temple now stands commemorating Shakyamuni's entrance into nirvana.

talk with your family. If you do, you are also all like Upavana, since you will be placing yourself between Shakyamuni Buddha and your family. Therefore, when we talk about it, we must, as much as possible, assume a position of modesty. This episode has a very deep meaning.

It will not do for us to stand up and be arrogant. It is that simple. But if we are afraid to become like Upavana, we cannot do anything. So, if someone tells us to get out of the way, then, like Upavana, we should move.

Endeavor to Practice Diligently

Now, Shakyamuni is surely moving toward death. Ananda is told over and over by Shakyamuni that "All things are impermanent," that everything has its time to leave, but Ananda is unable to take in the reality of it. It is bitterly hard for Ananda to say farewell to someone he loves so much, and he weeps. He is a very sensitive man. Logically speaking, he should not cry, but he does, upon which Shakyamuni consoles him, saying:

"Please stop, Ananda. Do not grieve. With compassion and mercy, with innumerable pure thoughts, words, and deeds, you have served Gautama for a long time. Ananda, you have been a faithful disciple. Work hard and strive in

your training. You will quickly become free of all impurities."

Thus someone who is on the verge of death, with all his might encourages those who will live on. This is truly the gentle spirit of Shakyamuni. The relationship between these two is truly a gentle one. Earlier, I said that at the end of his life, Shakyamuni's perspective was one of affirmation. In this episode, too, I feel that is true.

And then Shakyamuni quietly passes away. His last words are his testament:

"I will leave words to all of you. All phenomena are always changing. Endeavor to practice my teachings diligently."

So, after Shakyamuni in effect said that time passes on, that because everything is impermanent, we must study without faltering, practice the teachings, and live our lives as humans to the fullest, he died. Thus, even in the face of death, Shakyamuni was able to leave for those he left behind this truly compassionate testament, full of encouragement.

And we must inherit that testament. To think that we know enough is only to suffer from self-conceit. We must study unto death. □

Do No Evil, Do Only Good

by Nichiko Niwano

The I Ching tells us that “The superior man never slackens in perfecting the self,” repeating what the Dhammapada identifies as the essence of Buddhism: “To do no evil, / To do only good, / To purify the mind.”

Buddhism teaches of an absolute realm transcending good and evil, but in the context of human life we must discriminate between the two. There are various ways of doing this. In Buddhism, good means turning toward the Buddha and endeavoring to improve oneself. Evil means the opposite: turning toward hell and exacerbating the three poisons of greed, anger, and ignorance. This is the broad meaning of good and evil in terms of Buddhist teaching.

Good means seeing the Buddha’s wisdom—specifically, seeing the law of transience and obeying it. Thus, ignorance of the law of impermanence constitutes evil. In the context of our daily lives, good means realizing the preciousness of life and living each day to the hilt, while evil means struggling with others and being ruled by greed, oblivious to the preciousness of life.

The ultimate wisdom, the Buddha’s wisdom, is called *prajna*. *Prajna* is inherent in everyone, but when it is concealed we turn toward greed, anger, and ignorance. And when that which has obscured *prajna* is dispelled, we turn toward good and endeavor to improve ourselves. The state of fully revealed *prajna* is buddhahood. It is because *prajna* is not fully revealed that we are prey to delusion and attachment. Revealing our inherent *prajna* enables us to turn toward good and strive tirelessly.

Begin by Avoiding Evil

The verse of admonishment of the seven (past) buddhas in the Dhammapada answers the question, What is Buddhism?

To do no evil,
To do only good,
To purify one’s mind,
This is the teaching of the buddhas.

The verse begins, “To do no evil.” In this case, evil means flouting the precepts that human beings should obey, engaging in unethical and immoral acts. Thus, not doing what is evil means first and foremost refraining from any-

thing that would give one a guilty conscience. In other words, right living is important.

Buddhism teaches five precepts that we are to observe in daily life: not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to engage in sexual misconduct, and not to drink to excess. These are precepts that everyone should observe as a matter of course. Moreover, it is important that we observe them not because we are told to but on the basis of our own judgment. Essentially, evil arises from ignorance of the law of transience, ignorance of the preciousness of life.

The verse continues, “To do only good.” Good is that which accords with ethics and morality, as indicated by the terms “goodwill” and “good nature.” Religious practices are also taught as forms of good. I am not talking about some rarefied asceticism; the most basic religious practice is to open the eye of buddha-wisdom—to see the Truth and the Dharma. In other words, recognition of the law of transience represents good.

The third line, “To purify one’s mind,” means attaining

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Rev. Niwano joining in a sutra recitation at the Yokohama Branch of Rissho Kosei-kai in May 2001. He visited the branch on one of his dissemination tours to meet and share teachings with members nationwide and abroad.

the precious wisdom of the Buddha by not doing what is evil and by doing what is good. Purity means living in awareness of the law of transience and obedience to the Truth and the Dharma. Conversely, impurity means exacerbating delusion and attachment and going against the Truth and the Dharma.

Finally, by not doing what is evil and by doing what is good, strictly observing what should be observed, we gain wisdom, leave behind delusion and attachment, and attain the realm of the Buddha. As the verse says, "This is the teaching of the buddhas."

We should note that the verse begins by warning against doing what is evil. When we resolve to do what is good, the first thing we need to do is stop doing what is evil, such as behaving in ways that violate the five precepts. That means resolving to cease our bad habits from this day forward and then doing what is good. The first two lines of the verse indicate the proper order of self-purification.

Without Haste and Without Pause

Accomplishing anything requires perseverance. Even when we resolve not to do what is evil, we cannot keep it up. It is important to reflect on our failure as often as it takes and resolve to try again. Sometimes it is painful to persevere, but if we try to escape that pain partway through we can never taste enjoyment. As we persevere, pain turns into enjoyment. Discovering that enjoyment in the course

of persevering enables us to keep going. For example, many people say they find it difficult to perform sutra recitation every morning and evening. At first this would be hard for anyone, I imagine. Sometimes, tired at the end of a busy day, we find sutra recitation burdensome. But as we persevere, day in day out, little by little we begin to find sutra recitation gratifying, and when that happens we feel unsettled if we skip it, or as if we have forgotten something important. Sutra recitation becomes an indispensable part of our day. Thankful to be able to perform sutra recitation daily, we find that we can persevere naturally. In short, the key to perseverance is a sense of enjoyment and thanksgiving.

There is a passage from the *I Ching* (Book of Change) that I have made my motto: "The movement of heaven is full of power. The superior man never slackens in perfecting the self." "Never slackens" means striving of one's own initiative and without pause: in other words, constant endeavor. I paraphrase this as "without haste and without pause." "Perseverance is power," as the saying goes. Perseverance in even the smallest things greatly empowers us in time. Repeating the basics is especially important in all things.

Without pause, and with enjoyment and thanksgiving, persevering in the endeavor not to do what is evil and to do what is good purifies our hearts and minds and brings us both *joie de vivre* and happiness. □

The Strength to Live through Repentance

by Hiroaki Ito

Hamamatsu Branch member Hiroaki Ito, shocked to hear his brother say, "I have always hated my elder brother," tells how hearing it gave him a change of heart that changed his life.

Through the lens of my camera I could see my brother Shigetoshi, his mouth tightened as he stood in front of the lectern. Today he was to speak at a special training session of the men's group.

"I wonder what he will talk about," I thought. I had been asked to take photographs of the event and was just looking for good photo opportunities, trying to get the best pictures I could of my brother. Suddenly my brother started to speak without hesitation.

"I have always hated my elder brother."

What! I was so completely astounded, I almost cried out. He started talking about what I did in my delinquent youth; about the tens of millions of yen in debt I created drinking and gambling, about how badly I'd treated my parents, about my divorce problems. . . .

"So, with all this going on you can imagine the pressure I have been living under for many, many years," continued my brother, spilling out how troubled in mind he had been all that time because of my actions.

I had no idea beforehand that he was going to say anything like this. Camera still in hand, without realizing it, I backed away, and eventually found myself standing right at the back, behind everyone sitting in the hall, thinking, "Could my brother really have been harboring such a deep hatred for me?"

I thought that he would talk about what caused him to disappear for a while, leaving his wife and children, about his present repentance and what he had decided to do now.

Six months before this session, he had suddenly disappeared one day. He had been suffering mounting stress from being caught in between the demands of his superiors and inferiors in his middle-management position at work. Because of his usual strong sense of responsibility, he blamed himself.

Until this happened, my brother and I had been estranged to the point where I don't think we had spoken to each other in more than twenty years. However, during

the time he was wandering around in Tokyo, the only person he called on the telephone was me, his elder brother.

"Hiro, I'm asking you to take care of Mom and Dad, of my wife and kids," he said.

There he was, depending on a wayward man such as me as his elder brother. Thinking of this, I could not sit idle. I had to talk about it with somebody and found myself passing through the door of the branch, where I had not visited in many a year.

At first I prayed to the Eternal Buddha, hoping that he would help my brother. However, as I talked with the chapter leader, branch education affairs staff, and other members of the Sangha, it occurred to me that my brother's disappearance could serve as an opportunity for me to

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effect a change in myself through the Dharma and undergo a change of heart on my own part.

Perhaps in answer to the prayers of everyone in the Sangha, three months after this my brother came home all right. And he was asked to speak publicly at the special training session of the men's group, and there he was in front of me, speaking with confidence. But the content of what he was saying was, quite unexpectedly, his hatred for me.

Originally, my "nature" tended toward the loud and bright; I could not bear a humdrum existence and so from my youth I spent my days drinking and gambling. I was clever at exploiting other people's better nature and took advantage of them for monetary gain. Though I was dimly aware that this was a stupid thing to do, I went through life deceiving myself, telling myself that my wits were a kind of gift.

In the course of this career, I accumulated massive debts. To pay them off, my parents sold the family home and the land bequeathed to our family by our forbears, which forced them into a life of poverty.

My brother's words thrust the details of my stupidity into my face one by one, until I was unable to utter a sound.

"I'm so sorry. Please forgive me," I thought. Perhaps because I was learning how my brother felt while standing close to the Buddha, I felt contrite for the first time in my life. I was too ashamed and regretful to stay on. Up until

then, every day of my life I had been using people, and, in the final analysis, forcing them into difficulties. At the same time I felt that to admit wrongdoing and mistakes on my own part would be tantamount to admitting defeat.

To apologize to others, or even to show weakness, was for me so humiliating that I felt it would completely cut off my power to live. But after the special training session was over, I stopped my brother on his way out, unable to let him pass without bowing my head.

"I'm really sorry," I said.

Looking ashamed, my brother shook his head. The moment I apologized, I felt as if a window in my heart had opened slightly, allowing fresh air to blow in.

Going to Headquarters

The Buddha again made some unexpected arrangements for me.

It was in March of 1999 when Rev. Motoyuki Araki, head of the branch, said to me, "Your brother will be speaking again, this time in the Great Sacred Hall. Won't you go with him to headquarters?" He even asked me to be my brother's attendant during the event, and made arrangements for me to travel to the Great Sacred Hall.

The night before the monthly memorial day ceremony, my brother seemed very relaxed as he lay down to sleep, saying, "I'm glad you will be my attendant tomorrow." Lying down next to him, I also fell asleep a few minutes later.

The big day arrived at last, and my brother ascended the

Mr. Ito (right) with his younger brother, Shigetoshi.

sacred stage. The subject of his talk was almost identical to what he had said during the special training session.

"I hated my brother. . . ."

His words about the hatred he bore me back in those days reverberated through the Great Sacred Hall, where everyone sat hushed in silence. As I repeated apologies in my heart, even more than during the special training session, I listened attentively to the words my brother was speaking there in front of the image of the Eternal Buddha. Gradually I began to see what my brother was trying to tell me and to understand his true feelings, which cannot be expressed in words.

What he was saying with the "voice of his heart" was, "I, too, have prevailed, and so, Hiro, please give it your best effort, too!" His message reverberated through my breast.

Even though I am the elder, it is a fact that my selfish actions have brought suffering to my younger brother. However, my brother has taken those circumstances as a trial to be met head-on. He lived through it all without yielding, supporting our parents and providing for his wife and children. My little brother, who always reached out to me for affection as we played together had somehow grown up into a strong person.

When I heard with my heart the wordless shout of my brother, who had lived through his troubles with such vigor, I felt an almost blinding sense of his worth. Until that moment, I had only judged people on the basis of whether or not they would be useful to me. I felt for the first time the state of mind when you sense another person's intrinsic worth. When this happened, for some reason I even felt a sense of my own worth, as someone who could recognize my brother's worth.

"Ah, is this what is meant by attaining a Buddha-like heart? . . ."

I could not prevent the tears from flowing, and forget-

ting shame and embarrassment, I cried a man's tears. No matter how stupidly I lived my life, I was still this precious self, identical with buddha-nature. And what allowed me to recognize my own stupidity was none other than the heart and mind identical to the Buddha's that I, myself, possessed. This is the realization I came to through the repentance I felt in my heart.

"Thank you, Shige. . . ." Overflowing with happiness, I tasted the true joy of living, having been given life.

Two years have passed. I am now a pharmaceutical salesman, working day by day to pay off my former debts, constantly cutting back the weedy sprouts that emerge from the seeds I sowed during my former wild days. Because the task seems endless, there are times when I feel hedged in by insecurity. That is "you reap what you sow," as far as that goes, but, beyond that, I feel that my debts are now what protect me. This is because the act of steadily paying back my debts bit by bit is what will help me change my life in a significant way.

Repentance has led me to kneel down before the Buddha and bare my heart. The result is that I can face my real self and live. There is no stronger way to live. That is what my brother showed me. □

Life has changed for Mr. Ito, who now works as a pharmaceutical salesman, to pay off his former debts.

A 1,000-Armed Kannon of the Kamakura Period

by Takeshi Kuno; Photos by Kozo Ogawa

The Thousand-Armed Kannon of Sanjusangendo is very important, not only as a representative example of Tankei's work, but also as a great masterpiece of Japanese sculpture.

The Thousand-Armed Kannon (Skt., Sahasrabhuja Avalokiteshvara; photo on page 40) is the central image in the main hall of Rengeo-in. The main hall is popularly called the "Hall of the Thirty-Three Bays" (Sanjusangendo) since it is made of 33 (*sanjusan*) bays, each 1 *ken* in width and 3 *gen* in depth (1 *ken/gen* = 1.8 m). Rengeo-in, dedicated in 1164, was established under the patronage of the Retired Emperor Go-Shirakawa (1127–92). It was destroyed in a fire in 1249, and the main image and most of the thousand-armed Kannon statues surrounding it were lost. Rebuilding began almost immediately, and the new temple was completed in 1266.

The present central image was built by Unkei's eldest son, Tankei, in collaboration with Koen (b. 1207) and Kosei (dates unknown). Of the 500 large thousand-armed Kannon statues standing on each side of the central image at the time of the fire, records attest that 120 were rescued, and these are thought to be the 120 statues still extant, which exhibit the stylistic character of the Fujiwara period (894–1185).

The central image, about 3.3 m in height, is placed in the middle of the altar, seated in lotus position on a splendid lotus pedestal. It is made of Japanese cypress (*hinoki*) using the joint-block method (*yosegi-zukuri*), and its eyes are inset crystals (*gyokugan*). The surface is covered with gold leaf over an undercoat of lacquer (*shippaku*). Though theoretically this Thousand-Armed Kannon has one thou-

sand arms, the image is more commonly represented with forty-two arms. (Note that each of the forty flanking arms is said to save twenty-five sentient beings in this *saha* world, and $40 \times 25 = 1,000$.) The upper pair are in the prayer, or worship, position and the second pair are placed across the stomach in the dharma-mudra position. The flanking arms hold various objects that symbolize the power of the bodhisattva. Behind the head is a double-banded round halo, and a heavily ornamented canopy is placed over the image, decorated with lotus and cloud patterns, with metal pendants hanging from it in eight places. The pedestal is carved with lotus petals arranged in eight layers.

What draws the attention of those who visit Sanjusangendo are the long lines of thousand-armed Kannon images that are placed on either side of the main image, totaling one thousand in all. Contemporary beliefs explain why it was thought necessary to construct so many. The nobility of the Fujiwara period believed that the age of the Latter Day of the Law (*mappo*) had already begun, and that consequently it was not possible to gain salvation in this world by means of the Buddha Law. In order to be

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born into paradise in the next world, though, it was necessary to accumulate meritorious deeds (*sazen*). These might consist of building a temple, constructing Buddha images, or copying out sutras. It was also thought that one condition for rebirth in paradise was, if constructing Buddha images, for example, to make as many of them as possible. Thus, sculptors of Buddhist images were employed in large numbers to construct the thousand images of the Thousand-Armed Kannon in Sanjusangendo.

Tankei was central to the restoration. We know this from an inscription on the pedestal of the main image, which says that the work was done by Tankei in collaboration with Koen and Kosei. Tankei was born in 1173, the eldest son of Unkei (d. 1223), and, following in Unkei's footsteps, he worked as a youth as one of the Buddhist sculptors who repaired the images in the lecture hall (*kodo*) of Todai-ji in Nara. In 1208 he took part in the work on the North Octagonal Hall (Hokuendo) at Kofuku-ji, also in Nara, and participated in the carving of the images for the nine-storied pagoda of Hossho-ji in Kyoto, dedicated in 1213. At that time, he became the pre-eminent sculptor in place of Unkei, and received the accolade of *hoin*

("Dharma Seal," an honorific Buddhist title). He collaborated in many works but very few have survived. The best known are the three statues at Sekkei-ji in Kochi of Bishamonten (Skt., Vaishravana), his consort, Kichijoten (Shri Mahadevi), and their son, Zennishi Doji (Skt. unknown).

The Thousand-Armed Kannon of Sanjusangendo, therefore, is very important, not only as a representative example of Tankei's work, but also as a great masterpiece of Japanese sculpture. It combines the masculine strength that was a characteristic of Unkei's carving with a delicacy that was Tankei's own. The torso, with its sense of volume, and the deeply carved folds of the garments show the influence of Unkei, but the rather intellectual facial expression belongs to Tankei himself. The face is a superb manifestation of the buddha-nature. Tankei skillfully incorporated the new sculptural techniques that were then entering Japan from Song China (960–1279); the statue of Kichijoten at Sekkei-ji shows this influence clearly. Tankei is said to have died at the age of 84 in 1256, just two years after his completion of the central image of Rengeo-in. □



The Thousand-Armed Kannon by Tankei, the central image in the main hall of Rengeo-in (Sanjusangendo) in Kyoto.

Licchavi Nobles Visit Gotama

by Hajime Nakamura

The wealthy Licchavi nobles of Vesāli met Ambapālī on the road and tried to buy from her the right to be the first to invite Shakyamuni to dinner—only to learn that their riches could not buy everything.

The Licchavi nobles too decided to go and visit Gotama, and a group of them set off. The Licchavis were, as was mentioned in the previous issue, the most prominent of the noble families of Vesāli, whose power and wealth were derived from commerce. They were later attacked and destroyed by Ajātasattu of Magadha.

“(15) And the Licchavi nobles of Vesāli heard that the Venerable Master had come to Vesāli and was staying at Ambapālī’s grove in Vesāli. Then the Licchavi nobles had a number of finely decorated carriages prepared, and riding in them they left Vesāli. Some of the Licchavi nobles were deep blue, deep blue in color, and wore clothes of deep blue and ornaments of deep blue. Some of the Licchavi nobles were yellow, yellow in color, and wore clothes of yellow and ornaments of yellow. Some of the Licchavi nobles were ruddy, red in color, and wore clothes of red and ornaments of red. Some of the Licchavi nobles were white, white in color, and wore clothes of white and ornaments of white.” (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 15)

The fact of the skin color, accessories, and clothes of the Licchavi nobles being different points to the mixing of different races of people in the mercantile city of Vesāli.

They encountered Ambapālī on the way.

“(16) At that time the courtesan Ambapālī collided with the young Licchavi nobles, axle to axle, wheel to

The late Hajime Nakamura, an authority on Indian philosophy, was president of the Eastern Institute in Tokyo and a professor emeritus of the University of Tokyo at the time of his death in October 1999. This ongoing series is a translation of Gotama Buddha, vol. 2, Tokyo, Shunjūsha, 1992.

wheel, and yoke to yoke. Then the Licchavis said to the courtesan Ambapālī, 'Hey, there, Ambapālī, why have you collided with the young Licchavi nobles, axle to axle, wheel to wheel, and yoke to yoke?' 'Noble sirs, I have invited the Venerable Master, together with his *bhikkhus*, to eat a meal at my house tomorrow.' 'Ambapālī, we will give you one hundred thousand pieces of gold if you will allow us to make an offering of a meal tomorrow in your stead.' 'Noble sirs, you could offer me the city of Vesālī and all its territory, and yet I still would not give up to you the offering of a meal.' Then the Licchavis snapped their fingers and said, 'Ah, we have been beaten by this woman! Ah, we have been outwitted by a woman!' And they went to Ambapālī's grove." (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 16)

The collision of carriages is a surprisingly violent incident. Could it have been a deliberate ruse to prevent the Licchavi nobles from going any further? The Yu-hsing-ching version of the same incident is as follows:

"At that time the Licchavis of Vaiśālī, hearing that the Buddha was staying at Āmrāpālī's park, had their jeweled carriages prepared, decked in the five colors. Some rode in blue carriages pulled by blue horses, and their coverings, canopies, banners, and retinues were all blue. The carriages and horses of the others of the five colors were all similarly adorned. The colors of the robes the five hundred Licchavis wore were the same. They all wanted to go and visit the Buddha. As Āmrāpālī [Pāli, Ambapālī] was returning to her home after taking leave of the Buddha, she met the Licchavis on the way. At that time the horse pulling her carriage was galloping swiftly, and she collided with their jeweled carriages and damaged the banners and canopies, and furthermore blocked the road. The Licchavis reproached her, saying, 'What has made you block the way like this? You have collided with our jeweled carriages and damaged the banners and canopies.' She replied, 'Noble sirs, I am returning home to make preparations for a meal, for I have invited the Buddha tomorrow. For this reason I was returning swiftly in my carriage and my blocking you is inexcusable.' The Licchavis again said to her, 'Put aside for a time your invitation, and let us offer it instead. We will give you one hundred thousand pieces of gold [to do so].' She replied in turn, 'I have already issued the invitation and I will make no alteration. I do not want what you offer.' Then the Licchavis said to the woman again, 'We will give you sixteen times one hundred thousand pieces of gold. Let us extend the first invitation.' Again she refused. 'I have already issued the invitation and I cannot make a change in it.' Then the Licchavis again said to the woman, 'We will give you half the country's wealth. Let us extend the first invitation.' Again she replied, 'Even were you to offer me all the wealth of the country, I would not take it. The Buddha is staying in my park and he has accepted my invitation first. The matter is finished.' Unable to offer the first invitation, the Licchavis snapped their fingers in despair, and

said, 'Because of that woman we have missed the initial merit.' Then they went on until they arrived at [her] park."

The young Licchavi nobles offered Āmrāpālī a vast amount of money, seeking to purchase the rights to the meeting with the Buddha that she had already acquired. Despite her profession, she did not waver in her determination. The episode about the collision of the carriages and the attempt by the Licchavis to buy the invitation from Āmrāpālī occurs only in the Pāli recension mentioned above and the Yu-hsing-ching; no mention of it is found in the Sanskrit, Tibetan, or Sarvāstivādin recensions. The fact that it does not appear in what are later texts suggests that the compilers deliberately omitted it, probably because they did not wish to reveal infighting among Buddhists or potential Buddhists. (Unlike the story of Devadatta, the episode at Vesālī could serve no purpose in promoting a cooperative spirit among Buddhists.) No doubt some such event actually did occur.

Let us examine the social and historical significance of the episode. Āmrāpālī, elated and triumphant, made no attempt to apologize to the young nobles. Yet, making an enemy of them could be expected to jeopardize her calling. Her attitude arose from the following considerations:

(1) The young nobles were members of the aristocracy of Vesālī, representatives of the establishment.

(2) Āmrāpālī's dealings were chiefly with the newly emergent merchant class (*gahapati*, *vaṇijja*) so that friction with the nobles would have been of little concern to her.

(3) Gotama was welcomed both by members of the establishment and by the merchant class. Vesālī had no caste system, for the merchants were against it.

The Licchavis went out to meet the Buddha in a splendid procession.

"(17) The Venerable Master saw the Licchavis coming from afar. Seeing them, he announced to the *bhikkhus*, 'Bhikkhus, those of you who have not yet seen the thirty-three deities should look now. Look well, *bhikkhus*, at the Licchavis. Compare, *bhikkhus*, the Licchavis with the deities of the thirty-three heavens.'" (Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta, II, 17)

The Licchavis do not appear in history for a period of around eight hundred years, from 500 B.C.E. to 300 C.E. Their name reappears in the time of Candragupta I (r. ca. 320–ca. 330), founder of the Gupta dynasty. His wife was a Licchavi princess. His successor, the powerful Samudragupta (ca. 330–375), repeatedly called himself "son of the Licchavi princess," so proud of his mother's ancestry was he. Inscriptions reveal that such a sentiment was shared and repeated by later emperors of the Gupta dynasty, who all claimed descent from female Licchavis. This was a unique phenomenon.

The Licchavis probably submitted to Kushan power, but with the decline of that dynasty regained their independence and took control of Pāṭaliputra. During the reign of Candragupta II they seem to have extended their

power over Vesāli, and later into Nepal as well. The question remains, however, whether the Licchavis of this time were the same people as those who ruled Vesāli at the time of the Buddha. We have already seen that the Vajjis conducted affairs by means of assemblies and governed along republican lines. The Licchavi republic was not simply an aristocracy, but had many elements reminiscent of a democracy. Early Buddhist writings report that government was conducted by 7,707 descendants of Licchavi royalty who lived in Vesāli. Of course, the number may be an exaggeration; nevertheless, it is very likely that government was relatively broad-based. Members of the royal family in Vesāli were required to receive consecration by water from a special holy pond in order to be qualified to take part in government affairs. This was equivalent to the king's consecration, and it is not clear whether people were consecrated simultaneously or consecutively, but it is likely that a son received consecration following his father's death.

Until quite a late period the Licchavis of Vesāli totally rejected any social order based on class, and we can even discern a strong reaction to time-honored social customs. According to the biographies of the Buddha, Sakyamuni dwelt in the Tusita heaven as a bodhisattva before descending to this world and, while there, made a careful survey to decide where and in what circumstances he should be born. The deities of that heaven made the following comments: "A very few deities said, 'This great city [*mahānagari*] of Vaiśāli is rich, prosperous, and peaceful; [the people] give alms kindly; [the city] is beautiful and populated by many people, is adorned with balconies, gates, arches, windows, dwellings, terraces, palaces, and flat-roofed houses; flowers bloom in the parks and the rows of trees in the woods are luxuriant. It is as splendid as a city of the deities. Therefore it is eminently suitable as the place of the bodhisattva's birth.' However, the other deities said, 'There is a reason why it is unsuitable. What is it? The people [of Vaiśāli] do not speak together of the true Dharma. They do not practice the Dharma, and they do not protect those of high rank, those of middle rank, the aged and the seniors. Each person thinks of himself as the ruler. Such people do not become disciples or maintain the Dharma [the transmission of the Vedas?]. Therefore Vaiśāli is not suitable.'"

The Sanskrit recension gives a clear description of the procession of the young nobles when they went to see the Buddha.

"(XI, 1) [At that time] the Licchavis who lived in Vaiśāli heard 'The World-honored One has arrived in Vaiśāli after walking through the villages of the Vṛjjis [Pāli, Vajjis], and is in the grove of Āmrāpāli.'

"(XI, 2) Then, the Licchavis rode each in a fine carriage and went out of Vaiśāli.

"(XI, 3) Some of them rode in blue carriages, pulled by blue horses, with blue bridles and whips, wearing blue

hats, carrying blue parasols, wearing blue scabbards, carrying blue fly-whisks whose hilts were inlaid with jewels, wearing blue robes and blue makeup, employing blue paint, and accompanied by blue attendants.

"(XI, 4) Some of them rode in yellow carriages, pulled by yellow horses, with yellow bridles and whips, wearing yellow hats, carrying yellow parasols, wearing yellow scabbards, carrying yellow fly-whisks whose hilts were inlaid with jewels, wearing yellow robes and yellow makeup, employing yellow paint, and accompanied by yellow attendants.

"(XI, 5) Some of them rode in red carriages, pulled by red horses, with red bridles and whips, wearing red hats, carrying red parasols, wearing red scabbards, carrying red fly-whisks whose hilts were inlaid with jewels, wearing red robes and red makeup, employing red paint, and accompanied by red attendants.

"(XI, 6) Some of them rode in white carriages, pulled by white horses, with white bridles and whips, wearing white hats, carrying white parasols, wearing white scabbards, carrying white fly-whisks whose hilts were inlaid with jewels, wearing white robes and white makeup, employing white paint, and accompanied by white attendants.

"(XI, 7) The people of Vaiśāli, calling out in high voices, making a great stir and commotion, and calling out in loud voices, making a great stir and commotion, left [the city] and approached the place where the Venerable Master was, for they wished to meet the Venerable Master and make him offerings.

"(XI, 8) The Venerable Master, seeing the Licchavis of Vaiśāli coming from afar, announced to the *bhikṣus*,

"(XI, 9) '*Bhikṣus*, if there are any of you who have not seen the deities of the thirty-three heavens approaching the park, look at the Licchavis of Vaiśāli. Why is this, *bhikṣus*? The thirty-three deities themselves would be splendid and magnificent living in the Nandana Grove just like the Licchavis of Vaiśāli.'" (Ernst Waldschmidt, *Das Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, XI, 1-9, p. 178)

The Sanskrit recension and the Chinese translations portray vividly the vigor of Vaiśāli and compare the splendor of its nobility with that of the deities themselves. A few Western scholars have interpreted the various colors of implements and entourages as indicating caste distinctions, since in Brahmanism the souls of people of different castes were considered to be of different colors. I cannot agree, since no caste distinctions existed in republican Vaiśāli. There may have been distinctions based on rank and wealth, but there were none deriving from caste. In fact, no mention of Vaiśāli is even made in Brahmanic works concerning caste. In the time of the Buddha, Vaiśāli was an international city where people of various races lived using different-colored tools. Both the Vṛjjis and the Mallas had a republican form of government headed by the aristocracy. Compared with other regions of India, the city was liberal, unfettered by Brahmanic

A relief from Bhārhut, depicting the building of the Jetavana monastery. The Indian Museum in Calcutta.

tradition. This atmosphere is reflected in the descriptions in the Mahāparinibbāna-suttanta.

I would like to add a few words here about the turban. A relief from Bhārhut (now in the Indian Museum, Calcutta) of the building of the Jetavana monastery shows Indians wearing turbans, indicating that the custom had developed by the time the relief was carved. Sanskrit appears to have used the word *uṣṇīṣa* for “turban,” a word

to be found from the time of the Atharva-veda, though to what it referred is not at all clear. The Chinese translators had no idea of what a turban was, and so translated it as “hat.” In addition, the *uṣṇīṣa* is one of the thirty-two distinguishing marks of a buddha, and refers to a protuberance on the top of the head. Linguistically this can be interpreted as a transformation of the turban.

To be continued

The Sutra of the Lotus Flower of the Wonderful Law

Chapter 5

The Parable of the Herbs (2)

This is the sixty-fifth installment of a detailed commentary on the Threefold Lotus Sutra by the late founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, Rev. Nikkyo Niwano.

TEXT At that moment numberless thousand myriad kotis of classes of living beings came to the Buddha to hear the Law. Thereupon the Tathagata, observing the natural powers of all these beings, keen or dull, zealous or indifferent, according to their [capacity] preached to them the Law in varying and unstinted ways, causing them all to rejoice and joyfully obtain much profit.

COMMENTARY *The natural powers . . . keen or dull.* The Chinese word translated as “natural powers” refers to the five roots of emancipation (*pañcendriyani*), that is, the five potentials or faculties. (See the November/December 2000 issue of DHARMA WORLD.) They are faith, endeavor, mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom. These five elements are the foundation of practicing the Buddha Way. When these elements (the capacity or faculties to accept the teaching) are superior, they are termed “keen,” and when inferior, are termed “dull.”

- *Joyfully obtain much profit.* We should delight in our religious practice, taking pleasure in hearing the Law and practicing it, rather than endure it reluctantly with gritted teeth. To lead others joyfully is the leader’s ideal.

TEXT All these living beings, having heard this Law, [are] comforted in the present life and afterward [will be] born in happy states, [where they will be] made joyful by the Truth and also hear the Law. Having heard the Law, they are freed from hindrances, and according to their capacity in all the laws, they gradually enter the Way.

COMMENTARY *Comforted in the present life.* This is a very important point. To be “comforted in the present life” is to be able to live peacefully in this world. In the old days people interpreted this as meaning merely that any disease would be cured and any anxiety and poverty alleviated. People believed emotionally, not knowing that such comfort comes through the Law that is the truth. Later “comforted” was taken to refer to the mind alone, and the passage was generally interpreted as meaning to be able to meet whatever trials might beset one with a

peaceful mind. This interpretation came about as a result of the narrow-mindedness of certain religious scholars who considered religious faith a matter of the mind alone. It also grew out of a lack of confidence on their part; they had superficially absorbed modern science and were afraid of incurring the scorn of people of good sense if they did not differentiate between mind and matter. This is an erroneous view. Modern psychosomatic medicine has proved that many illnesses can be cured if the mental component is resolved. It is therefore not surprising that an unfettered mind allows one to live in comfort, because one can experience changes for the better in personal character, lifestyle, and circumstances.

Everything in the triple world (of desire, form, and formlessness) is originally “empty,” yet for eons the subconscious has insisted on regarding phenomena as “real,” actually existing in themselves. If we can alter our way of looking, the state or aspect of phenomena will also change completely. It is an unalterable truth that since the triple world is a manifestation of the mind alone, phenomena alter as a result of changes in the mind.

If, though, we think only that religious faith will bring us benefits in this life, we will bring harm on ourselves, for such an attitude will never bring us true freedom of mind. It is therefore acceptable at this juncture to consider our attitude to religious faith as a matter of the mind alone. All the same, it is exceedingly one-sided, and moreover a serious slur on the Buddha’s teaching, to think that there is no connection between the Buddha’s teaching and the comfort gained in everyday life as a result of attaining peace of mind. People today need to accept the Buddha’s teaching more openly and straightforwardly than they are accustomed to doing.

- *Afterward [they will be] born in happy states, [where they will be] made joyful by the Truth and also hear the Law.* This is also very important. As I mentioned in the discussion of transmigration, we are not restricted to this one existence. Though we may shed the present body, as long as we have acted in accordance with the Dharma,

which is the truth itself, we will indeed be reborn “in happy states.” Perhaps we will have birth in a better world, such as a heavenly realm, or if we are born again in the realm of human beings, we will be able to hear the true Dharma and live a peaceful, comfortable life. We are enabled to do so because we know the way true human beings should live through the Buddha’s teaching and can live in accordance with the truth. We are “comforted” because we can straightforwardly follow the Buddha Law. Thus we are “made joyful by the Truth.” Because at one time Buddhism was distorted by a concern for rebirth alone, in reaction there was later a strong tendency to focus on the spiritual problems in this life alone. This too is erroneous. The Buddha’s teaching is not so narrow; we must not forget that it teaches us the true, ideal way that all things, including both mind and matter, should be. If we listen to the teachings with all our might, all spiritual hindrances and obstacles gradually disappear, allowing us to choose the teaching best suited to us, one that we can understand according to our individual ability. Through this teaching we gradually reach an ever higher spiritual state until we are able to enter the state of supreme enlightenment (the Way).

The next passage likens this to the great cloud letting its rain fall on grasses and trees, which accept moisture sufficient for their needs according to their own type and nature; the moisture allows each to grow, to flower, and to produce fruit based on its own nature.

TEXT “Just as that great cloud, raining on all the plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs, and according to their nature and kind perfectly fertilizing them so that each grows and develops, [so] the Law preached by the Tathagata is of one form and one flavor, that is to say, the form of deliverance, the form of abandonment, the form of extinction, and finally the attainment of [the Buddha’s] perfect knowledge.

COMMENTARY *Of one form and one flavor.* Here “form” should be understood as “essence,” and “flavor” as “function.” The Buddha’s teachings are essentially one, as is their function (to lead all people to buddhahood).

• *The form of deliverance, the form of abandonment, the form of extinction.* Historically there have been a number of interpretations of this phrase. I prefer to understand it as an observation of the organic links in human spiritual progress. “The form of deliverance” (emancipation) is the condition in which the mind has become unmoved by phenomenal change (birth and death), as a result of discerning the truth that all things are originally “empty” (there is no absolute substance). “The form of abandonment” is the condition of being detached from the one-sided view of things as “empty.” If we become too attached to the idea that because everything is “empty” all things are equal, we tend to ignore the discriminative as-

pects expressed within phenomena, and therefore lack empathy for those who are suffering. To live detached from the world is to become complacent and therefore unable to save people or society. Thus, Buddhists must abandon attachment to the contemplation of “emptiness.” “The form of extinction” is the destruction of all differences between self and others. When we can feel one with others, we are able to advance to awareness that we are also one with all things in the universe. As long as we strain, thinking we must save the suffering, we have not reached the state of oneness of self and others. We have reached that state when we spontaneously reach out and bring all into our embrace. A baby cries when it is hungry. Its mother immediately picks it up, comforts it, and feeds it. At that moment there is not the slightest sense in the mother’s mind that she is consciously deciding to nurse the baby. Rather she feels the baby’s hunger as her own and acts accordingly. This state of mind is the essence of oneness of self and others. How pleasant, bright, and peaceful the world would be if everyone could attain this state of mind, feeling the sufferings of others as their own and being compelled to reach out a helping hand, or if they could share the joy of others as if it were their own. This is what is meant by “the form of extinction.”

• *[The Buddha’s] perfect knowledge.* As has been explained often, “[the Buddha’s] perfect knowledge” is supreme wisdom. It is the integrating wisdom that makes the fullest and best use of both the wisdom that discerns that all things are ultimately equal and the wisdom that distinguishes clearly the discriminative aspects of phenomena. One who has come to possess this perfect knowledge has attained buddhahood.

TEXT If there be living beings who hear the Law of the Tathagata and keep, read, recite, and practice it as preached [by him], their merits will [not enable them] to understand their own [nature]. Wherefore? [Because] there is only the Tathagata who knows the kind, the form, the embodiment, and the nature of all these living beings, what things they are reflecting over, what things they are thinking, what things practicing, how reflecting, how thinking, how practicing, by what laws reflecting, by what laws thinking, by what laws practicing, and by what laws attaining to what laws.

COMMENTARY *Their merits will [not enable them] to understand their own [nature].* There are certainly considerable merits in hearing the Buddha’s teaching, believing it and keeping it firm in the mind, reciting it over and over, and putting it into practice. What is meant by these merits is that a person’s value as a human being is gradually elevated; such a person is endowed with high and abundant virtues, though the person is seldom aware of that. Other people know, though, and the Buddha discerns the situation completely. This can be said not only

about the merits that affect personal character but also about those that reveal themselves physically and in one's circumstances.

As we believe in the Buddha Law, study it wholeheartedly, and put it into practice, changes will surely become apparent in our lives, though they will not necessarily be changes we like, for being ordinary, we tend to consider things only in terms of our present situation and to think only of the advantages and disadvantages that lie before us. In the broader view, though—that is, the Buddha's view—all changes are for our own sake. Changes that arise from believing deeply in the Buddha Law and practicing it wholeheartedly attest that we are on the correct course. For example, something that seems on the surface to be a negative change may turn out to be the means of further honing our character. Therefore we must go along with whatever happens, however disagreeable it may seem, and continue our practice of the Buddha Way, for that unwanted change becomes the foundation for eventual happiness. We must understand and accept that, in the final analysis, only the Buddha knows precisely what is fortunate or unfortunate.

- *Kind*. This indicates the capacity to be a shravaka, a pratyekabuddha, or a bodhisattva.
- *Form*. This is the form that appears on the surface.
- *Embodiment*. This is a person or thing itself.
- *Nature*. This is a person's inherent nature (for "form," "embodiment," and "nature," see the November/December 1997 issue).

TEXT There is only the Tathagata who in reality sees, clearly and without hindrance, the stages in which all living beings are, just as those plants, trees, thickets, forests, medicinal herbs, and others do not know their own natures, superior, middle, or inferior. The Tathagata knows this Law of one form and one flavor, that is to say, the form of deliverance, the form of abandonment, the form of extinction, the form of ultimate nirvana, of eternal nirvana, ending in return to the void.

COMMENTARY *Stages*. Here "stages" refers to various mental states of practitioners of the Buddha Way, but lay people must also understand the term more broadly as meaning the mental states of human beings attained in the course of a lay life. More precisely, they indicate the worth or significance of each human being's existence. Human beings (as well as nonhuman beings and inanimate objects) appear in this world for a reason. Therefore each is of value. This being the case, "stages" refers to the position and worth each person has in the universe. It is very difficult, though, to recognize one's own position and worth accurately. Like the plants, trees, thickets, forests, and medicinal herbs, many people do not know or try to conceive of the position they occupy, that is, their own true worth in the scheme of things.

The Tathagata, the highest of all existences, says that he can clearly distinguish the individual worth of all people. It is impossible for us as ordinary people to attain this perfect level of understanding, yet we should endeavor to approach it, for it is important that we at least are clearly aware of our own worth. This is impossible for inanimate objects, animals, and plants. If we do not even know our role in this world, the outlook or aim of the true way of living becomes vague, and without having such an outlook or aim we live instinctively, just like animals and plants, and are not worthy of having been born as human beings.

In the eyes of the Buddha, all human beings are equal in their existence. Though people differ in character, ability, occupation, and living environment, they are equal in the sense that they are all factors in the formation of societies and in their progress; none are superior or inferior. A clock is made up of many parts: the face and the hour, minute, and second hands that we can see, and the cogwheels, stems, and all the other bits and pieces of the internal machinery. No part is unimportant, unvalued. All together make up the clock, and all are equal in that every one is vital to the clock's functioning.

It is the same for us in society. Though we think that those who are in the forefront of affairs are somehow special while those who remain hidden and unknown are of no interest, all are absolutely equal in view of the important role each has in the overall working of society. We must be proud, therefore, of our own social task and of the worth of our individual existence. At the same time, we must take responsibility for our own task and actively fulfill our own role. If everyone did so, human society would operate harmoniously and progress would be unlimited. We should understand the parable of the three kinds of medicinal herbs and the two kinds of trees in terms of everyday life and strive to put it into practice.

- *Ultimate nirvana*. This means the supreme nirvana, that is, the Mahayana nirvana. It is the state of true peace of mind, attained by knowing that all things exist through dependent origination, without being bound to the diverse aspects and changes of phenomena or denying in a nihilistic way the phenomena that manifest themselves in actual life, and also by knowing that all things are full of life in the state of great harmony that is sustained by the great compassion of the Buddha. If such a state could be attained, it follows that people would live naturally in great harmony with all things in the universe.

TEXT The Buddha, knowing this and observing the dispositions of all living beings, supports and protects them. For this reason he does not immediately declare [the Buddha's] perfect knowledge to them. Kashyapa! All of you! A most rare thing it is that you should be able to know the Law preached by the Tathagata as he sees fit, and be able to believe and able to receive it. Wherefore? [Because] the Law preached by buddhas, the world-honored

ones, as they see fit is difficult to discern and difficult to know.”

COMMENTARY *A most rare thing.* Here this phrase means a rare and outstanding person.

- *The Law preached by the Tathagata as he sees fit.* This expression refers to teaching using the most suitable means for the person and the situation. In other words, it refers to the teachings of skillful means.

- *Able to receive it.* This indicates the firm receiving and keeping of the Law. It means not only receiving the Law but also making it part of one's being and retaining it in one's heart and mind.

TEXT At that time the World-honored One, desiring to proclaim this meaning over again, spoke thus in verse:

“The Law king who destroys existence / Appears in this world; / According to the natures of all living beings, / He preaches the Law discriminately. / The Tathagata is greatly to be honored / And profound in wisdom; / For long has he kept secret this essential [truth], / Not endeavoring hastily to declare it. / The wise, if they hear it, / Are able to believe and discern; / The ignorant doubt and turn away, / Losing it perpetually. / Therefore, Kashyapa, / According to their powers I preach to them / With varied reasonings / To bring them to right views.

COMMENTARY *The Law king.* This refers to the ruler of the teachings, who proclaims all the teachings with complete freedom. This freedom is of great importance. Those who believe fervently in a certain teaching or idea are apt to preserve every word and phrase of the proponent and every article of the doctrine in a formalistic way, and lack the flexibility to teach broadly according to the person and the circumstances. Such an approach is called dogmatism. In Buddhist history, it can be said that Hinayana took the attitude of dogmatism and Mahayana tried to break it down. Such inflexibility makes it impossible to bring large numbers of people to that teaching or idea. It is through the wisdom and ability to make full use of skillful means to preach the teachings with complete freedom that all people can be led to the final, ultimate purpose. This is why Shakyamuni gives special attention to the subject of skillful means in the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, we should not merely think of the qualities of the Law king as special abilities and a position that only Shakyamuni has. We must make them our own concern and make use of them in all our activities, particularly our bodhisattva practice.

- *Existence.* This indicates phenomena. The way of seeing things as actually existing is also called “existence” (*bhava*). So to destroy existence means to break down the fundamental human illusions and to bring people to a realization of the real aspect of all things. Since it is difficult to lead them to that stage in one bound, it is neces-

sary to apply the various teachings of skillful means in the process of attaining that stage.

- *For long has he kept secret this essential [truth], not endeavoring hastily to declare it.* “This essential [truth]” is the vital, pivotal point of the Buddha's teaching, that is, the real aspect of all things. By realizing it all people can equally attain nirvana in the true sense. If it is taught too hastily, however, there is a danger that people without wisdom may have doubts about it, saying, “That can't be true,” or give up their practice completely, saying, “I can't possibly attain such enlightenment,” and so remain separated from the Buddha Way forever (“losing it perpetually”). Therefore, the Buddha waits a long while (“for long has he kept secret”) until people have the capacity to accept the “essential [truth]” in faith.

- *With varied reasonings to bring them to right views.* “Reasonings” here translates the Chinese word *yüan*, meaning “condition” or “relationship.” What is meant by “condition” is extremely important. It must be due to a certain condition both that your interest in hearing about the Buddha Way was aroused and that you are reading this; yet that condition is different for each person. Therefore, if we really desire to lead other people to the Buddha Law and help them attain true happiness, it is of prime importance that we discover the most fitting condition for each person and realize that such a condition exists for everyone. We must discern that condition and make ourselves a “good condition” for each person and nurture faith in him or her. This is the shortest way, and also the true way, to guide other people.

People have various conditions for entering into religious faith. It is vitally important that in the early stages of faith we choose the way of leading in accordance with the particularity of those conditions, specifically when teaching an individual. For example, if family discord has become a condition of entering into faith for someone, we will lead the person by coming to grips with that particular problem, while if an illness has become a condition for someone else, we will guide the person by explaining the relationship between sickness and the mind. At the same time, we must never lose sight of the ultimate purpose, which is to teach the truth about the world and human beings as the Buddha has taught us. We must therefore be careful not to depart from the Dharma, whatever we may preach; every teaching of skillful means must lead to the truth. In summary, the Buddha's statement “I preach to them with varied reasonings to bring them to right views” means that at first people are taught according to their particular circumstances and then are shown very gradually how to perceive the ultimate truth.

To be continued

In this series, passages in the TEXT sections are quoted from *The Threefold Lotus Sutra*, Tokyo: Kosei Publishing Company, 1975.

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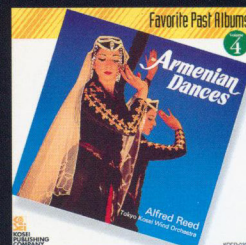
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